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RECYCLING BRECHT



THE BRECHT YEARBOOK
DAS BRECHT-JAHRBUCH

42

THE INTERNATIONAL BRECHT SOCIETY



Das Brecht-Jahrbuch 42

Recycling Brecht

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CAMDEN HOUSE

In Zusammenarbeit mit der Internationalen Brecht-Gesellschaft

The Brecht Yearbook 42

Recycling Brecht

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For the International Brecht Society

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Edited at Oxford University (Oxford, UK), the University of York (York, UK), and
Bowling Green State University (Ohio, USA)

First published 2018 by Camden House for the International Brecht Society

Camden House is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt. Hope Avenue, Rochester, New York 14620, USA
www.camden-house.com
and of Boydell & Brewer Limited
P.O. Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 3DF, UK
www.boydellandbrewer.com

ISSN 0734-8665
ISBN 978-0-9851956-5-6

Cover image: Brecht at the HUAC hearings, still from the film *A Model Family in a Model Home* by Zoe Beloff, 2015. © Zoe Beloff.

This publication is printed on acid-free paper.
Printed in the United States of America

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Die Internationale Brecht-Gesellschaft ist nach dem Modell von Brechts nicht verwirklichtem Plan für die Diderot-Gesellschaft gegründet worden. Durch Veröffentlichungen und regelmäßige internationale Tagungen fördert die Gesellschaft freie und öffentliche Diskussionen über die Beziehungen aller Künste zur heutigen Welt. Die Gesellschaft steht neuen Mitgliedern in jedem Fachgebiet und Land offen und begrüßt Vorschläge für zukünftige Tagungen und Aufsätze in deutscher, englischer, spanischer oder französischer Sprache für *Das Brecht-Jahrbuch*.

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Editorial

Tom Kuhn and David Barnett

This volume of the *Brecht Yearbook* features a selection of papers given at the Fifteenth Symposium of the International Brecht Society at St. Hugh's College, Oxford, that took place from June 25 to 29, 2016. It is perhaps worth noting that an event that opened a mere two days after the United Kingdom narrowly voted to leave the European Union offered a model of international cooperation and exchange. The political isolationism and the emotive arguments that seem to have won the day for the Brexiteers would surely have given Brecht, the perennial collaborator, cause for consternation. And, as ever, Brecht can furnish a suitably contradictory commentary from his poem of 1954, "Böser Morgen": "Unwissende! schrie ich / Schuldbewußt." (A bad morning: There are things you don't know! I cried. / Knowing I was guilty.)

The theme of the symposium, "Recycling Brecht," very much traded on the ambiguity of the phrasing in English. "Recycling" is both an activity applied to one of the twentieth century's most productive artists and a description of the notorious recycler himself. Recycling was, in turn, understood in a number of ways. Some speakers discussed the straightforward re-use of material, while others took the term more literally, considering how something already used and used up could gain fresh utility by being taken apart and refunctioned, itself a very Brechtian *modus operandi*. The organizers were pleasantly surprised that a term that was originally intended as a way of attracting many and varied contributions proved useful in itself as a focus for sophisticated and ingenious interpretations of the recycling process.

We received a broad range of responses to the call for contributions. Brecht's legacy in the theater, in poetry, and in thought regularly figured in the proposals, as well as Brecht's penchant for engaging with all manner of sources in all manner of ways. In the former category, a remarkable number of panels discussed and explored Brecht's international presence, not only in his native Europe, but also in the other four continents. The breadth of re-use was considerable and revealed as much about Brecht as it did about the cultural traditions that engaged with him. In the latter category, the coincidence of the Fifteenth Symposium and the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death produced two diverse panels on the relationship between the two playwrights, while others considered Brecht's recycling practices as

novelist, playwright, and theorist. A day-by-day program for the symposium, which betrays the rich variety the theme provoked, can be found here: <http://brecht.mml.ox.ac.uk/ibs-programme>.

We are delighted to include the two keynote papers given by Hans-Thies Lehmann and Amal Allana. Lehmann's discussion of Brecht's adaptation of *Antigone* looked back at the theater-maker's reception of a classical tragedy via a radical nineteenth-century German translation by Hölderlin, and forward to how the contemporary practitioner René Pollesch treated the Brechtian legacy in his curiously titled *Bühne frei für Mick Levčik* of 2016. Allana chose to discuss Brecht's reception in India, highlighting the successive attractions of "Westernization" and "Asianization" in the theater of the subcontinent. Both keynote speakers, pioneering and inspiring educators themselves, set an important tone for the essays that also feature in this volume: they select significant material from their chosen areas, treat it with sensitivity and insight, and forge new understandings that shed light well beyond their respective topics. In Lehmann's case, his mode of thought addresses wider issues of tragedy and the tragic experience in the theater; in Allana's we perceive the significance of Brecht's whole approach for the development of a new (but arguably Brechtian) political and educative theater.

The papers chosen for publication in this *Brecht Yearbook* account for a fraction of the stimulating contributions to the symposium as a whole, and others will appear in the following number, simply due to pressure of space. Our organization of the contents of the current volume is designed to make evident some of the possible chronological and geographical progressions and cross-connections through all these histories of Brecht/recycling/Brecht.

After Lehmann's opening thoughts on the successive transformations and reinterpretations of *Antigone*, Astrid Oesmann's contribution focuses on Brecht's reception of Shakespeare, and in particular on the notes on *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. She uncovers fascinating currents traceable in two very different contexts (*Macbeth* in 1927, around the time of *Fatzer*, and *Hamlet* in 1948, around the time of *Antigone*), and again the particular concern is with the nature of the "tragic."

Steve Giles's account of the contemporary reception of the 1930 production of *Mahagonny* is preceded by a wide-ranging theoretical investigation of the processes of cultural recycling. The analysis of reviews and other documents then reveals some of the fault lines of aesthetic and political debate in the Weimar Republic—some of those debates are still being "recycled" today.

Alice Koubová reflects on Brecht's reception of ludic thinking and develops notions of the "ludic agent" in Brecht's *Schweyk in the Second World War* and the Herr Keuner stories. She discusses the ways in which the concept of serious play allows Brecht to approach somber subjects with a lightness that nonetheless avoids the pitfall of trivialization.

Nikolaus Müller-Schöll examines a particularly feted production at the Berliner Ensemble in true dialectical fashion by articulating Brecht's achievements as the director of *The Tutor* and his sometimes painful limitations. He reads the infamous self-castration in the play as not only a comment on German intellectuals in a class-based society, but also on a particular intellectual in a socialist society, namely Brecht himself.

Martin Brady and the late Carola Nielinger-Vakil worked together to research the composer Paul Dessau's relationship to Brecht's artistic ethos after 1956. The authors argue that Dessau continued a productive reception of Brechtian approaches after his collaborator had died in 1956, contrary to the dominant view that Dessau effectively turned his back on Brecht.

Martin Kagel performs an elegant and revealing analysis of George Tabori's three successive (obsessive?) reworkings of Brecht's one-acter from *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, "The Jewish Wife." He argues that Tabori's reinterpretations amount to a writerly further development of Brecht from the perspective of the Holocaust survivor.

At this point we have inserted Amal Allana's keynote contribution, in part so that Prateek's essay, which considers the crucial role of Brechtian aesthetics between the late 1960s and early 1970s in creating a new strain of political theater in India, can be read in the context of that wider Indian reception history. Prateek concentrates in particular on the Brechtian device of *Gestus* and discusses a 1970 production in India of *The Threepenny Opera*, directed by Fritz Bennewitz.

Moving on through these chronicles of recycling, Anja Hartl and Michael Wood explore the legacy of Brecht's *Lehrstück* in their respective essays. Hartl focuses on the British playwright David Greig, whose work as a whole reveals a rich inheritance and whose play *The Events* suggests a post-Brechtian treatment of the learning play form in its ambivalence toward a moral and political outrage: the slaughter of a community choir by a right-wing extremist. Wood focuses on a film, *Der Kick* (directed by Andres Veiel and Gesina Schmidt), rather than a play. It signals its connection to Brecht in its subtitle, "A *Lehrstück* on Violence." What appears to be an incident of local brutality is reframed as something that is shot through with broader social and political contexts. The evidence provided is presented in such a way that it both establishes dialectical connections, yet leaves the contradictions open, provoking curious audience participation.

Finally, Nenad Jovanovic explores a documentary medium that is still in its infancy, the i-doc. *18 Days in Egypt* is an online collection of contributions that relates to the fall of Hosni Mubarak in 2010. Drawing on Brecht's theories of media, Jovanovic explicates the dialectical possibilities of the i-doc. He also teases out the ways in which similarities with Brechtian practice might offer readers new perspectives that do not rely so much on the authenticity of the material, but on its assemblage online.

Taken together, the dozen essays in this *Yearbook* reflect very well on the state of Brecht Studies. There is a healthy mixture of work that reviews and reevaluates older views and opinions, and work that breaks new ground by turning its attention to recent developments and artistic responses to them. The Fifteenth Symposium amply demonstrates that Brecht still presents a vibrant source for scholarship, either as the subject or the object of recycling.

These more academic papers are followed by a short section, which has its own short introduction, of “Creative Responses” to the challenge of the symposium title.

The editors, also as organizers of the symposium, would like to thank the many bodies and individuals who contributed financially and in so many other ways to the success of the event, and hence also to this volume. In particular, thanks are due to the International Brecht Society; the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council; St. Hugh’s College, Oxford University; the John Fell Fund; and the Toepfer Foundation, Hamburg. More personally, we would like to thank Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Birgit Mikus for help with translations, and Charlotte Ryland for her superb editorial assistance of all kinds.

Oxford and York, UK

Abbreviations

The Brecht Yearbook uses these standard abbreviations:

- BBA Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.
- BFA Bertolt Brecht, *Werke: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, edited by Werner Hecht et al., 30 vols. and *Register* (Berlin and Frankfurt am Main: Aufbau and Suhrkamp, 1988–2000).

Brecht übersetzt / Brecht übersetzen

Ausgehend von der Erkenntnis, dass Wiederholung und Variation fundamentale kulturelle Gesten sind, nähern wir uns Brechts exemplarischer Arbeit an die *Antigone*, wie sie das Modellbuch von 1948 zum Vorschein bringt, ein Modellbuch, das selbst 2016 zum Thema einer Inszenierung von René Pollesch am Schauspielhaus Zürich, *Bühne frei für Mick Levčik*, wurde. Dieses Stück Theater über die Praxis des Theaters war von der gesamten Geschichte der *Antigone* inspiriert und fuhr fort, sie, wie sie von Brecht und Caspar Neher's Bühnenbild der 1948er *Antigone* offenlegt, neu zu interpretieren. Dieser Essay verfolgt und untersucht die sukzessive Transformationen des "Werkes," die fortlaufenden radikalen Extremismen der Konzeption, Übersetzung, Bearbeitung, Reinterpretation: von der prä-dramatischen Tragödie des Sophocles über die Übersetzung ins "Drama" von Hölderlin bis zum "epischen" Theater Brechts, und dem post-dramatischen Diskurs des Pollesch. Jedes Mal findet eine umdeutende Übersetzung statt, die zugleich eine Transposition des theatralen Formtyps bedeutet—mit weitreichenden Implikationen für den Status (1) der Theorie der theatralischen Bühne und (2) des Schauspielers, der nicht mehr auf die Funktion beschränkt wird, die Rolle einer fiktiven Figur zu übernehmen. Schlussendlich entdeckt wird, dass jeder dieser Akte des Theaters das Potential hat, eine Grenze zu bespielen, an der die innere Unhaltbarkeit der Kategorien der Polis anschaulich wird, und wo die Ratio ihrer Alterität entgegentritt.

Starting from the recognition that repetition and variation are the fundamental gestures of culture, we approach Brecht's exemplary work on *Antigone* as revealed in the modelbook of 1948, which was, in turn, taken as the theme of a production by René Pollesch at the Zurich Schauspielhaus in 2016, *Bühne frei für Mick Levčik*. This piece of theater about the practice of theater was inspired by, and went on to reinterpret the whole history of *Antigone*, as revealed by Brecht and by Caspar Neher's stage set of the 1948 *Antigone*. The current essay traces and examines the transformations the "work" undergoes, the successive radical extremes of conception, translation, adaptation, reinterpretation: from the predramatic tragedy of Sophocles, through the translation into "drama" by Hölderlin, into the "epic" theater of Brecht, and to the post-dramatic discourse of Pollesch. In each instance the translation is a reinterpretation and at the same time it is a transposition of a specific type of theatrical form, introducing far-reaching implications for the status, first, of the theory of the stage and, second, of the actor who is not limited to the function of assuming the role of a fictional figure. What is ultimately discovered is that each of these acts of theater has the potential to perform a boundary where the categories of the polis are unsustainable, where rationality confronts its other.

Brecht Translating / Translating Brecht

Hans-Thies Lehmann

Recycling

There is hardly a more appropriate theme than recycling—the stubborn return of the “same”—that exemplifies the fundamental gesture of culture and even more so of the theater. Almost the entire repertoire of art consists of repetition, copy, and variation. Shakespeare invented not a single one of his numerous subjects. Reading a modern guide to dramas can seem like leafing through an encyclopedia of mythology. *Réécriture*—rewriting—is the law of culture: quotation, not originality in terms of content. The theater in particular repeats, quotes, copies, frequently oscillating between pastiche and parody, preexisting themes, subjects, figures, the entire course of narrative events. Since this process crosses not only the boundaries of language but also those between cultures and genres, we are confronted with a sort of translation in the broadest sense of the term—*Übersetzung* as *Über-Setzen*, carrying over.

With the modelbook of the 1948 staging of his *Antigone*, Bert Brecht provided a further dimension to the productive quality of copying. It must be immediately obvious that to see the modelbook as a guide for slavish imitation is to misunderstand it completely.¹ The model is to be treated with confidence; it lives on only through adaptation. From the perspective of language Brecht's adaptation of the Sophoclean tragedy is based on Hölderlin's translation. With unusual modesty Brecht chose the title *The Antigone of Sophocles: A Version for the Stage after Hölderlin's Translation*. From the perspective of content Brecht's adaptation is certainly a radical reinterpretation of the classical plot. *Antigone* became for Brecht a play about Hitler's fascism. Creon is called “my Führer.” Like Hitler, at the end he wants to take Argos down with him: “And it shall fall . . .” He indirectly kills his own child. For Brecht, Haemon is supposed to be Creon's weapon of war in the final hour, like Hitler's “generation of 1929.” Creon's hope for a final victory—“another battle”—is a deceptive illusion (and propaganda), just as it was for the Nazis. Here it is a question of the suicidal or suicidally inclined state. The real “attraction” of the *Antigone* play is rather “the role of violence in the breakdown of the state authority”—that is, something with little relation to the Sophoclean tragedy.

In spring 2016 René Pollesch made this very modelbook his theme in a production at the Zurich Schauspielhaus with the cryptic-sounding title *Bühne frei für Mick Levčik* (Presenting Mick Levčik).² He uses it as a quotation for a play about acting, a humorous, sometimes farcical reflection on

questions of the theater: on quoting and copying, the critique of naturalistic casting choices, illusion in the theater, typical discussions and conflicts in rehearsals. Like a common thread, the question arises again and again: “What is this play actually about?” The very successful production must be seen, then, in the tradition of making theater the theme of the theater that reaches from Molière’s *The Impromptu of Versailles* to Beckett’s *Catastrophe*. To engage with Brecht’s modelbook immediately introduces the question of how all stage acting is subject to the law of always already having been quoted, in word or gesture. As is generally known, the theme of quotation follows recent language philosophy, especially the analysis of so-called performance in speech-act theory, which then frequently finds its way into the actors’ discussions on Pollesch’s stage. In addition, the actors grappled with Judith Butler’s reading of *Antigone* so that one well-disposed critic commented how the production reminded him of a seminar at the Giessen Institute for Applied Theater Studies. In fact, in a too infrequently quoted formulation Brecht himself compared the theater production with a “colloquium” of the actors and viewers.

The project of working with Bertolt Brecht’s model production of *Antigone* is a new, unexpected move in the development of Pollesch’s postdramatic discourse theater. Other than some Brecht quotes from *Fatzer* and *Mother Courage* in his earlier works, Pollesch here for the first time has taken up a dramatic subject. It can be traced back to a plan of the recently deceased Bert Neumann, his long-standing, trusted collaborator and set designer. Neumann wanted to quote in the present the Caspar Neher set of the 1948 *Antigone*, the model of which he had been assigned as a student to restore. Now he had hoped to “stage” this stage on the main stage of the Zurich Schauspielhaus, the Pfauen Theater, for which the set was originally created.

The complex that I want to examine in what follows interests me from the perspective of European theater’s history of form and of translation. For a start we are dealing with a predramatic work, Sophocles’s classical tragedy. It underwent a translation by Hölderlin into the “dramatic” form, itself accomplished within the context of a crisis of dramatic tragedy, which led to the failure of his attempt to create a tragic drama with *Empedocles*. This is the translation that Brecht uses for his *Antigone* adaptation, which after the war was intended to reestablish the (no-longer-dramatic) Epic Theater. And now one of the most prominent representatives of contemporary postdramatic theater has taken on this material. In each instance the translation is a reinterpretation and at the same time it is a transposition of a specific type of theatrical form, introducing far-reaching implications for the status, first, of the theory of the stage and, second, of the actor who is not limited to the function of assuming the role of a fictional figure. Let us begin with Sophocles’s classical tragedy, then proceed to the translation by Hölderlin into the tragic drama of modernity, and then to Brecht’s version of Epic Theater, before we return finally to Pollesch’s postdramatic staging.

Sophocles

Still today the widespread understanding of Sophocles's *Antigone* is marked essentially by Hegel's interpretation and its subsequent variations. In contradistinction to Hegel's idea that the play's tragic core is to be sought in the dramatic collision of state law and family obligation as two equally legitimate ethical aims, from the perspective of *theater* aesthetics the construction of the conflict on the stage decisively shifts its meaning in the face of any conceptual formulation that it may undergo. Hence, it is advisable to relinquish the idea that the tragic text confronts antithetical "positions" on justice, politics, state, and the family. On the contrary, the tragedy makes "having a position" itself into a problem through a highly contradictory dramaturgical and dialogic procedure. It does not confront judgments but ways of judging. This is not a matter of two views about the priority of one law over another, but of two views about what constitutes a law or decree.

The law, as something grounded, confronts a law as something fundamentally ungrounded, if need be, something still to be grounded. The law as certainty faces the contingent; the performance of questioning, doubting, limiting confronts the performance of (absolute) positioning. Antigone's speech does not call for a different law, but in accordance with her speech's form she calls for a different kind of law, a radically ungrounded non-law, a justice beyond all norms. In any case Creon rightly senses the real level of resistance against his decree in this desire to insist on the self against the law. In Hölderlin's words:

KREON:

Die aber findet eine Lust aus damit,

Dass sie die vorgeschriebenen Gesetze trüb macht. (II. Akt, 1. Szene)

[Creon:

But she discovers a delight in muddying

The laws prescribed. (act 2, scene 1)³]

When Antigone muddies or ruptures forms of thought, she disrupts and undercuts any attempt to confer upon the law a "mystical authority." The point has been aptly made that the tragedy of Antigone is grounded in the temptation to take the polis not as an *image* of the whole but as the whole *itself*. Creon's hubris has to fail, for in truth the state that posits itself as the organization of (living) citizens cannot cast off completely its connection to the underworld by means of a rational order of power, as he would like. In this sense we can read the figure of Antigone as the model, even as the very *embodiment of tragedy itself*—and in some sense of the theater and art more generally, to the extent that she represents the claims of everything that is not subsumed into the political and judicial logic of "living" mortals and expediency. If the discourse of art can be defined as one of "surplus," the

suggestion of a possible other, it disrupts necessarily also the foundations of political rationality. Released from a certain control by madness, these foundations tend always to turn into machines of domination, “police” in Jacques Rancière’s sense, even if they are or appear to be democratic.

Creon knows time only in the linearity of purposeful action, a pragmatic teleology. It is not simply to be rejected as tyranny, and it is not seen as such by Sophocles, even if it actually functions as tyranny. On the contrary, it is more an issue of maintaining the polis as an end in itself and upon which everything else depends. In this linear and logical time of the polis there is no alternative to a principle of the political, which must be systematized as the difference between friend and enemy. The principle of enmity is consistent with the maintenance of order. Time, which Antigone brings into play against it, is a different principle: apolitical, rhythmical, and genealogical; the time of “Philia,” determined by generation, of sibling love in contrast to eros. This is a time in which the dead and the living coexist. The substance of her attitude materializes in a question:

KREON:

Doch, Guten gleich sind Schlimme nicht zu nehmen.

ANTIGONE:

Wer weiß, das kann doch drunt’ ein andrer Brauch sein.

[Creon:

But the bad are not to be taken like the good.

Antigone:

Who knows? Perhaps down there the custom’s different.]

This “wer weiß” (who knows) is staggering. It overturns everything. Rational discourse divides and differentiates. It is political discourse precisely to the extent that it can make distinctions. Creon’s response to this sentence is Carl Schmitt *avant la lettre*:

KREON:

Nie ist der Feind, auch wenn er tot ist, Freund.

[Creon:

The enemy, even dead, is never a friend.]

For Hades, for Antigone, for the sphere of the indistinguishable that she brings into play, all political criteria have to collapse because of this lack of certain knowledge. Everything turns to dust.

The substance of the tragic experience in tragic theater arises strikingly in Sophocles’s text when Antigone’s act is described:

KREON:

Was meinst du? Wer hat dies sich unterfangen?

DER BOTE:

Undenklich. Nirgend war von einem Karst
 Ein Schlag; und nicht ein Stoß von einer Schaufel,
 Und dicht das Land; der Boden ungegraben;
 Von Rädern nicht befahren. Zeichenlos war
 Der Meister, und wie das der erste Tagesblick
 Anzeigte, kams unhold uns all' an, wie ein Wunder.
 Nichts feierlichs. Es war kein Grabmal nicht.
 Nur zarter Staub, wie wenn man das Verbot
 Gescheut. Und auch des Wilds Fußtritte nirgend nicht,
 Noch eines Hundes, der gekommen und zerrissen.
 Und schlimme Worte fuhren durcheinander.

[Creon:

What do you mean? Who was it dared do this?

Messenger:

Not thinkable. Nowhere had any mattock
 Gone in or any shovel thrust, the land
 Was solid, the earth nowhere dug up,
 not ridden over by wheels. The master had left
 No mark and when the day's first glimpse denounced
 It to us, it had an eerie feel, like a miracle.
 Not ceremonial. Not a burial mound.
 Only a gentle dust as though someone had shied
 Before the ban. And nowhere any footsteps
 Of wild beasts, or dogs that had come and torn.
 And dire words went crossing to and fro. (act 1, scene 3)]

Antigone was there before their eyes, but she was invisible, no one saw her, and there is no trace of her. The sand, the earth is intact, no imprint, no break, no open crevice from digging. Neither a predator nor a dog was involved—both are mentioned in order to indicate figuratively that neither an attack from “outside,” from the wilds beyond the civilized polis, nor a guard dog from the “interior” of the humanized, policed space come into question. It is all about the *in between*. Something between the earth and the airspace, between inside and outside, has become manifest, was lingering in an unthinkable, inconceivable boundary zone. The scene presents the act in a rhetorically produced field of uncertainty, as a boundary phenomenon—or more precisely as a non-phenomenon, as something un-appearing. Something happens in the field of vision that was not seen. The terrain that was guarded, and seemed to be under watch, can be neither defined nor sealed off. There is an act and a trace, dust on the corpse, but the perpetrator has made a clean getaway, and with not a trace to be found in the dust. These verbal images tell us: there is a gap in perception that appears to be “eerie,” “terrifying,” “sudden,” and to that extent rationally unresolvable.

The motif of lack of knowledge, certainty, conscience shimmers through again and again in Antigone's language when she takes aim at the "prescribed" law. This is a language that conspicuously avoids self-positioning and replaces it with negation and indirect speech. To Creon's reproach that she has violated his custom (Greek: *nomos*) she does not, for example, defend her own custom along the lines of: "It is also a custom to bury the dead." Instead she quarrels and negates:

ANTIGONE:

Darum. *Mein* Zeus berichtete mirs nicht;
Noch hier im Haus das Recht der Todesgötter,
Die unter Menschen das Gesetz begrenzet.

[Antigone:

Because. *My* Zeus did not dictate that law
Nor did the justice of the gods of death
Here in the house who limit human laws. (act 2, scene 3)]

She doesn't say, for instance: I followed the decree of the gods of death; she says: Your decree did *not* strike me as superior to their decree. She does not affirm the right of the gods of death as a counterdecree, but argues by negation, by limitation, for a "*boundary*" to the law of the polis. And when she reaches the climax of her argument—gesturing to traditional rites and claims of the dead to being honored—her discourse emphasizes in a remarkable way precisely all that is uncertain about them:

ANTIGONE:

Noch schien mir dein Gebot von solcher Kraft,
das sterbliche, dass es das ungeschriebene,
Untilgbare der Götter übertraf.
Denn nicht von gestern, nicht von ehegestern,
Das währt und lebt, weiß keiner, seit wie lang.

[Antigone:

Nor did your decree appear to have the power
The merely human, to override the unrecorded
Immutable laws of the gods.
They are not merely today or yesterday but
Endure eternally, and no one knows since when.]

This is Karl Solger's German version of 1808. Hölderlin's translation heightens the point so that not only the time but also even the source of these unwritten laws is unknown:

ANTIGONE:

Und niemand weiß, woher sie sind gekommen

[Antigone:

And nobody can tell where they have come from. (act 2, scene 1)]

For the Greek *ex hotou* can be read as meaning “since when?” (seit wann?) as well as “for what reason?” (aus welchem Grunde?).

Hölderlin

It is well-known that Hölderlin considered his text of Sophocles to be much more than a translation from ancient Greek into German. He saw his task as transposing the classical text of ancient tragedy (that can be called in our terminology predramatic) into the modern dramatic genre of the tragic drama—or, to put it in Benjamin’s context: of the *Trauerspiel*. It is a paradox of theater history that this very translation, which still today many consider to be unstageable, should have had such an enormous impact precisely on stage practices. Ridiculed by the poet’s own contemporaries, mocked and rejected as the product of a sick mind, it reveals a unique poetic and linguistic practice that did not seek to “communicate” and is fully accessible really only to those who can read the original in Greek. Hölderlin’s adaptation is, like much of his late poetry, characterized by a radical extremism that sacrifices immediate comprehensibility: what Hellingrath calls its stark juxtaposition or “harte Fügung” and Adorno “parataxis.” As Hellingrath writes: “This form of poetry pulls listeners from one difficult word to the next, never allows them to come into their own, to understand, imagine, feel something in their own sense: they must follow the flow from word to word.”⁴

The intractability of this language takes on meaning in at least a two-fold way. On the one hand it corresponds to the poet’s intention to make the all-too-smooth and all-too-accomplished classical form coarser, as it were, rockier, in order to excavate the kernel from its far too successful disguise in perfect form. For Hölderlin, this was a condition of truly modern literature. On the other hand, the difficult comprehensibility of the text points to a new “art of song” (*Sangart*), anticipating the intellectualization of theater in modernity that introduces a radical “reversal of all ways of thinking and forms.” When he remarks that a future “patriotic” (*vaterländisch*) art form does not have “to end actually with murder and death,” we can discern his rejection of the dramatic plot in favor of a (dramatic-) literary form that can be thought of as lyric or epic.⁵ The eminent Hölderlin scholar Wolfgang Binder sees Hölderlin’s “impressive modernity” in his emphasis on stepping back to reflect, which prefigures the Epic Theater.⁶ Viewed in this way, it comes no longer as such a great surprise that Brecht drew on Hölderlin’s “difficult” text. What he himself characterizes as his “streamlining” (“Durchrationalisierung”) of the play extends in a certain sense the line of Hölderlin, who already posits the

rupture (“Zäsur”) by a moment of “intellectual perception” in the place of a “tragic” fate. Brecht for his part introduces a radical “translation” that also focuses attention on the theme of knowing.

Brecht

After the predramatic theater of classical tragedy there evolved in the Renaissance the form of drama that in theater practice we should refer to as *dramatic theater*. Hölderlin represents a moment at the end of the eighteenth century when the model of dramatic theater had taken a turn to an inherently literary work of art: let us call it *dramatic literary theater*. Brecht, who considered all of his work in the theater to be an alternative project to dramatic theater in order to perform the epic style in an exemplary fashion, surprisingly (and, as it seems, largely upon the instigation of Caspar Neher) takes on the classical form as well as the language of Hölderlin’s version. Neher’s stage, just like Hölderlin’s language, harks back beyond the conventionalized idea of classical beauty to the archaic time, seeking to point to the present through the guise of the ancient play:

. . . wo einst unter den
Tierschädeln barbarischen Opferkults
Urgrauer Zeiten die Menschlichkeit
Groß aufstand.

[Where formerly among
The skulls of the sacrificial beasts of a barbarous cult
In very ancient times humanity
Stood up tall.⁷]

In his text about the 1951 production, Brecht’s most salient point is the replacement of the classical idea of surrendering oneself to “fate,” which mankind “more or less blindly” suffers. His adaptation, in contrast, proceeds from the “opinion mankind’s fate is mankind itself.” Classical literature, he holds, can “bear” this enormous alteration because “at bottom, it is an entirely realistic text that, with a great deal of practical human insight and political experience, gives shape to a real event . . .” According to Brecht, this event would have been “the fall of the ruling house of Oedipus.”⁸

The unused, 1947 introductory exposé by Neher and Brecht claims that Sophocles’s *Antigone* shows “the decided rejection of tyranny in favor of democracy.”⁹ That is more or less a quotation of Hölderlin’s own interpretation, who suggests that in *Antigone* a “republican form of reason” takes shape. Of course, we can smile today at the arrogance that resonates in the praise for Sophocles’s political realism, offered from the vantage point of the latest Marxist insights. Nonetheless, it is remarkable how Brecht grasps a state’s collapse as the logic of an inner mechanism: a war of conquest

produces horrors also internally, resulting in the weakening and division of rule. If the desire to triumph becomes too overwhelming, it is to the detriment of the army's own military prowess.

As far as the title figure is concerned, for Brecht she belongs to the dominant group, she herself has "eaten from the bread." As he declared, it was his own "streamlining" that—precisely through the analogies with her that it highlights—brought to light the fact that "the great figure of resister in the old play" simply cannot represent "the German resistance fighters who necessarily seem most important to us."¹⁰ (This would obviously have been the working class and in particular the communist resistance fighters.) We might ask whether Brecht's astonishment is not a mask here. Is it not much more probable that it rubbed him the wrong way from the start to depict a simply positive resistance heroine? Be that as it may, he does create once again a figure of contradiction and surrounded by a questionable twilight: Antigone's "humanity" consists precisely in her acceptance of the defeat of her own people. What Brecht considered to be "tragic" in antiquity, the belief in fate, is certainly replaced by the impressively analytical depiction of a political process. However, an element of the "irrational" tragic behavior persists, and be it only in the motive of self-sacrifice. It functions as a remainder of the tragic model in a text that so clearly sets out to replace the tragic by rational insight.

Brecht seeks every opportunity to render his aesthetics of barbs, which applies secret brakes to the seemingly straightforward transformation of the tragic material into rationally comprehensible conflicts. He even comes close to the daring interpretation of Lacan, who locates the ethical in psychoanalysis in the fact that for the subject it is not a matter of identification with some principle but "the insurmountable power of being—against all odds—that which it is" ("le pouvoir infranchissable d'être envers et contre tout, ce qu'il est").¹¹ In this sense Antigone embodies "the pure and simple desire for death as such" ("le pur et simple désir de mort comme tel"). When Ismene reproaches her, Brecht puts in Antigone's mouth the following, freely invented formulation, which has no corresponding passage in Sophocles or Hölderlin:

ISMENE:

Vielleicht macht es der Schwester Lust, mich zu verspotten

ANTIGONE:

Vielleicht macht's Kummer auch, *und ich begehre mein Schmerzglas voll.*

[Ismene:

Perhaps it is my sister's pleasure to mock me.

Antigone:

Perhaps her grief as well, *and I desire my cup of suffering full.*]

And in the third strophe of the famous stasimon Brecht's decision seems almost sensational when he reproduces Hölderlin's mistake in a crucial line for interpreting the entire play—which was the case for Heidegger as well:

Die Alten:
Allbewandert/Unbewandert. Zu nichts kommt er.

[Elders:
All-traveled / Untraveled. He comes to nothing.]

He maintains the “tragic” reading like an erratic obstruction in the enlightened text, simply adding the philologically more valid translation—the one, we might have guessed, closer to the project of “Durchrationalisierung”:

Überall weiß er Rat / Ratlos trifft ihn nichts.

[Always he knows what to do / Nothing nonplusses him.]

The traces of a tragic perspective remain, even if the Marxist Brecht leaves out the themes of death and pestilence in what follows and “invents” for the end of the chorus song the new theme of “measure.” The powers of nature in no way limit humankind's control over it:

Dies alles ist grenzlos ihm

[In all this he is boundless]

but there follows an intentional anacoluthon:

. . . ist / Aber ein Maß gesetzt

[but / A measure is set.]

and this leads to a completely new passage added by Brecht. The measure is the measure of the political. Brecht emphasizes humankind's oppression of other humans, the resistance against it, the problem of property and the struggle against property, the loss of humanity in class society. Almost in the manner of Rousseau Brecht introduces the clear denunciation of class society in place of the fundamental ambiguity of the original.

Pollesch

René Pollesch essentially plays around Brecht's prelude—a text that deserves more attention than it usually gets because of the subtlety with which he takes up and then modulates the motifs of the tragedy. In the case of Pollesch it immediately becomes clear that it is not the tragic plot that

counts but rather playing theater, not the original but the modelbook as an idea. In epic style the stage directions are spoken. Sophie Rois begins:

Berlin, April 1945. Tagesanbruch. Zwei Schwestern kommen aus dem Luftschutzkeller zurück in ihre Wohnung.
 Und als wir kamen aus dem Luftschutzkeller
 Und es war unversehrt das Haus [*hier übernimmt Marie Rosa Tietjen die "Ismene"*] und heller
 Als von der Früh, vom Feuer gegenüber
 War's meine Schwester, die zuerst es sah.
 (*Sophie Rois öffnet die Tür*)
 Schwester! Warum steht unsre Türe offen?

[Berlin, April 1945. Daybreak. Two sisters come back to their home from the air-raid shelter.
 And when we came up from the air-raid shelter
 And the house was whole [*here Marie Rosa Tietjen takes over "Ismene"*] and in a brighter
 Light than dawn from the fire opposite
 It was my sister who first noticed.
 (*Sophie Rois opens the door*)
 Sister, why is our door open wide?]

And this triggers the first laugh. As with Brecht, here it is a matter of the theater confessing cheerfully its magical illusion, its constructedness: the door is open because she just opened it.

Marie Rosa Tietjen:
 Der Feuerwind hat sie von drauß getroffen.
 Sophie Rois:
 Schwester, woher kommt da im Staub die Spur?
 Marie Rosa Tietjen:
 Von einem der hinauslief ist es nur.

[Marie Rosa Tietjen:
 The draft of the fire has hit it from outside.
 Sophie Rois:
 Sister, what made the tracks there in the dust?
 Marie Rosa Tietjen:
 Nothing but someone who went up there fast.]

Then the Second Sister sees a coat in the corner:

Schwester, was ist das für ein Zwirn im Eck?
 [Sister, the twine in the corner there, what's that?]

Pollesch uses the archaic “Zwirn” or twine, perhaps because twine, like this production, has been twisted together from different threads, in other words, “gezwirnt” or twined. She puts on the coat and pulls from the pocket what we read in Brecht:

Ein Brotlaib, Schwester, und ein ganzer Speck

[A joint of bacon, sister, and a loaf of bread.]

Then, however, it’s no longer Brecht but Harpo Marx. From the seemingly deep coat pocket ever more objects are brought forth:

Und ein Hase. Und ein Horn. Schwester, wer war da hier?

Und eine Krücke. Und ein Kunstbein. Und ein Schlitten.

[And a rabbit. And a horn. Sister, who was here?

And a crutch. And a fake leg. And a sled.]

Later also a toaster, until the actor playing Creon intervenes:

Nils Kahnwald:

Nee, Leute, darum geht es nicht! Worum geht es in diesem Stück? Das ist die Frage. Du bist nicht mehr am Modellbuch, du bist ausgeschert.

Sophie Rois:

Modellbuch hin, Modellbuch her. Man wird doch wohl noch einen Einfall haben dürfen. Oder ist das jetzt verboten? Das Modellbuch wurde uns doch nicht gegeben, um etwas zu fixieren, ganz im Gegenteil. Es lebt überhaupt erst mit der Weiterentwicklung.

[Nils Kahnwald:

No, folks, that’s not right! What is this play about? That’s the question. You’re no longer in the modelbook, you veered off.

Sophie Rois:

Who cares about the modelbook. We’re allowed to have an idea after all, aren’t we? Or is that forbidden now? We weren’t given the modelbook to ossify it, on the contrary. It lives only when developed further.]

That is a Brecht quote, and time and again such theoretical quotes are appropriated in one way or another. It is impossible here to describe the fireworks of the individual phases of the production; instead I will limit myself to sketching some of its themes.

Theme 1: Tragedy and Comedy

The final lines of Brecht’s prelude in the printed version consist of an open-ended question aimed also at the audience:

Sollt sie in eigner Todespein
Jetzt gehen, den Bruder zu befreien?
Er mochte nicht gestorben sein.

[Should she on pain of death go now
And free our brother who
May be dead or no?]

Several readings are possible here. The brothers suffering should be avenged (the last line “er mochte nicht sterben” can mean he didn’t want to die). That would be a humane act, but not rationally “calculated,” that is, not a “meaningful” act from this point of view. Or the brother is perhaps still alive and therefore to be “freed”: that would be a politically risky but humanly understandable act. In no way does moral obligation of a ritual burial play a role. By contrast, Brecht’s 1948 stage script put it plainly. There the Second Sister stabs the SS man because she doesn’t want to “let her brother hang”:

Und als er hat nach ihr gelangt
Hat meine Schwester nicht geschwankt
Und als sie ihm das Messer eintrieb
Da war mir meine Schwester lieb.

[And after he had reached for her
My sister wavered not at all
And after she drove in the knife
There was the love for my sister.]

In this careful and childlike use of the word “lieb” Brecht seeks apparently to echo Hölderlin’s frequent choice of words like dear (lieb), the beloved ones (die Lieben), and being friendly (mitlieben), derived from the Greek *philoí*.

Pollesch breaks off his quote of the prelude right before this high point of the tragic plot. When Antigone wants to go out the door, possibly to save her hanged brother, and her sister wants to hold her back, she fights back:

Sophie Rois:
Laß mich, bin schon nicht gegangen
Wie sie ihn uns aufgehangen.
Marie Rosa Tietjen:
Und als sie wollt vor das Haustor
Ein SS-Mann trat hervor.

[Sophie Rois:
Let me go. I didn’t while
They were hanging him. Now I will.

Marie Rosa Tietjen:
 And as she made for the door
 An SS man stood there.]

But instead of the SS man, at this very moment a queer, dancing Nazi chorus appears, quoting Mel Brooks's *The Producers*.

Sophie Rois:
 Ein SS-Mann trat hervor. Einer!

[Sophie Rois:
 One SS man stood there. One!]

Pandemonium now causes the rehearsal to get entirely out of hand, and in a not atypical manner for Pollesch, more or less chaotic discussions ensue: the obnoxious vogue of Nazis on the stage, questions of casting, theater conflicts. How do we connect the Nazi comedy and the classical tragedy in light of this association? It is not really possible to fall prey to the error that here pure slapstick is displacing the theater. On the contrary. Pollesch himself pulls out all the stops of epically estranged, exaggerated theater so that an homage or evocation of the theatrical here-and-now results. His work assumes its place in the honorable theater tradition dating back to Molière's *Impromptu of Versailles* as well as in the more recent tradition of films he directly quotes, including *Opening Night* with Gena Rowlands to Mel Brooks's *The Producers*, all of them focused on the actors themselves as a theme, their reflections, their situation in front of the audience, their condition as the medium of someone else's text. Tragedy is implied in the comedy, which, however, does not give an inch. This theater is guided by the conviction that the tragic mood of desperation hardly can find a more adequate expression than the dark sarcasm of the comic style.

Theme 2: The Actors

Georg Simmel could write: "Just as the piece of canvas does not become the painted work of art through the application of colors, the actor as a living reality is not the theatrical work of art . . . Being has no place on the stage."¹² Yet contemporary postdramatic theater contradicts fundamentally this declaration. Theater has been stricken with deep skepticism about the possibility of providing a representation of reality, hence the actors' presence on the stage has become ever more aesthetically important. This is not only a gain in playfulness. It marks a further advance in the direction that Brecht was the first to undertake consistently in the Epic Theater. Here, too, the actors do not disappear into their represented roles but rather foreground their own positions so that they can critically comment from there on the substance of the play's characters. Criticizing the theatrical illusion

and shifting the notion of acting from role-player to performer may be regarded as two equivalent shifts, two aspects of one and the same movement in theater aesthetics from re-presentation to presentation.

Once upon a time actors were the medium of the text and hence of the spirit and hence of the tradition and hence of the history and hence they could be seen as a medium of cultural identity. If actors once were expected to be a medium, then we now find that the new understanding of theater has made this medium itself into a theme. The medium is the message. The actors refuse to disappear behind the role, behind the persona in the old sense of the word: the mask. This shift in theatricality has far-reaching consequences in terms of a kind of brother- or sisterhood relation between performer and spectator. We recognize our affinity to them: our self is a construct just like theirs, a dramatic fiction. We are under the constant demand to perform well. It is our gestures that are socially coded, our emotions that are manipulable, our intimacy that is largely role-playing. We all make theater. Brecht's theater calls upon us to leave behind our spontaneous ideologies that lead us to believe that our thinking, decisions, and wishes are what we want, whereas in reality they are socially coded ideas, attitudes, and wishes with which we comply. Similarly Pollesch's theater calls upon us to leave behind the fetish of authenticity:

Sophie Rois:

Wir müssen zitieren, damit wir weiterkommen, anders geht es nicht. So leben wir ja auch. Das nennt man Kultur. Es geht nicht drum, sich auszudrücken, sondern wir müssen zitieren, um mit unseren Worten eine Wirkung zu erreichen.

[Sophie Rois:

We must quote to move forward, there is no other way. That's how we live. It's called culture. It's not a matter of expressing ourselves, instead we have to quote so that our words have an impact.]

The conventional mode of perception in the theater demands that we accept the real actors up there on stage as a pure, almost childlike illusion and focus on what lies "behind" it, on what is intended, the fictional world, the meaning of the words and gestures, the logic of the events. Let's just say: basically we are asked in the theater to *forget the theater* in favor of the dramatic depiction. It's no wonder that in reaction the need arose to elevate this forgotten dimension to the dominant, possibly even exclusive one.

That is a given in Pollesch's theater.

It demands an art of spectatorship ("Zuschaukunst") that extends the Brecht line, that doesn't delude us about the chasm between the fictional and the real onstage but instead explores this very split, acknowledging the performers as persons with their own wishes and interests.

Theme 3: Judith Butler

There is one issue in contemporary debates about Antigone that the actors take up—although the term *debate* is misleading here because for Pollesch all speech is essentially monologic or choral. Therefore, the various actors all speak in the same direction, as it were, resulting in a discourse with distributed voices. There is no dramatic dialogue. They do, however, have a sound grasp of Judith Butler’s reading of the Antigone figure. As is well known, Butler poses the question as to how it is possible that the discourse on Antigone can stubbornly maintain that her status is to be the representative of a good and healthy family in contrast to the state. Is it not obvious that she is the offspring of a completely broken, screwed-up, incestuous family? Butler reads *Antigone* with the aim of demolishing a certain nostalgic idealization of the family, a construct that in the present has less legitimacy than ever. I quote Butler:

[We live] during a time in which children because of divorce and remarriage, because of migration, exile, and refugee status, because of global displacements of various kinds, move from one family to another . . . live in multiply layered family situations, in which they may well have more than one woman who operates as the mother, more than one man who operates as the father, or no mother or no father . . . this is a time in which kinship has become fragile, porous, and expansive.¹³

She underscores the “social deformation” and the “socially contingent character of kinship,” which receives attention neither from Hegel nor from Lacan. Butler asks whether the boundary Antigone crosses may not be “the trace of an alternative legitimacy that haunts the conscious, public sphere as its scandalous future.”

From this point of view Antigone is by no means the representative of kinship and family but conversely is legible as “an allegory for the crisis of kinship” (Butler, 24). The way Antigone brings kinship into play does not mark an opposing “political” position but rather a “transcendental” principle, to the extent that kinship can be conceived as the “prepolitical” condition of possibility of all politics. In a productive move Butler reformulates Hegel’s concept of “Sittlichkeit” or morality in a somewhat Kantian move as “cultural intelligibility,” which is not affirmed but problematized by tragedy. Tragedy represents “the limits of intelligibility, which are exposed at the limits of kinship.” This is a brilliant analysis—even if Butler emphasizes much too strongly (in my opinion) that Antigone remains within the limits of the dominant discourse of Creon, that she allows herself to become part of this discourse by herself making use of its way of arguing. Butler overstates this point. As I tried to show, Antigone’s discourse of limiting, doubting, and questioning keeps a marked distance from the political discourse of positing.

What the scene of classical theater, what Hölderlin, what the scene of Brechtian theater, and the theater of Pollesch accomplish is this: they perform a boundary at which the categories of the polis are depicted as internally unsustainable. They cannot be sustained because and as long as they always rely on some exclusion, the exclusion of the “human”—be it the exclusion of the dead, the expulsion of the underclass and enemies, in brief: the exclusion of the other. Only speech acts in the theater offer this chance: to place us precisely on the borderline where rationality meets its other. Speech acts in the theater appear as the mimetic reflection of actual speech and simultaneously as radically decontextualized, or at least imprecisely contextualized, intelligible and yet residing on the boundary of intelligibility. The speech of the theater is systematically constructed as if the shards of a broken jug were being held together in someone’s hands, so that it looks like a whole, yet we see all the cracks and know that the cohesion or illusion of the whole will not hold or cannot be held together for long: in the moment when the tension of the hands’ grip eases, it will shatter and turn to shards.

—Translated by Marc Silberman,
in consultation with Steve Giles

Notes

¹ For material from the Antigone modelbook, including photos of Caspar Neher’s stage for the 1948 production, see “On *The Antigone of Sophocles* (1947–48) from *Antigone Model 1948*,” in Tom Kuhn, Steve Giles, and Marc Silberman, eds., *Brecht on Performance: Messingkauf and Modelbooks* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2014), 163–80.

² The play opened in Zurich on April 1, 2016.

³ For Hölderlin’s text in German, see <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/antigone-6244/1> (Friedrich Hölderlin, *Werke in 2 Bänden*, Günter Mieth, ed. [Dortmund: Harenberg, 1982], II: 397–450). For the English rendering, see Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hölderlin’s Sophocles*, David Constantine, trans. (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2001).

⁴ Norbert von Hellingrath, *Pindarübertragungen von Hölderlin. Prolegomena zu einer Erstausgabe* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1911) and Theodor W. Adorno, “Parataxis: On Hölderlin’s Late Poetry,” *Notes to Literature* III (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 109–49.

⁵ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Werke und Briefe* (Munich: Hanser, 1970), II: 946.

⁶ Wolfgang Binder, *Hölderlin-Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1970).

⁷ Bertolt Brecht, *Die Antigone des Sophokles. Nach der Hölderlinschen Übertragung für die Bühne bearbeitet*, BFA 8: 193–242. All translations of Brecht’s *Antigone* are by David Constantine, *The Antigone of Sophocles*, in Brecht, *Collected Plays* 8 (London: Methuen, 2003), 1–51. All translations of other *Antigone* versions, including Pollesch’s, are by Marc Silberman.

⁸ Bertolt Brecht, "Notes on the Adaptation, 1951," David Constantine, trans., in Brecht, *Collected Plays 8* (London: Methuen, 2003), 216.

⁹ Bertolt Brecht and Caspar Neher, "Draft of a Foreword, 1947," David Constantine, trans., in Brecht, *Collected Plays 8*, 201.

¹⁰ Bertolt Brecht and Caspar Neher, "Masterful Treatment of a Model (Foreword to the *Antigone-Model*)," David Constantine, trans., Brecht, *Collected Plays 8*, 204.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire VII. L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, June 8, 1960. See <http://staferla.free.fr/S7/S7.htm>.

¹² Georg Simmel, "Der Schauspieler und die Wirklichkeit," *Berliner Tagesblatt und Handelszeitung*, 41.II (January 7, 1912), I. Beiblatt, 5–6; see <http://socio.ch/sim/verschiedenes/1912/schauspieler.htm>.

¹³ Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 22.

Immanente Verfremdung: Brechts Lektüre von Shakespeares Tragödien

Brecht setzte sich im Laufe seines Lebens immer wieder mit Shakespeares Tragödien auseinander. Obwohl es sich dabei meist um kurze Notizen und Reflektionen handelte, intensivierte Brecht seine Arbeit an Shakespeare in Situationen, in denen er mit theatralischen Mitteln auf die ihn umgebende politische Situation zu reagieren suchte. Dieser Beitrag konzentriert sich auf Brechts Notizen zu *Macbeth* (1927) und *Hamlet* (1948). Im Jahre 1927 arbeitete Brecht an der zweiten Phase seines *Fatzer*-Fragments; 1948 probte er *Antigone des Sophokles*. Beide Stücke behandeln Extremsituationen der deutschen Geschichte: Fahnenflucht im Ersten Weltkrieg (*Fatzer*) und Fahnenflucht am Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs (Brechts Prolog in *Antigone*). In beiden Arbeitsphasen interessierte sich Brecht besonders für die Verfremdung, die Shakespeares Tragödien innewohnt. Er beschreibt eine "wilde Unlogik," die zur "Unterbrechung des tragischen Geschehens" führe. Obwohl diese Verfremdungstechniken Shakespeares Tragödien teilweise episieren, stellt Brecht das Tragische an sich nicht infrage, sondern sieht in seinem dionysischen Aspekt ein angemessenes Mittel, den traumatischen und irrationalen Aspekten der deutschen Geschichte gerecht zu werden.

Brecht engaged repeatedly with Shakespeare's tragedies throughout his life. Although this was mostly in short notes and reflections, his work on Shakespeare intensified when he sought to respond to the current political situation through theatrical means. This essay focuses on Brecht's notes on *Macbeth* (1927) and *Hamlet* (1948). In 1927 Brecht was working on the second phase of his *Fatzer* fragment; in 1948 he was rehearsing *Antigone des Sophokles*. Both plays deal with extreme situations in German history: desertion in World War I (*Fatzer*) and desertion at the end of World War II (Brecht's prologue to *Antigone*). In both phases Brecht was particularly interested in the *Verfremdung* inherent in Shakespeare's tragedies. He describes a "wild illogicality," which leads to the "interruption of the tragic event." Although these *Verfremdung* techniques of Shakespeare's are to an extent rendered epic, Brecht does not question the tragic element per se, but rather sees in its Dionysian aspect an appropriate means for responding to the traumatic and irrational aspects of German history.

Inherent Estrangement: Brecht's Reading of Shakespeare's Tragedies

Astrid Oesmann

Some see Shakespeare's tragedies as an aesthetic response to bad politics. This might have been part of what attracted Brecht to Shakespeare and to tragedy. Brecht turned to Shakespeare on and off during his career, as numerous and mostly short notes attest.¹ But there were times when Brecht's studies of Shakespeare intensified, and these were times when Brecht struggled with how his own theater could respond to extreme changes in German politics. Shakespeare's approach to theater disrupts the tragic representation of historical narratives. Brecht detected elements of *Verfremdung* in this aspect of Shakespeare's tragedies and sought to recycle these components in his most experimental theater and in his own staging of Greek tragedy.

To illustrate this I will concentrate on two examples of Brecht's reception of Shakespeare: his notes on *Macbeth* in 1927 and his reading of *Hamlet* in 1948. In 1927 Brecht was writing the second phase of his *Fatzer* fragment, a play about four World War I soldiers who, under the guidance of Johann Fatzer, desert from the German army and attempt to live collectively in hiding while waiting for a revolution that they expect to end the war. In 1948 Brecht turned to *Hamlet* when he was directing his *Antigone des Sophokles*, to which he added a new prelude about two sisters who find out that their only brother has deserted from the German army and is about to be hanged by the SS. During the Weimar Republic, while working on *Fatzer* and again after World War II, while working on *Antigone*, Brecht turned to Shakespeare's tragedies to work through the political situations he found himself in. He studied and used tragedy to engage with contemporary history in ways that allowed him to hold onto the critical distance of epic theater, but still engage with violent aspects of history.

It was less Brecht, however, than Heiner Müller who turned to Shakespeare's tragedies in order to come to terms with irrational implications of historical events. Müller turned to Shakespeare in order to counter what he calls "Vereinfachung in Brecht" (simplification in Brecht).² Like Brecht, Müller worked with *Macbeth* and with *Hamlet*. He also created a stage version out of Brecht's *Fatzer* fragment, and he wrote his own version of *Macbeth*. Comparing *Macbeth* with Stalin, Müller states, "Macbeth ist eine große

Figur, kein Schurke” (Macbeth is a great character, not a villain, *W* 11, 332), focusing on tragic subjectivity in the specific context of communist despotism.³ Brecht sought to come to terms with a failed German revolution after World War I and later the aftermath of National Socialism; Müller sought to work through communism.⁴ While both authors worked through history and tragedy in different ways, this essay will show that Brecht also engaged with tragedy as a way to show traumatic implications of history.

Brecht’s theater is often perceived as anti-tragic, but it is noteworthy that when finding himself in extreme political situations that revealed historical change, he turned to tragedy, often while experimenting with new theatrical forms. The *Lehrstücke*, Brecht’s most experimental form of theater, intend to suspend the separation between actors and audience through exercises in mimesis that place death at their center. Collective learning must include learning how to die, and Brecht calls the *Lehrstücke* a “Sterbelehre” (teaching of death) when he seeks to foster “Einverständnis” (consent) with death (*BFA* 3, 38). But death is not the only lesson in the *Lehrstücke*; Brecht is equally concerned with mourning: “Worüber ein Mensch in Trauer verfällt und in was für eine Trauer, das zeigt seine Größe. Die Trauer auf eine große Stufe zu heben, sie zu einer gesellschaftlich nützlichen Sache zu machen, ist eine künstlerische Aufgabe” (What a person mourns and the nature of his mourning reveals his quality. To lift mourning up to a high level, to make it socially useful, is a task of the arts, *BFA* 21, 403). If it is the task of the arts to elevate mourning in order to make it useful, then theater can participate in this process by making mourning visible as a social event. The *Lehrstücke* are exercises in collective mourning and it is in this most experimental work that Brecht comes closest to classical Greek tragedy. That is why his anti-tragic stance must be seen as relative, something that is being recognized in various aspects of Brecht’s work. Most recently, it was Hans-Thies Lehmann who showed that Brecht, like Artaud, sought to launch his new form of modernist theater in confrontation with Greek tragedy.⁵ In *Fatzer* Brecht turns to Greek tragedy with two choruses, catharsis and intellectual clarification while maintaining the structure of the *Lehrstücke*.⁶ However, the reflections on the barbarism of World War I and its historically specific context (*BFA* 10, 516) led Brecht not to the Greeks but to Shakespeare.

In *Fatzer* Brecht examines desertion as an act that leaves the one who commits it to “be deserted,” or, in Fatzer’s words, “Ich mache / Keinen Krieg mehr . . . Ich bin verloren” (I make war no longer / I’m doomed, *BFA* 10, 394). Desertion as an act of disobedience has its own revolutionary and tragic potential and the fragment moves between teaching play and tragedy. *Fatzer* explores the existential question of whether by separating themselves from the troops the four men could survive a war directed against their own class interests, or whether they were more likely to survive by remaining part of an obedient mass while working for a revolutionary change for all. These questions are examined in teaching-play style and are

positioned in elaborate contexts, such as choral sequences and theoretical reflections. After having worked on the *Fatzer* text for four years, Brecht termed the play “unaufführbar” (un-performable, *BFA* 10, 1118) and left it a fragment.⁷ His reasons for considering the play unfit for the stage may lie in the extraordinary richness of the text. Lehmann finds elements of contradictory genres such as epic theater, *Lehrstück*, tragedy, and surrealist phantasmagoria.⁸ Like the *Lehrstücke*, *Fatzer* examines collective discipline and death, but it pursues those explorations in settings that include immediate material contingencies and basic human desires that the *Lehrstücke* avoid, such as subsistence, sexuality, and naked violence. Brecht subsumes these three topics under the comprehensive notion of “Furchtzentrum” (fear center) as a permanent disturbance that makes a smooth conclusion of the play as unlikely as smooth conclusions to people’s lives. As the four men wait for a better time, they anticipate the following: “Denn jetzt muß / Kommen eine gute Zeit; denn jetzt bald / Tritt hervor das neue Tier, das / Geboren wird, den Menschen auszulösen” (For now must / come a good time / for now soon / Emerges the new animal, which / will be born, to release mankind, *BFA* 10, 428–29). What constitutes a human being is subject to negotiation in all teaching plays, but this question gains added urgency in *Fatzer*. The men born from a tank, as *Fatzer* puts it, emerge from a barbaric prehistory looking for redemption to arrive in the form of a new animal. *Fatzer*, who convinces his friends to desert, ensures the downfall of the collective by preaching solidarity while practicing selfishness. While the story of *Fatzer* ends with the demise of all four men, it reveals in the midst of murder, treason, and squalidness what Brecht calls the “blutige[n] Spuren einer neuen Moral” (bloody traces of a new morality, *BFA* 10.1, 469). This new morality is never explicitly outlined, nor is the bloodshed redeemed, because Brecht withholds any telos of revolution.

Parallel to *Fatzer* Brecht also worked on a radio version of *Macbeth*, and although the actual play is lost, the questions Brecht ponders in his annotations give us clues about the importance Brecht assigns to Shakespeare for modern theater. Brecht maintains that the most intriguing parts of the tragedy are those in which Macbeth is tangled up in bloody, but futile undertakings. Those scenes that release the main character into fight and futility are what Brecht considers to be the essence of the play, and this essence, he insists, could not be presented in traditional German theater. Brecht explains the reason:

Wir haben gesehen, dass es sich hier um eine gewisse Unlogik, um eine wilde Willkür handelt, die alle technischen Folgen szenischer Dezentralisierung ruhig auf sich nimmt. Jene gewisse Unlogik der Vorgänge, jener immer wieder gestörte Ablauf eines tragischen Geschehnisses ist unserem Theater nicht eigen, er ist nur dem Leben eigen. (*BFA* 24, 54)

[We have seen that this is about a certain illogicality, about a wild arbitrariness, which calmly accepts all technical consequences of scenic decentralization. That certain illogicality of the action, that repeatedly disrupted process of a tragic event is not embraced by our theater, it only belongs to life.]

Brecht holds Shakespeare up as a mirror to what he calls “our theater,” by which he refers to the German canon, a mirror that reveals the difficulty of staging what seems natural to Shakespeare’s tragedy, namely illogicality, arbitrariness, and disruption of the tragic course of action. Brecht is not opposed to *Macbeth* as tragedy. On the contrary, he considers tragic action, with disruptions, to be something that moves theater closer to life. Brecht turns to Shakespeare’s tragedy as a modernist countermodel to German drama of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In particular, Brecht argues that the German theater tradition with its dedication to dramatic consistency, which shows itself most clearly in bourgeois tragedy, had proven itself incapable of achieving much that Shakespeare’s tragedy accomplishes. Brecht credits Shakespeare with staging life through a disrupted course of action, instead of representing consistent developments. He does this by using human illogicality and wild arbitrariness, and calmly showing the consequences that follow. So Brecht does not object to the tragic in *Macbeth*; instead he appreciates the tragic event as long as it is presented with disruptions. The staging of disruption in a calm setting is a central element of Brecht’s epic theater.

Brecht’s observation that Shakespeare disregards dramatic consistency in favor of life’s contingency matches Stephen Greenblatt’s account of Shakespeare’s later tragedies. Here Greenblatt detects a new strategy in Shakespeare’s writing, one that has nothing to do with plot invention, but focuses instead on what he calls the “excision of motive.” To cut out causality and motivation for a character’s actions has a liberating and deepening effect in that it opens the plot to contingency and acknowledges irrational aspects of human action. According to Greenblatt, the “excision of motive” expresses “Shakespeare’s root perception of existence, . . . his preference for things untidy, damaged, and unresolved.”⁹ Shakespeare then perceives human existence first and foremost as conflicted and traumatic and the “excision of motive” replaces dramatic causality with a focus on affect and trauma.

By leaving out what Greenblatt calls the “explanation for the tragic plot,” Shakespeare moves the action toward situational contexts, something Brecht sees as an enhancement of theatrical possibilities when he talks about *Macbeth*:

Shakespeare etwa hat das Denken nicht nötig. Er hat auch das Konstruieren nicht nötig. Bei ihm konstruiert der Zuschauer. Shakespeare biegt keineswegs den Verlauf eines Menschenschicksals

im zweiten Akt etwas zurecht, um einen fünften Akt zu ermöglichen, . . . In der Zusammenhanglosigkeit seiner Akte erkennt man wieder die Zusammenhanglosigkeit des menschlichen Schicksals, wenn es von jemand berichtet wird, der kein Interesse daran hat, es zu ordnen, um eine Idee, die nur eine Vorurteil sein kann, mit einem Argument zu versehen, das nicht aus dem Leben gegriffen ist. (*BFA* 24, 55)

[Shakespeare, for example, has no need for thought. He has no need for construction either. With him the audience constructs. Shakespeare never bends the course of a person's fate in the second act in order to make a fifth act possible . . . In the discontinuity between the acts of his plays one sees the discontinuity of human fate when reported by someone not seeking to make a point, which can only be a prejudice, with an argument, which is not taken from life.]

Brecht considers the disconnectedness of single acts and scenes to be especially suitable to present human destiny, because life, unlike most theater, does not follow the pattern of cause and effect. In epic theater, Brecht writes, questions are never posed by the individual; instead, "die Frage wird immer wieder von der jeweiligen Situation gestellt und die Individuen sind es, die sie durch ihr typisches Verhalten beantworten" (the question is posed by the specific situation and it is the individuals who respond to it through their typical behavior, *BFA* 21, 374). A character's disposition and actions emerge in response to the surrounding situation, and for that reason a single gesture gains historical significance as *Gestus*. Situational contexts also determine the disposition of *Fatzer* and his friends and it might be Brecht's commitment to the historical situation of World War I that made the completion of this fragment impossible. In his *Arbeitsjournal* Brecht subsumes *Fatzer* under "Stücktypus der Historien" (history plays) as a type of play without a "Grundidee" (basic idea, *BFA* 27, 324). The complexity of history rather than a single basic idea or concept should guide the plot. This can certainly be applied to Brecht's *Fatzer*, where we learn that revolution is never resolution, but a painful process in which the contradictions between thought and life are constantly present and never resolved.

In *Macbeth* Brecht finds a countermodel to German tradition, in that the play conserves what he calls the truth of life, precisely because Shakespeare was willing to disregard dramatic order. While the disrupted presentation of the plot might also be the result of the play's shortness, and the disorganization of a number of scenes,¹⁰ it is clear that Brecht saw great potential there that could be applied to his own theater. In seeking to complete *Fatzer*, Brecht used Shakespeare to free himself from the constraints imposed by the German dramatic tradition. For Brecht, Shakespeare's escape from the limits of dramatic causality and plot development constitutes a major achievement, one Brecht struggled to accomplish in his *Fatzer* fragment.

Shakespeare as theatrical innovator also attracted Müller, who, like Brecht, engaged in an ongoing struggle with both *Fatzer* and *Macbeth*. Brecht asserts that Shakespeare's theater stands in a completely different relationship with life (*BFA* 24, 54), a relationship that triggers a different engagement with history. Müller, similarly, calls Shakespeare's presentation of historical events "Geschichte im Naturzusammenhang" (history as natural history, *W* 8, 336). History is compulsively repeating because political conflicts disguise the lust for domination. As Horkheimer and Adorno have shown, the failure to recognize these fundamental causes of repetition create the mythical prison of modern subjectivity.¹¹ Müller sees the importance of Shakespeare in the fact that this violence is straightforwardly staged: "Nie waren Interessen so nackt aufgetreten, ohne den Faltenwurf der Ideen" (Never before did interests appear so naked, without being concealed by the folds of the curtain of ideas, *W* 8, 336). Contrary to the German theater tradition, which is committed to dramatizing ideas, Shakespeare lets human interests rule. This is what attracted Brecht to Shakespeare.

Brecht worked on *Fatzer* from 1926 until 1931 and in that time period he completed a variety of other stage works ranging from *Die Dreigroschenoper*, which was one of his most popular works, to *Die Maßnahme*, which was his most experimental. *Fatzer* certainly has the scope of an epic play and the experimental composition of a *Lehrstück*. Müller, who created a stage version from the sprawling *Fatzer* material, called the fragment a "Jahrhunderttext" (text of the century), and he convincingly applies the fragment's qualities to the historical range of experiences in Brecht's life, which extended from the shocking experience of World War I, to the anticipation of a revolution in Germany, to his final disillusionment in the face of the rise of German fascism.

Was an *Fatzer* wichtig ist, das hängt zusammen mit dem Fragment-Charakter. Da geht es gar nicht um Literatur, das geht es um Geschichte und Politik. Und was wichtig ist, ist der Fragment-Charakter der deutschen Geschichte, der dazu führt, dass so ein Stück, das ganz unmittelbar mit Deutschland zu tun hat, Fragment bleibt. (*W* 8, 201)

[What is essential about *Fatzer* is connected with its fragmentary character. This is not about literature; this is about history and politics. And what is essential is the fragmentary character of German history, which suggests that a play that is directly concerned with Germany remain a fragment.]

According to Müller the fragmentary quality of *Fatzer* is the consequence of the fragmentary character of German history, and the fact that Brecht was unable to complete the play is an indication that Brecht was committed to writing a play that directly responded to the political situation Germany found itself in between World War I and the emergence of National

Socialism. Consequently, Müller voices frustration with his own stage version of the fragment with his remark that he was unable “das Material genügend zersprengt zu lassen, und damit als utopisches Material zu behaupten” (to leave the material sufficiently dispersed and through that to claim it as utopian material).¹² The play negotiates historical trauma and ideological conflict and presents the realization that the deserters are unable to escape the brutality of World War I and instead fall victim to their own self-imposed terror. The *Fatzer* fragment, then, reaches from one catastrophic experience of the twentieth century to the anticipation of another.

Brecht turned to Shakespeare to enrich the theatrical exploration of history and politics. In this process it is the presence of history in Shakespeare that opens tragedy toward epic theater.

In den geschichtlichen Dramen, wo das Epische am stärksten hervortritt, hat der vorhandene Stoff sich eben am stärksten der Gleichschaltung widersetzt. Bestimmte geschichtliche Charaktere mussten einfach vorkommen, weil man sie sonst vermisst hätte. Bestimmte Vorfälle mussten aus dem gleichen “äußeren” Grunde passieren. Das so hereinkommende Moment der Montage macht die Sache schon episch. (*BFA* 22.2, 613)

[In the history plays, where the epic component emerges most strongly, the given material most resists consolidation. Certain characters simply had to appear because otherwise they would have been missed. Certain incidents had to happen for the same “external” reason. The resulting incoming moment of montage already makes the whole thing epic.]

“Gleichschaltung,” or the consolidation of character and telos, is what Brecht criticizes most in German bourgeois drama, and he credits Shakespeare’s history plays with inserting montage into tragedy. External reasons and minor characters become necessary in the presentation of historical detail. Unresolved contradictions remain essential elements of many scenes: disruption, pause, and epic framework constitute a montage that makes critical distance possible. Patrice Pavis would argue that at this moment the play ceases to be a tragedy and takes on the “objectivity of a historical analysis.”¹³ But as we have seen earlier, what Brecht values most in Shakespeare is the presentation of the illogicality of futile endeavors, not the coherent presentation of a historical event. Likewise, he does not question the status of the play as tragedy. For Brecht, it is the futility that accounts for the tragic component in *Macbeth*.

Yet it is equally clear that Brecht did not study Shakespeare in order to return to tragedy. Thus we can assume that Brecht considers tragedy to be capable to present aspects of history that would go unnoticed otherwise. Similarly, Müller insists that tragic conflicts cannot be invented; they must be anchored in history, and in this he follows Carl Schmitt’s definition

of tragedy as “Einbruch der Zeit in das Spiel” (the eruption of time into play).¹⁴ Brecht credits Shakespeare’s tragedies for providing a long-term view of history: in *Der Messingkauf* Brecht lets the philosopher answer the question about the tragic in Shakespeare: “Aber gibt es Vielfältigeres, Wichtigeres, und Interessanteres als den Untergang großer herrschender Klassen” (But is there anything more multifaceted, more important, more interesting than the decline of powerful ruling classes?, *BFA* 22,735). Not the tragic individual but the downfall of ruling classes makes tragedy as genre suitable for exploring complex historical conflicts.

It is thus unsurprising that Brecht turned to tragedy after his first encounter with Germany upon his return from exile after World War II. Brecht’s first theatrical engagement in Europe after the war was in Switzerland where he staged *Antigone* in the winter of 1947–48. While there he met with the Swiss author Max Frisch who kept notes of Brecht’s reaction to German theater: Brecht, “bleich vor Wut” (white with rage), cried out:

Das Vokabular dieser Überlebenden, wie unbelastet sie auch sein mochten, ihr Gehaben auf der Bühne, ihre wohlgenute Ahnungslosigkeit, die Unverschämtheit, dass sie einfach weitermachten, als wären bloß die Häuser zerstört, ihre Kunstseligkeit, ihr voreiliger Friede mit dem eigenen Land, all dies war schlimmer als befürchtet; Brecht war konsterniert, seine Rede ein großer Fluch.¹⁵

[The vocabulary of these survivors, as innocent as they might be, their affectation on stage, their cheerful ignorance, the infamous way they carried on as if only the houses were destroyed, their artsy bliss, their premature peace with their own country, all that was worse than anticipated; Brecht was frustrated, his speech a great curse.]

In this outcry Brecht condemns actors as artists and as citizens for their use of language, their conduct on stage, their pretense of ignorance. He calls out a commitment to *continuing* to use techniques from the preceding era “weitermachen” (to carry on). Here Brecht observes an aesthetic continuity of Nazi politics and culture in German theater practice.

Frustrated with many Germans’ professed “innocent ignorance” of National Socialist crimes as well as the decline of artfulness in acting technique that he found in many theaters, Brecht sought to reinvigorate his concept of *Gestus* in order to isolate and explore specific aspects of Germany’s unprecedented crimes. He did so by turning to Greek tragedy, staging his *Antigone des Sophokles* after meticulous rehearsals that were photographed by Ruth Berlau for his *Theatermodelle*. At the same time Brecht turned to Shakespeare, and his reading of *Hamlet* was informed by Brecht’s own experiences in World War II. “Angesichts der blutigen und finsternen Zeitläufe, in denen ich dies schreibe, verbrecherische Herrscherklassen, eines verbreiteten Zweifels an der Vernunft, welche immerfort missbraucht

wird, glaube ich diese Fabel so lesen zu können: Die Zeit ist kriegerisch . . ." (In the face of the bloody and dark times in which I am writing this, criminal ruling classes, a widespread doubt of reason, which is constantly misused, I believe I can read the fable that way: The time is warlike, *BFA* 23, 93). The private sphere cannot be kept isolated from the public sphere, and Brecht considers Hamlet's encounter with Fortinbras and his army to be the trigger for the murder of his uncle. According to Brecht, Shakespeare's tragedy demonstrates that, "Kampf keinen Sinn haben müsse, um höchst blutig zu werden" (fighting does not have to make sense in order to turn extremely bloody, *BFA* 21, 243). Carnage can have its origin in affect and imitation that prove to be stronger than reasonable doubt.

But Brecht's interest in *Hamlet* goes to the very core of his own concept of Epic Theater. In 1948 Brecht was also working on his *Kleines Organon* where he makes the case for Epic Theater as a theater for the scientific age:

Welch ein Werk, dieser *Hamlet*! Das durch Jahrhunderte andauernde Interesse an ihm kommt wohl daher, dass ein neuer Typus, voll ausgestaltet, in einer nahezu unaufgeräumt gebliebenen mittelalterlichen Umwelt ganz verfremdet hervortritt. Der Schrei nach Rache, von den griechischen Tragikern veredelt, dann vom Christentum disqualifiziert, ist im *Hamlet*-Drama noch laut genug, ansteckend genug reproduziert, um das neue Zweifeln, Testen, Planen befremdend zu machen. (*BFA* 27, 284)

[What a work, this *Hamlet*! The persistent interest across centuries probably results from the creation of a new and completely estranged type, which emerges within an almost entirely disordered medieval environment. The cry for revenge, sublimated by the Greek tragedians and disqualified by Christianity is, in the *Hamlet* drama, reproduced loudly enough and catchily enough to make the new doubting, testing, planning appear strange.]

The paradox of Hamlet as a modern character—university educated and seeking to approach politics through rational problem solving—caught in the premodern, non-rational sexual and dynastic politics of the Danish court helps explain the play's undiminished relevance for authors and audiences across time. By staging the alienation of rational man from the irrational emotions that drive an insatiable need for revenge, the play stages the way that human drives overwhelm rationality. For Brecht it is precisely this, Shakespeare's success combining the Dionysian aspects of tragedy with *Verfremdungseffekt*, that makes Shakespearian tragedy a powerful force in the modern world and in modern theater.

The defamiliarizing distance of Epic Theater then is especially effective in contrast to the Dionysian aspects of Shakespeare's tragedy. And it is this contrast that allows for a better reception of history.

So wie die Einfühlung das besondere Ereignis alltäglich macht, so macht die Verfremdung das alltägliche besonders. Die allerallgemeinsten Vorgänge werden ihrer Langweiligkeit entkleidet, indem sie als ganz besondere dargestellt werden. Nicht länger flüchtet der Zuschauer aus der Jetztzeit in die Historie; die Jetztzeit wird zur Historie. (*BFA* 22, 736)

[Just as identification makes the special event ordinary, so estrangement makes the ordinary special. The most ordinary incidents are stripped of their boredom, by being presented as special. The audience no longer escapes from the here and now into history; the here and now turns into history.]

Benjamin describes *Verfremdung* as a process in which we “discover a situation for the first time,”¹⁶ which hinges on the interruption of the action—something that Brecht observes in *Macbeth*. Once the situation is isolated it is distanced for observation, examination, and criticism. Early in his theoretical writings Brecht states that “Verfremden heißt historisieren” (to estrange means to historicize, *BFA* 22, 554), that the situation shows itself as history in the moment of observation. However, in times of political crisis he turns to Shakespeare to elaborate on the contrast between *Verfremdung* and the Dionysian element of tragedy and reveals what Müller calls “Geschichte im Naturzusammenhang” (history as natural history, *W* 8, 336). Müller worked on a concept of the tragic that could do justice to the barbaric history of the twentieth century, whereas Brecht sought to present the gravity of a present political situation. While Brecht’s theater remains committed to critical distance, he acknowledges the presence of the Dionysian in politics and history.

For Brecht, the political situation after World War I and after National Socialism called for distinct theatrical responses. Shakespeare’s tragedies that show human existence as “untidy, damaged, and unresolved” were an essential part of Brecht’s response to German history. After World War I Brecht created an elaborate fragment that traces the continuity of terror. But his failure to complete *Fatzer* stands in retrospect as something like a terrifying prophecy. Following the unthinkable disasters of National Socialism, he again turned to Shakespeare, and through him to the very roots of tragic theater in Sophocles, in an effort to force Germans to think critically about the anti-rational forces that the previous two decades had revealed at the center of German politics.

These productive interactions with Shakespeare’s tragedies also reveal a fundamental problem, as Müller points out: “Wir sind nicht bei uns angekommen, solange Shakespeare unsere Stücke schreibt” (We have not arrived at ourselves as long as Shakespeare writes our plays, *W* 8, 335). The commitment to staging history in the force fields between human interests

and natural history also means that playwriting entails a partial recycling of Shakespeare's tragedies. These tragedies with their long-term historical perspective are still "absoluter Stoff" (absolute substance, *BFA* 24, 55), as Brecht calls them, and as such they provide material that makes it into the theatrical works of Brecht and Müller. But that also means that the progress that Brecht sought through *Fatzer* keeps turning into regress. "Der Schrecken, der von Shakespeares Spiegelungen ausgeht, ist die Wiederkehr des Gleichen" (The terror that comes from Shakespeare's plays is the return of the same, *W* 8, 337), as Müller puts it. What helps to account for Shakespeare's undiminished relevance for Western civilization is also what makes him indispensable for the most innovative theater of the twentieth century.

Notes

¹ For a detailed overview of Brecht's engagement with Shakespeare, see David Barnett, "Brecht as Great Shakespearean: A Lifelong Connection," in *Hugo, Pasternak, Brecht, Césaire: Great Shakespeareans*, vol. XIV, Ruth Morse, ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 113–54.

² Heiner Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1992), 265.

³ "Heiner Müller im Gespräch mit Flavia Foradini." All parenthetical citations of Heiner Müller appear as (*W* vol., page) and refer to Heiner Müller, *Werke*, Frank Hörnigk, ed. (Frankfurt am Main, 1998–2008).

⁴ Alexander Karschnia, "William Shakespeare," in *Heiner Müller Handbuch: Leben—Werk—Wirkung*, ed. Hans-Thies Lehmann and Patrick Primavesi (Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2003), 164.

⁵ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Tragödie und dramatisches Theater* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2013), 585.

⁶ Judith Wilke, "Fatzer," in *Brecht-Handbuch*, vol. 1, ed. Jan Knopf (Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2001), 167–78, here 174.

⁷ Wilke points out that Brecht considered the fragment to be the appropriate form to capture "zeitnahe historische Erfahrungen," "Fatzer," 168.

⁸ Hans-Thies Lehmann, "Versuch über *Fatzer*," in Lehmann, *Das politische Schreiben* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2002), 250.

⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 2004), 324.

¹⁰ Stephen Orgel makes this point in his introduction to *Macbeth* in William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Stephen Orgel, ed. (New York: Penguin, 2016), xxx.

¹¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "Dialektik der Aufklärung," in Max Horkheimer, *"Dialektik der Aufklärung" und Schriften 1940–1950, Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 5, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1987), 21.

¹² Cited in Judith Wilke, "Fatzer-Bearbeitungen," in *Heiner Müller Handbuch: Leben—Werk—Wirkung*, 206.

¹³ Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 417.

¹⁴ Carl Schmitt, *Hamlet oder Hekuba: Der Einbruch der Zeit in das Spiel* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 2008), 47.

¹⁵ Max Frisch, *Die Tagebücher, 1946–1949, 1966–1971* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), 435.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, “What Is Epic Theater?” in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2003), 304.

Recycling Brecht: Die zeitgenössische Rezeption von *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*

Mein Ziel in diesem Artikel ist die Analyse der zeitgenössischen Reaktionen auf die Leipziger Premiere von Brechts und Weills *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* 1930, sowie die Reflexion dieser Reaktionen in Bezug auf ein neues Modell der Rezeptionstheorie. Die zeitgenössische Rezeption von Brechts Werk in der Weimarer Republik ist ein Bereich der Brecht-Forschung, der bisher eher vernachlässigt wurde (auch wenn der gleiche Punkt über andere theatralische oder operatische Schlüsselwerke dieses Zeitraums gemacht werden kann, wie zum Beispiel Kreneks *Jonny spielt auf!*), und meine Untersuchung bemüht sich, diese Anomalie wenigstens bis zu einem gewissen Grade zu berichtigen. Ich beginne mit der Präsentation meiner überarbeiteten Variante der Rezeptionstheorie im Kontext einer gegenkulturellen Perspektive auf die Entwicklung der modernen Kunst. Damit ersuche ich auch, eine theoretische Basis für die Untersuchung des Prozesses des kulturellen Recyclings als solches bereitzustellen, ganz gleich ob Brecht der Recycler oder der Recycelte ist. Im Anschluss an die methodische Grundlagenarbeit wende ich mich *Mahagonny* zu und beginne mit der Kontextualisierung der Leipziger Produktion in Relation zu den historischen und politischen Entwicklungen in Deutschland zwischen 1929 und 1932. Im Anschluss betrachte ich zeitgenössische Reaktionen auf die Leipziger Produktion, basierend auf der Analyse von fünfundzwanzig Kritiken in Zeitungen und Zeitschriften, und runde meine Diskussion mit hoffentlich provozierenden und streithaften Reflexionen in der Schlussfolgerung ab.

The article offers a new analysis of contemporary responses to the Leipzig premiere of Brecht and Weill's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in 1930, with reference to a new model of reception theory. I begin by presenting my revised variant of reception theory, in the context of a counter-cultural perspective on the development of modern art. In so doing, I also seek to provide a theoretical basis for investigating the process of cultural recycling as such, whether Brecht is the recycler or the recycled. Moving to *Mahagonny*, I begin by contextualizing the Leipzig production in relation to historical and political developments in Germany between 1929 and 1932. I then consider contemporary responses to the Leipzig production, based on analysis of twenty-five reviews in newspapers and periodicals, and round off my discussion with some hopefully provocative and contentious reflections in conclusion.

Recycling Brecht: The Contemporary Reception of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*

Steve Giles

Introduction

My aim in this article is to analyze contemporary responses to the Leipzig premiere of Brecht and Weill's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in 1930, and reflect on them with reference to a new model of reception theory.¹ The contemporary reception of Brecht's work during the Weimar Republic is an area of Brecht studies that has been somewhat neglected (though the same point applies to other key theatrical or operatic works from this period, such as Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf!*), and my discussion attempts to rectify that anomaly at least to some degree. I begin by presenting my revised variant of reception theory, in the context of a countercultural perspective on the development of modern art. In so doing, I also seek to provide a theoretical basis for investigating the process of cultural recycling as such, whether Brecht is the recycler or the recycled. Having done the methodological groundwork, I move on to *Mahagonny*, and begin by contextualizing the Leipzig production in relation to historical and political developments in Germany between 1929 and 1932. I then consider contemporary responses to the Leipzig production, based on analysis of twenty-five reviews in newspapers and periodicals, and round off my discussion with some hopefully provocative and contentious reflections in conclusion.²

Recycling, Counterculture, and Reception Theory

There is a case for arguing that all the groundbreaking cultural developments in Germany and Central Europe from the Enlightenment to Postmodernism may be construed as countercultures—not in the perhaps trivial sense that any “new” cultural development is critical of its predecessors, but in the more drastic and fundamental sense that modern German and European culture has been characterized by a series of paradigm shifts, or even caesuras, whereby the conceptual and institutional presuppositions of the prior cultural formation have been decisively rejected. Deploying the category of counterculture as a tool of historical analysis also enables us to rethink contemporary controversies concerning, for example, the

relationship between modernism and postmodernism, or the relative priority of the avant-garde—as opposed to countercultural manifestations—in initiating and defining radical artistic movements from the late nineteenth century onward.”³ Brecht’s theory and practice of Epic Theater are also countercultural, and both these dimensions are graphically exemplified through *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*—theoretically by the “Anmerkungen zur Oper *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*,” and practically by the opera’s 1930 premiere and its subsequent reception.”⁴

At the same time, rethinking counterculture as a historical category also has theoretical implications. Instead of approaching the historical development of culture in linear or evolutionary terms, as one formation is succeeded by another in a process of inheritance or *Aufhebung*, the countercultural perspective outlined above suggests that our primary object of analysis might be not artistic evolution, but cultural revolution. Similarly, attending to radical shifts and ruptures at the overarching historical or chronological level also raises questions concerning the internal cohesiveness of any particular cultural formation if such fundamental changes are to be possible. In other words, the underlying dynamic of endogenous cultural development might itself be countercultural, in the sense that the domain of—say—artistic phenomena is constantly reshaped, as the center becomes the periphery, “low” culture is transmuted into “high culture,” and vice versa.

The Czech structuralist Jan Mukarovsky contended that the history of art involves a series of rebellions against ruling norms, in that there is a constant tension between old and new, between tradition and innovation.⁵ Indeed, the development of modern art in particular seems to presuppose that the aesthetic value of a work entails a rejection of existing aesthetic norms, the consequence being that aesthetic value—and the nature of art—is inherently mutable. Mukarovsky shows that in any social formation there simultaneously exists a *variety* of systems of aesthetic norms, which are in conflict and competition with one another. These normative systems are dynamic, ever changing, and permeable, so that norms may, for instance, shift from the aesthetic realm to the domain of ethics, and vice versa. Crucially, aesthetic norms share a key property of all norms, as they are organized on the basis of societal stratification and differentiation. Just as we are able to express ourselves linguistically in various social dialects, so too, Mukarovsky maintains, we may well be conversant with a variety of aesthetic norms. Moreover, he continues, social stratification must be defined both vertically—in traditional social class terms—and horizontally, with reference to categories such as age, gender, and occupational group (categories that might, of course, be supplemented by others, such as religion and ethnicity). It therefore follows that not only different social strata, but also different sectors within the same social stratum, may adhere to different and conflicting sets of aesthetic norms, so much so that they may even construct alternative artistic canons.

The interplay between social stratification, aesthetic norms, and cultural canons also has an institutional dimension. Society has developed a range of agencies that, for example, regulate the evaluation of artworks and thus enable society to influence aesthetic value. These institutional forms include literary criticism, public libraries, museums, academies, prizes, and even censorship. Although the primary role of these and other agencies may well not be to influence aesthetic value, in that they in fact carry out a range of societal functions and mediate a variety of societal tendencies, their regulation of aesthetic value is closely connected with general social developments. Mukarovsky thus provides us with a sophisticated and differentiated way of characterizing the shifts and gradations between subcultures and countercultures through his account of the relationship between social stratification, aesthetic norms, and cultural canons. He also emphasizes that the societal mediation of those norms and canons involves institutional structures that play a crucial role in the reproduction of the cultural sphere.

How, though, are we to establish whether a specific cultural development or seeming innovation is merely reproductive of dominant modes of discourse, rather than being transformative or even revolutionary? This question was addressed in a particularly instructive fashion by Hans Robert Jauß in his classic essay "Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft," in which he attempted to transcend and supersede the supposed limitations of Marxism and Formalism, and thereby heal the rift between the sociological and the aesthetic in modern literary studies and, by extension, in cultural inquiry in general.⁶ At the same time, Jauß does nonetheless endorse certain key premises of Russian Formalism, starting with the notion that the course of literary history does not proceed in a smooth, linear, or teleological manner, but is permeated instead by discontinuities, conflict, and revolution. In view of the fact that Jauß maintains that epochal shifts in literary history and the artistic value of specific works both depend on their rejection of prevailing aesthetic norms, his theoretical approach could be characterized as being intrinsically countercultural. From Jauß's own standpoint, however, his key theoretical notion and his most innovative contribution to cultural inquiry is the horizon of expectations, or *Erwartungshorizont*.

Jauß contends that readers and audiences always perceive literary texts against the background of a series of assumptions that establish the nature of literature. But, in order to escape the accusation that such assumptions are merely arbitrary or subjective, he proposes that they are in fact embedded in an objectifiable referential system of coordinates or expectations, namely an *Erwartungshorizont*. The *Erwartungshorizont* of a particular grouping of readers—or even writers and critics—incorporates elements such as a prior understanding of genre conventions, formal and thematic aspects of texts already known to the reader, and the opposition between practical and poetic language. Epochal change—or, we

might say, a countercultural shift—involves a fundamental transformation in the *Erwartungshorizont*, inaugurated by texts that radically reject or deconstruct prevailing artistic conventions.

Basic structural changes in the *Erwartungshorizont* can, Jauß proposes, be identified by establishing the existence of ruptures and discontinuities between those dominant referential schemas that happen to be in force at different points in time. Rather like a cultural gardener digging with an analytical spade, the literary historian would make a vertical slice through a particular cultural formation in order to reveal a cross section of aesthetic space that incorporates the variety of oppositional and hierarchical normative structures in evidence at a particular social moment. This initial slice or cross section would then be followed up by further slices from earlier and later periods, so as to enable comparisons to be made between these various moments in order to establish the extent of normative change. At the same time, the foundation would be laid for a new type of literary or cultural history that focuses on diachronic ruptures rather than underlying continuities.

Although Jauß's new mode of literary history appears to deal particularly well with the complex and contradictory nature of modern culture, it does have certain shortcomings. First, Jauß takes certain contentious Russian Formalist precepts—such as the opposition between poetic and practical language—to be self-evident, and he incorporates them into his general schema of readerly expectations even though they are historically specific and intimately associated with late modernism. Second, whereas he insists that such expectations are not subjective or psychologistic, his evidence for their objectivity is not derived from systematic investigation into the underlying structures of readers' responses, but refers instead to the occurrence of certain stylistic features in parodistic texts. And, third, the core components of the *Erwartungshorizont* are restricted to aesthetic norms and conventions. Nevertheless, his revamped methodology for literary history still provides a productive starting point, and I would propose modifying Jauß's theoretical model in three principal ways.

First, Jauß's emphasis on expectations should be replaced by a focus on discursive presuppositions, so that instead of establishing the constitutive features of the reader's horizon of expectations, we would seek to reconstruct the relevant *horizons of discourse* that underpin readers' perceptions of texts. I use the term discourse not in the Foucauldian sense, but to designate the set of implicit and explicit beliefs and presuppositions that inform and constitute a domain *in their textual embodiment*, for example in terms of figurative language, rhetoric, and syntax.⁷ Second, the key conceptual components in a particular horizon of discourse should be identified on a strictly historical basis, so that inappropriate or anachronistic normative and analytic categories are not built into the horizon of discourse on an a priori basis. And, third, the horizon of discourse should not be construed essentially or primarily in aesthetic terms. Jauß is right to argue that

reading—and writing—is located within an objectifiable referential framework of norms and conventions, so that no act of reading or reception is theory neutral. But the discursive presuppositions that inform particular readings may also be ethical, political, sociological, or even metaphysical, whether we are investigating key moments in literary history or cultural transformations. Furthermore, horizons of discourse characterize all forms of artistic expression, not just literature, and can be utilized to characterize artistic production as well as the various modes of a work's subsequent appropriation—or recycling—through editing, translation, and adaptation.⁸

Productions and Contexts

Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny was first performed at the Neues Theater (New Theater) in Leipzig on March 9, 1930. Almost three years had elapsed since the premiere of the *Mahagonny Songspiel* in July 1927, during which time the economic and political landscape in Germany had undergone a seismic shift. The *Songspiel's* premiere had been followed a year later by a swing to the left in the general elections of May 1928, with the Social Democratic Party consolidating its position as the largest single party in the Reichstag and forming a coalition government. But the premiere of the opera had been preceded by the Wall Street crash in October 1929, precipitating an economic crisis that affected Germany more profoundly than any other European country. The coalition government led by the Social Democratic Party collapsed in March 1930, and in July 1930 the new Chancellor, Heinrich Brüning, invoked the president's emergency powers: Germany was now being governed by presidential decree. The general elections of September 1930 signaled the death knell for the Weimar Republic. The National Socialist Party moved from political marginality to center stage, increasing its number of seats in the Reichstag from 12 to 107 to become the second-largest party after the Social Democrats.

The Nazi Party's extreme right-wing political stance was reflected in its aggressive cultural radicalism, which anathematized all forms of avant-garde art. The premiere of *Mahagonny*, as the Weimar Republic was moving into a state of crisis, presented Nazi activists with an ideal opportunity to demonstrate their opposition to the Republic and its left-wing modernist culture, as epitomized by Brecht and Weill. Nazi Brownshirts demonstrated in front of the theater prior to the premiere, which was severely disrupted, especially in the final act. Conservative and far-right members of the audience were particularly offended by the opera's focus on the dregs of society and by its blasphemous content—premiering *Mahagonny* on a Sunday was, after all, likely to offend even middle-of-the-road Christians—and their increasingly strident protests ultimately exploded in response to the supposedly communist columns of demonstrators who dominated the finale. In the aftermath of the premiere, far-right members of the Leipzig

City Council's theater committee proposed that all future performances of *Mahagonny* should be cancelled. A full council meeting subsequently resolved that performances could be resumed, but only if the most offensive parts of the libretto were altered. Cuts were made to the brothel, boozing, and trial scenes, and the most controversial scene—"God in Mahagonny"—was removed completely, as were the provocative placards carried by the demonstrators in the final scene. A second performance duly took place on March 16, 1930, followed by four more; but police were present in the theater, and the houselights were illuminated throughout so as to minimize any risk of disruption. The premiere of *Mahagonny* was immediately perceived as one of the major theatrical scandals of the Weimar Republic, and its national impact led to several major cities cancelling productions of the opera; indeed, it was not performed in Berlin until nearly two years later, in late December 1931. Brecht and Weill retained their status as cultural and artistic bêtes noires for the far right throughout the 1930s, both before and after the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, culminating in the "Entartete Musik" or "Degenerate Music" Exhibition of 1938, in which *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*) and *Mahagonny* were pilloried as key exemplars of Weimar culture at its most seditious.⁹

Leipzig

Scandal . . .

Contemporary reviewers of all cultural and political persuasions were taken aback by the unprecedented disruption and disturbances that beset *Mahagonny* in the course of the final act and came to a head as the curtain fell. Enthusiastic applause from supporters of Brecht and Weill was drowned out by vociferous opposition that appeared to have been orchestrated by local Nazis, and the police were compelled to intervene and make arrests in the auditorium.¹⁰ There is also a surprising degree of consensus among reviewers regarding the main reasons for the outrage that the opera had provoked. While some responses can be accounted for in terms of sheer right-wing prejudice against Brecht and Weill,¹¹ many reviewers focus on the offence caused by the *Mahagonny*'s moral and religious stance. The opera was castigated for its glamorization of whores and criminals, for its blasphemy (notably in the "God in Mahagonny" scene), for its George Groszian cynicism, and for being morally reprehensible.¹² Even Karl Holl, in two articles in the relatively liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung*, felt that the audience's outrage was quite understandable. Although he observed that the audience's vexation was not justified if it was based on party-political prejudice and disregard for the opera's undoubted artistic accomplishments, he also conceded that such distress could be seen as an entirely legitimate response to Brecht's crude and sensationalized attack on traditional moral,

religious, and political values. Holl insisted that there were indeed limits to artistic freedom, suggesting that the Mahagonny motto—"Daß man hier alles dürfen darf" (All morals are permitted here)—simply had no place in the theater.¹³

Is Mahagonny an Opera—

Reviewers across the political and cultural spectrum were generally of the opinion that *Mahagonny* represented a fundamental break with opera as traditionally conceived. The relatively small number of Brecht/Weill aficionados saw *Mahagonny* as inaugurating a new form of musical theater that did not really belong in old-style opera houses; indeed they suggested that it constituted an attempt to drag opera out of its feudal environment.¹⁴ From the point of view of *Mahagonny*'s more numerous radical opponents, on the other hand, it was precisely this abandonment of traditional operatic and artistic convention that represented its fatal flaw. *Mahagonny* was criticized for focusing on the scum of humanity and for its fundamental coarseness of sentiment—it was a work fit for a barn or fairground, but certainly not for an opera house. Furthermore, its music was lacking in harmony, euphony, and beauty, while its overall structure failed to embody an integrated dramatic action—it was little more than a hodgepodge of songs, which were in fact rather less impressive than those in the *Threepenny Opera*. As a contemporary opera, it was strictly time bound, rather than aspiring to the timelessness of authentic art, and dealt with ephemeral issues of the present day instead of the generality of the human condition. In short, it rejected the fundamentals not simply of classical music but of art as such, failing to liberate the soul or provide any form of spiritual purification, and was simply a miserable botch likely to generate not just moral outrage, but downright physical nausea.¹⁵

There was, however, a third position regarding *Mahagonny*'s operatic credentials, which was adopted by a majority of reviewers. Their general response to the opera was fairly positive, in that they were impressed by the musical and theatrical qualities of the production and the excellence of individual performances. At the same time, however, they shared some of the reservations expressed by *Mahagonny*'s more strident critics, especially those concerning its denomination as opera. This third grouping of reviewers criticized the work for its self-conscious irony; its mishmash of song, satire, didacticism, and tendentiousness; and its sexual puerility—in short, it represented not the renewal of opera claimed by its advocates, but its demise.¹⁶

The most sophisticated analysis of *Mahagonny*'s musical features was to be found in R. A. Sievers's review in the politically conservative *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, where he presented a detailed critique of Weill's musical views.¹⁷ Sievers agreed that *Mahagonny* embodied Weill's core theoretical precepts, in that its music was not subordinated to the traditional

dramatic function of driving forward the operatic action, but strove instead for autonomy in artistic terms. For Sievers, however, the integrity of an opera's dramatic action was paramount; although he conceded that *Mahagonny* could not be adequately described with reference to traditional artistic criteria, he was decidedly skeptical regarding the intellectual coherence of the avant-garde aesthetic the opera sought to embody instead. Sievers felt that Weill's music was most impressive when its formal rigor came to the fore, when its borrowing of jazz rhythms and motifs was organically fused with Weill's own musical language: somewhat ironically, Sievers's argument confirms his adherence to artistic categories that were radically at variance with those of Brecht and Weill. Ultimately, Sievers concluded, *Mahagonny* was far better suited to the concert hall, rather than the opera house, not least because of the divergent expectations of the different types of audience that frequented those venues.

—or Epic Theater?

While some commentators considered the epic features of *Mahagonny* in the context of their discussion of Weill's music, reviewers generally shared the opinion that the production's credentials as Epic Theater were most graphically exemplified in stage techniques initiated by the *Threepenny Opera*—a minimalist set designed by Caspar Neher, together with projections of scene titles and of images drawn by Neher. Critical evaluation of the production's epic features followed a similar pattern to assessments of *Mahagonny*'s status as opera. Brecht-Weill rejectionists derided Neher's anti-illusionist set as a heap of junk; found his projections to be at best infantile and at worst tasteless; and decried the exaggerated acting, with its use of half masks and grotesque makeup.¹⁸ The production's visual style was likened to that of the infamous George Grosz, and Neher's sketches were excoriated for their bilious brutality.¹⁹ Less partisan critics, on the other hand, responded rather more positively to Neher's staging and set design.²⁰ The musicologist Alfred Einstein, who had been severely critical of *Mahagonny*'s operatic pretensions and its intrinsic coarseness, was full of praise for the dynamism of its set. He even commended the actors' use of masks and makeup for embodying the true grimace of the age, which he said concealed a terrifying void. Nevertheless, he also felt that Brecht's attempt to translate art from the spiritual to the political sphere detracted from the production's overall impact, especially through its use of doctrinaire placards in the final scene.²¹

The precise nature of *Mahagonny*'s articulation of aesthetics and politics also exercised several reviewers who were writing from a more liberal or left-wing perspective. The avant-garde music critic Heinrich Strobel praised the opera's formal and ideological rigor, even though it fell short of the lapidary clarity of the *Lehrstück*, while Klaus Pringsheim's review

in *Die Weltbühne* offered a particularly interesting explanation for the rabid hostility of certain sections of the audience.²² Pringsheim noted that whereas Erwin Piscator's political theater was explicitly and unequivocally pro-communist, Brecht's approach was potentially more subversive of bourgeois complacency. Brecht gradually picked away at the fabric of bourgeois society, chipping away at its façade bit by bit, until he at last revealed his own truly Bolshevik visage. Crucially, however, Brecht's mode of ideological critique was indirect and oblique, as he systematically undermined the illusionist representational conventions of bourgeois theater on its home ground.

Anti-capitalism or Anti-humanism?

Despite the fact that *Mahagonny* was perceived to be outrageous and provocative in moral and religious terms, only a minority of reviewers discussed its critique of contemporary society in any detail. And, although there was broad agreement that the opera was fundamentally anti-capitalist, that in itself provided grounds for disputing its artistic credentials. Alfred Einstein, for example, observed that Wagner's *Ring* cycle was also anti-capitalist, but differed from *Mahagonny* in two key respects: it was not a political demonstration, and ultimately love overcomes capitalism. *Mahagonny*, on the other hand, leaves us with a sense of utter hopelessness.²³ The soulless and nihilistic nature of *Mahagonny* is linked by several critics to the predominance of money, and it is this that is assumed to be at the core of its anti-capitalist message.²⁴ Even Brechtian partisans see the deadly consequences of Jimmy's lack of money as exposing the real nature of capitalist society.²⁵ One anonymous pro-Brechtian critic also appears to be the first—anticipating Adorno's seminal essay—to characterize the posthurricane city of Mahagonny as anarchic. Initially, anarchy refers in fairly general terms to human beings simply doing what suits them, as they gratify their basic desires in the four tableaux of act 2. Ultimately, however, the unleashing of anarchy in the opera's finale is seen to be the inevitable consequence of the principles on which the city was founded.²⁶

Although various reviewers take *Mahagonny* to be a socially critical work, even those who reject its tendentious anti-capitalism do not perceive it to be fomenting proletarian revolution in the manner of Piscator.²⁷ And, although Klaus Pringsheim views the finale as the crowning point of a powerful revolutionary drama, he also suggests that Brecht's social philosophy—as illustrated by the placards at the end of the opera—is not communist at all. This is because Brecht offers no alternative to the world of Mahagonny and leaves things ultimately as they are, a view shared by the reviewer for the Communist *Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung*.²⁸ Any revolutionary potential might also be minimized, as several commentators observed, by the fact that the city of Mahagonny is nowhere. It is located

in a space outside civil society, where even its sacrilegious dimension is not so much blasphemous as an indicator of the city's inner corruption and decay.²⁹

Reviewers across the political spectrum took the city's ultimate demise to be a consequence of the new morality that comes into its own in the second act. The hurricane that supposedly inaugurates human freedom actually unleashes our baser instincts, so that the audience is confronted by the naked egoism of human bestiality.³⁰ Indeed, the responses of several critics hostile to *Mahagonny* suggest that its most radical provocation consisted not in its anti-capitalism or alleged communism, but in its nihilistic excoriation of humanist idealism. Karl Holl reproaches Brecht for failing to present a better, higher idea of life and humanity; Adolf Aber bemoans the absence of nobler feelings in the opera; and Alfred Einstein observes that the finale leaves us with a helpless, divided, and godless rabble.³¹ Although the dominance of money in *Mahagonny* is seen as a key factor in stripping away the lineaments of humanity, the opera's true message is much more subversive: for it rejects an entire culture and worldview founded on the notion that humanity is fashioned in God's image. And that, ultimately, is why one of the most outraged reviewers was driven to the edge of physical sickness, as one of these dregs of humanity, one of these obscenity-spouting lowlives, has the gall and effrontery to play the role of God, a sentiment expressed by several far-right critics.³²

Reflections in Conclusion

I noted earlier that post-Enlightenment cultural formations are characterized by multiple horizons of artistic discourse, and my perspective on post-Enlightenment developments in aesthetic theory and artistic practice is strongly influenced by M. H. Abrams's classic text *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Abrams's basic argument is that in the late eighteenth century, the mimetic-pragmatic view of art that had held sway in European culture from the classical age to the Enlightenment is put in question by the emergence of expressive and autotelic theories of art associated with English and German Romanticism.³³ Indeed, one way of construing the shift to modernist aesthetics from the late nineteenth century onward is to suggest that the mimetic-pragmatic view of art is supplanted by expressive and autotelic conceptions of art, at least until Dada explodes the category of art as such around 1916—which is the cultural situation we find ourselves in today, and the only way I can make any real sense of the term “postmodernism.”

But what happens if we briefly consider contemporary responses to the Leipzig and Berlin productions of *Mahagonny* in the context of Abrams's artistic categories, in an attempt to identify the multiple horizons of discourse that inform its reception?

- Critical responses to *Mahagonny* are grounded in a mixture of aesthetic and non-aesthetic criteria, especially when its status as “art” is being questioned, and the aesthetic criteria range from the autotelic to the pragmatic;
- Critiques of *Mahagonny* are very often moralizing and religious, and cut across a broad range of political positions from liberal to far right, suggesting the lack of any straightforward correlation between political and artistic ideologies;
- Discussions of *Mahagonny*’s status as “opera or epic theater” indicate the essentially contested nature of key aesthetic presuppositions—for example when epic theater is rejected because it does not conform to the post-Romantic view that works of art should be self-contained, harmonious, integrated, organic wholes;
- There is no consistent response to Brecht from left-wing critics—though that is not particularly surprising given the tenor of far-left cultural debates, especially on modernism, from the early years of the Weimar Republic to the mid-1930s;
- Brecht’s post-Dada anti-humanism is vigorously rejected by critics across the political spectrum from far left to the far right, in the latter case prefiguring the cultural and artistic assumptions that inform National Socialist critiques of modernism in the “Degenerate” Art and Music Exhibitions of 1937 and 1938 respectively.

Notes

¹ The Leipzig premiere uses the first published version of the libretto from 1929, in Bertolt Brecht, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny. Oper in drei Akten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013). The Berlin premiere (December 21, 1931) uses Brecht’s revised 1930 version, in Brecht, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, *BFA* 2, 333–92. The 1930 version, together with all the variants from the 1929 and unpublished 1927 versions, is in Brecht, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, Steve Giles, trans. and ed. (London: Methuen, 2007).

² A more detailed and comprehensive analysis of the reception of the Leipzig and Berlin premieres of *Mahagonny* may be found in Brecht, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, 102–21. I do not discuss T. W. Adorno’s 1930 essay on *Mahagonny* in this article as it is not a review of the Leipzig premiere. It is translated in my edition (122–30), together with the infamous National Socialist attack on Brecht and Weill in the 1931 essay “New Opera ‘Culture’” (130–36), which anticipates the invective of the “Degenerate” Music Exhibition of 1938. My discussion of contemporary responses to the Leipzig premiere also draws on the documentary materials in Brecht/Weill “*Mahagonny*,” Fritz Hennenberg and Jan Knopf, eds. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006), 219–77.

³ For further discussion, see *Theorizing Modernism. Essays in Critical Theory*, ed. Steve Giles (London: Routledge, 1993), especially Richard Sheppard, “The

Problematics of European Modernism,” 1–51, and Giles, “Avant-Garde, Modernism, Modernity: a Theoretical Overview,” 171–86.

⁴ Brecht, “Anmerkungen zur Oper *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*,” *BFA* 24, 74–84; “Notes on *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*,” trans. Steve Giles, in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Tom Kuhn (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 61–71.

⁵ See Jan Mukarovsky, *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1970), first published in Czech in 1936, and Steve Giles, “Sociological Aesthetics as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” *New Comparison*, no. 19 (Spring 1995), 89–106.

⁶ Hans Robert Jauß, “Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft,” *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 144–207; English version in Jauß, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

⁷ For further discussion of this approach to discourse and literary analysis, see Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), especially chapters 1, 2, and 12.

⁸ For further discussion of these issues in relation to Brecht, see *Rethinking Brecht: A Special Number of German Life and Letters* LXIX, no. 2 (April 2016), Stephen Parker and Steve Giles, eds.

⁹ See *Entartete Musik. Zur Düsseldorfer Ausstellung von 1938. Eine kommentierte Rekonstruktion*, ed. Albrecht Dümling and Peter Girth (Düsseldorf: Servicedruck Kleinherne, 1988).

¹⁰ Anon., “Schwarzer Tag der Leipziger Oper. Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny. Uraufführung im Neuen Theatre,” *Leipziger Abendpost*, March 10, 1930; Gutman, “Opernskandal in Leipzig. ‘Mahagonny’ von Brecht und Weill,” March 10, 1930; Rudolf Kastner, “Die Oper von der Stadt Mahagonny. Brecht und Weills neueste Dreigroschenoper. Ein Theatreskandal,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, March 9, 1930; Max Marschalk, “Mahagonny. Uraufführung der Oper von Brecht-Weill,” *Vossische Zeitung*, March 9, 1930; Heinrich Strobel, “Skandal bei ‘Mahagonny,’” *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, March 1930.

¹¹ Anon., “Schwarzer Tag der Leipziger Oper. ‘Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.’ Uraufführung im Neuen Theatre”; F. E., “Die Geschmäcker der Publikümer . . . ‘Mahagonny’ in Leipzig und Kassel,” March 13, 1930; Wilhelm Jung, “Scharfer Protest des Publikums. Generalmusikdirektor Brecher treibt kommunistische Propaganda im Neuen Theatre,” *Leipziger Abendpost*, March 10, 1930; Hans Schnoor, untitled, *Dresdner Anzeiger*, March 1930.

¹² Adolf Aber, “Skandal in der Oper,” *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, March 10, 1930; F. E., “Die Geschmäcker der Publikümer . . . ‘Mahagonny’ in Leipzig und Kassel”; Karl Schönewolf, untitled, *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten*, March 1930; R. A. Sievers, “Weill-Brechts Mahagonny Oper. Uraufführung im Leipziger Neuen Theatre,” *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, No. 60, March 1930; V. Z., “‘Mahagonny’ im Leipziger Opernhaus. Wilde Tumulte um Weill und Brecht,” March 9, 1930.

¹³ Karl Holl, "'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.' Die Oper von Brecht und Weill," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, March 13, 1930; "Zum Fall 'Mahagonny,'" *Frankfurter Zeitung*, March 14, 1930.

¹⁴ Anon., untitled, *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, March 11, 1930; Anon., "'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.' Tumultuöse Brecht-Weill-Premiere in Leipzig," March 10, 1930; H. G. Lustig "Wo liegt Mahagonny"; Strobel, "Skandal bei 'Mahagonny'"; Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, untitled, *Die Scene*, March 1930.

¹⁵ Anon., "Theaterskandal in Leipzig. Bei der Uraufführung der neuen Brecht-Weill-Oper," March 9, 1930; Anon., "Schwarzer Tag der Leipziger Oper. 'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.' Uraufführung im Neuen Theater"; Alfred Einstein, "Brecht und Weill: 'Mahagonny.' Uraufführung in Leipzig," *Berliner Tageblatt*, No. 117, March 10, 1930; Jung, "Scharfer Protest des Publikums. Generalmusikdirektor Brecher treibt kommunistische Propaganda im Neuen Theater"; Kastner, "Die Oper von der Stadt Mahagonny. Brecht und Weills neueste Dreigroschenoper. Ein Theaterskandal"; Marschalk, "Mahagonny. Uraufführung der Oper von Brecht-Weill"; V. Z., "'Mahagonny' im Leipziger Opernhaus. Wilde Tumulte um Weill und Brecht."

¹⁶ Alfred Baresel, "Aufstieg und Fall der Dreigroschenmänner. Uraufführung der 'Mahagonny'-Oper von Brecht-Weill im Neuen Theater zu Leipzig," *Neue Leipziger Zeitung*, March 11, 1930; Holl "'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.' Die Oper von Brecht und Weill"; Kurt Kern, "Brecht-Weills neue Oper. 'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny,'" March 1930; Nora Pising-Boas, "'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.' Theaterskandal im Leipziger Stadttheater," *8 Uhr-Abendblatt der National-Zeitung*, No. 58, March 10, 1930; Klaus Pringsheim, untitled article, *Die Weltbühne*, March 18, 1930.

¹⁷ Sievers, "Weill-Brechts Mahagonny Oper. Uraufführung im Leipziger Neuen Theater."

¹⁸ Wilhelm Klatte, "Operskandal in Leipzig. Brecht-Weill: 'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny,'" *Berliner Lokalanzeiger*, March 9, 1930; Marschalk, "Mahagonny. Uraufführung der Oper von Brecht-Weill."

¹⁹ Aber, "Skandal in der Oper"; V. Z., "'Mahagonny' im Leipziger Opernhaus. Wilde Tumulte um Weill und Brecht."

²⁰ Alfred Einstein, "Brecht und Weill: 'Mahagonny.' Uraufführung in Leipzig"; Holl, "'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.' Die Oper von Brecht und Weill"; Pising-Boas, "'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.' Theaterskandal im Leipziger Stadttheater."

²¹ Einstein, "Brecht und Weill: 'Mahagonny.' Uraufführung in Leipzig."

²² Strobel, "Skandal bei 'Mahagonny,'" Pringsheim, untitled article.

²³ Einstein, "Brecht und Weill: 'Mahagonny.' Uraufführung in Leipzig."

²⁴ Holl, "'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.' Die Oper von Brecht und Weill"; "Zum Fall 'Mahagonny'"; Sievers, "Weill-Brechts Mahagonny Oper. Uraufführung im Leipziger Neuen Theater"; Max Unger, untitled, March 10, 1930.

²⁵ Anon., "'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.' Tumultuöse Brecht-Weill-Premiere in Leipzig"; Pringsheim, untitled article.

²⁶ Anon., “‘Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.’ Tumultuöse Brecht-Weill-Premiere in Leipzig.”

²⁷ Kastner, “Die Oper von der Stadt Mahagonny. Brecht und Weills neueste Dreigroschenoper. Ein Theaterskandal”; Pringsheim, untitled article.

²⁸ Anon., “‘Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.’ Oper von Kurt Weill und Bert Brecht. Uraufführung im Neuen Theater zu Leipzig,” *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, March 12, 1930; Pringsheim.

²⁹ Einstein, “Brecht und Weill: ‘Mahagonny.’ Uraufführung in Leipzig”; Gutman, “Opernskandal in Leipzig. ‘Mahagonny’ von Brecht und Weill”; Sievers, “Weill-Brechts Mahagonny Oper. Uraufführung im Leipziger Neuen Theater.”

³⁰ Einstein, “Brecht und Weill: ‘Mahagonny.’ Uraufführung in Leipzig”; Holl, “‘Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.’ Die Oper von Brecht und Weill”; Strobel, “Skandal bei ‘Mahagonny.’”

³¹ Holl, “‘Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.’ Die Oper von Brecht und Weill”; Aber, “Skandal in der Oper”; Einstein, “Brecht und Weill: ‘Mahagonny.’ Uraufführung in Leipzig.”

³² Anon., “Schwarzer Tag der Leipziger Oper. ‘Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.’ Uraufführung im Neuen Theater”; Jung, “Scharfer Protest des Publikums. Generalmusikdirektor Brecher treibt kommunistische Propaganda im Neuen Theater”; Klatte, “Opernskandal in Leipzig. Brecht-Weill: ‘Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny.’”; Schnoor; Schönewolf.

³³ In the “Introduction” to *The Mirror and the Lamp. Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 3–29, M. H. Abrams contends that mimetic theories construe the work of art as an imitation of the universe we live in; pragmatic theories argue that art must have a purpose, for example teaching and/or pleasing; expressive theories take the work of art to be an expression of the innermost thoughts and feelings of the artist; and autotelic theories—Abrams uses the term “objective”—construe the work of art as a “heterocosm,” a self-contained and self-sufficient entity that is neither mimetic, nor pragmatic, nor expressive.

Die ludische Philosophie in Brechts Dramen und Prosa

Dieser Essay untersucht, auf welche Weisen Bertolt Brecht in seinem Stück *Schweyk im Zweiten Weltkrieg* und in seinen *Geschichten des Herrn Keuner* etwas wiederverwertet und ausschöpft, was "ludisches [spielerisches] Denken" genannt werden könnte. Das "Ludische" bezeichnet nicht bloß Amüsantes, Leichtes, nicht Ernstgemeintes, oder Eskapistisches ("es ist nur ein Spiel"); im Gegenteil, es bezeichnet eine Struktur, die gerade durch die Kategorien des Spiels, der Leichtigkeit, oder des Vergnügens tatsächlich eine Ernsthaftigkeit, Realität und Ethik par excellence erfasst. In einer dreistufigen Argumentation zeige ich die ludische Herangehensweise, die Brecht in seinen Werken im Zusammenhang mit seinen Praktiken des Recyclings verwendet. Zuerst erkläre ich das Projekt des ludischen Denkens in seinem weiteren historischen und systematischen Kontext, mit besonderem Bezug auf die Ideen von Donald Winnicott und Friedrich Nietzsche. Winnicott und Nietzsche befassen sich unter anderem mit der ethischen Dimension des Spiels, die ebenfalls eine zentrale Rolle in der Reflexion des ludischen Denkens bei Brecht spielt. Zweitens werden die Aspekte des ludischen Denkens bei Brecht herausgearbeitet, zunächst durch Analyse von mehreren Auszügen der ursprünglichen Geschichte des Schweyk und deren Wiederverwendung von Brecht, dann durch Analyse von ausgewählten Geschichten des Herrn Keuner. Zuletzt zeige ich, dass die ludische Herangehensweise eine Basis für eine einzigartige philosophische Denkweise und Ethik bildet.

This essay looks into ways Bertolt Brecht recycles and exploits what could be called "ludic thinking" in his play *Schweyk in the Second World War* (*Schweyk im Zweiten Weltkrieg*) and in his *Stories of Mr. Keuner*. "Ludic" does not denote something merely amusing, light, unserious, or escapist ("it is just a game"); it rather signifies a structure that through the categories of play, lightness, or amusement actually grasps seriousness, reality, and ethics par excellence. My aim here is first to explain the project of ludic thinking in its broader historical and systematic context, with principal reference to the ideas of Donald Winnicott and Friedrich Nietzsche. Winnicott and Nietzsche touch upon the ethical dimension of play that plays a crucial role in the reflection on ludic thinking in Brecht, too. Second, I will elucidate the aspects of ludic thinking in Brecht by clarifying the characteristics of the Brechtian ludic agent. Last, I will formulate more generally the kind of ludic approach Brecht uses in his works in the frame of his practices of recycling. I will concentrate on the understanding of the ludic agent, ludic distance, and ludic care as they together construct a basis for understanding the ethics of the playful attitude.

Ludic Philosophy in Brecht's Drama and Prose

Alice Koubová

This essay looks into ways Bertolt Brecht recycles and exploits what could be called “ludic thinking” in his play *Schweyk in the Second World War*¹ (*Schweyk im Zweiten Weltkrieg*) and in his *Stories of Mr. Keuner*.² The “ludic” is a significant term in that it does not denote something merely amusing, light, unserious, or escapist (“it is just a game”); it rather signifies a structure that through the categories of play, lightness, or amusement actually grasps seriousness, reality, and ethics par excellence.³ Ludic thinking does not resolve the paradox of playfulness and seriousness; it respects it. As essentially heteronomous thinking, it implies an order in which one is seriously playful, both engaged and distanced, but never fully identified with one's role or totally separated from it.

My aim here is first to explain the project of ludic thinking in its broader historical and systematic context. I will mainly flesh out the ideas of Donald Winnicott and Friedrich Nietzsche, who not only introduce the important duality of seriousness and playfulness in the ludic stance, but also show how playfulness nourishes maturity in human beings. Winnicott and Nietzsche also touch upon the ethical dimension of play that is crucial in the reflection on ludic thinking in Brecht, too. Second, I will elucidate the aspects of ludic thinking in Brecht by clarifying the characteristics of the Brechtian ludic agent. I will show how the rejection of “identification with” and “separation from” relates to ludic thinking and manifests itself in Brecht's texts on Schweyk and Mr. Keuner. I will pursue the question of self-distance and distance from social norms. Last, I will formulate more generally the kind of ludic approach Brecht uses in his works in the frame of his practices of recycling. I will concentrate on the understanding of the ludic agent, ludic distance, and ludic care as they together construct a basis for understanding the ethics of the playful attitude.

The Context of Ludic Thinking

Research into the concept of play and playfulness received increasing attention in the human sciences in the twentieth century. The structure of play seemed to offer answers to new intellectual challenges after the “failure of the big narratives” and the “flop of the project of a complete human emancipation.”⁴ When resorting to transcendental principles or universal narratives for describing human beings and their social interactions became impossible, new ways of human self-understanding were needed. The discourse of play offers to operate in a *Spielraum*, a field of play, the leeway of

possibilities. This field is interactive, negotiated, heterogeneous, limited in space and time, habituated, but still shareable and shared. For this reason, it is highly suitable for the new project. Among the most influential works on ludic attitude are, for instance: *Homo ludens*;⁵ *Man, Play and Games*;⁶ *Truth and Method*;⁷ *The Oasis of Happiness: Toward an Ontology of Play*;⁸ *Play as the Symbol of the World*;⁹ *Playing and Reality*;¹⁰ or *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.¹¹ Despite many differences, what the authors of these texts agree on is that playfulness structures individual and cultural behavior: people cultivate their humanity through playing and they develop culture in this structure, too. The structure of play enables the individual to address his or her own strangeness, nontransparency, alterity, as well as the alterity of the other. It allows for ambivalence in life, heteronomy in perspectives, ambiguity of opinions, and lack of control over oneself and others. As such, playfulness represents a necessary condition of human adulthood, emotional growth, orientation in the world, and self-organization in social relations.

This understanding of playfulness is convincingly supported by Friedrich Nietzsche's and Donald Winnicott's concept of seriousness connected to play. As the point of departure, it is well known that every game must be played seriously, otherwise it loses its meaning.¹² However, seriousness is not only a condition that makes every game possible, but also the most important condition of human maturity that is achieved through play. In order to attain adult robustness, one needs to maintain and cultivate the *structure of serious playfulness* typical in games, and to develop it as a stance in a real life. Nietzsche defines it as "The maturity of man—that means, to have reacquired the seriousness that one had as a child at play."¹³ Human maturity, then, does not preclude playfulness; they depend on each other. The same idea reappears in Winnicott, that is, that living the paradox of reality and play without resolving it leads to the healthy emotional development of the individual: "The capacity to play is an achievement in the emotional development of every human."¹⁴ Playfulness is, however, not only an individual achievement, but it creates the ground for all adult social interactions and culture: "Play and playing . . . form the basis for cultural experience in general."¹⁵ The incapacity to play, on the other hand, is a clear symptom of psychopathology: "The child with serious splitting of the personality cannot play."¹⁶ British anthropologist Ashley Montagu supports Winnicott's ideas by claiming that to neglect playfulness is not a symbol of maturity but a symptom of "psycho-sclerosis"—rigidity of the psyche.¹⁷ What that entails for play is that it is not only a serious business, but that *seriousness is inseparable from playfulness*. Nietzsche¹⁸ claims that to oppose seriousness and play is immature and argues for achieving their linkage, coexistence. In *Ecce Homo*, he shows that the radical split between seriousness and playfulness leads to fetishism, moralism, and perversion.¹⁹ Ascetic, all too heavily serious man replaces serious playfulness

with unadulterated seriousness, purged of playfulness. In such cases, the capacity to play with serious engagement, but always in some delimited playground and under clear rules, is replaced by an overwhelming seriousness without any limits or boundaries. A deadly serious person hopes to transgress all internal and external ambiguities and conflicts in favor of a purified, unified interpretation of the so-called reality that governs his or her behavior. The behavior is itself the goal, either good or bad.

According to Winnicott, however, the separation of good and bad is a very important psychopathological symptom. Play, as he puts it, creates “the added achievement of ambivalence in place of splitting the object (and self) into good and bad.”²⁰ As a structure of maturity, play thus enables us to incorporate the ambivalence of good and bad. This does not imply that we cannot discern good deeds from bad deeds, but that this capacity to identify them must remain in the field of perspective and plasticity. The ethics of a deadly serious agent, on the other hand, do not take account of these categories. The ludic agent, by contrast, uses perspectival and situation-based ethical approaches. To be aware of one’s contingency implies a special capacity to see the setup of social situations and to understand oneself as a player of the game. Therefore, the ludic agent must logically admit to being, to a certain extent, unpredictable and changeable in his or her deeds.

Bertolt Brecht’s Ludic Agent: Švejk, Schweik and Schweyk

In order to link these philosophical reflections on play, playfulness, and seriousness with Brecht’s ideas, I will first trace Brecht’s ludic work with playful agents, especially in his recycling of the well-known Czech novel *The Good Soldier Schweik* (which I will henceforth refer to as Švejk using Czech spelling or Schweik in English spelling). The ludic character of this recycling is twofold: first, the way Brecht works with the original; second, the characteristics of the protagonist. I will show how Hašek’s Švejk and consecutively Brecht’s Schweyk embody the ludic attitude and produce an ethos of resistance by taking a ludic stance against an oppressive regime.

The original novel *The Fateful Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk During the World War* was written by Czech novelist Jaroslav Hašek and remained unfinished when he died in 1923. Set in the First World War when the Czech lands were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and oppressed by the imperial government, the novel recounts the stories of a Prague dog dealer, Josef Švejk, his recruitment process, and his wartime escapades. During the war, Czech citizens were recruited to fight for the empire without any feeling of loyalty. In the novel, while many try to evade the army at any cost, Švejk adopts a completely different, unpredictable attitude: he celebrates the chance to serve and displays extreme enthusiasm when cooperating with the authorities. This exaggerated agreement with recruitment

exasperates the authorities at many levels. They become disoriented as Švejk doesn't play the game "on recruitment" as expected; instead of trying to avoid the war, he insists on the rules of the game to the extreme and identifies with the idea of fighting for the emperor. The officers become so perplexed by his case that they finally come to a conclusion contradicting their own point of departure: only an idiot could be so keen to go to war. They consequently proclaim him officially insane. Yet they are the ones driven to the point of despair while Švejk remains intact and behaves politely.

Švejk's strategy can be illustrated in a famous scene²¹ in which Švejk is being accused of terrible crimes based on his innocent jokes in the pub. On his way to the chief Austro-Hungarian officer, Švejk promenades in the hall of the court and smiles at all around him; unlike other accused men, he is very even-tempered. When he notices a label on the wall "Spit in spittoons only," he takes this regulation literally, spits into every spittoon he passes and stops the strict policeman who accompanies him with a clear and determined gesture of his hand. The irritated policeman asks: "How many times are you going to spit, man?" Švejk answers: "Well, as a matter of fact, I do not feel like it, but I am trying to do as the regulations tell me." While the policeman looks discombobulated, Švejk displays a robust, self-confident attitude. Going by the rules that govern both him and the policeman puts Švejk's conduct beyond reproach. When entering the high-ranking officer's room, he takes his hat off respectfully, smiles, and the following communication proceeds:

Švejk: Good evening, gentlemen, I hope, you are all well.

A high ranking officer makes him come to his desk and screams at him: Take that idiotic expression off your face!

Švejk: I can't help it. I was discharged from the army on account of being feeble-minded. I am feeble-minded officially, please.

Officer: The offences you have committed show that you have got all your wits about you. Insulting His Royal Highness, approval of the murder of the Archduke, making fun of the state mourning, inciting rebellion . . . (Švejk tries to look at the list the officer is reading, the officer gets angry and agitated) . . . Why are you sticking your nose into my papers?

Švejk: (with a smile) I only wanted to know whether nothing has been left out.

Officer: What have you got to say for yourself?

Švejk: There is a lot of it. You know, you can have too much of a good thing.

Officer: So, you admit it's true?

[. . .]

Švejk: If you wish me to admit everything, I shall admit it. Sir, but if you tell me: “Švejk don’t you admit anything!” then I shall argue the point till the end of my days!

The example illustrates how Švejk’s meticulous and persistent adherence to the rules ruins the game “on recruitment.” The trick played by Švejk is his determined compliance with what is being imposed without any objections. He seemingly identifies with his role in the game and fulfills all that is proclaimed by the authorities. In this way, he renders himself beyond reproach and uses the rules to dominate those who thought that they had the game under control. They can hardly object to the rules they have imposed themselves, but these rules, when applied faithfully, lead them to failure, impotence, and ridiculousness. The game is brought into hypostasis, because it rules all the players rigidly and thereby subjects the low-ranked player to the same rules as the higher-ranked player. The rules apply to the human authorities, too, and this fact transforms the real power relations.

This example demonstrates how the ethical struggle does not play out within the game as such but above it, on a meta-level. Power usually not only imposes the game to be played, but also the way its rules are to be interpreted and the roles of the players. The ludic stance in this structure dwells, among other things, in the capacity to deconstruct this meta-level and to uncover the rules governing the use of the rules of the game. The ludic gesture always consists in some move, trick, or strategy that frees the player from a rigid “separation from” the role and rules, or too serious “identification with” the role, and allows the player to engage in an experimental, conscious, and investigative play *within the rules* of the game. The ludic agent thus builds an awareness of the ambivalence within the game, creates a specific self-distance showing reality in a form of social game, and thus reveals the playful character of social interaction. In this way, the space for possibilities and openness within the *Spielraum* is created.

Schweik Recycled

Bertolt Brecht recycled the novel during his exile in California in 1943 and transformed it into the drama *Schweik in the Second World War* (transcribed in German as Schweyk and English as Schweik again). The play is set mostly in Prague, but this time during World War II, when Czechoslovakia was reduced to the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia under German occupation. Brecht’s version of Schweyk has many interesting features. There are passages literally transplanted from the original and placed in another time and political context, such as the scene of the hearing of Schweyk above, this time at the Gestapo headquarters, in SS-Lieutenant Bullinger’s office:

Bullinger:

You have expressed opinions that endanger the security of the Third Reich, you have called the Führer's defensive war a war of conquest, you have criticized the rationing system, and so on. What have you got to say to all this?

Schweyk:

It's a lot. You can have too much of a good thing.

...

Bullinger:

And you admit everything this says about your remarks? (looks into a list)

Schweyk:

If you want me to admit it, your eminence, I'll admit it, what have I to lose? But if you say "Schweyk, don't admit a thing," they can tear me apart and they won't get a word from me.

Bullinger (yells):

Shut up! Take him away!

Schweyk:

Long live our Führer Adolf Hitler. Victory shall be ours!

Bullinger (dumbfounded):

Are you a half-wit?

Schweyk:

Beg to report, sir, yes, sir. I can't help it . . . I have been officially certified an idiot by a medical board. (S 80–81)

It is clearly visible that Brecht's *Schweyk* recycles Hašek's *Schweik* to a large degree. Brecht explains Schweyk's strategy as that of a "little man" striving to survive against the *rulers*: "The new rulers have even more grandiose and all-embracing plans than the old ones, which makes it even harder for today's Little Man to remain more or less alive" (S 279). Once again, Schweyk demonstrates such extreme cooperation with the Nazis that he ultimately undermines the regime and reveals the authorities' contradictions. (After celebrating the Führer, the officer asks him if he is a half-wit, as if it were madness to celebrate Hitler.) In the final scene, Schweyk meets Hitler and drives him to distraction with his relentless logic, causing him to perform a grotesque dance and disappear in the snowstorm.

By recycling Schweik from World War I into Schweyk in World War II (both names now in German transcriptions) Brecht makes a very ludic gesture on yet another level. Although he changes one letter in the name of the character, it is only noticeable in the written form, not when being pronounced. Schweik and Schweyk are different only as literary characters, but not in their performative actualization. Schweyk is neither a mere copy of the same Schweik, nor a new "original"; he is neither identified with nor

separated from his antecedent; it is recycled material—coming in a new cycle, in a loop, that seems to be repetitive from a performance perspective, but reveals through the accumulation of the same patterns the recognizable principles of social power games throughout history.

However, the question arises as to whether the situation of Švejk/Schweyk/Schweik can be called a game at all. One could claim that the world wars had nothing to do with playing games; they were rather a terrible and cruel reality in which common people did their best to survive and their lives were put in jeopardy. Jean Améry explicitly says, in his essays on torture and guilt during World War II: “before we entered the camp we were nothing more than *homines ludentes*.”²² But when living the liminal moments in the concentration camp prisoners lost their potential to be playful and were transformed into unilateral beings. However, what I argue is that the greatest achievement of Švejk and Schweyk, and Hašek’s and Brecht’s art, was to maintain ludic attitude face-to-face with the liminal situation, and to uncover the reality of war as a cruel game, framed by rules imposed and interpreted by the “rulers.” Švejk manifests the capacity to keep his distance from even the starkest and grimmest reality through his behavior. He shows reality as a social game, translates it into the “transitional space of play,”²³ stops being a mere victim and becomes a player. In every play, all players are equal in that they have to follow the rules. Therefore, Švejk achieves a better position through which he can to some extent control and influence the behavior of the rulers, the deadly serious agents. But with the same gesture, he also destroys the game from within, by playing it too literally. He is a specific spoilsport, if we use H. G. Gadamer’s wording,²⁴ as he destroys the game without cheating. The game is a very specific one: it is considered to be reality, having no limits in space and time, and selected players have the right to interpret the rules and impose them on other players. He actively sabotages the quest for a limitless, deadly serious, perverse, pathological form of *the game of reality*.

The two mechanisms of playfulness—its capacity to subvert the power relations between the rulers and players and its potential to make revelations through a recycling process of historicization are combined with the dramatic irony Brecht introduces in his version of Schweyk. These aspects enable the audience to see the broader structure of social games as ruling and structuring reality. The audience gets distanced three times—through dramatic irony, through observing a self-distancing ludic agent, and through historicization. In this fashion, the three phenomena create an inner gap within the situation in the play and in the understanding of the observers that enables change, surprise, and exploration. To be distanced, conscious about the very fact of playing and at the same time engaged in the game itself, is a precarious state, but at the same time it is creative.

Brecht's Mr. Keuner

Different characteristics of the ludic subject can be seen in another, more heteronomous and multiperspective way, manifested in Brecht's character of Mr. Keuner. Mr. Keuner deconstructs many presuppositions of those who take themselves too seriously (the so-called "deadly serious agents" I mentioned above) and postulates an anti-tragic ludic style of behavior. To illustrate the manifold ways of refusing both identification with and separation from the situation, I will now analyze five exemplary stories.

In "Hardships of the Best," Mr. Keuner is openly and radically easygoing toward his self-importance, and toward the idea of insistence on being right: "I am having a hard time; I am working on my future mistake" (*K* 7). It seems that Mr. K is very certain in this story, although the consequences of his deeds are not. This capacity to separate one's intention and effort from the result might be the first characteristic of a ludic agent. The ludic agent is openly standing at a distance from himself and rejecting the fetish of fatal seriousness.

In "Love of Fatherland, the Hatred of Fatherlands," Brecht again criticizes hypnotized and infectious identification with social roles without any self-distancing. "What made me become a nationalist for this one minute? It was because I encountered a nationalist. But that is precisely why this stupidity has to be rooted out, because it makes whoever encounters it stupid" (*K* 9). The deadly serious identification with the social game creates an atmosphere in which it is extremely complicated to distance oneself. The ludic agent, however, does not criticize this fact from the detached position of a virtuous subject, but from that of one who can be easily induced to a reactionary politics. This specific form of ludic modesty is reiterated in many examples of Keuner and Schweyk.

In "Originality" (*K* 13), Brecht mocks the idea of pure individual autonomy, singular originality, and independent separation from history. He regrets that current authors think that to be original means to avoid recycling, citations and references to others, which they consider as symptoms of dependency and lack of authenticity. Brecht rejects this thinking as narcissistic and presents creative people as nonautonomous, dependent on others and open to draw on the wisdom of their ancestors in a courageous, amused, but still humble way. They do not identify themselves with history, but use it creatively to understand the present and future.²⁵

In "The Right to Weakness," Brecht directly deconstructs the fetish of identification with virtues and separation from the so-called bad aspects of one's character. "Why should I not be so weak as to insist on gratitude?," says Mr. K (*K* 15). The right to be weak includes the readiness to let others be weak. Brecht exemplifies Winnicott's claim about the pathology of splitting good and evil and replaces it by the right to the coexistence of good and bad in one person.

Ludic Ethics: Self-Distance and Care

Having revealed the significance of the ludic agent for understanding ludic thinking, I will now map the theme of ludic distance and care in more detail, using ideas from Martin Puchner's book *The Drama of Ideas*.²⁶ The understanding of the ludic agent, ludic distance, and ludic care together construct a basis for understanding the ethos and style of the playful attitude, maybe even a point of departure for an ethics of play.

What can we learn from Puchner about Brecht's way of thinking, distancing, and caring? In his book, Puchner investigates how we can conceive of certain theater pieces and concepts of theater as a special kind of philosophical thinking, namely that of "dramatic philosophy." Dramatic philosophy doesn't present ideas in the form of unilateral fundamental argumentation, but as a network of relations, dependencies, and tensions, as a field of ideas, and as a drama. In line with Adorno's claim that philosophy is always a form of distance from clichés, dramatic philosophy also proposes a special form of distance/skepticism from what is taken for granted. This distance takes the form of a dialogue in which several strong and convincing reflective figures take part without a clear leading person.²⁷ The aim of dramatic dialogue is thus not to help one voice win and to silence the others, but to maintain the field of discussion as a field of tensions and a domain of knowledge generated through these dramatic tensions. Puchner finds in Brecht a good example of a dramatic philosopher, who, driven by "deeply rooted mistrust of the theatre"²⁸ chooses to stand at a distance from the common "tragic," emotionally driven theatrical practice, as well as from common sense. At the same time his distance is always directed to the subject of investigation.

How is this engaged distance formulated in Brecht's writings? Instead of jumping to the well-known V-effect, which prevents the audience members from sinking into the play and forces them to create their own engaged opinion, I wish to focus on three intriguing and maybe less mentioned kinds of distance and tension in Brecht's work, namely theater and life, philosopher and thespian, and author to himself.

The first distance is that between the theater and life. Brecht's scientific agenda enables him, according to Puchner, to say that "theatre should function like a laboratory, serving the purposes of knowledge and analysis."²⁹ Here a laboratory represents an artificial and controlled environment, in which one can analyze life samples in an artificial milieu in order to discover the rules of life. Brecht knows that the laboratory is *an artificial space* controlled by the researcher. Usually things do not happen in real life as they happen in Brecht's theater laboratory, but the laboratory discovers patterns of the social that would not be otherwise researchable. Schweyk as well as Mr. Keuner are good examples of experimental laboratory behavior that most probably could not transpire in real life, but that uncovers basic

patterns of social interaction and ethics. Through dramatic irony, historicization, and exaggeration, Brecht enters the field of social behavior and investigates it from a limitless proximity, as we shall see. This laboratory approach is expounded in Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, in the model of the surgeon and the magician. The distance Brecht uses and Benjamin speaks about is achieved paradoxically through extreme proximity to the situation, not through a magical authoritarian distance. Benjamin writes:

The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The attitude of the magician, who heals a sick person by a laying-on of hands, differs from that of the surgeon, who makes an intervention in the patient. The magician maintains the natural distance between himself and the person treated; more precisely, he reduces it slightly by laying on his hands, but increases it greatly by his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse: he greatly diminishes the distance from the patient by penetrating the patient's body, and increases it only slightly by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs³⁰

Brecht's distance between theater and life could be described as an exaggerated proximity creating "manifold parts being assembled according to a new law"³¹ rather than the law of "total image" and distant magic view.

Another important distance Brecht provides is that between a philosopher/theoretician and a thespian. Especially during the time of his enforced exile, "Brecht used his distance from the theatre for another, larger project . . . the reflection of the main elements of his theory of the theatre."³² In the *Messingkauf*, Brecht revisits the theory of Epic Theater through the figure of the Philosopher. "Even though the philosopher is not particularly knowledgeable about the theatre, and perhaps does not like it much, he does find himself, on this occasion, in the theatre. He is interested in it, if only for its potential for philosophy."³³ Once more, philosophy does not identify itself with theater, nor does it separate itself from it; instead, it makes new discoveries through coming closer to the subject, through being engaged.

The most subtle and vulnerable distance I wish to mention is that of Brecht to himself in his works: Mr. Keuner, as well as the Philosopher in the *Messingkauf* are often interpreted³⁴ as characters that are not identical with Brecht, but provocatively close to him. (Similar nonidentical, but close characters that speak along with the author can be found in Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Plato's Socrates, Kierkegaard's Abraham, etc.) This last sort of distance is of major importance as it is the most precarious and least visible one. Brecht is as close to his own texts as he can be while maintaining the distance of attentiveness to his writings.

Besides ludic distance, the distance that is created through exaggerated proximity, engagement, and interest, we need to take account of what

Brecht *cares about* in his plays. If we come back to Puchner's explication, Brecht's mission is formulated through focusing on actions of fictitious characters. He doesn't care mainly about interiority, fate, and psychology of the characters. Instead, he emphasizes the necessity to focus on their interaction, distribution of power, and the constitution of their situation. To focus on the situation does not mean to dive into it and lose oneself in it. It means to play with it. This duality, this playful ambivalence, is what will be cultivated in a theatrical *Spielraum*, a field of investigation and generation of meaning, which Donald Winnicott calls the "transitional space of play," and defines as the "intermediate area which has to do with living experience and which is neither dream nor object-relating. At the same time that it is neither the one nor the other of these two it is also both. This is the essential paradox . . . that we need to accept as paradox, not to resolve it."³⁵

The world of play, the transitional space, is a "resting place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated."³⁶ This is an imaginoreal³⁷ space in which the individual imagination intertwines creatively in the shared world. In this field, agents play the game of identification and separation, subjectivity and objectivity, clarity and opacity, self-security and modesty, expansion and self-limitation, fragmentation and unity, without the need to create a hierarchy of these poles, separate them, or fuse them. It seems that dwelling and practicing in this space of play for a sufficiently long time enables the players to create a special style of behavior, which could be called the ludic ethos. Bertolt Brecht, I claim, offers this space through the characters of Schweyk and Keuner to the highest degree and cares about the cultivation of the ludic stance.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have sought to investigate the basic characteristics of what could be termed ludic thinking and ludic ethos in Brecht's Schweyk and Mr. Keuner. I have shown that a ludic approach always entails a specific kind of distance, care, and subjectivity, rejecting a pure identification with the subject of investigation *and* a strict separation from the world. A ludic approach takes playfulness seriously, but never deadly seriously; it rather discovers new kinds of distance in seriousness. Many authoritarian characters and opponents presented in the story of Schweyk are perfect exemplifications of deadly serious persons, suffering from psychopathology of play. They perpetually broaden the playground of the social game and impose their view as the only available interpretation of reality, equipped with rules that must be understood as moral norms. Unlike them, Schweyk doesn't separate seriousness from playfulness, and this very fact enables him to stand apart from what is being played while still engaged in the play. Being a ludic agent allows him to not only distance himself from himself

and from the situation, but also choose from a wider range of possible responses. This creative duality would not be possible if he took himself too seriously. Schweyk takes himself only seriously enough to be able to uncover that so-called reality takes the form of social games in which he can actively participate. This enables him to keep the situation open and act in a highly unexpected and efficient way. In contrast to him, other characters take themselves deadly seriously, identify with their roles, and remain predictable and stable in style, to the extent of extreme rigidity.

Like Schweyk, Mr. Keuner is another example of the ludic agent capable of sustaining and profiting from ambiguities like creative tensions and fields of play, which generate meaning. He uncovers a nonheroic ethics that is based on his self-distanced attitude and healthy distrust of the human capacity to follow strict and rigid principles.

Brecht visibly, and with the aid of different tools, supports playful heteronomy in thinking and doing. When proclaiming the need for science and knowledge in theater, he creates an internal gap within artistic experience. However, he does not promote the method of disengaged distanciation, separation or split, but rather exemplifies an engaged, embodied, caring, and even fascinated distance. In order to unmask clichés and hypnotization in theater, Brecht proposes different levels of distance (theater and life, theater and philosophy, author to himself) while showing that this principle is always closely tied with the subject of investigation. Thanks to dramatic irony, historicization, and presentation of the ludic agent, Brecht invites onlookers to courageously create their own viewpoints, without reclaiming any objective exactness, clarity, and completeness. Brecht makes room for the perspectival gaze, incertitude, and change. His ludic approach lies in this willingness to occupy the precarious state beyond “identification with” and “separation from” the subject, in order to trace another topology of action.

The same gesture beyond identification and separation is mirrored in Brecht’s approach to recycling existing materials. Brecht deliberately recycles other authors and uses their works, plots, and ideas (besides Schweyk let us mention *The Threepenny Opera*, *Antigone*, etc.); however, the very gesture of recycling is neither a gesture of identification nor one of separation; it is a generative iteration. He recycles others to let something new happen: the repetition either emphasizes patterns that become clearly visible, or produces a shift in meaning through the difference between the original and the copy.

Brecht’s homo ludens is principally neither escapist, nor a fully conscious, self-transparent, determined being. Playfulness builds its strengths on the capacity to sustain and even creatively profit from the manifold aspects of life, from the lack of final answers and fixed referential points. Brecht shows to which extent this approach is mature and efficient. Ludic thinking might therefore represent a robust philosophical attitude that is not

encapsulated in the ivory tower, but can efficiently act in the time when the loss of big narratives intertwines with the postfactuality.

Notes

This article has been written with the support of the Czech Science Foundation grant No. 16-00994Y “Performativity in Philosophy: Contexts, Methods, Implications” at the Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences.

¹ Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Plays: Seven* (London: Methuen Drama, 1976), 66–140. All subsequent references appear in the main text as *S*.

² Bertolt Brecht, *Stories of Mr. Keuner* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2001). All subsequent references appear in the main text as *K*.

³ Derived from the Latin *ludus* for play, game, sport, school, and partly religious plays (in plural).

⁴ See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979).

⁵ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950).

⁶ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

⁸ Eugen Fink, “The Oasis of Happiness: Toward an Ontology of Play,” in *Yale French Studies No. 41, Game, Play, Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968): 19–30.

⁹ Eugen Fink, *Spiel als Weltsymbol* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1969).

¹⁰ Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹¹ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1956).

¹² This is claimed by many authors, for example, by Gadamer in *Truth and Method* and Fink in “The Oasis of Happiness.”

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), Maxim 94.

¹⁴ Donald Winnicott, *Psychoanalytic Explorations* (London: Karnac, 2010), 59.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁶ Donald Winnicott, *The Child, the Family and the Outside World* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 145.

¹⁷ Ashley Montagu, *Growing Young* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981).

¹⁸ And others, for instance Fink, “The Oasis of Happiness: Toward an Ontology of Play,” 24–25.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004), 39, 67, 70.

²⁰ Winnicott, *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, 61.

- ²¹ I decided to use an example that can be easily found in a film version of the novel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwWexJ72Mbl>.
- ²² Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 20.
- ²³ Winnicott, *Play and Reality*, 3.
- ²⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 41.
- ²⁵ Compare with Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of the History for Life, Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 57.
- ²⁶ Martin Puchner, *The Drama of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.
- ³⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 35.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² Puchner, 107.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ³⁴ For instance James K. Lyon, *Brecht in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 68. Bernd Witte, *Walter Benjamin: An Intellectual Biography* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 122; Klaus Heinrich, *Versuch über die Schwierigkeit, nein zu sagen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1964); John Milfull, "Herr Keuner and Herr Brecht," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 43, no. 3 (1968): 188–200; Bernard Fenn, *Characterisation of Women in the Plays of Bertolt Brecht* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1982), 24.
- ³⁵ Winnicott, *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, 204.
- ³⁶ Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 3.
- ³⁷ Annabelle Dufourcq, "Du réel à la friche des images sans originaux: pour une approche non-catastrophiste de l'hyperréalité," in *Est-ce réel? Phénoménologies de l'imaginaire* (Nijmegen: Brill, 2016), 98.

Der kastrierte Lehrmeister: Brecht, *Der Hofmeister*, und Lenz

Brechts legendäre Bearbeitung und Inszenierung des *Hofmeisters* von J. M. R. Lenz, die nach Maßgabe der Zeitgenossen wie auch später Heiner Müllers der "Höhepunkt" seiner Theaterarbeit im Berlin nach dem 2. Weltkrieg war, kann aus theaterwissenschaftlicher Perspektive als Teil von Brechts Projekt eines Theaters zur "wissenschaftlichen Erzeugung von Skandalen" bzw. zur "Ideologiezertrümmerung" verstanden werden. Die Inszenierung kann bis heute unter vielen Gesichtspunkten als bahnbrechendes Meisterwerk begriffen werden: Mit Blick auf ihren Umgangs mit Alterität, auf ihre künstlerische Forschungsarbeit, auf ihre Produktionsweisen, auf ihre Verdienste um die Etablierung einer deutschsprachigen Komödientradition und vor allem auf die mit ihr verbundene Dokumentations- und Archivierungsarbeit. Allerdings wird die Kastrationsszene, in der sich der Hofmeister entmannt, eine Szene, die Brecht bereits früher mit einem Sonett als Szene kommentiert hatte, in der sich die "deutsche Misere" erkennen lässt, aus der Rückschau auch als Selbstdarstellung Brechts lesbar: Brecht, so die Hypothese, hält hier die Beschneidung seiner Möglichkeiten durch die Verhältnisse auf emblematische Weise fest. Daraus resultiert nicht zuletzt das merkwürdige Detail, dass das bereits fertige "Modellbuch" der *Hofmeister*-Inszenierung niemals veröffentlicht wurde.

According to his contemporaries as well as to Heiner Müller, Brecht's legendary adaptation and staging of the J. M. R. Lenz's *Tutor* was the "peak" of his work for the theater in post-Second World War Berlin. From a perspective of theater studies, it can be regarded as part of Brecht's project to create a theater for the "scientific production of scandals" or the "destruction of ideology." Up until today this staging can be understood as a groundbreaking masterpiece for many reasons: with regard to its way of dealing with alterity, to its artistic research, its innovative ways of production, its achievements in the establishment of a German tradition of comedy, and above all to the work on documentation and archiving related to it. However, retrospectively one might read the famous castration scene in which the tutor emasculates himself not only as a self-quotation by Brecht, taking up his earlier sonnet commenting on this scene, but also as a self-portrayal. The article develops the hypothesis that in this scene Brecht portrays the curtailment of his possibilities by the political conditions in an emblematic way. This might explain the curious detail of why the already finished "Modelbook" of the *Tutor* production has never been published.

The Castrated Schoolmaster: Brecht, *The Tutor*, and Lenz

Nikolaus Müller-Schöll

Brecht's Theater of Cruelty

"That was cruel theater, an intrusion into consciousness, an attack on false consciousness, the destruction of illusions," claimed Heiner Müller and added that this production was the "high point" of the work at Brecht's Berliner Ensemble.¹ *The Tutor* was a lesson on how to make theater like Brecht. However, if Brecht's work in the theater, as the postwar legend in the second half of the twentieth century would have it, now peaked in the founding of the Berliner Ensemble and if *The Tutor* at the Berliner Ensemble comprised the culmination of that which was possible, then it makes sense to take a look at this piece today from a theater studies perspective. While numerous essays and a whole book have been written on *The Tutor* from a literary or socio-historical perspective—a theater studies perspective is still to be developed.² After a short recapitulation of that which Brecht attempted with his adaptation of Lenz's play, in an attempt to rehabilitate this notable piece from a theater studies perspective, I would like to examine three aspects: to which extent this production was part of Brecht's professed project of creating a theater for the "scientific generation of scandals" or of "ideology demolition."³ Furthermore, I will attempt to follow the specificity of his work in the theater, and finally, I would like to trace the way that Brecht elevated the castration scene to the status of an emblem, before ultimately arriving at a new interpretive hypothesis by going over previous interpretations of this scene.

Brecht's Adaptation of the Historical Material

In *The Tutor or the Advantages of Private Education*,⁴ Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz picks up on a grievance of his time: because the gentry obstructed their appointments as pastors, young theology graduates—like the protagonist Läufer in Lenz's play—must hire themselves out as servants to earn a living, are exploited as "tutors," which means as private teachers dependent on the favor of aristocratic patrons. Läufer teaches in Insterburg in the service of a major, his precious wife, and their children Leopold and Gustchen. A parallel plot shows how Gustchen's lover Fritz spends his student life in faraway Halle together with other high society sons. Even though Gustchen

and Fritz swore eternal loyalty to each other the day before his departure, lonely Gustchen is quickly conquered by Läufer. They flee together; Gustchen gives birth to their child and is saved by her father shortly before her planned suicide. Läufer finds sanctuary at the home of the village teacher Wenzeslaus, where he, having seen his child for the first time, emasculates himself out of remorse. However, Lenz lets the play end with a double marriage: Fritz returns and forgives Gustchen; Läufer finds a country beauty. In April 1778, the play was staged for the first time. It remains the only play by the writer that appeared on a stage during his lifetime, but it vanished again after 1791 and was only excavated by Brecht some 150 years later.⁵

In terms of form and content, both in the history of German-language literatures and with regard to its legacy, the play is remarkable: it is a piece, whose five acts are arranged into short scenes that are reminiscent of Shakespearean dramaturgy. It is testament to the enthusiasm for Shakespeare of the so-called “Sturm and Drang” authors, and is thus part of a protorevolutionary bourgeois uprising against the aristocracy. It also reflects a battle of young against old; the modern era against antiquity and Aristotelianism; and it is part of a literature that looks to England against the dominance of the French culture cultivated by the aristocracy, and at the same time the beginning of a literature and a theater of infamous men, which is later, after the anachronistic interruption of Weimar Classicism, continued by Büchner, Grabbe, Hauptmann, Wedekind, Sternheim, and, of course, Brecht.

The piece’s revolts take place not least on the level of its genre designation. Lenz describes it in the handwritten version as a “comedy and tragedy,” in one letter as a “tragedy,” and finally in the printed version as a “comedy,”⁶ although this designation is based on one of Lenz’s considerations about this genre that, in the baroque sense, grasps it as something popular, addressed to the people as a whole. Above and beyond the author’s intentions the play is testament to a postwar society, in which the succession of generations has been interrupted. The fathers in Insterburg let their sons deteriorate in a prison in Halle, obstruct the boys on their journey through life. Their behavior can be understood as a posttraumatic symptom of a ruined society, as a testimony to societal structures in which the destruction of the Thirty Years’ War and the Seven Years’ War continue to have an effect.⁷

Even if, from a literary studies perspective, Brecht’s adaptation of the play can be described as a blatant albeit productively erroneous reading, from a theater perspective it is a dramaturgical masterstroke.⁸ Here, Brecht excavates a play that has hitherto been considered unstageable and reads it from a dual perspective: on the one hand, as revolutionary literature that has been suppressed by literary history, as the beginning of that which he grasps using the term “realism”—one I will delve into further later on. He thus considers it a “highly moralistic piece without trumpets” (*BFA* 30, 13), as he calls it, alluding to Nietzsche’s pejorative description of Schiller as the

“moralistic trumpeter of Säckingen.”⁹ In this, he underlines his preference for Lenz in comparison to Schiller. On the other hand and at the same time, Brecht considers the play as the “earliest—and very keen sketch” of that which he describes, quoting Friedrich Engels’s formulation: “the wretchedness of German history (deutsche Misere).”¹⁰ It is the literature of a failed class, whose failure he sees especially manifest in the juxtaposition of Lenz’s *Hofmeister* with Beaumarchais’s Figaro.¹¹ Measured against Beaumarchais’s victorious hero, the castrated tutor no longer appears as a comedic hero, but rather as the sad hero of a bourgeois tragedy or mourning play (*Trauerspiel*). But Brecht’s ideas go above and beyond this generic contrast when he confronts a specifically German collocation against France, that not least characterizes Classicist literature. In the face of the terror of 1793 in France, Goethe and Schiller discovered aesthetics as the domain of a reconciliation in the “beauty in appearance (schöner Schein),”¹² a program that Brecht describes in his working journal as a “conspiracy against the audience” (*AJ* 503). Among the first victims of these momentous Weimar cultural politics was not least Lenz, Goethe’s former friend, who was banished from court at the behest of the poet prince. As Büchner later alluded to in his narrative of the same name, Lenz deteriorates into insanity and dies in the year 1792, all alone, on a street in Moscow.¹³ From the point of view of his “servant’s perspective,”¹⁴ Brecht may have been interested in *The Tutor* not least as a literal portrayal of that symbolic castration, as which one can grasp Lenz’s fall from grace. Our task is to now elaborate upon this.

A Theater of “Ideology Demolition”

The Tutor, writes Brecht, had been “at the back of his mind” for a long time before he went to work on its “adaptation” (*AJ* 559) at the end of 1949. The first deliberations on *The Tutor* can be traced back to the time when Brecht, in exile in Svendborg, began working on the *Messingkauf* (cf. *AJ* 147), his great, fragmentary attempt to—if not in a practical way, then in a theoretical form—reconnect with that time that in his view was “of the highest technical standard,” the time of *Fatzer* and the learning plays.¹⁵ It may well have been one of the projects with which he attempted to react to the experience of the dual defeat recorded by Walter Benjamin in his Svendborg diary entries and by Brecht in numerous fragments in his working journal: to the expulsion by the Nazis from Germany, who dispossessed him of his stage and his audience,¹⁶ but also to a leftist theory that he called “murxistisch” (murxist), overtaken by a “pfäffische[n] Kamarilla” (clerical camarilla, *GS* 7, 534) and to the “verbrecherische[n] Cliquen” (criminal cliques, *GS* 7, 537) that had managed to seize power in Moscow.

Upon his return from the USA to Europe in 1947, he asserts that it seems that the “hauptsächliche wirkung einer produktion wie der meinen heute” (primary impact of a production like mine today) is “soviel wie

möglich vom theater niederzureißen und zu ruinieren” (to break down and ruin as much of the theater as possible, *AJ* 498). At the same time, we read that “deutschland seine krise noch gar nicht erfasst habe: weitermachen ist die parole. es wird verschoben und es wird verdrängt. alles fürchtet das einreißen, ohne dass das aufbauen unmöglich ist” (germany has not yet even comprehended its crisis: continuing is the watchword. there is postponement and suppression. there is fear of demolition all over, without which construction is impossible, *AJ* 506). As in *Fatzer*, the *Messingkauf*, and the “studies” named “sonnets” (*V* 351–60) published at the same time as the Lenz adaptation, in the production of *The Tutor* we are dealing with the demolition of ideology. It is apparent that, after the end of the National Socialist state, its ideological premises, which have survived its end, must be combatted.

Conducive to this was not least the volume *Theaterarbeit*, published in 1952: a collection of materials on six productions at the Berliner Ensemble, which corresponded with Brecht’s demand to develop “the art of acting” as well as the “art of spectating” (*BFA* 23, 191).¹⁷ In a speech by Brecht in 1952, quoted in the foreword, one reads:

Dass die Beschädigung an den Theatergebäuden so viel sichtbarer war als die an der Spielweise, hängt wohl damit zusammen, dass die erstere beim Zusammenbruch des Naziregimes, die letztere aber bei seinem Aufbau erfolgte. So wird tatsächlich noch heute von der “glänzenden Technik” der Göringtheater gesprochen, als wäre solch eine Technik übernehmbar, gleichgültig, auf was da ihr Glanz nun gefallen war.

[That the damage to theater buildings was so much more visible than the damage to acting technique is connected with the fact that the former occurred during the breakdown of the Nazi regime, the latter, however, during its establishment. This means that one still speaks of the “illustrious technique” of the Göring theater, as if such technique could be adopted, regardless of what it had helped to appear in an illustrious light. (*TA* 7)]

Brecht’s response, not without humor, is as follows:

Nicht durch besonders leichte Aufgaben konnte das verkommene Theater wieder gekräftigt werden, sondern nur durch die allerschwersten. Kaum mehr imstande, seichteste Unterhaltung herzustellen, hatte es noch eine letzte Aussicht, wenn es sich Aufgaben zuwandte, die ihm nie gestellt worden waren; unzulänglich in sich selbst, als Theater, musste es sich anstrengen, auch noch seine Umwelt zu verändern.

[It was not through particularly easy tasks that the deteriorating theater could be strengthened again, but rather only through the most difficult.

Hardly in the position to generate the most shallow of entertainment, it had a last chance if it turned to tasks that had never been asked of it before; inadequate in itself as theater, it had also to make an effort to change its environment. (cf. *TA* 8)]

It is no accident that we find in these words sentiments that Brecht had earlier laid in the mouths of Fatzer and Galileo: too weak to defend ourselves, we must move on to attack. As Heiner Müller will later put it in a nutshell, Brecht demands “20 years of ideology demolition and an idiosyncratic theater for the scientific generation of scandals,” which is based on political division instead of the Schillerian illusionistic unification in the aesthetic appearance.¹⁸ What makes Brecht’s work in this respect, as Müller writes, “heroic,” is, however, that he is fighting not just against a National Socialist ideology that continues to exert power but also, less obviously but ultimately of higher priority, against a new ideology that is no less powerful. Its premises date back to a time when, in the retrospectively named “Expressionism-debate,” the course was set for a cultural politics at the center of which was the ideal of a “socialist realism” free of basic antagonisms. Its German-speaking pioneers, such as Georg Lukács, Fritz Erpenbeck, and Alfred Kurella—attacked by Brecht in numerous essays only published posthumously—found their archetype in the literature of Weimar Classicism.¹⁹ In these circumstances, the revision of Classicism becomes an immediate intervention against its state-supported ennoblement; the excavation of Lenz, cast away by Goethe, becomes a political issue. Brecht reproaches “German Classicism” for its failure in light of the French Revolution and the fact that it forgot its “realistic beginnings”: “Die Unterdrückung Lenzens durch die Literaturgeschichte muss man aufzeigen” (We must draw attention to the suppression of Lenz by literary history).²⁰ When Brecht thus describes Lenz as a “realistic beginning,” the term “realistic” implicitly quotes the language of orthodox leftist cultural politics, but uses it in an altogether different way, turning it against them while seemingly adopting their terminology. As early as 1938, Brecht had asserted that Marxist theoreticians had “now happily brought down realism in the same way that the Nazis brought down socialism” (*AJ* 11). When he now uses this no longer usable notion, one can see this as the attempt to conquer his opponents by taking on the vagueness of their definition, of that which they considered to be “realism.” He used the borrowed term in order to evoke that which state cultural politics had buried in oblivion in its canonization of classicism: another classicism or rather the other or the rest of or those conquered by classicism (*AJ* 11).²¹

As I will show, it is in the face of this task that Brecht develops that which, from today’s perspective, seems to be a politics of compromise. In order to explain this, one needs to develop a dual perspective with a view to Brecht’s much praised, perhaps most successful production at the Berliner

Ensemble. If, on the one hand, it is necessary to find out where Brecht's achievements lie in this piece, on the other hand, as we will see, one can no longer circumvent his failure, a failure that he recognized, and of which *The Tutor* is an emblematic expression.

Achievements: Production of The Tutor and the "Modellbuch"

So what were the achievements? First of all, the production constitutes a groundbreaking example of the kind of art *that was possible for Brecht during his lifetime*, meaning that it is suitable for an exemplary appraisal of Brecht's work in the theater—in terms of direction, directing the actors, dramaturgy, technique, and the organization of rehearsals. However, here, I can supply little more than an index of such an appraisal:

First, his tremendously inventive work in directing and dramaturgy must be recognized, whose potential goes far beyond that which will become canonical as the "epic style," Brechtianism, or the director's theater of the 70s. As in earlier works, Brecht conceives the production co-originally with Neher's stage plans, which at the same time act as dramaturgical installations, create and dissolve spaces, and prestructure the gestural and scenic plot.²² Detailed considerations are made about the thoroughly upscale props, which are reminiscent of the early-bourgeois golden age and are thus meant to refer to the later decline of the bourgeoisie. The work on the costumes and the repertoire of movements are just as meticulous. There are nine weeks of rehearsals, "at least five hours a day" (*V* 328), in forty-four prerehearsals and forty stage rehearsals. Direction is led collectively by a team of four (*V* 328). Included in their means are the "epicization"²³ of scenes, whose dialogues are set in the third person and the past, in order to find out what the "main movements" and "gestures" of the scenes are before the incorporation of roles (*TA* 94). The actors read out the texts in a "natural tone of voice" or in the "mode of the eye witness account" (*TA* 94). One reads about one rehearsal technique whereby participants must always write down from memory what the whole piece is about, that newspaper articles were produced in which the plot was explained in the style of the news, and that meticulous accounts were kept about the so-called "rehearsal results" (*V* 328–38).²⁴ Of course, they work on the adaptation with leading (literary) scholars of the young DDR, with the German studies scholar and philosopher Hans Mayer, and the archive in Weimar. Using a term coined by Brecht, one could speak of "Angewandte Theaterwissenschaft" (applied theater studies), or, employing a term used more frequently today, "practice based research"²⁵ or "thinking on the stage."²⁶

Brecht pays special attention in his scenic research to speaking on the stage. "Our stage language lives," he writes in his working journal, "where it lives, from the dialects; it is only a thin shorthand without overtones and

undertones. the people itself speaks this language like a stranger" (*AJ* 560). Correspondingly, he calls on the Swiss actor playing the protagonist Läufer to harness his dialect. In the documentation in *Theaterarbeit*, he dedicates one page to the "speaking of Klopstock verses" (*TA* 104). He sees these texts composed in antiquated rhythms, whose rhyme forms had already been described schematically by Klopstock,²⁷ as a particularly "good exercise in ordinary iambs," because their allure, as he explains, "is that they reluctantly contrast with the regular measure in mind" (*TA* 104). One notices how important it is for Brecht to correct standardized stage language when he writes, "We kept an account of the pauses and emphases, and the social significance of the scenic occurrences was, of course, ascertained before the characterization gained momentum" (*TA* 94). One technique that served to deconstruct the habits the actors brought to rehearsals was that they had to rehearse in response to the comments from the directing team sitting in the auditorium. "This kind of rehearsing spared us the usual psychological discussions; the comments [from the creative team] made it more difficult to foster the usual 'creative atmosphere' in which conscious awareness [of the issues at stake] diminishes" (*V* 56). If one looks at the so-called "results of the rehearsals" from scene to scene, one recognizes the analytical poignancy and wit with which Brecht, in his adaptation, constructs the *Tutor's* central plot of the seduction of an exploited tutor throughout the different scenes. That which might seem natural appears in these notes to be the result of a mechanics that is not inferior to that of the French eighteenth century, to those of Marivaux or Beaumarchais. One realizes that Brecht's work was entirely geared toward constructing the acting on the stage based on the exteriority of the course of events instead of on psychology, empathy, and character, like a game of chess.

As the focus on the love story and the excavation of French comedy techniques have already illustrated, the production is part of a comprehensive reevaluation of the exclusions that constitute the German-language theater of the eighteenth century, especially of "inferior" theater as, for example, buffoonery (*Hanswurstiaden*), parabasis, and other disruptions in the fourth wall. These had already been the subject of his work on the comedy *Mr Puntila and His Man* (or rather: *Servant Matti*, in whose margins he noted: "the English and the French have had nothing but comedy since the end of the 17th century, the Germans do not yet have comedy in the 19th century" (*AJ* 131). His efforts surrounding the comedy present themselves specifically in Brecht's rehabilitation of the so-called *Kisten*: "The expression has something derogatory, as if one were speaking of an unpermitted effect. But the *Kiste* seems to be such a central component of the craft of acting, that removing the stigma of derision from the expression is worthwhile" (*TA* 102). *Kisten* are scenic insertions reminiscent of *lazzi*, the comic gestures of the commedia dell'arte—and presumably not by chance. After all, the declaredly first "epic theater piece," *Man Equals Man*,²⁸ was

not just connected with a castration scene (*BFA* 2, 150) like *The Tutor*, but also with the rediscovery of the Hanswurst or Harlequin, banished from the German stage in the eighteenth century, in the form of Galy Gay (*BFA* 2, 143),²⁹ who awakes from his seeming execution as a dividuum. The comedy, particularly in its retrospectively designated *lower* form, is, as Brecht observes again and again, very close to the “Epic Theater” inasmuch as this theater is at all possible: it allows the front edge of the stage to be traversed, to win over the audience by means of enjoyment (*TA* 93), and to draw on film burlesques (*AJ* 558) and the comedies of Chaplin, so admired by Brecht. Rescuing comedy is not least part of Brecht’s excavation of the other of German Classicism. *The Tutor*, he writes to Mayer, is a “real *comedy* but it is so characteristic of them that the classics did not foster this decidedly realistic artistic genre!” (*BFA* 30, 20f.) In Brecht’s productions, *Kisten* are gestural insertions into the piece, for example the scene where the pupil Leopold chases a fly while the new “tutor” introduces himself, or the tutor who, suffering from an “increasing hunger for sex,” “exposes himself like a cockerel to the young girls with stunts at the ice skating rink” (*TA* 102). The rediscovery of the “lower comedy,” as the reformers of the eighteenth century formulated it, is part of a path, repeatedly emphasized by Brecht, back to reason and realism, and to go *back* thereby means to undo the introduction of that late eighteenth century bourgeois theater based on empathy, illusion, and the dramatic negotiation of conflicts and, at the same time, return “to Shakespeare.”³⁰ If this path at first seems like the mere introduction of another technique, into which Brecht’s “Epic Theater” has been transformed in acting schools, an examination of Brecht’s rehearsal work proves that, for Brecht, it is in fact about a different way of dealing with the “other,” in this case with the problems of another postwar time and another postwar society. Only by respecting their alterity could lessons be pulled into the present.

Included among Brecht’s “achievements” would be, finally and in particular, the invention of new methods of documentation. Together with sketches drawn by Caspar Neher at the beginning of the work on the piece, which served as “templates for the arrangement” of the scenes, and with photos by Ruth Berlau and notes on the relationship between the “poetic and the artistic,” the “rehearsal results” were to be compiled into a further *Modellbuch* into the documentation of not just the finished piece but also the rehearsal process and the considerations that accompanied it. Freddie Rokem and David Barnett have recently and rightly pointed out the significance of Brecht’s *Modellbücher*, which have hardly received the acknowledgement they deserve.³¹ In fact, amongst these, the *Modellbuch* planned for *The Tutor* (*V* 328), which Brecht described as already being in existence, is of particular interest for several reasons: like the exemplary documentation of the work with Charles Laughton, the *Antigone* production, *Mother Courage* and the “*Katzgraben* Notes,” it was to present research results. It would also prevent directors in

West Germany who had been shaped by the period of National Socialism and its theater (and presumably to a no lesser extent their colleagues schooled in Stanislavski's methods in the eEast) from staging the play without due reference to Brecht's dialectical practices. If one looks at the components planned for the book, it is evident that every single *Modellbuch* was fundamentally different from the others. They were literally singular attempts at archiving and to this extent also attempts at "anti"-archiving: they were evidence of the impossibility of documenting and archiving comprehensively and of the necessity to continuously reinvent the form of each production's memory. What the *Modellbuch* for *The Tutor* demonstrates very revealingly is that, although five copies were available at the publisher's that could be borrowed by theaters in order to enable further productions in Brecht's manner, it neither appeared as a book nor was it included in the Brecht editions.³² We can speculate as to why this was the case. Was it, as the comment in the *BFA* suggests, because the publication in the book *Theaterarbeit*, in which parts of the *Modellbuch* appeared, had priority (*BFA* 8, 575)? Was it because Brecht had already published significant texts from it in the "Versuche"? Did the project fall by the wayside because it was supposed to appear in the series of *Modellbücher*, planned shortly before Brecht's death, only after the books on *Galileo*, *Antigone* and *Mother Courage*? Was it, because of the very poor sales of the *Antigone*-Modell? We do not know. However, I would like to develop a hypothesis here.

The Castrated Teacher: The Tutor as an Emblematic Piece

The importance of Brecht's production of *The Tutor* as a commemoration of the forgotten victims of German Classicism becomes not least apparent when one reminds oneself that the premiere at the Berliner Ensemble sparked an entire campaign to rediscover Lenz. A radio feature about Lenz by Brecht's longtime comrade in arms Elisabeth Hauptmann played the night before on state radio and emphasized Lenz's nonconformity and his distance from the classicists of Weimar, called his works "revolutionary and critical of society," and reminded the listener that both Büchner and Gerhard Hauptmann would also later draw on his work.³³ An exhibition in the theater foyer of the Berliner Ensemble flanked the production and pointed out that innumerable great German authors and philosophers, from Gellert to Winkelmann, Schleiermacher, Kant, and Jean Paul up to Hegel and Hamann, had let themselves be exploited as tutors. It peaked in an extremely revealing list of the "income levels in the absolutist aristocratic state." One reads that a tutor during Lenz's lifetime earned 60 thaler per year, a cattle maiden 5, Augustus the Strong's lover 100,000 and—presumably the number that interested Brecht the most—Goethe, as the state minister of the Duke of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach, 3100.³⁴

Not included were panels that listed detailed expenses of the duke who employed Goethe as well as a text that was to explain a war scene depicted behind glass using lead or cardboard soldiers: the bourgeois revolution, as it would have read, was prevented in the eighteenth century by the inter-German wars. Alongside the monarch, only the aristocracy and a few bourgeois civilians had any interest in these wars; together they comprised “2% of the German population.” Beneath this was to be the question: “Who definitely lost?” and the answer: “The other 98%” (BBA 1564/07). Goethe’s vow of wanting to keep the peace, which contrasted with the time of “openly revolutionary behavior, the time from which Lenz’s work originates” (BBA 1564/09), was not included in the exhibition either.

The caution with which politically charged material was both placed in and withheld from the exhibition reveals that this intervention, just like the entire enterprise of ideology demolition, took place in a situation in which, once again formulated by Heiner Müller, the basements had to be cleared out without endangering the structure of the new buildings.³⁵ Because in the year 1950, the question of whether one should prefer Goethe and Schiller or, rather, the traditions of German literature that had been suppressed by Classicism was neither merely academic nor one of theater history nor one of taste. This rather was an aesthetic question and, as I have said, as such, also a political and strategic question. Because Weimar Classicism, in particular Goethe in the anniversary year of 1949, was not least celebrated in the young GDR in order to win over the (educated) bourgeoisie for the new state. No less politically connoted was the state-supported empathy and illusion fought against by Brecht, which had to a certain extent become state doctrine in matters of theater as seen in the reception of Stanislavski under Soviet occupation—with the, at the first glance, paradoxical consequence that Brecht could only polemicize against it effectively by publicly decrying that which he called the “Göring theater,” as quoted previously, which he clearly formulated in his unpublished texts as a criticism of Stanislavski and the renewed empathy-based and illusionistic theater shaped by him.

But these compromises did not just pertain to the terminology in which Brecht wrote down his theory and opinions; they also affected everyday work in the theater at the newly founded Berliner Ensemble. Thus, the demolition of the old, the continual work on the examination and negotiation of fixations of any kind, and the great public debate—all of this was superseded by a kind of continuous politics of compromise. Brecht no longer targeted the “division of the audience,” which he had devised in his major and minor pedagogy of the learning play period for the preparation of a revolution and the transitional period after it. This was despite the fact that he had propagated this division anew to students in Leipzig. The actors were only trained rudimentarily in the new technique; in fact, for a large part, Brecht respected that which they understood to be their art and tolerated what he considered to be old acting methods.³⁶ Neher’s tableaux, from

which Brecht develops his productions, to a certain extent, as their variants, can be seen as masterworks of his art, but also reinforce that paradigm shaped in the eighteenth century of a production strategy based on images.³⁷ The dispositive of the proscenium theater, questioned in the learning plays and in the *Messingkauf*, is restored, pleasure propagated. It is therefore no surprise when Brecht notes with regard to the popular success of *The Tutor*: “the people loves caviar” (AJ 562), and, in respect of *The Tutor*, one understands why Brecht, after a reference to the fact that Puntila “is of course only as much epic theater as can be accepted (and offered) today,” notes the question in his working journal, “When will the real, radical epic theater exist?” (AJ 558). In other words, little by little, in his practical theater work and for the sake of a theater that *is* possible, Brecht abandons that impossible theater that he had championed in his most radical projects, in *Fatzer* and in the *Messingkauf*.³⁸

These observations invite us to take a second long look at the piece’s central castration scene. In Lenz’s text, the act was the consequence of the tutor’s remorse and, at the same time and, from the author’s perspective, an emblem of the untenable circumstances in late eighteenth-century Germany. In contrast, Brecht is interested in the “parable-like significance of the tale of emasculation” (letter to Hans Mayer). The “self-emasculation of the intellectuals” according to him, is “demonstrated using an example in flesh and blood.” This was simultaneously an “intellectual emasculation,” the “grotesque way out” (BFA 30, 20) of the tutor’s social situation, the emblematic expression of the wretchedness of German history, the beginning of that development that led to the catastrophes of the twentieth century: “One almost hears the French laughing about the German tutor, who through his sexual connection to his aristocratic pupil, does not advance his career but rather is forced to emasculate himself in order to continue his service.”³⁹ By doubling and tripling the castration to a certain extent in the piece, by showing the students Pätus and Fritz as self-emasculating philistines, even if only symbolically, who at the end draw in their horns in order to lead a bourgeois existence, Brecht illustrates that it is not just a single tutor who mutilates himself here, but rather the entire German bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century, and Lenz himself is certainly included in this lineup. Brecht’s *The Tutor* constitutes an answer to Büchner’s “Lenz,” as a distanced view of the failed friend, antipodean, and Goethe’s victim. This is well known.

However, what has not been seen up until now is that Brecht, with this portrayal of the castration of the intellectuals of the eighteenth century—of a castration that he once also called the “counterrevolution” (V 337), “a blind prostration of rebellion, the deed to end all deeds” (V 77)—not least provides a portrayal of his own situation, even if it takes place in a hidden form. The castrated tutor: this is not just the “tutor,” Lenz, and the bourgeoisie of his time, but also the dramatist Brecht, whose most radical plays

are “learning plays” that he abandons in favor of less radical but more easily playable and consumable plays. The castrated tutor is the theater revolutionary who, with the denegation of his great revolutionary drive, paves the way to fame. This fame is accompanied by his opponents’ ideologically charged assertions that the productions—fortunately—have barely anything to do with his theory. They refer, relieved, to the continuation of empathy, illusion, character, plot, drama, dialogue—thus to the fact that he is about to restore that good old theater that he had once declared war against in favor of the bad new one that is to be taken up again. Läufer’s castration in *The Tutor*—that much vaunted adaptation and production, the peak of the work of the Berliner Ensemble—shows not least Brecht’s own castration: Brecht, who abandons his revolution in the theater for the sake of a possible theater. The production does not just stage the castration on the stage, it is also an act of self-castration, or can at least be interpreted in this way.

But, if this is the case and in view of the choruses of praise for this production, Brecht’s theater work and his late work in general seem at first implausible—could this really have been concealed from all of his contemporaries? Would not his colleagues, those who were close to him, who had returned with him from exile, have noticed something? Here, a spectral text by longtime friend Ruth Berlau, who Brecht credits as a contributor to the adaptation, is revealing, written by her in March 1950 in the Charité after a supposed suicide attempt. She describes how Lenz visits her in the hospital and complains that Brecht, who is currently staging him, does not have any time for him. In response to her answer that it was Lenz’s problem that he couldn’t laugh at himself, he answers that a man in his situation cannot do that and continues, “Now, right now in the year nineteen-hundred-and-fifty, it is not comical and there is nothing to laugh about if a person has to castrate himself in order to live, right now, where the whole of Germany is castrated and lies dismantled before our eyes!” (BFA 30, 486–87). Berlau counters that, as a Dane, it has nothing to do with her if Germany lies in ruins and then remarks that Brecht in our time is the best of them, is a genius today and as such the master of the former geniuses. And in this dialogue, recorded and imagined by her, in order to convey to Lenz that she understands him, she explains: “if you had really castrated yourself and if this not only had been done in your work *The Tutor* by your hero, you would not have had to flee, not have gone insane . . .” Lenz responds: “But the master of this time says himself that he escaped from the tigers, that he nurtured the bugs and was eaten up by mediocrity!” Berlau responds: “*Right you are!*” (BFA 30, 486–87).

Brecht, who castrates himself, stays in the country and in his right mind. In the context of this impression by a contemporary, one reinterprets what it is the actor portraying the tutor is speaking of in the epilogue when he describes the “wretchedness in the German land” as holding “true even today” and says about the tutor:

In einem Gleichnis überlebensgroß
 Geht er am End auf sich selber los
 Austilgend seine Zeugungskraft
 Die ihm nur Pein und Elend schafft.

...

Schüler und Lehrer einer neuen Zeit
 Betrachtet seine Knechtseligkeit
 Damit ihr euch davon befreit!

[In a parable larger than life
 He charges at the end towards himself
 Eradicating his potency
 That only causes him pain and misery.

...

Pupils and teachers of a new time
 Observe his servitude
 So that you can liberate yourselves from it! (V 327)]

Beyond all insights into historical diagnosis or sociology, the production and the adaptation convey to posterity, in my opinion, a secret subtext: the insight into a historical failure, which for decades would obstruct the view of Brecht's most radical, groundbreaking experiments and continues to this day to obstruct this view outside of the German-speaking realm. It is a message in a bottle, which is to be opened when, after decades of Cold War, the circumstances for a really radical epic theater will have arrived, for that theater that was impossible in his present, to which Brecht's work, in its strongest moments, was committed.⁴⁰

—Translated by Lydia White

Notes

¹ Heiner Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht. Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1992), 228.

² See the bibliographical note on Brecht's *Hofmeister* in Jörg Wilhelm Joost, "Der Hofmeister von Jacob Michael Reinhold Lenz," in Jan Knopf, ed., *Brecht Handbuch* (Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler, 2001), 563–78, here 577–78.

³ Heiner Müller, "Fatzer + Keuner," in Müller, *Material* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1990), 30–36, here 32.

⁴ See Jacob Michael Reinhold Lenz, *Der Hofmeister oder Vortheile der Privaterziehung. Eine Komödie*, ed. Michael Kohlenbach (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1986).

⁵ See Karen Lauer, "Anmerkungen," in J. M. R. Lenz, *Werke* (Munich, Vienna: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992), 489–501, here 489–90; Christoph Weiss, "Elisabeth Hauptmanns Hörfunksendung über Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz am

Vorabend der Premiere von Brechts *Hofmeister*-Bearbeitung,” in *Text + Kritik* (2000), 3–15, here 4–5.

⁶ Lauer, “Anmerkungen,” 490.

⁷ See “Das Prinzip Verwahrlosung. Helmut Schäfer über die Hofmeister-Inszenierung des Mülheimer Theaters an der Ruhr,” in *Schauplatz Ruhr. Jahrbuch zum Theater im Ruhrgebiet*, ed. Ulrike Haß and Nikolaus Müller-Schöll (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2007), 40–42.

⁸ Inge Stephan, Hans-Gerd Winter, “‘Die Selbstentmannung der Intellektuellen’—Brecht und die zeitgenössische Hofmeister-Rezeption,” in “*Ein vorübergehendes Meteor*”? *J. M. R. Lenz und seine Rezeption in Deutschland*, ed. Inge Stephan and Hans-Gerd Winter (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984), 178–210.

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Götzendämmerung, Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemäßen 1,” in Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Einzelbänden*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), vol. 6, 111.

¹⁰ Bertolt Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal*, ed. Werner Hecht, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), vol. 2, 559; appears hereafter as *AJ*. This journal is quoted from the first published edition since it is closer to Brecht’s manuscript than the later *BFA* edition, which changed Brecht’s text by adding capital letters.

¹¹ Brecht, “Über das bürgerliche Trauerspiel *Der Hofmeister* von Lenz,” in Brecht, *Versuche* 20–26/35 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 356. Also in this case the text in the *Versuche* edition is more reliable than the one in the *BFA* and thus hereafter cited as *V*.

¹² Friedrich Schiller, “Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen,” in Schiller, *Über das Schöne und die Kunst. Schriften zur Ästhetik* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 139–230.

¹³ See Georg Büchner, “Lenz,” in Büchner, *Werke und Briefe. Commentary by Karl Pörnbacher*, 8th ed. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987), 69–90. For commentary on the historical background, see Büchner, “Lenz” (358–68).

¹⁴ On the servant’s perspective, which is taken up by Brecht on different occasions, see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Vienna: Ullstein, 1970), 370.

¹⁵ See Nikolaus Müller-Schöll, “Bruchstücke eines (immer noch) kommenden Theaters (ohne Zuschauer). Brechts inkommensurable Fragmente *Fatzer* und *Messingkauf*,” *The Brecht Yearbook* 39 (2014): 30–54.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 539; hereafter referred to as *GS*.

¹⁷ Ruth Berlau, Bertolt Brecht, Claus Hubalek, Peter Palitzsch, Käthe Rüllicke, *Theaterarbeit. 6 Aufführungen des Berliner Ensembles* (Düsseldorf: Progress-Verlag Johann Fladung, 1952); hereafter appears as *TA*.

¹⁸ Müller, “Fatzer + Keuner,” 32.

¹⁹ On this debate, see Hans Jürgen Schmitt, ed., *Die Expressionismusdebatte. Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973); Schmitt, Godehard Schramm, ed., *Sozialistische Realismuskonzeptionen*.

Dokumente zum 1. Allunionskongreß der Sowjetschriftsteller (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974).

²⁰ “Bertolt Brecht an Hans Mayer, Berlin, 25. März 1950,” *BFA* 30, 20–21.

²¹ See also *AJ* 15, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 32.

²² See the images in Susanne de Ponte, *Caspar Neher, Bertolt Brecht. Eine Bühne für das epische Theater* (Munich: Henschel, 2006), 91–95; furthermore *TA* 114–17.

²³ See *TA* 94–96, *V* 67–72.

²⁴ See the material of the rehearsals in the Brecht Archive as well as in the archive of the Berliner Ensemble, which would deserve a more detailed analysis elsewhere.

²⁵ See Nikolaus Müller-Schöll, “Das künstlerische Forschen,” *Theater heute* 54, no. 7 (2013): 36–39.

²⁶ See Müller-Schöll, “Denken auf der Bühne. Derrida, Forsythe, Chétouane,” in *Mnema. Derrida zum Andenken*, ed. Hans-Joachim Lenger, Georg Christoph Tholen (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2007), 187–208.

²⁷ See Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, *Gedanken über die Natur der Poesie* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1989).

²⁸ Brecht, *Mann ist Mann* (*BFA* 2, 93–168).

²⁹ See Nikolaus Müller-Schöll, *Das Theater des “konstruktiven Defaitismus.” Lektüren zur A-Identität bei Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht und Heiner Müller* (Frankfurt am Main, Basel: Stroemfeld Verlag, 2002), 201–30, especially 213; Müller-Schöll, “‘Der Chor der Komödie.’ Zur Wiederkehr des Harlekin in Theater und Performance der Gegenwart,” in *Performing Politics. Politisch Kunst machen nach dem 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Müller-Schöll, André Schallenberg, Mayte Zimmermann (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2012), 189–201.

³⁰ See *AJ* 560: “der HOFMEISTER scheint gut gewählt für die übung der schauspieler im realistischen und zugleich großen stil. das ist der weg zum shakespeare, der rückweg; so viel ist von ihm im deutschen begriffen worden.”

³¹ See, for example, David Barnett, “The Rise and Fall of Modelbooks, *Notate* and the Brechtian Method: Documentation and the Berliner Ensemble’s Changing Roles as a Theatre Company,” *Theater Research International* 41, no. 2 (2016): 106–21. See as well with regard to the origin of the Modelbooks in the context of the learning plays and the journal *Krise und Kritik*: Nikolaus Müller-Schöll, “Das Modell des Modells,” in Müller-Schöll, *Das Theater*, 307–24.

³² According to Elisabeth Hauptmann, Brecht’s publishing house Suhrkamp had five copies of the *Hofmeister*-Modelbook; see Werner Hecht, ed., *Brecht Chronik, 1898–1956* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 929. Today the Brecht Archive stores seven copies of the Modelbook, which are significantly different from each other. There might be additional copies elsewhere.

³³ See Weiss, “Elisabeth Hauptmanns Hörfunksendung.”

³⁴ See the posters of the exhibition in *TA*, 84. Additional material stored in the archive shows that the topic of an opposition between the Storm and Stress and the Classicism of Weimar was the most controversial. See BBA 1564/02.

³⁵ See Müller, “Material,” 32.

³⁶ See *V* 328: “Die Meisterschaft respektierend, ließen wir es gut sein”; and *V* 339: “Ganz un hypnotisches Spielen wurde nur auf der Probe und nur in einigen Szenen versucht.”

³⁷ On the images of Neher, see de Ponte, Caspar Neher. See also Benjamin, *GS* 2, 525.

³⁸ See Müller-Schöll, “Bruchstücke.”

³⁹ Brecht, “Notizen über realistische Schreibweise,” in *BFA* 22.2, 620–40, here 632.

⁴⁰ This essay is a written version of a lecture given on three occasions: in a first version at a conference dedicated to Freddie Rokem in Tel Aviv, in a second at the Brechtforum in Berlin, and finally in a shortened version at the International Brecht Society symposium in Oxford. I would like to thank all the listeners on these different occasions for their remarks and critiques. I am especially grateful to Anett Schubotz and Erdmut Wizisla for permitting me to view the different materials in the Brecht Archive and for their criticisms and corrections. However, all remaining mistakes are my sole responsibility. A longer, German version of this text has appeared in *Lenz-Jahrbuch. Literatur—Kultur—Medien 1750–1800* 23 (2016).

“Altes wird aufgerollt”: Paul Dessaus posthume Zusammenarbeit mit Brecht

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht die posthume Kollaboration Paul Dessaus mit seinem Freund und Mitarbeiter Bertolt Brecht. Zwischen 1956 und seinem Tod 1979 komponiert Dessau etwa zwanzig Werke, die entweder Brechttexte vertonen (z.B. die Oper *Puntilla*, Theatermusik, Lieder) oder Kompositionen aus der gemeinsamen Schaffensperiode—zwischen 1943 und 1956—explizit oder verdeckt zitieren. Dabei setzt Dessau zwei Hauptstrategien ein, um seine kreative und politische Kollaboration mit Brecht im Sinne einer fortschrittlichen, teilweise seriellen neuen Musik fortzuführen: Erstens bildet er aus Formen, Genres und Werken, die er mit Brecht ausgearbeitet hat, bindende Modelle für weitere Arbeiten—aus der großangelegten, oratorienartigen Vertonung der *Kriegsfibel*-Gedichte *Deutsches Miserere* (1943–47) entsteht z.B. ein fibelartiges “Misereremodell”; zweitens arbeitet er über längere Zeit mit jungen DDR-Dichtern zusammen, die in der Brechtschen Tradition stehen (Heiner Müller, Volker Braun, Karl Mickel). In seinen späten Werken setzt er kompositorische Techniken und Mittel, die er mit Brecht entwickelt hat—zuvorderst das Zitieren und die Fragmentierung—konsequent und wiederholt ein. Als repräsentative Beispiele dieser posthumen musikalischen Zusammenarbeit werden insbesondere Dessaus anspruchsvolle Musik für den “Blutspendefilm” von Walter Heynowski und Gerhard Scheumann *400 cm³* (1966) und die Müller-Honecker-Vertonung *Chormusik Nr. 5* (1976) untersucht. Unveröffentlichte Dokumente aus dem Paul Dessau Archiv werden hierbei erörtert und zitiert.

This essay examines the posthumous collaboration of Paul Dessau with his friend and collaborator Bertolt Brecht. Between 1956 and 1979 Dessau composed around twenty works that set Brecht texts (the opera *Puntilla*, theater music, songs) to music or quote, explicitly or obliquely, compositions from their collaboration (1943–56). Dessau adopts two strategies to continue the creative and political collaboration and to develop a progressive, on occasion serial, form of New Music: first, he creates models for new pieces based on the forms, genres, and individual works composed with Brecht—for example a primer-like “Miserere Model” emerges from the grand oratorio-like setting of Brecht’s *Kriegsfibel* (*War Primer*) poems, *Deutsches Miserere* (*German Miserere*, 1943–47); second, he collaborates with GDR writers working in the Brechtian tradition (Heiner Müller, Volker Braun, Karl Mickel). In his late works Dessau regularly employs compositional techniques developed with Brecht—notably quotation and fragmentation—and develops them further. Representative examples of this posthumous musical collaboration are analyzed, in particular Dessau’s demanding music for the “blood donation film” of Walter Heynowski und Gerhard Scheumann *400 cm³* (1966) and the Müller-Honecker setting *Chormusik Nr. 5* (*Choral Music No. 5*, 1976). Unpublished documents from the Paul Dessau Archiv are discussed and quoted.

“Altes wird aufgerollt”: Paul Dessau’s Posthumous Collaborations with Brecht

Martin Brady and Carola Nielinger-Vakil

Die . . . Technik der Übernahme . . . ist auch von Brecht. Er hat einmal zu mir gesagt: “Weißt du, wenn man etwas Gutes gemacht hat, soll man es wieder aufnehmen und in anderem Rahmen nochmal verwenden.”¹

[The . . . technique of borrowing . . . is also from Brecht. He once said to me: “You know, if you’ve done something good you should take it up again and use it once more in a different context.”]

1. Collaboration

From the beginning of their collaboration in 1943 through to 1956, Paul Dessau was Brecht’s most innovative and experimental musical collaborator. During Brecht’s lifetime he provided the music for productions of *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (Mother Courage and Her Children), *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* (The Caucasian Chalk Circle), *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (The Good Person of Szechwan), *Mann ist Mann* (Man Equals Man), *Herrnburger Bericht* (Report from Herrnburg), *Die Erziehung der Hirse* (The Cultivation of the Millet), for the opera *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus* (The Condemnation of Lukullus), alongside dozens of songs and occasional pieces including what is purportedly the most-sung political song of the German Democratic Republic, the “Aufbaulied der FDJ” (Reconstruction Song for the Free German Youth). Dessau was also, through to his death in 1979, the most important avant-garde composer of the GDR; its leading practitioner of serialism; a noted composer of film music (not least for four documentary films of Andrew and Annelie Thordike);² and a mediator between East and West, bringing Luigi Nono, Hans Werner Henze, and others to East Berlin and arranging performances of their works. Some of his own compositions were suppressed or censored; he was a tireless supporter and protector of younger, experimental composers (including Friedrich Goldmann and Reiner Bredemeyer); and a long-term collaborator with Brechtian writers including Heiner Müller, Volker Braun, and Karl Mickel. Müller wrote in his obituary for the composer:

Er hielt für lernbar, was gebraucht wird. . . Ich habe viel von ihm gelernt. Das Beispiel seiner Arbeitshaltung. Sie hatte den Ernst des Kinderspiels. Das die avancierteste Weise der Produktion ist, Arbeit auf höchstem Niveau, ein Vorgriff in das Reich der Freiheit. Er hat einen lebenslangen Kampf gegen die Dummheit nicht nur in der Musik

geführt. Mit den unvermeidlichen Niederlagen und ohne die Todssünden des sozialistischen Künstlers, deren Namen Kompromiß und Hochmut sind, häufiger als unbedingt notwendig zu begehn . . . *Was zählt ist das Beispiel der Tod bedeutet nichts.*³

[He believed that what is needed can be learned . . . I learned much from him. The example he set with his attitude to work. It had the seriousness of a child's game. This is the most advanced method of production, work of the highest order, reaching forward into the realm of freedom. He fought a lifelong battle against stupidity, not only in music. With the inevitable defeats and without committing the deadly sins of the socialist artist—namely compromise and arrogance—more than was absolutely necessary . . . *What matters is the example death means nothing.*]

All of this contradicts the frustratingly tenacious cliché that Dessau was, as the British composer Dominic Muldowney put it in a discussion in March 2013 at the Southbank's *The Rest is Noise* festival in London, "a rather obsequious yes-man."

2. "Gewissermaßen eine Lebensaufgabe"

In an interview with Hans Bunge in 1958 Dessau admitted that his first encounter with Brecht, in New York in February 1943, marked the beginning of "gewissermaßen eine Lebensaufgabe" (to some extent a life's task).⁴ This challenges the claim made by Joy H. Calico, in her essay "Musical Threnodies for Brecht," that the orchestral epitaph *In memoriam Bertolt Brecht* of 1956–57 represents a break with Brecht and a shift toward an avant-garde compositional idiom closer to his other great mentor, Arnold Schoenberg: "Dessau experienced two major moments of artistic emancipation in his career: the first came when he began working with Brecht in 1943, and the second when he stopped working with Brecht in 1956."⁵ Calico concludes that during their collaboration Dessau was "devoted to him, and strongly influenced by everything from his politics to his aesthetics," even if by the mid-1950s Dessau's "pursuit of a more complex, dissonant musical language had become a source of contention."⁶ She interprets *In memoriam Bertolt Brecht* as a kind of musical exorcism, a "modern elegy" in which the composer signals his increasing kinship with serialism and, in an act of defiance, not only deploys the very violins that Brecht abhorred, but also refrains from including any sung or spoken text by the master.⁷ While her argument is compelling musically, it is not entirely convincing in the light of Dessau's subsequent career. During his later years, he not only remains faithful, as Calico indeed acknowledges, to "Brecht's penchant for appropriating and repurposing material," he also continues to collaborate with Brecht on new pieces beyond the grave.⁸

Shortly after his friend's death, Dessau turns to him for the libretto of his second opera, *Puntila*, which is followed by a steady flow of songs, music for stage productions, and arrangements all using Brecht texts. Notable examples include: the aforementioned *In memoriam Bertolt Brecht für großes Orchester* (In Memoriam Bertolt Brecht for Large Orchestra, orchestral music, 1956–57); *Puntila* (opera, 1956–59); *Appell der Arbeiterklasse* (Plea of the Working Class, oratorio, 1960–61, containing a substantial quotation from the *Deutsches Miserere*); *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe: Erste Entwurf für eine Oper* (St. Joan of the Stockyards: First Draft for an Opera, 1961); *Coriolan* (Coriolanus, stage music, 1963); “An meine Landsleute” (To my Countrymen, song, 1965); “Kleines Lied” (Little Song, 1965); *Quattrodramma* (chamber music, 1965, containing a quotation from *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus*); “Moderne Legende” (Modern Legend, song, 1965); *400 cm³* (film music for Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann containing quotations from the “Solidaritätslied” [Song of Solidarity] and “Friedenslied” [Song of Peace]); *Tierversen* (Animal Verses, 10 songs, 1962–72); *Grabschrift für Gorki* (Epitaph for Gorky, song, 1967–68); *Lenin: Orchestermusik Nr. 3 mit dem Schlußchor “Grabschrift für Lenin”* (Lenin: Orchestral Music No. 3 with the Choral Finale “Epitaph for Lenin,” 1969); *14 Stücke aus “Internationale Kriegsfißel”* (14 Pieces from “International War Primer,” voice and ensemble, 1970); *Die Geschichte vom kaukasischen Kreidekreis für Schulen eingerichtet* (The Story of the Caucasian Chalk Circle Arranged for Schools, voice and string quartet with conga); “Historie vom verliebten Schwein Malchus” (Malchus, the Pig That Fell in Love, song, 1973); “Spruch” (Saying, song, 1973); “Bei den Hochgestellten” (Amongst the Highly Placed, song, 1975, with Wolf-ram Heicking). The first set of five *Tierversen* are also the subject of Dessau's only independent book publication, *Musikarbeit in der Schule* (Music Work in School) of 1968.⁹

3. Musikarbeit

Musikarbeit in der Schule, a relatively modest volume of sixty-three pages, consists of pedagogical musical exercises based on Dessau's own experience of teaching at his local school in Zeuthen. The five *Tierversen* settings that form the basis for the volume were developed in collaboration with pupils at the school under the motto “‘Denken ist die erste Bürgerpflicht.’ Auch in der Musik. Und: kritisches Denken ist noch besser.” (“Thinking is the citizen's primary duty.” Also in music. And: critical thinking is even better.)¹⁰

This primer, much in the spirit of Brecht's work for children, is one of three volumes that cement Dessau's reputation as a fitting heir to Brecht. The first, originally published by the Deutsche Akademie der Künste in 1957 and then in an expanded version in 1963, is a lavishly illustrated

hardcover volume entitled *Brecht / Dessau. Lieder und Gesänge*.¹¹ The 1963 edition contains fifty-five scores, accompanied by tipped-in photographs of stage productions and drawings and, in the case of nine songs from the *Deutsches Miserere*, the oratorio completed in 1947, which contains settings of Brecht's *Kriegsfiabel*, reproductions of the original illustrations. This opulent volume begins with a 1936 song from *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe* composed seven years before the pair met in New York, and continues with examples from across their thirteen-year collaboration. It includes ten pieces from *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus*; thirteen from *Der kaukasische Kriedekreis*; six from *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*; five from *Mann ist Mann*; and sundry songs, concluding with the "Friedenslied (Frei nach Neruda)" (Song of Peace [freely adapted from Neruda]), accompanied by a Picasso drawing.

On numerous occasions in the volume Dessau notes that he has included something because Brecht liked it: for example in the case of "Die Freunde" (The Friends, based on a Chinese text) he notes: "Ich komponierte es als Huldigung für Brecht, den Freund . . . Als ich Brecht dieser Version durchs Telefon vorsang, bekundete er großes Vergnügen." (I composed it as a homage to my friend Brecht . . . When I sang this version to Brecht on the telephone he expressed great pleasure.)¹² Like the *Musikarbeit* volume, *Lieder und Gesänge* is practical—all the pieces can be performed by a singer with piano accompaniment—and pedagogical, setting the singer "kleine Aufgaben" (small challenges).¹³ The pedagogical tone, which also characterizes *Musikarbeit in der Schule*, is symptomatic of Dessau's engagement with Brecht after his death and the volume concludes with two songs specifically for children, the aforementioned "Friedenslied" and "Jakobs Söhne ziehen aus, im Ägyptenland Lebensmittel zu holen" (The Sons of Jacob Set Out to Gather Food in Egypt). The latter, written in response to the controversial distribution of surplus US supplies in the GDR in 1953, is prefaced with the instruction "der Leiter der Kindergruppen sollte den singenden Kindern die politische Bedeutung der Verse nicht vorenthalten" (the leader of the children's groups should not withhold the political meaning from the singing children).¹⁴ This didactic purpose is later replicated paradigmatically in the 1973 Nova LP of Dessau's music for children *Rummelplatz Kinderlieder Jugendlieder* (Funfair Songs for Children and Young People), which contains ten Brecht settings (including *Fünf Kinderlieder* [Five Children's Songs] sung by Roswitha Trexler) along with more straightforwardly agitational songs and *Fünf Lieder aus der Schule* (Five School Songs) composed—like *Rummelplatz*—in collaboration with the Zeuthen schoolchildren.¹⁵

The third volume cementing Dessau's reputation as Brecht's heir is a substantial academic volume, published in the same year and by the same publisher as the second, covering Brecht settings through to 1960, Fritz Hennenberg's 552-page *Dessau Brecht Musikalische Arbeiten* (Dessau

Brecht Music Works). In discussing *Puntila* (1957–59) in particular, Hennenberg moves seamlessly from the collaborations to the posthumous collaborations, not least in his astute justification for the (still) controversial use of serialism as a manifestation of content: “Im ‘Puntila’ entspricht die Reihe einem inhaltlichen Ausdrucksbedürfnis” (In “Puntila” the row corresponds to a need to express specific content).¹⁶ Here Hennenberg effortlessly bridges the gap identified by Calico as Dessau’s emancipation from Brecht in 1956 and rightly concludes that Brecht’s realism and Schoenberg’s modernism are entirely compatible with each other in Dessau’s hands.

4. Collaboration In Memoriam

In the years following Brecht’s death Dessau adopts two strategies to maintain and to build on the spirit and political energy of their collaboration. First, he expands on compositional forms and techniques associated with his Brecht collaborations: quotation in many different forms, fragmentation, and what Daniela Reinhold describes as the translation of “das Brechtsche Konfrontationsprinzip von Wort, Ton und Bild in die groß angelegte oratorische Konzertform” (the Brechtian principle of confronting words, sounds, and images into the large-scale concert oratorio form)—a kind of “epic multi-mediality.”¹⁷ The model here is the *Deutsches Miserere*, which Dessau often combines with structures and forms derived from Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Johannes-Passion* (St. John Passion, BWV 245) and *Matthäus-Passion* (St. Matthew Passion, BWV 244), which Brecht himself, according to Eisler, Albrecht Dümling, and others, acknowledged as a prototype for the separation of the elements in Epic Theater in general and the *Lehrstücke* (learning plays) in particular.¹⁸ *Appell der Arbeiterklasse*, which recycles “Der Anstreicher spricht von kommenden großen Zeiten” (The House-Painter Speaks of Great Times to Come) from part 1 of the *Deutsches Miserere*, is the first large-scale example of this oratorio form post-Brecht and is followed by further musical *Fibel* including the large-scale *Requiem für Lumumba* (1961–63), based on a text of Karl Mickel, and the epigrammatic Vietnam cantata for four soloists, mixed choir, percussion, two pianos, and double bass *Geschäftsbericht* (Business Report, 1966), a setting of six quatrains from Volker Braun’s sequel to Brecht’s *Kriegsfibel*, the similarly ingeniously titled *KriegsErklärung* (published in 1967).¹⁹ Like the *Deutsches Miserere*, *Geschäftsbericht* requires projection of the found newspaper images commentated on in the poems.²⁰

Mickel’s *Requiem* and Braun’s *Geschäftsbericht* are paradigmatic examples of Dessau’s second collaborative strategy: as well as setting texts by eminent politicians (Walter Ulbricht, Erich Honecker) and established poets (Johannes R. Becher, for example) to music he turned to younger writers working in the tradition of Brecht, such as Heiner Müller, Braun, and Mickel. Müller and Mickel provide the texts for numerous pieces both

large and small, including the libretti for Dessau's third and fourth operas, *Lanzelot* and *Einstein*, in the latter case the realization of a long-cherished project planned, discussed, and sketched out with Brecht himself shortly before his death.²¹

Dessau often turns to Brechtian models when responding to major political events in the form of large-scale "public" and occasional pieces. Some of these have the apparent simplicity and directness of Brecht and Dessau's *Herrnburger Bericht* of 1951, a cantata derided in the West but which Dessau asserted, in discussion with Bunge, was "eine gute Sache" (a good thing) ripe for revival—"das wird gespielt werden" (it will be performed).²² Often these partisan works contain literal echoes—in the form of direct quotations, sometimes adapted—of pieces composed with and for Brecht: this is the case, for example, with the score for *400 cm³* (1966). In what follows examples of both strategies will be considered: Dessau's music for Heynowski and Scheumann's short documentary as an instance of direct quotation from Brecht; the late *Chormusik Nr. 5* (Choral Music No. 5, 1976) as a collaboration with a Brechtian writer of the younger generation, Heiner Müller adapting a speech of Erich Honecker.

5. Vietnam

The music for *400 cm³* and *Geschäftsbericht*—written concurrently in 1966 in response to events in Vietnam and also coinciding with the belated GDR premiere of the *Deutsches Miserere* in September 1966—demonstrate not only a political and aesthetic continuation of Dessau's work with Brecht, but also an expansion, modification, and refinement of that collaboration and the models it generated in the context of a new global conflict which, for Dessau and others, strikingly resembled the one that had been the subject of the *Kriegsfibel* itself, World War II. In what follows we will concentrate on the film music to *400 cm³* as a paradigmatic example of Dessau's posthumous collaboration with Brecht.

Director Gerhard Scheumann noted retrospectively that Vietnam had been an inescapable theme for GDR artists during the mid to late 1960s²³ and Daniela Reinhold identifies in Dessau's works of this period a significant shift of emphasis to a style of composition in which injustice is made palpable "durch die Ausdünnung des Klanges und die Prägnanz typischer Vokalgesten" (through thinning out the sound and deploying typically terse vocal gestures).²⁴ Dessau's Vietnam works are taut, aphoristic, and characterized by febrile instrumental outbursts, complex rhythms, and the use of extended vocal techniques including *Sprechgesang*. There are at least nine completed and fragmentary works that respond to the Vietnam War, including: *400 cm³*; *Geschäftsbericht*; the song "Übt Solidarität" (Practice Solidarity) from 1966;²⁵ *Guerilla*, a fragment from 1967 of an unfinished piece for alto solo, speaker, and mixed choir setting texts of Frantz Fanon

and Heiner Müller's Vietnam poem "In Vietnam werden die Zeitungen" (In Vietnam the Newspapers Are);²⁶ and "Klein Li möchte schlafen" (Little Li Wants to Sleep) of 1969 for voice and guitar, based on a poem by twelve-year-old Rita Franke and dedicated to the singer Gisela May.²⁷

Dessau's espousal of the Việt Cộng case finds its most explicit expression in his music for *400 cm³*, which in the handwritten score in the Paul Dessau Archiv bears the dedication "Für den Heynowski/Scheumann-Film: 400 cm³ / Für die Nationale Befreiungsfront FNL geschrieben und den tapferen Kämpfern gewidmet Paul Dessau XI/1966 Z" (For the Heynowski/Scheumann film 400 cm³ / Written for the National Liberation Front NLF and dedicated to the courageous fighters / Paul Dessau XI/1966 Z).²⁸ The film's title refers to the volume of blood to be provided by each individual donor for the Việt Cộng.

**6. "Oh nehmt mich, nehmt mich mit in die Reihen auf!"
(Oh let me join, let me join the ranks!)**

400 cm³, a black-and-white short lasting less than six minutes, juxtaposes footage of GDR blood donors (thirty-five shots) with still and moving archive material of the war in Vietnam (thirty-eight shots), on-screen text (the above Hölderlin quotation, title, and credits), and Dessau's dramatic score for solo voices and chorus which, in the words of composer and musicologist Wolfgang Thiel, "in der Komplexität und Kompliziertheit ihrer Faktur weit über das auf filmmusikalischem Sektor zumeist gehörte hinaus[geht]" (in the complexity and difficulty of its facture far exceeds what is usually to be heard in the film music sector).²⁹

In *400 cm³* still images, juxtaposition, and repetition are deployed to deconstruct and interrogate the material polemically; as film historian Olaf Möller puts it: "Eine Wahrheit . . . ist etwas, worum man kämpfen muss; Wahrheit muss man schaffen" (A truth is something that has to be fought for; truth has to be established).³⁰ *400 cm³* is experimental propaganda incorporating elements of the photo and film essay, found footage, and structural formalism in the service of ideological disclosure. It is collaborative and deploys visual, acoustic, and linguistic "shock effects." In all of this, and in particular its theme of charity, it is strikingly reminiscent of Brecht's learning play *Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis* (The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent) with its use of film, photographs of victims of war, quotations, and music by Paul Hindemith. The style of *400 cm³* is experimental, the message propagandistic, the result a kind of "modernist blatancy" in which ideological conflict is translated into visual and acoustic dissonance.

The first explicit reference to Brecht in the soundtrack coincides with shot 28, a still photograph—similar to those in *KriegsErklärung*—of a US soldier with Vietnamese civilian captives, here animated by the rostrum

camera with a zoom out and pan down. The chorus intones in rhythmic spoken unison “Endet ihre Schlächtere[n]!” (End their slaughter!, *BFA* 14, 119) from the second verse of the “Solidaritätslied,” here directed not, as in Eisler’s setting, at oppressors worldwide, but explicitly at “Mörder Johnson” ([President] Johnson the murderer).

The second and more extensive quotation from Brecht, and his collaboration with Dessau, concludes the film: over a shot of a Vietnamese boy playing a flute seated on a water buffalo (shots 75 and 76), boys from the Thomanenchor sing a fifty-second extract of the “Friedenslied”—Dessau’s 1951 setting of the Brecht/Neruda poem, which also concluded the volume *Lieder und Gesänge*—with the words “Friede den Kindern Koreas” (Peace to the children of Korea) changed to “Friede den Kindern Vietnams” (Peace to the children of Vietnam). Here Dessau engages in the kind of quotation he describes in the book *Aus Gesprächen*:

Zitieren ist nicht einfach. Ich zitiere ja nicht wörtlich, sondern im Zitat verändere ich. Und ich glaube, auch das Recht zu haben . . .

Ein Zitat hilft nicht nur dem Hörer, ein Zitat ist mehr. Es hat auch geschichtlich als Kontinuum eine echte Berechtigung heute . . .³¹

[Quoting isn’t simple. I don’t just quote verbatim, instead in quoting I change things. And I believe I have the right to . . .

A quotation doesn’t just help the listener, a quotation is more than that. It is also historically justified today as part of a continuum . . .]

These remarks not only echo Brecht’s own “Lehre des Zitierens” (lessons in quotation) (*BFA* 21, 537) and statements on copying—“es muss zur Kunst entwickelt werden, und zwar dazu, dass keine Schablonisierung und Erstarrung eintritt” (it must be developed into an art that avoids mere imitation and ossification)³²—but also reiterate Walter Benjamin’s claim that quotation can be an interruptive, and thus political, act:

Man darf hier weiter ausgreifen und sich darauf besinnen, dass das Unterbrechen eines der fundamentalen Verfahren aller Formgebung ist. Es reicht über den Bezirk der Kunst weit hinaus. Es liegt, um nur eines herauszugreifen, dem Zitat zugrunde. Einen Text zitieren, schließt ein: seinen Zusammenhang unterbrechen.³³

[One can expand on this and suggest that interruption is one of the fundamental principles of shaping. It reaches well beyond the domain of art. To take one example, it underlies quotation. To quote a text implies interrupting a connection.]

What links the imagery of Heynowski and Scheumann to the music of Dessau in *400 cm³* is not just a febrility of utterance and rhetoric and an amalgamation of simplicity (or blatancy) and difficulty—a sense that the

viewer must be challenged to arrive at an inescapable conclusion by arduous means—but also a tendency to employ shock-like interruptions of a Benjaminian kind. This again links *400 cm³*—and Dessau’s music for it—with Brecht’s *Kriegsfibel*, and here a striking connection should be noted: Walter Heynowski was the founder of the Eulenspiegel Verlag, which had first published the *Kriegsfibel* in 1955. The lapidary terseness of the *Kriegsfibel* poems, of Heynowski and Scheumann’s imagery, and of Dessau’s accompanying music can perhaps best be characterized using a term Benjamin coined in his discussion of Brecht’s *Svendborger Gedichte*—“Inschriftenstil” (inscription style).³⁴

A text written by Dessau to introduce a screening of *400 cm³* at the Berliner Ensemble in February 1968 demonstrates that he viewed the film as an agitational piece in the tradition of Brecht:

Meine sehr geehrten Damen und Herren
 ich denke, es ist in diesen kriegerischen, ja, barbarischen Zeiten durchaus natürlich, wenn man im politischen Theater von Brecht politische Aktionen unternimmt. Und, ich denke ferner, trotzdem sicher bereits einige unter Ihnen den Blutspendefilm der hervorragenden Heynowski und Scheumann gesehen haben, dass es nicht falsch ist sondern im Gegenteil, nützlich, ihn heute noch einmal zu zeigen.
 Der Film dauert ganze 6 Minuten und ich bitte Sie sehr herzlich und auch eindringlich, während der Pause im Wandelgang des Theaters die Tische zu besichtigen. Sie haben dort Gelegenheit, sich über die Formen zu informieren, in welchen Sie den tapferen Verteidigern, den Soldaten der Befreiungsfront, und . . . ich glaube auch—sich selbst—helfen können.
 ich danke ihnen.
 15 2 68³⁵

[Ladies and Gentlemen

I think it is entirely natural in these times of war, of barbarism even, that political actions take place in Brecht’s political theater. And I think, moreover, that even if some of you have seen the outstanding blood donation film of those excellent filmmakers Heynowski and Scheumann, it is not so much wrong as valuable to show it again today. The film lasts all of six minutes and I would ask you as a matter of urgency to examine the tables in the lobby of the theater during the interval. There you will have the opportunity to inform yourself about how you can help not only the courageous defenders, the soldiers of the Liberation Front but also, I think, yourselves.

Thank you.

2/15/68]

Of course, the fact that the film was screened in Berlin two years after the original blood donation program suggests that in Dessau’s eyes, at least,

it had a life beyond the occasion of its production, at which point it had, apparently, been rapturously received: a telegram to Dessau from Heynowski, received on November 19, 1966, claims: “Film hat tiefe Wirkung erzielt. Ihr Telegramm wurde vor Aufführung verlesen und erhielt starken Applaus” (The film made a big impact. Your telegram was read before the screening and received much applause).³⁶

7. Brechtian Commitment in Music, Words, and Images

Incidental evidence, such as receipts for substantial donations to the Vietnam cause in the Paul Dessau Archiv, demonstrates the composer’s long-standing commitment to the struggle: these include receipts from the Berliner Ensemble for Vietnam solidarity payments dated January 14, 1970 (five thousand marks), and January 11, 1973 (twenty thousand marks) and from the “Vietnam-Ausschuss beim Afro-Asiatischen Solidaritätskomitee der DDR” dated February 20, 1973 (thirty thousand marks).³⁷ Dessau’s name also appears on a list of eminent people registered to participate in a Berliner Ensemble Vietnam solidarity event on December 15, 1974; other names on the list include Konrad Wolf, Erwin Strittmatter, Stephan Hermlin, Anna Seghers, Gisela May, Ekkehard Schall, Heiner Müller, Karl Mickel, Volker Braun, and Luigi Nono. Gerhard Scheumann, Walter Heynowski, Hermann Kant, and others feature in a further list, also in the Paul Dessau Archiv, of those due to be invited.³⁸

In 1968 Dessau co-edited and contributed to the substantial GDR publication *Vietnam in dieser Stunde* (Vietnam at This Hour), a compendium of texts and images (photographs, paintings, and drawings) by international artists, writers, and filmmakers denouncing American involvement in Vietnam. Echoing the Brecht-inspired multi-mediality of his *Deutsches Miserere*, Dessau’s own contribution to the volume—based on collages of handwritten scores and newspaper clippings from 1966³⁹—unites words, photographic images, and music in a reproduction of two excerpts from the manuscript score for his instrumental chamber piece *Quattrodramma*, of 1965,⁴⁰ together with a brief and virulent anti-American text and two photos of Vietnamese victims of the “USA-Killer” (USA killers).⁴¹ *Quattrodramma*, as already noted, contains a quotation from his Brecht opera *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus* set alongside further citations from Hans Werner Henze’s *Being Beateous*; Dessau’s own *Requiem für Lumumba*; and, in the score, a Sean O’Casey quotation.

Brecht, therefore, remains present, through quotation and allusion, in Dessau’s contributions to the Vietnam struggle in the concert hall (the *Kriegsfibel*-inspired *Geschäftsbericht* and other pieces); on film (*400 cm³*); in print (*Vietnam in dieser Stunde*); and at the Berliner Ensemble, where the Heynowski and Scheumann film was given its repeat screening in 1968.

A typewritten manuscript in the Paul Dessau Archiv dated February 13, 1966—thus predating the premiere of the *Deutsches Miserere* by more than six months and the composition of both *Geschäftsbericht* and *400 cm³*—explicitly places Dessau’s political commitment to Vietnam in the context of his work with Brecht:

Brecht wollte mit seiner “Mutter Courage” zeigen dass sie trotz Verlust ihrer Kinder und Hab und Gut nichts gelernt hat und weiter mit dem Krieg, dieser “schönen Einnahmequelle” (wie es in der “Courage” heißt) paktiert. Das heißt, er hoffte zu erreichen, dass die Menschen doch hinlänglich zum Nachdenken gezwungen werden und Lehren ziehen aus der Vergangenheit und sich verändern . . .

Vor 20 Jahren wurde Dresden von den Amerikanern bombardiert. Wieder lesen wir von barbarischen Angriffen der amerikanischen Luftwaffe auf Nordvietnam . . .

Was haben diese Amerikaner eigentlich in Vietnam zu suchen?!⁴²

[With his “Mother Courage” Brecht wanted to show that despite losing her children and worldly possessions she hadn’t learned anything and continued to ally herself with the war, this “good provider” (as it is referred to in the play), i.e., he hoped to make people think adequately, learn lessons from the past, and change themselves . . .

Twenty years ago Dresden was bombed by the Americans. Once again we read about the barbaric attacks of the US Air Force on North Vietnam . . .

What are the Americans really after in Vietnam?!]

Significant here, alongside the reference to Brecht and a palpable fury—one that also animates the musical compositions, taking the form of ferocious rising and falling lines for solo soprano in the fifth section of *Geschäftsbericht* and the music for *400 cm³*, for example—is a motif that dominates GDR discourse on the Vietnam war: the relationship between proximity and distance, the complicity between the enemy next door (the BRD) and abroad (the US in Vietnam). This motif of proximity and distance—already present in Brecht’s *Kriegsfibel* (the Caucasus and Swabia)—is not only manifest in the extreme musical contrasts deployed by Dessau, but also complemented and enhanced by a historical and political collocation of past and present. This temporal dynamic is articulated in a set of quotational, leitmotivic connections to Dessau’s earlier “war primers,” the *Deutsches Miserere* and the settings of the “Internationale Kriegsfibel.” As we have seen, proximity and distance also provide the structuring principle for *400 cm³* as it juxtaposes images of violence in Vietnam with blood donors in the GDR and, in the adapted quotation from the “Friedenslied,” calls for peace for the children of Vietnam and the comrades from the Neisse and Ruhr.

8. The Brechtian Model

In his obituary for Dessau, Heiner Müller characterized the composer's pedagogical program as a playfulness that was both childlike and avant-garde: "Er hielt für lernbar, was gebraucht wird" (He believed that what is needed can be learned). This could also be said, as its title is intended to suggest, of Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*. For Dessau this anti-fascist work—in conjunction with his own music for it—amounted to a *Modell*, one that he subsequently deployed when composing the score for Heynowski and Scheumann's film, the *Geschäftsbericht*, and numerous other works.

In their status as primers—as pedagogical, exemplary works—and also in their use of photographs and commentary, Brecht's *Modellbücher* (modelbooks) are related to the *Lehrstück* theory and practice of the interwar years. This connection is supported by the fact that in 1949, just after the completion of the first *Modellbuch*, Brecht revived the clown scene from *Das Badener Lehrstück* for a satirical sideswipe at Konrad Adenauer and George Marshall to be performed in factories.⁴³ The music this time was provided by Dessau, who published one number separately after Brecht's death. In *Theaterarbeit* the 1949 *Clownspiel* experiment is summarized as follows:

Das Clownspiel lehnten die Arbeiter u. a. mit der Begründung ab, daß die Spaltung Deutschlands nicht in einem Clownspiel dargestellt werden sollte. Ihre Einwände richteten sich in der Hauptsache gegen die Form. Das lehrte uns, besonders auf leicht verständliche Formen zu achten.⁴⁴

[The workers rejected the clown number among other things because they felt that the division of Germany could not be portrayed by clowns. Their criticisms were directed above all at the form. This taught us to concentrate above all on easily digested forms.]

As well as demonstrating his continued interest in the *Lehrstück* this highlights a shift in Brecht's thinking from the complexity of the prewar *Lehrstücke*, with their challenging mix of different styles, forms, and media, to a more pragmatic, straightforward, and—if not exactly culinary—at least digestible pedagogy. Dessau, in composing complex, highly chromatic, dissonant, and epigrammatic pieces after Brecht's death, returns to the dialectics of the earlier, more difficult *Lehrstücke*. It is worth remembering that Brecht had been unhappy with some of Dessau's later compositions on the grounds they were too difficult.⁴⁵

According to Brecht, in *Theaterarbeit*, a *Modell* is an example of "praktisches Kopieren" (practical copying) and—again like the *Lehrstück*—of collective production.⁴⁶ Seen in this light *400 cm³* and *Geschäftsbericht* deploy not just what Welf Kienast terms a "Kriegsfibelmodell"⁴⁷ but, more

precisely, a *Misereremodell* in which the offences (“iniquitatem meam”) and sins (“peccato meo”) of Psalm 51 are no longer Nazi or fascist but American and capitalist; as Brecht concludes in *Theaterarbeit*: “Ein Modell steht und fällt mit seiner Nachahmbarkeit und Variabilität” (A model stands or falls by its imitability and variability).⁴⁸ In their overall form, multimediality, epigrammatic concision, and musical detail the soundtrack for *400 cm³*, *Geschäftsbericht*, and other works of Dessau after 1956 take the *Deutsches Miserere*, and thus also Brecht’s *Kriegsfiabel*, as their model.

9. “erst durch Schwierigkeiten wird die Sache ja interessant” (difficulty is what makes things interesting)⁴⁹

In his later writings and interviews Dessau again and again stresses the importance of difficulty as a pedagogical tool.⁵⁰ What sets his difficulty apart from that of many other modernists is that it is invariably contiguous with simplicity and blatancy, requiring their presence as a constructive and constitutive other. “Das Einfache” (the simple thing), which Brecht speaks of in his poem “Lob des Kommunismus” (*BFA* 11, 234), is also for Dessau “ohne Anstrengungen nicht zu erreichen” (unachievable without considerable effort).⁵¹ It is the dialectic of the apparently simple (socialism) and the difficult (politically progressive modernism) that Dessau attempts to make audible not only in some of his works with Brecht—*Die Verurteilung des Lukullus* for example, or the music for the *kaukasische Kriedekreis*—but most evidently in the posthumous collaborations. It is also this simplicity, especially when manifest as socialist affirmation, that has led to the rejection of his compositions by some commentators. It is here that the attacks on Dessau strikingly resemble those directed at Brecht in the GDR.⁵² Thus Slavoj Žižek describes the Honecker-Müller poem for Dessau’s *Chormusik Nr. 5* as an “obscurity.”⁵³ While there is no evidence to support Žižek’s claim that Dessau’s piece itself might come close to “a parallel procedure for subverting the ideology in the state-socialist” GDR—such a thing would have been anathema to Dessau—he is right in identifying an “extreme disparity, tension even, between the thoroughly modernist, non-melodic, atonal music, and the utter banality of the text” and concludes that the “frontier between the (state byzantine) Sublime and the ridiculous is here effectively indecipherable.”⁵⁴

While Müller’s text is indeed superficially simple in its affirmative rhetoric—it begins “GROSSES WURDE VOLLBRACHT / Mit der Kraft des Volkes und zum Wohle des Volkes / In Verbundenheit mit der Sowjetunion” (GREAT THINGS HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED / Through the power of the people and for the benefit of the people / In collaboration with the Soviet Union)⁵⁵—it is certainly not straightforward when seen, as Achim Heidenreich has pointed out, in the context of the criticism of ideology in his contemporaneous *Hamletmaschine*.⁵⁶ Dessau’s music, like that of

400 cm³, inventively embodies this dialectic of affirmative simplicity and avant-garde difficulty. *Chormusik Nr. 5* is, as Žižek rightly notes, modernist, although in fact it is not simply “atonal,” but rather in C-major with stridently dissonant passages and the serial use of a three-note motif, which in German notation (Es-E-D) can spell out the acronym of the party for which the piece was written. Yet like the apparently simple music for the *Herrnburger Bericht*—which at one point obliquely quotes Eisler and Becher’s *Nationalhymne der DDR* (National Anthem of the GDR)—*Chormusik Nr. 5* is musically complex. There are abrupt changes of style and register, unexpected contrasts and caesuras, as well as passages in which dense counterpoint is deployed as a visceral analogy for dialectics. For all the ferocity, instructions in the score also include “leicht, beschwingt” (light, springing), “elegant,” and “äußerst zart” (extremely tender). The result is musically and intellectually challenging, difficult to take in at a single listening; Žižek correctly points to “harsh declarations and injunctions, accompanied by rather brutal drum beatings.”⁵⁷ While it may seem easy to dismiss the rhetoric of Honecker and Müller, in the context of the music the blatancy of the text is transformed into something oblique and unresolved, indicating that the communist utopia invoked by Honecker is, as Brecht had it at the end of *Das Badener Lehrstück*, if not “das Unerreichbare” (the unreachable) then certainly “das noch nicht Erreichte” (the not-yet-reached, *BFA* 3, 27). Dessau’s work with and after Brecht demands reassessment as a challenging dialectics of simplicity and difficulty, of affirmation and contestation, of tradition and the avant-garde, of directness and complexity. Seen this way, Dessau continues and expands on his collaboration with Brecht right through to the end of the 1970s:

Altes wird aufgerollt, von mir bewußt in Neues umgewandelt—ein Vorgang, der legitim ist und an dem ich besonders viel lerne für die weitere Arbeit.⁵⁸

[Old things are rolled out and deliberately transformed by me into something new—a process that is legitimate and from which I learn much for further work.]

Notes

This article began as a collaborative essay focusing on Dessau’s Brechtian works in response to the Vietnam War entitled “Paul Dessau, Bertolt Brecht and the Vietnam War: *400 cm³* and *Geschäftsbericht*.” An initial draft was completed in April following joint research in the Paul Dessau Archiv in Berlin in early 2016. The paper on Dessau’s posthumous collaborations with Brecht delivered at the Recycling Brecht conference was based on this material. Carola Nielinger-Vakil died, aged 49, on June 27, 2016, the day after the paper was delivered in Oxford. Although this essay

lacks the detailed musical analysis that she would have brought to its final version, it remains collaborative.

¹ Paul Dessau, *Aus Gesprächen* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1974), 74–75. All translations from the German are by the authors unless otherwise stated.

² See Martin Brady, Carola Nielinger-Vakil, “‘What a Satisfying Task for a Composer!’: Paul Dessau’s Music for *The German Story* (. . . *Du und mancher Kamerad*),” in *Classical Music in the German Democratic Republic: Production and Reception*, eds. Kyle Frackman and Larson Powell (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015), 195–218.

³ Heiner Müller, “Zum Beispiel Paul Dessau,” in Müller, *Material* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1989), 71–72.

⁴ Hans Bunge, “Gespräch mit Paul Dessau über Bertolt Brecht am 30. September 1958 in Zeuthen,” PDA 1.74.1768, 6. The authors would like to thank Daniela Reinhold and Maxim Dessau for permission to quote from unpublished documents in the Paul Dessau Archiv (PDA).

⁵ Joy H. Calico, “Musical Threnodies for Brecht,” in *Brecht and the GDR: Politics, Culture, Posterity*, eds. Laura Bradley and Karen Leeder (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 176.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Dessau, *Musikarbeit in der Schule* (Berlin: Verlag Neue Musik, 1968).

¹⁰ Dessau, *Musikarbeit in der Schule*, 5. The volume is dedicated to his son Maxim.

¹¹ Dessau, Bertolt Brecht, *Lieder und Gesänge* (Berlin: Henschel, 1963).

¹² *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁵ Dessau, *Rummelplatz Kinderlieder Jugendlieder*, Nova 8 85 034 (1973). Like much of Dessau’s GDR music, many pieces on this LP have not been made available post-1989.

¹⁶ Fritz Hennenberg, *Dessau Brecht Musikalische Arbeiten* (Berlin: Henschel, 1963), 73.

¹⁷ Daniela Reinhold, “Paul Dessau,” in *Komponisten der Gegenwart*, eds. Hanns-Werner Heistre and Walter-Wolfgang Sparrer (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1992) (supplement 12/03), 13.

¹⁸ See Joy H. Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 32, 188–89 (n. 60).

¹⁹ Volker Braun, *KriegsErklärung* (Halle [Saale]: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1967).

²⁰ Dessau, *Geschäftsbericht: Text von Volker Braun* (Berlin: Verlag Neue Musik, 1969).

²¹ Dessau discusses Brecht’s response to his *Einstein* project in detail in Paul Dessau, *Aus Gesprächen*, 84–87.

- ²² Bunge, “Gespräch mit Paul Dessau,” 23.
- ²³ Gerhard Scheumann in *Arbeitshefte 27: Dokument und Kunst: Vietnam bei H&S*, ed. Robert Michel (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1977), 95.
- ²⁴ Daniela Reinhold, *Paul Dessau 1894–1979: Dokumente zu Leben und Werk* (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1995), 83.
- ²⁵ Published, together with a drawing of a dove of peace by Bert Heller, in *Musik in der Schule* 17, no. 9 (1966): 353.
- ²⁶ For the Fanon and Müller texts see: PDA 1.74.947.1 and 1.74.947.2. Müller’s poem was published under the title “(NACH JORIS IVENS)” in the West German collection of antiwar poems entitled *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, ed. Riewert Qu. Tode (Berlin: verlag amBEATion, 1968, 35).
- ²⁷ PDA 1.74.966.1 and PDA 1.74.966.2.
- ²⁸ PDA 1.74.928.1. Z stands for Zeuthen.
- ²⁹ Wolfgang Thiel, “Bausteine zu einer Ästhetik der Dokumentarfilmmusik,” *Arbeitshefte 27: Dokument und Kunst: Vietnam bei H&S*, ed. Robert Michel (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1977), 55.
- ³⁰ Olaf Möller, quoted on the box set of five DVDs of Studio H&S released in 2014: *Studio H&S: Walter Heynowski und Gerhard Scheumann: Filme 1964–1989* (Friedolfing: absolut MEDIEN, 2014).
- ³¹ Dessau, *Aus Gesprächen*, 23.
- ³² *Theaterarbeit: 6 Aufführungen des Berliner Ensembles*, ed. Ruth Berlau, Bertolt Brecht, Claus Hubalek, Peter Palitzsch, and Käthe Rüllicke, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Henschel, 1961), 311.
- ³³ Walter Benjamin, “Was ist das epische Theater? *Zweite Fassung*,” in Benjamin, *Versuche über Brecht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), 26.
- ³⁴ Walter Benjamin, “Zu der ‘Deutschen Kriegsfiabel,’” in Benjamin, *Versuche über Brecht*, 74.
- ³⁵ PDA 1.74.1757.1.
- ³⁶ PDA 3063.
- ³⁷ PDA 1.74.2027.3, PDA 1.74.2027.5, and PDA 3421.
- ³⁸ PDA 1.74.2027.6.
- ³⁹ PDA 1.74.1221.
- ⁴⁰ The excerpts are from sections of the score marked G and L: Paul Dessau, *Quatrodramma* (Berlin, Wiesbaden: Bote & Bock, 1976), 15, 28.
- ⁴¹ *Vietnam in dieser Stunde*, eds. Werner Bräunig, Fritz Cremer, Paul Dessau, Peter Gosse, Günter Jacobi, Stefan Hermlin, Sarah and Rainer Kirsch, Georg Maurer, Gabriele Mucchi, Otto Nagel, Ursula Sczeponik, Anna Seghers, Willi Sitte, Jeanne und Kurt Stern, and Dieter Strützel (Halle [Saale]: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1968), 46–47.
- ⁴² PDA 1.74.2405. The manuscript is dated February 13, 1966 and signed “d.”
- ⁴³ *BFA* 3, 416–17.
- ⁴⁴ *Theaterarbeit*, 402.

⁴⁵ See Calico, 176.

⁴⁶ *Theaterarbeit*, 309.

⁴⁷ See Welf Kienast, *Kriegsfibelmodell Autorschaft und "kollektiver Schöpfungsprozess" in Brecht's Kriegsfibel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001).

⁴⁸ *Theaterarbeit*, 346.

⁴⁹ Paul Dessau in a Radio DDR II discussion accompanying the broadcast of *Der geflügelte Satz* (The Familiar Saying, 1974), text Volker Braun, December 6, 1978. See PDA 31.100.315.

⁵⁰ See Gitta Nickel's DEFA documentary *Paul Dessau* (1974).

⁵¹ Dessau, *Notizen zu Noten* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1974), 17.

⁵² See, for example, the attack on the *Herrnburger Bericht* in *Die Zeit* (W. N., "Herrnburger Bericht: Ein Chorwerk von Bertolt Brecht und Paul Dessau," *Die Zeit*, November 19, 1953; <http://www.zeit.de/1953/47/herrnburger-bericht>) and on Dessau's *Chormusik Nr. 5* in *Der Spiegel* ("Was geachtet wird": Heiner Müllers Verse nach Worten Erich Honeckers," *Der Spiegel*, 8 (1993), 212; <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-9275381.html>). Both commentaries quote the text extensively.

⁵³ Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London, New York: Verso, 2012), 699.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 699–700.

⁵⁵ Heiner Müller, "GROSSES WURDE VOLLBRACHT," *Werke I: Die Gedichte*, ed. Frank Hörmigk (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 206. See also Paul Dessau, *Chormusik Nr. 5 für Baß-Solo, großen Chor und großes Orchester* (Leipzig, Dresden: Edition Peters, 1981).

⁵⁶ See Achim Heidenreich, "Chormusik mit Orchester 1970–1990," *Musik in Deutschland 1950–2000: Chorgesang mit Orchester 1970–1990* (Bonn: Deutscher Musikrat, RCA Red Seal, CD 2005), 11–12. The performance of *Chormusik Nr. 5* on this CD was recorded on February 24, 1984 in the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin. The version referenced by Žižek is of the premiere performance on May 16, 1976 in the Funkhaus Berlin, released on the CD *Die Partei hat immer recht: Eine Dokumentation in Liedern* (Cologne: DeutschlandRadio, CD 1996).

⁵⁷ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 700.

⁵⁸ Dessau, *Aus Gesprächen*, 23.

Die Toten bewegen: George Taboris Umdeutungen von Bertolt Brechts *Die Jüdische Frau*

Der Einakter "Die jüdische Frau" aus *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches* war einer der wenigen Texte, in denen Brecht die Verfolgung von Juden in Nazi-Deutschland thematisierte. 1961 wurde die Szene Teil der New Yorker Aufführung von *Brecht on Brecht*, einer Collage von Brecht-Texten, die George Tabori zusammengestellt und zum Teil übersetzt hatte. Tabori betonte hier den Opferstatus der Hauptfigur und stellte Brecht dazu als einen Autor dar, dem das Schicksal der verfolgten Juden besonders am Herzen lag, was de facto nicht der Fall war. Gut zwanzig Jahre später tauchte die Szene erneut in der Bochumer Inszenierung von Taboris *Jubiläum* (1983) auf. In post-dramatischer Manier benutzt er den Text hier in einer Weise, die die Opfer zugleich distanziert und Empathie möglich macht. Die dritte "Übermalung" findet im Jahr 2000 statt, in der Doppelaufführung von zwei Einaktern am Berliner Ensemble: Brechts "Die jüdische Frau," bei der Tabori Regie führte, und Christoph Heins *Mutters Tag*, ein Stück, das für Tabori geschrieben wurde und in dem dieser die Hauptrolle spielte. An *Mutters Tag* zeigt sich, dass Taboris Umdeutungen ultimativ im Fortschreiben von Brechts Werken aus dem Blickwinkel des Holocaust-Überlebenden kulminieren.

"The Jewish Wife," a scene from Bertolt Brecht's *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, was one of the few Brecht texts that highlighted the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany. In 1961, the scene became part of the New York production *Brecht on Brecht*, a collage of Brecht texts compiled, and in part translated, by George Tabori. Tabori emphasized the protagonist's victimhood and presented Brecht as an author deeply concerned with the persecution of German Jews, which was de facto not the case. Twenty years later the scene reemerged in the Bochum production of Tabori's *Jubiläum* (1983). This postdramatic treatment of Brecht's text distances the victim while at the same time enabling empathy. The third "reframing" takes place in the year 2000, in the double production of two one-act plays at the Berliner Ensemble: Brecht's "The Jewish Wife," which Tabori directed, and Christoph Hein's *My Mother's Day*, a play that was written for Tabori and in which he played the main character. *My Mother's Day* shows, as a final form of adaptation, what Tabori sought to realize throughout, namely, to reconfigure Brecht's works from the perspective of the Holocaust survivor.

Walking the Dead: George Tabori's Reframing of Bertolt Brecht's *The Jewish Wife*

Martin Kagel

I

The one-act play *Die jüdische Frau* (The Jewish Wife), a scene from Bertolt Brecht's *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches* (*Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*), is generally considered an exemplar of Brecht's Epic Theater. Elements of distanciation include the poetic commentary preceding the scene, the extended pantomime at its outset, the one-sided phone conversations the audience witnesses, and the wife's rehearsal of the discussion with her husband prior to his arrival and its subsequent repetition. Set in 1935, the year of the passage of the Nuremberg racial laws, laws that "would provide the legal framework for the systematic persecution of Jews in Germany," the scene shows Judith Keith packing her suitcase, preparing for her initial exile in Amsterdam. She does so to alleviate the political pressure on her gentile husband, a chief surgeon at a Frankfurt hospital whose job is threatened by his marriage to a Jew.¹ To her friends and relatives, Judith's departure is presented as a short sojourn, though everyone, including her husband, knows that her leave is of a more permanent nature. Both the acquiescence to the political developments in this upper-bourgeois household and the charade put up to veil this fact are cruelly exposed in this scene, which highlights the combination of fear and deceit that characterizes the existence under the totalitarian regime.

Die jüdische Frau is one of twenty-seven scenes Brecht wrote in 1937–38 depicting everyday life in Nazi Germany, and it is one of the few instances in which Brecht addressed Jewish persecution under National Socialism. Even then, however, he is not primarily interested in Nazi racial policies targeting German Jews as a separate group, but in the mechanisms of fascism as pertaining to the German bourgeoisie. As John J. and Ann White have observed, for Brecht, anti-Semitism was "a politically functional phenomenon," an ideological tool to deflect from class conflict.² *Die jüdische Frau* consequently depicts the persecution of German Jews in the context of "the capitulation of bourgeois intellectuals" and, pointing to the lack of active resistance, of their complicity in the rise of National Socialism.

In its attempt to document everyday life in Nazi Germany, *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches* is, perhaps, unique among Brecht's dramatic

works, in that it presents the author's critique in historically and socially realistic settings rather than in temporally removed locales or in parable form. The play's direct engagement with Nazi politics, necessary to render the theatrical intervention effective, stands somewhat in conflict with Epic Theater's emphasis on observation. Accordingly, the action unfolds in a tension "between realistic and epic features, between empathy and alienation," a juxtaposition that also applies to *Die jüdische Frau*.³ On the one hand, the one-act features considerable drama, as it depicts the evasions and lies that husband and wife offer each other in order to avoid facing the truth: that the new political reality has penetrated even the most intimate moments in their lives. On the other hand, the scene's exposure of—and reflection on—performance is an "extended example of epic acting." In this way, it functions "as a paradigm of the whole play."⁴

The cycle, Walter Benjamin observed in 1938, after viewing the Paris performance of eight scenes from the play, was "constructed according to traditional dramatic principles." "The epic theater was not yet established solidly enough, and had not trained enough people, to be able to reconstruct itself in exile," Benjamin maintained and concluded that Brecht's new work "was a response to this."⁵ In light of changed political circumstances, Brecht, as Frank Dietrich Wagner has pointed out, revised his literary practice at the beginning of the 1930s, abandoning the formal experiments of his learning plays (*Lehrstücke*), ceasing to adhere all too strictly to the precepts of Epic Theater in favor of "a new synthesis of principles and forms once opposed to each other" (einer neuen Synthese einst gegensätzlicher Prinzipien und Formen).⁶

Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches is an expression of this synthesis. While individual scenes, or certain elements in them, followed conventional dramaturgy, the mosaic structure of the work as a whole reflected the principles of Epic Theater, as the cycle featured "no continuous plot, no turning point, no center-piece of any sort."⁷ Dramatic realism thus remained confined to the one-acts themselves, whose diversity and multitude aimed to reveal the overarching system of oppression.⁸ Like a series of documents, each scene represented a piece of evidence in the case Brecht intended to build against Nazi Germany. *Die jüdische Frau*, illustrating the regime's ideological use of anti-Semitism, was one such document.

II

For Hungarian-German Jewish playwright George Tabori (1914–2007), the scene apparently held particular significance, for he adapted it several times throughout his career. I believe that it became a special entryway into Brecht's work for Tabori, allowing him to connect with Brecht—whom he admired and whose influence is readily apparent in his work—not just in terms of a literary apprenticeship but also through his own Jewishness.

Introducing a post-Holocaust perspective into Brecht's writing, Tabori's adaptations, in fact, epitomize his relationship to Brecht, which is at once admiring and critical, submissive and usurping.

Tabori likely first saw *The Jewish Wife* performed in Eric Bentley's translation when scenes from the cycle were staged under the title *Private Life of the Master Race* in New York during the mid-1950s. A few years later he suggested to his then wife, the Swedish actress Viveca Lindfors, its use as "something . . . to work on" in Lee Strasberg's Actors Studio, of which she was a member.⁹ The success of the resulting studio sessions led Lindfors to want to perform the scene in public, and in subsequent discussions, Lucille Lortel, who ran the American National Theater and Academy matinee series, wondered whether additional material might create a two-hour show. Lindfors recalled in her memoir that Tabori immediately took to the idea. "I'll call Lotte [Lenya, M.K.] and I'll ask her to sing, and maybe Annie (Jackson) and Eli (Wallach) would like to read some poetry," he said. "Everybody said yes immediately . . . I was teaching for Gene Frankel at the time. We asked him to direct, and Wolfgang Roth, a brilliant stage designer who worked with Brecht in Berlin as a young man, to design our set . . . Four weeks later we performed *Brecht on Brecht*."¹⁰ The show, a staged reading of a compilation of texts and scenes from the author's writings, performed "on seven dusty stools recovered from an alley in front of a blown-up portrait of Brecht," was momentous in a way that the participants could never have anticipated.¹¹ Originally planned as a two-time matinee performance, *Brecht on Brecht* (Brecht über Brecht) was such a resounding success that Cheryl Crawford decided to produce a continued run in the Theatre de Lys, where it became a box office hit. It opened in early January 1962 and "ran for 424 performances, toured to general acclaim, and enjoyed a return engagement of fifty-five more evenings."¹² It also associated Tabori with Brecht in a particular way, making him a cultural translator of sorts, introducing Brecht to an American audience largely unfamiliar with his work.

In addition to the *The Jewish Wife*, *Brecht on Brecht* included two other Brecht texts centered around political anti-Semitism and Jewish persecution: the poems "The Jew, a Misfortune for the People" (Der Jude, ein Unglück für das Volk) and "The Ballad of the Jew-Whore Marie Sanders" (Ballade von der 'Judenhure' Marie Sanders). Seen together, these texts gained special significance in the program simply through their relative weight; a significance heightened by Viveca Lindfors's striking performance as Judith Keith in *The Jewish Wife*. "The gem of the evening," *Variety* observed, "is 'The Jewish Wife' . . . Viveca Lindfors portrays brilliantly the woman who must leave the husband she loves because her religion endangers him."¹³ Others offered similar praise: "I have seen the Jewish Wife section of *The Private Life of the Master Race* performed with more humanity, and with more tragedy," Sandra Schmidt wrote in the *Village Voice*, "but never with more hard despair than Miss Lindfors brings to the role."¹⁴

Prominently placed at the end of the evening and showcasing Lindfors's considerable talent as an actress, the scene naturally drew attention to the plight and suffering of German Jews while, concurrently, it emphasized as important what was actually a perfectly minor subject in Brecht's work and thinking.¹⁵ The view that *Brecht on Brecht* expressed "the author's rage against 'the burning of the books,' the senseless persecution of the Jews and the crass commercialism of people," as if all had been matters of equal importance to him, was the logical—and erroneous—result of such placement and emphasis.¹⁶ For although Brecht clearly recognized that the ideological effacement of class conflict under National Socialism included "the annihilation, exclusion or subordination of those groups of people who are detrimental to national solidarity, the Jews and the workers," he never ceased, as mentioned earlier, to prioritize the class struggle over Nazi racial politics.¹⁷

In his own theory of fascism, Brecht failed to grasp the persecution of Jews as an independent phenomenon integral to the destructive logic of Nazi ideology; rather, he saw anti-Semitism as an interchangeable tool employed to distract from economically driven class conflict by creating a "common enemy." In addition, he presumed Nazi policies against Jews to be a testing ground for more general forms of persecution.¹⁸ Although it was certainly difficult to anticipate the full extent of the Holocaust in the mid-1930s, it is noteworthy that Brecht made no fundamental revision to this position in later years; though he did, of course, acknowledge the horrific consequences of Nazi racial policies.¹⁹

Presenting the critique of the persecution and the suffering of German Jews as central to Brecht's work was therefore something that Tabori introduced into the show, and, more importantly, into his relationship with Bertolt Brecht. I would argue that Tabori deliberately reconceived Brecht as a writer preoccupied with the Jewish fate under National Socialism because he himself was searching for a theatrical aesthetic that would allow him to explore and represent the Holocaust on stage. Brecht's Epic Theater offered useful templates for a first foray into this territory, which is why Tabori adapted it, adding his own focus on those who perished. Modified in tone and language, Judith Keith's monologue, now performed in Tabori's own more nimble translation,²⁰ emphasized psychological conflict over structural opposition, offering a first glimpse at his "misprision," a sometimes subtle and other times not so subtle redirection of the precursor.²¹ More importantly, Lindfors's portrayal of Judith Keith's anger, despair, and loneliness—"a finely controlled disclosure of . . . hysteria and heartbreak," according to *New York Times* critic Howard Taubman—foregrounded the victim's perspective from which Tabori refused to abstract.²² Though the changes were few, Tabori's reframing of *The Jewish Wife* transformed the scene from "an effective weapon in the ideological struggle against fascism" to a site of memory that contemplated the disruption and memorialized the loss of Jewish life during the Holocaust.²³

III

A good twenty years would pass before Tabori returned to *The Jewish Wife*, and much had happened in the interim. A New York resident in 1961 and virtually unknown in Germany, Tabori had since become an acclaimed and frequently controversial playwright and director for the German stage, a late career move that commenced with the 1969 performance of his Holocaust play *The Cannibals* at the West Berlin Schiller Theater and his subsequent relocation to Germany. By 1983, the year his play *Jubiläum* (Jubilee) premiered in Bochum, he was one of the leading figures in German theater, and as a Jewish remigrant promoting reconciliation, occupied a unique place in German culture.²⁴

Jubiläum, commissioned on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi seizure of power, is a play of active remembrance that “involves actor and spectators physically, intellectually, and emotionally.”²⁵ In addition to recalling the fate of Holocaust victims, it depicts the climate of intolerance in West Germany at the time, criticizing the persistent presence of anti-Semitism and the hatred of minorities, as well as the German public’s continued indifference to it.²⁶ Consisting of twelve loosely connected scenes with no dramatic arch or conventional plot, the play bears some semblance to Brecht’s dramatic dissection of Third Reich ideology; in fact, the author had originally sought to orient himself along the episodic dramaturgy of *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches*, devising *Jubiläum* “as its quasi continuation” (gleichsam als dessen Fortschreibung).²⁷ Prior to the beginning of rehearsals, however, Tabori’s version had evolved into a freer form of adaptation, what he called a “black mass of souls” (eine schwarze Seelenmesse).²⁸ Rather than serving to document Nazi crimes and ideology, the play presented “fragments of remembrance,” focusing on Holocaust memory and the ways in which such memory informs the actions of the characters—and spectators—in the present.²⁹

The cast of *Jubiläum* features three distinct groups. First, there are the Jewish victims of Nazi genocide, Lotte Stern and the father of her husband Arnold Stern who himself appears to be a survivor. Then there is a group of three who would have been victims during the Third Reich and now present stories of continued discrimination in postwar Germany. This group includes Lotte’s disabled niece, Mitzi, and the homosexual couple, Otto and Helmut, both of whom committed suicide (Mitzi does so as well in the course of the play). A third group consists of Helmut’s nephew Jürgen, a neo-Nazi, and a Shakespearean grave digger named Wumpf. The latter cares for the graves from which Lotte, Arnold, Helmut, and Otto have risen, the victims of violence that has left them in a state of purgatory haunted not by their own sins but by the crimes committed against them. “Es ist schwer, Laub zu sein” (It is hard to be leaves),³⁰ Arnold observes in the opening scene of *Jubiläum*, an apparent reference to Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for*

Godot, that points to the intermediary state in which the dead are caught. In Beckett's play—which Tabori would begin to rehearse later that year—the two protagonists, Estragon and Vladimir, describe the rustling of leaves as the murmuring of the unredeemed dead. "They talk about their lives . . . have to talk about it," Estragon replies when Vladimir asks about the nature of their discourse. "To have lived is not enough for them," the latter subsequently contends in a cadence typical of Beckett's dialogue. "To be dead is not enough for them."³¹ This appears to be true as well for the characters in *Jubiläum*.³² Rich in symbolic and allegoric meaning—signifying, among other things, a death not fully consummated, the state of having fallen, and the prospect of being burned—the leaves are also a physical feature of the principal location in Tabori's play, a Jewish cemetery on the banks of the Rhine River, "where the dead are condemned to remember what they would rather forget" (wo die Toten dazu verurteilt sind, sich dessen zu erinnern, was sie lieber vergessen würden).³³ As *Jubiläum* progresses from this opening, the characters are displaced to other imagined locations and the play unfolds into a series of role-plays and reenactments focused on Nazi persecution, murder, and suicide.³⁴

The conflation of imagined and real space, the central structural element of the play, was congenially captured in Kazuko Watanabe's stage design, which incorporated the outside of the theater, as the play was staged in the theater's foyer, with part of the Jewish cemetery extending to the other side of the lobby's glass front, where it remained visible against the backdrop of passing traffic. Likewise, Tabori himself, in the role of (the ghost of) Arnold's father, and Jürgen, the neo-Nazi, also initially appeared outside. The play's deliberate dissociation of locations and their reconnection in reference to a single event, the Holocaust, allowed spatial relations to supersede chronological time, resulting in the simultaneous presence of diachronic and synchronic time frames.³⁵ In other words, Tabori's stage, though principally set in the present, became a memorial landscape, a *loi de mémoire*, to which the victims returned so that they might engage the audience in collective forms of active remembrance.³⁶

Tabori recalls Brecht's *Die jüdische Frau* in scenes 4 and 8 of *Jubiläum*. In the earlier of these two scenes, it is Helmut—cast as "the wife" of the homosexual couple—who, when asked what he is reading, mentions the one-act's title and then summarizes it as follows: "She packs [her suitcase], she phones, she says her sentimental good-byes, she goes into exile, her husband, that cowardly jerk, allows her to" (Sie packt, sie telefoniert, sie sagt beim Abschied leise Servus, sie geht ins Exil, ihr Mann, diese feige Memme, lässt sie).³⁷ He subsequently recites modified text from the scene, narrating and commenting on the original dialogue while indicating that he, a persecuted gay man, can identify with Judith Keith's fate:

I'll go and pack up. What kind of people are you, yes, you as well! . . . This won't just take four weeks. You know it, and I know it, too. So don't tell me: It is just a few weeks after all, while you are handing me the fur coat, which I won't need until it's winter. And let's not talk about misfortune. Let's talk about shame.³⁸

[Ich geh und packe. Was seid ihr für Menschen, ja, auch du! . . . Das hier dauert nicht nur vier Wochen. Du weißt es, und ich weiß es auch. Sag also nicht: Es sind schließlich nur ein paar Wochen, während du mir den Pelzmantel gibst, den ich doch erst im Winter brauche. Und reden wir nicht vom Unglück. Reden wir von Schande.]

Helmut's outburst is a prelude to things to come: later, in scene 8, it is Lotte Stern who is featured onstage in another revival of *Die jüdische Frau*. She begins her soliloquy by contemplating her Jewishness and her violent death in a Nazi gas chamber:³⁹ "But my death, I don't want to boast, my death, well, my death was perfectly grotesque, more beautiful than that of Ophelia or St. Joan, flames I never liked" (Aber mein Tod, ich möchte nicht angeben, mein Tod, ach ja, mein Tod, war eine prächtige Groteske, schöner als der von Ophelia oder der Heiligen Johanna, Flammen mochte ich nie).⁴⁰ Then, in a simple statement—"I am in a telephone booth near the [Cologne] cathedral" (Ich bin in einer Telefonzelle am Dom)—reminiscent of the beginning of the elevator monologue in Heiner Müller's *Der Auftrag* (The Mission), she switches to a different location in the theatrical present.⁴¹ Describing the scene around her as a carnival with different passers-by—among others, bishops, dentists, lawyers, left-wing liberals, retirees, judges, directors, whores, old Nazis, and young Nazis—she dials a number and seamlessly slips into Judith Keith's monologue.

This is Lotte Stern, Doctor, is that you?—Good evening. I just wanted to call up and tell you that you ought to look for a different bridge partner, I'm leaving, you see.—No, not for very long, but a couple of weeks at least.—By the way, doctor the door is jammed.—The door of the booth.—Of the telephone booth, the door is jammed. Yes, I know it sounds strange.—And, yes, I've already tried everything, pushing, pressing, with my elbows, shoulders, my behind, my knees, it doesn't open.—No, this is no Jewish humor.—Yes, there are people outside, a multitude.—No, they don't care.—Yes, I've cried for help.⁴²

[Hier Lotte Stern. Doktor, sind Sie es?—Guten Abend. Ich wollte nur mal anrufen und sagen, dass ihr euch jetzt doch nach einem neuen Bridgepartner umsehen müsst, ich verreise nämlich.—Nein, nicht sehr lange, aber ein paar Wochen werden es schon werden.—Übrigens, Doktor, die Tür klemmt.—Die Tür der Zelle.—Der Telefonzelle,

die Tür klemmt. Ja, ich weiß, es klingt merkwürdig.—Nein, ich habe schon alles versucht, gedrückt, gestoßen, mit Ellbogen, Schultern, Hintern, Knien, sie geht nicht auf.—Nein, das ist kein jüdischer Witz.—Ja, es sind Leute draußen, eine Menge.—Nein, die kümmern sich nicht.—Ja, ich habe um Hilfe gerufen.]

Citing fragments from Brecht's monologue, Lotte reenacts *Die jüdische Frau*, talking to the friends and relatives Judith Keith called in Brecht's scene, while expressing distress over her current predicament of standing in a locked telephone booth that is filling with water. Unable to free herself, and with the people around her ignoring her cries for help, she ultimately drowns, her last words being: "Here we go again" (Es geht schon wieder los).⁴³

The extended enactment of Lotte's death, an allegory of past Jewish suffering and present-day indifference toward discrimination, highlights, as does the play as a whole, the perspective and experience of the victim. This emphasis stands in marked contrast to many other German Holocaust plays of the postwar era, whose authors tried to either "lend the anonymous suffering a concrete shape in the figure of a single representative martyr, or to confront German collective guilt through the character of a Nazi who comes to acknowledge his mistake or make amends as an act of belated atonement," marginalizing the victim's perspective and Jewish suffering as a whole.⁴⁴ *Jubiläum*, by comparison, puts front and center the pain and suffering of those who died in the Holocaust, pointing both to the tormentors and to the inaction of those who just stood by. In her cell, Lotte appears isolated and helpless, entirely visible, yet imprisoned, a muted victim trying to be heard ("Zelle" in the German "Telefonzelle" [telephone booth] is, of course, the word for both booth *and* cell).⁴⁵ The rising water and the lack of air reference the gassing of Jews in fake shower rooms of German extermination camps, allowing Tabori to show what cannot be shown on stage: the murder of Judith Keith, a.k.a. Lotte Stern, in one of these camps due to her husband's—or the bystanders'—tacit consent to her ostracization.

IV

In staging Lotte's monologue, Tabori adopts techniques of Epic Theater insofar as he quotes text and social gestures from Brecht's original scene; however, in its performative presence and its reflection on the means of representation, the author also moves beyond Brechtian form toward that of postdramatic theater, a post-Brechtian theater, which according to Hans-Thies Lehmann "knows that it is affected by the demands and questions for theater that are sedimented in Brecht's work but can no longer accept Brecht's answers."⁴⁶ Lehmann sees the initial shift to postdramatic theater taking place in the mid-1960s, coinciding with the rise of performance art

and alternative theater as well as a changed social and political environment demanding new forms of representation. In this context, one of the major changes he identifies is a different understanding of the dramatic text. In contrast to the predominance of dramatic dialogue in traditional forms of theater—that is, the notion that a performance’s primary function is to illustrate the written text and that all theatrical means should serve to produce textual meaning—postdramatic theater stages the text as “merely a component with equal rights in a gestic, musical, visual, etc. total composition.”⁴⁷ With the “de-hierarchization of theatrical means” comes a new emphasis on other aspects of theatrical performance, such as gesture and body as well as the actual time and space of the play’s realization.⁴⁸ In postdramatic theater, says Lehmann, “[t]he physical body whose gestic vocabulary in the eighteenth century could still be read and interpreted virtually like a text . . . has become its own reality which does not ‘tell’ this or that emotion but through its presence *manifests* itself as the site of inscription of collective history.”⁴⁹

For the spectator, the emphasis on a shared reality moves the performance closer to ritual forms of theater, allowing for a new kind of immediacy in the relationship between audience and performance. It also leads to what Lehmann has called the “irruption of the real,” an awareness of the reality of the staging itself, a principal feature of the theatrical design of postdramatic theater.⁵⁰ The integration of the actual setting of the performance, the recognition that theater is “where a unique intersection of aesthetically organized and everyday real life takes place,” is routinely expressed by another characteristic of postdramatic theater: its inclination toward self-reflexivity.⁵¹ As the performance points to itself as theater, it questions traditional modes of theatrical representation, creating awareness among spectators of their role in relation to the performance and the construction of its meaning. In other words, postdramatic theater changes not just the character of the performance but also the nature of spectating, forcing the audience “to realize ‘that there is no firm boundary between the aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic realm.’”⁵²

Although Tabori is not featured in Lehmann’s study, his theater, including the scene at hand, is a perfect illustration of the new form: it is self-reflective; emphasizes the here and now of the performance; places the textual elements in a more equitable relationship to the physical performance with regard to the construction of meaning; and, finally, asks his audience not only to observe and evaluate the characters on stage but also to observe itself. In the reenactment of *Die jüdische Frau*, this entails that the spectators recognize their own passivity as they witness a person dying before them. In the unique dialectic of postdramatic theater, the scene of Lotte’s drowning is both a highly mediated scene and a theatrical moment of utmost authenticity resulting from the steady commute between fictional theatrical reality and the reality offstage.⁵³ In another way, the scene’s postdramatic transformation is perhaps best exemplified by the use of the

telephone, a central prop and, incidentally, apparently the only time Brecht used it in any of his plays.⁵⁴ In Brecht's *Die jüdische Frau*, speaking on the telephone is an alienation effect, allowing the audience to observe Judith Keith's state of mind and, from a distance, to infer what her friends and relatives might say or think. In scene 8 of *Jubiläum*, however, the phone calls no longer serve as a means of communication, which has been visibly cut off; instead, they point to the blueprint of Lotte's monologue, reflecting the historical limits of representation. Hence, Lotte is not just stuck in a telephone booth, but also in a text whose historical trajectory, in content and form, Tabori intends to overcome.

Tabori's critical engagement with Brecht pays tribute to the precursor by using his scene as a starting point for the exploration of new aesthetic forms in a post-Holocaust world. In doing so, he seeks to go beyond traditional Epic Theater, trying to simultaneously stage and overcome distance when representing Jewish suffering. To this end, he interrupts chronological time, opening up a self-reflective space that can reference both past and present. Lotte's reenactment presents Judith Keith in historical perspective while also demanding unmitigated compassion for the victim of discrimination and persecution seen drowning on stage.

Reflecting on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, another important reference point in much of Tabori's work, including *Jubiläum*, Japanese-German author Yoko Tawada once noted that the theater was a place "where knowledge not accessible to us becomes audible." In other places, she observes, "we almost always hear only the tales of the living. They force their stories on us to justify themselves, and so that they will be able to go on living, like Hamlet's uncle. The tales told by the dead are fundamentally different, because their stories are not told to conceal their wounds."⁵⁵

Without the reappearance of Hamlet's father, maintains Tawada, there could be no access to the past, for we could not learn the story of how he was killed by his brother. Instead, people would "go on believing the story of the murderer."⁵⁶ By allowing the dead to return to the stage, *Jubiläum* aims to contest that story.

V

While Tabori's adaptation of Brecht's *Die jüdische Frau* in New York was aimed at the redirection of text and author, and the Bochum production represented its postdramatic transformation, the third iteration of this scene was staged in Berlin and centered around the conflation of the imaginary with the real in Tabori's own persona. In *Jubiläum*, Tabori himself appeared as Cornelius, the ghost of Arnold's Father, wearing a concentration camp prisoner uniform, thus providing a form of authentication to the action on stage (Tabori's father Cornelius was murdered in Auschwitz) as he introduces the reality of loss into its "playful" theatrical representation.⁵⁷ This

feature was replicated when another continuation of *Die jüdische Frau*, Christoph Hein's one-act *Mutters Tag* (My Mother's Day), was produced jointly with Brecht's scene in 2000 at the Berliner Ensemble, where it commemorated the deportation of Berlin's Jews as stipulated by the theater's contract with the Holzapfel foundation.⁵⁸

The stage design of the one-hour show, which was performed without intermission in front of the theater's iron curtain, emphasized intimacy and simplicity, using just a few props: a table, a chair, an armchair, a fur coat, a telephone, and the requisite suitcase. This same setting, which included an outline of the Star of David on the floor, was used for both plays, underscoring the continuity between the two one-acts. Seen in the context of Tabori's engagement with Brecht, *Die jüdische Frau*, which Tabori himself directed, here seems to work as a kind of prelude to the figure's reappearance as the Jewish mother, Margarete Deutschmann, in Hein's *Mutters Tag*. Murdered at the age of forty-one and haunted by her own unredeemed purgatory, she observes her son Jakob, a writer, from the afterlife, commenting on his existence in a monologue audible only to the audience. While Jakob hammers away at the typewriter, Margarete, the mother with the most German of first names, reminisces about her upper-bourgeois life in Berlin, recounts her deportation—first to Lodz, then to Auschwitz—admonishes her septuagenarian son not to smoke, critiques both his physical appearance and his writing, and reflects on past and contemporary anti-Semitism.

Hein's one-act begins with the mother moving silently through the room "as if she were at home there" (als ob sie dort zu Hause wäre).⁵⁹ Although set in the present, Margarete's appearance and Jakob's old typewriter give the action a distinctly historical feel, exhibiting the continuity in character and scene. Likewise, this is true for the antiquated telephone, which in *Mutters Tag* is not used to call out to friends and family but rather for others to invade Jakob Deutschmann's privacy. When Jakob receives a phone call and listens to what is doubtless a slew of anti-Semitic insults, he responds to the hate speech with Tabori's trademark irony and a fixture in the playwright's conceptual thinking: that victim and perpetrator have more in common than what separates them.⁶⁰ Referring to the personal form of address the caller uses, Deutschmann replies:

Fühlen Sie sich jetzt besser, der Herr?—Da sie mich unentwegt duzen, kann es sein, dass Sie trotz ihrer bösen Worte mit mir befreundet sein wollen?—Nein, ich frage ja nur. Sie sollen doch nicht aus Ihrer Mördergrube ein Herz machen.⁶¹

[Are you feeling better now, Sir?—Since you address me rather personally, could it be that you'd like to be friends with me, in spite of your hateful words?—No, I am just asking. After all, you don't want to pretend to be frank.]

The inversion of the traditional maxim about not holding back one's true thoughts, which here can be understood rather literally, exposes the caller's verbal assault not just as hateful but also as illogical. In addition, it points to the author who is acting rather than the one who authored the text.

There are other allusions to Tabori's style—such as when Margarete quips that if one is forced to read sad things, they should at least be funny—all of which link the actor onstage to the role he plays.⁶² And while the references to her son's exile in England and other aspects of Margarete's life do not exactly match Tabori's own or that of his mother, who did not perish in the Holocaust, they are close enough to be seen as similar to his life and representative of the fate of German Jews more generally. This said, one important aspect does match exactly: the author Jakob Deutschmann—*nomen est omen*—returned to Germany in spite of the fact that the Germans had murdered most of his family; and so, too, did George Tabori. The mishpokhe, his mother tells Jakob in the play, does not approve of his return to the country of their murderers:

[E]igentlich sind fast alle dagegen. Aber ich sage immer: Lasst doch den Jungen, das muss er selbst entscheiden, wir sollten ihn nicht mit unseren Pogromen behelligen, das ist doch heute anders, auch in Deutschland.⁶³

[Actually, almost all of them are against it. But I always say: let the boy be, he has to decide that himself, we shouldn't bother him with our pogroms, it's different today, in Germany, too.]

This is, as the play goes on to show, an all-too-optimistic assessment, as Jakob is harassed by anti-Semitic letters and phone calls and, in a gesture of futility—subconsciously following the advice of his mother—finally calls his landlord to ask whether he can move into the third floor apartment, ostensibly to escape the danger of neo-Nazis throwing rocks through his windows. “Ich sage immer,” Margarete observes in a statement cheerful in tone, yet replete with disillusionment, “wenn der Koffer fertig gepackt und der Reisepass gültig ist, dann kann man auch in Deutschland unbesorgt leben” (I always say, when the suitcase is packed and the passport valid, you can live carefree in Germany as well).⁶⁴

The fact that Hein's short play referenced its protagonist was not lost on critics, as almost every review highlighted the merging of character and actor, noting that “the old Jewish writer, George Tabori, himself, sits at the typewriter” (der alte jüdische Schriftsteller, George Tabori selbst, sitzt an der Schreibmaschine),⁶⁵ or that no one could play the role “more authentically than George Tabori whose father, and not only his father, the German fascists had murdered” (authentischer darstellen als George Tabori, dem die deutschen Faschisten nicht nur den Vater mordeten),⁶⁶ or that “figure and actor flow so completely into each other that [only] Tabori remains

on stage” (Figur und Darsteller fließen so völlig ineinander, dass auf der Bühne Tabori übrig blieb).⁶⁷ The perceived and, from the point of view of the author, clearly intended conflation of the role on stage with Tabori’s real life persona makes it clear that Hein’s play was not so much created for Tabori as it was, in fact, written about Tabori who, in turn, authenticated the action on stage, where he coexists with his forbears who use this platform to show “their wounds” and ask the audience to work through their loss.

In its form, Hein’s one-act is clearly modeled on Brecht’s *Die jüdische Frau*, using most of its alienating devices, such as the extended pantomime in the beginning, the long monologue by the female protagonist, the one-sided telephone conversations, and commentary on anticipated action. And as can be gathered from the above, the overlap between the two one-acts is no coincidence, for although staged in sequence, *Mutters Tag* is really an “Übermalung” (painting over; reframing) of the *Die jüdische Frau*, for it uses Brecht’s original as a kind of understructure, superimposing on it a new and different story, a story focused on the fear and misery of the survivor.⁶⁸

Yet Tabori’s presence onstage is not just a commentary on the reality of murder and its aftermath, vouching for the ghost of Jakob’s mother; it also illuminates his relationship to Brecht, which, in this final iteration of *Die jüdische Frau*, is that of the Jewish son whose “father’s” story has become his own. Although it was no theatrical event of great significance and certainly modest in its artistic ambition, the double bill at the Berliner Ensemble, which Tabori had joined a year earlier, brought his relationship to Bertolt Brecht full circle. It is here, on Brecht’s German stage, that the author inserts himself into the drama of his precursor, making it seem to us, as Harold Bloom writes in *The Anxiety of Influence*, “as though the later poet himself had written the precursor’s characteristic work.”⁶⁹ Admittedly, the rewriting here takes the form of a performance, since Hein, not Tabori, is the author of *Mutters Tag* (although, as I have tried to show, the production suggests a complex interweaving of texts, styles, and playwrights). Nonetheless, the joint performance of Brecht’s *Die jüdische Frau* and Hein/Tabori’s *Mutters Tag* does reflect the son’s ambition to write in Brecht’s succession for the dead he did, or could not, write about.⁷⁰

Notes

¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Nuremberg Laws,” in *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007902>, accessed May 21, 2016.

² John J. White and Ann White, *Bertolt Brecht’s Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches: A German Exile Drama in the Struggle against Fascism* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 65.

³ Charlotte Ryland, "Commentary," in *Bertolt Brecht: Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 2009), lii.

⁴ Ryland, "Commentary," lii.

⁵ Cf. Walter Benjamin, "The Land Where the Proletariat May Not Be Mentioned," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael Jennings, vol. 3, 1935–1938 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 331.

⁶ Frank Dietrich Wagner, *Bertolt Brecht: Kritik des Faschismus* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989), 47.

⁷ Eric Bentley, "Bertolt Brecht and his Work," in Bertolt Brecht, *The Private Life of the Master Race: A Documentary Play*, trans. Eric Bentley (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948), 95.

⁸ Cf. Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch Theater: Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), 146.

⁹ Viveca Lindfors, *Viveka . . . Viveca* (New York: Everest House, 1981), 236.

¹⁰ Lindfors, *Viveka*, 236.

¹¹ Cf. *Brecht on Brecht: An Improvisation*, by George Tabori (New York: Samuel French, 1967), 5.

¹² Peter Bauland, *The Hooded Eagle: Modern German Drama on the New York Stage* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 189.

¹³ "Brecht on Brecht," in *Variety*, January 12, 1962.

¹⁴ Sandra Schmidt, "Theatre: Brecht on Brecht," *Village Voice*, November 23, 1961.

¹⁵ Cf. Manfred Voigt, "Brecht and the Jews," *Brecht Yearbook* 21 (1996): 108.

¹⁶ Louis Calta, "Theatre: Brecht on Brecht Offered," *New York Times*, November 15, 1961.

¹⁷ Brecht as quoted in White and White, *Bertolt Brecht's Furcht und Elend*, 63; cf. also 64.

¹⁸ Wagner, *Bertolt Brecht: Kritik*, 26, 137–38.

¹⁹ Cf. Brecht, "Gespräche mit jungen Intellektuellen" (*BFA* 23, 101).

²⁰ An example illustrating the difference is the following passage (Judith Keith addressing her husband):

(1) Fritz, everything is tolerable, except one thing: that we're not looking each other in the eyes during the last hour that remains to us. That they shall not achieve—the liars who set everyone lying. (Bentley, "Bertolt Brecht and his Work," 40)

(2) Everything is permissible, Fritz, except one thing, that in this last hour left to us we're afraid to look each other in the eyes. They must not do this to us, the liars who turn everyone else into a liar. (Tabori, *Brecht on Brecht*, 92)

²¹ I take these notions from Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, whose general trajectory Tabori follows in his unfolding relationship to Bertolt Brecht. Cf. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 5–16.

- ²² Howard Taubman, "Theatre: 'Brecht on Brecht' Opens Run," in *New York Times* (January 4, 1962).
- ²³ White and White, *Bertolt Brecht's Furcht und Elend*, 8.
- ²⁴ The production came about on the initiative of Brecht's daughter Hanne Hiob. Cf. Jan Strümpel, *Vorstellungen vom Holocaust: George Taboris Erinnerungsspiele* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000), 108.
- ²⁵ Anat Feinberg, "George Tabori's Mourning Work in *Jubiläum*," in *Staging the Holocaust: The Shoah in Drama and Performance*, ed. Claude Schumacher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 270.
- ²⁶ Strümpel, *Vorstellungen vom Holocaust*, 116.
- ²⁷ Cf. "Das Stück," *Theater heute* 2 (1983): 36.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ Feinberg, "George Tabori's Mourning Work," 271.
- ³⁰ George Tabori, "Jubiläum," in George Tabori *Theater* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2014) 1: 592. Unless otherwise noted all translations from the German are my own.
- ³¹ Samuel Beckett, *Warten auf Godot. En attendant Godot. Waiting for Godot* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 156.
- ³² On the intertextual relationship to Beckett's plays cf. Marcus Sander, "Friedhofs-Monologe. George Taboris *Jubiläum*," in *Theater gegen das Vergessen*, ed. Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), 188–91.
- ³³ Tabori, "Jubiläum," 591.
- ³⁴ Cf. Strümpel, *Vorstellungen vom Holocaust*, 112.
- ³⁵ Incidentally, linking play, production, and location in relation to the Holocaust is not unique to George Tabori's work. A similar approach was evident in the Vienna production of Thomas Bernhard's *Heldenplatz* (1988). Cf. Jeanette R. Malkin, "Thomas Bernhard, Jews, *Heldenplatz*," in *Staging the Holocaust: The Shoah in Drama and Performance*, ed. Claude Schumacher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 288–89; with regard to Tabori's consistent use of the approach cf. Wend Kässens, "Sehen, was man nicht sehen will. Zur Theaterarbeit George Taboris," in *George Tabori: dem Gedächtnis, der Trauer und dem Lachen gewidmet*, ed. Andrea Welker (Vienna: Bibliothek der Provinz, 1994), 147.
- ³⁶ Cf. Peter W. Marx, *Theater und Kulturelle Erinnerung. Kultursemiotische Untersuchungen zu George Tabori, Tadeusz Kantor und Rina Yerushalmi* (Tübingen: Francke, 2003), 238; also Sander, "Friedhofs-Monologe," 184.
- ³⁷ Tabori, "Jubiläum," 599. "Sagt zum Abschied leise servus," in the original German, is a quote from a popular song composed by Peter Kreuder, which premiered in the film *Burgtheater* (1936), a romantic comedy.
- ³⁸ Tabori, "Jubiläum," 599.
- ³⁹ Cf. Kässens, "Sehen, was man nicht sehen will," 146.
- ⁴⁰ Tabori, "Jubiläum," 609.
- ⁴¹ Cf. Heiner Müller, "Der Auftrag," in *Die Stücke* 3 (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 2002), 27.

⁴² Tabori, “Jubiläum,” 609.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 610.

⁴⁴ Cf. Feinberg, “George Tabori’s Mourning Work,” 269.

⁴⁵ Cf. Marcus Sander, “Der Tod der jüdischen Frau. Bertolt Brechts Einakter des Exils, ‘nach Auschwitz’ bearbeitet von George Tabori,” in *Theater gegen das Vergessen*, ed. Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), 236–37.

⁴⁶ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (New York: Routledge, 2006), 27.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 101. Postdramatic theatre, Lehmann notes at one point, “situates itself in a space opened up by the Brechtian inquiries into the presence and consciousness of the process of representation within the represented and the inquiry into a new ‘art of spectating’ (Brecht’s *Zuschaukunst*)” (33).

⁵³ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 99.

⁵⁴ Cf. White and White, *Bertolt Brecht’s Furcht und Elend*, 210.

⁵⁵ Yoko Tawada, “Storytellers without Souls,” in *Where Europe Begins* (New York: New Directions, 2002), 108.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ On Tabori’s construction of this authentic persona cf. Sandra Pott and Jörg Schönert, “Tabori unter den Deutschen: Stationen einer ‘authentischen Existenz’?,” in *Theater gegen das Vergessen*, ed. Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), 350.

⁵⁸ Christoph Hein, *Mutters Tag*, in *Die Stücke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 609–20. The contract requires the Berliner Ensemble each year to publicly remember the deportation of Berlin’s Jews, which began on October 18, 1941. So noted in the playbill: Berliner Ensemble, *Programmheft Nr. 15* (2000): n.p.

⁵⁹ Hein, *Mutters Tag*, 611.

⁶⁰ Cf. George Tabori, *Bett & Bühne. Über das Theater und das Leben: Essays, Artikel, Polemiken*, ed. Maria Sommer (Berlin: Wagenbach, 2007), 24.

⁶¹ Hein, *Mutters Tag*, 613.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 617.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 614.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 618.

⁶⁵ Rüdiger Schaper, “Vaters Nacht: Theater als Mahnmal: *Mutters Tag* von Christoph Hein am Berliner Ensemble—mit George Tabori,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, October 18, 2000.

⁶⁶ Matthias Ehlert, “Koffers Tag,” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (October 18, 2000).

⁶⁷ “Mördergruben zu Herzen,” *Berliner Zeitung*, October 18, 2000.

⁶⁸ Tabori used this term when referring to his adaptation of Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise*. Cf. “*Nathans Tod* von George Tabori und Gotthold Ephraim Lessing,” in *Coram Publico: Theaterzeitschrift des Bayrischen Staatsschauspiels* 11 (1991): 5.

⁶⁹ Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 16.

⁷⁰ See also Martin Kagel, “Tod eines Genossen: Erinnerung und Intervention in George Taboris *Nathans Tod*,” *The Brecht Yearbook* 39 (2014): 129–51.

In die Zukunft entlassen: Brecht für Indien (wieder)gewinnen

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Einflüsse von Brechts Theaterpraxis und -elementen auf die Theaterbewegungen und Dramatiker Indiens von den 1940ern bis 1980ern. Im Fokus stehen die ersten Versuche von Habib Tanvir in den 1950ern, indische klassische und Volkstraditionen des Theaters mit den narrativen Elementen Brechts zu kombinieren, sowie die daran anschließende Verbreitung von Brechts Theaterstil auf nationaler Ebene, unternommen von Ebrahim Alkazi. Als Direktor der National School of Drama (NSD) in Indien brachte Alkazi ein internationales politisches und ästhetisches Programm in die Aufführungspraxis von Brecht, sowie in die Inkorporierung seiner Stilmittel in das indische Theater, wobei Alkazi Elemente aus der Kabuki, Noh und Hindu Aufführungspraxis kombinierte. Vor dem Hintergrund der politischen Entwicklung von Indien und Pakistan in den 1970ern wurden Theater- und Kunstbewegungen immer mehr ein Mittel, Brechts Ideen in den modernen indischen Mainstream einzubringen. Der Artikel beleuchtet die Elemente von Brechts Einfluss auf indische Künstler bis zum heutigen Tag.

This paper traces the influences of Brecht's theater and theatrical devices on Indian playwrights and movements within Indian theater from the 1940s to the 1980s. It looks at the earliest attempt to combine Indian classical and folk traditions of theater with Brechtian narrative devices, by Habib Tanvir in the 1950s, and the subsequent proliferation of Brecht's style of theater on a national level, undertaken by Ebrahim Alkazi. As the director of the National School of Drama (NSD) in India, Alkazi brought an international political and aesthetic program to bear on the staging of Brecht, as well as incorporating Brechtian theatrical devices into Indian theater, combining Kabuki, Noh, and Hindu practices of performance. Against the background of political developments in India and Pakistan in the 1970s, theatrical and artistic movements became the means for incorporating Brecht's ideas into the modern Indian mainstream. The article illuminates Brecht's influence on Indian artists up to the present day.

Released into the Future: (Re)Claiming Brecht in India

Amal Allana

In India, the “people’s” theater movement grew out of the Progressive Writers’ Association, which was initiated in England in 1935 by Sajjad Zaheer, Mulk Raj Anand, and others. These writers attended the International Symposium of Writers for the Defense of Culture against Fascism, which took place in Paris in June 1935, where stalwarts like Maxim Gorky, André Gide, André Malraux, E. M. Forster, and Bertolt Brecht made massive pleas for the freedom of artistic expression. Inspired, these young Indians felt compelled to form an association of their own in India. Officially inaugurated in Lucknow in April 1936, it was named the All India Writers’ Association. Its manifesto stated:

We believe that the new literature must deal with the basic problems of our existence today—the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation. All that drags us down to passivity, inaction and unreason, we reject as reactionary—all that arouses in us the critical spirit, which examines institutions and customs, in the light of reason, which helps us to act, to organize ourselves, to transform, we accept as progressive.¹

Rapidly attracting a sizable following of Indian writers both at home and abroad, one of the founder members, Mulk Raj Anand, represented India on behalf of the new association at the second International Symposium held in Paris later in 1936. Once again, Bertolt Brecht was among those present. It is not known whether Anand personally met Brecht on this occasion, but it is not unlikely that Brecht’s ideas made an impression on him, which he carried back to India and discussed in various literary forums.

Anand was a young writer, extremely interested in theater, which led him and others in the PWA to encourage those working in the theater to align themselves with the Communist Party and use theater to resist the threat of fascism. It was in these circumstances that the Indian People’s Theater Association (IPTA) was born in 1943. Prioritizing the use of popular/folk culture in order to reach out to the masses, IPTA’s focus was on educating both the urban and “rural” masses, arousing them to political awareness and action. Regarding itself as a “people’s theater,” IPTA provided an

alternative to the “Parsi Natak” kind of commercial theater that was prevalent, dismissing it as a capitalist enterprise.

At IPTA’s very first meeting, held in Bombay in 1943, it was proposed that a new play be written and performed that reflected conditions prevailing in the country. Since Bengal was in the grip of a devastating famine (1943–44) it was decided that Shombu Mitra and the poet Bijon Bhattacharya, both youngsters at the time, would collaborate to write and direct a play on the theme of famine.

Based on documentary material that was reported in the daily newspapers, the two created *Nabanna* (The Harvest), exposing the devastating causes that led to a man-made famine in Bengal. Centered around a peasant family, *Nabanna* spoke of how the harvests of 1942 and 1943 were being used by the British to feed their troops fighting in the theaters of war in Europe and Japan.

In order to balance character individuation with a complex plot that took in sweeping events, the directors opted for an episodic structure, set on a revolving stage to facilitate rapid scene shifts, and thereby depicting multiple facets of social life in swift juxtaposition. Scholar of the IPTA Malini Bhattacharya points out that

The abrupt ending of each scene breaks up the single track movement of the narrative, and transfers the audience with great flexibility from one aspect of social life to another—from the woes of the peasants in their village homes to the hoarder’s den, from the relief kitchen to the charitable dispensary, from the wedding feast, to beggar’s scrounging for food in a nearby dustbin, from the child dying of malnutrition, to the village wife being approached by a city tout—so that although the main focus is on the peasant family, the approach to their problems is a multi-lateral one, so that the sensationalism of individual scenes gives way to an analytical linking-up of the different segments of social reality.²

One cannot really ascertain whether either Shombu Mitra or Bijon Bhattacharya had ever heard of Brecht or read about his ideas. Nonetheless, what they created contained several ingredients of Brecht’s Epic Theater. The critic Samik Bandyopadhyay notes that although IPTA’s early work was not affected by Brecht, translations of Brecht published in Moscow had begun to circulate in Calcutta, which could account for some information regarding Brecht being available.³

The First Generation of Post-Independence Directors

Referring to his journey by ship from Bombay to England in 1948, theater director Ebrahim Alkazi recalls that the first time he heard about Brecht was in Mordecai Gorelik’s new book at the time, *New Theaters for Old*.

Alkazi was very taken by Gorelik's exposition of Brecht's proposal for a new form of theater, but it was not until twenty years later that Alkazi found an opportune moment to facilitate the reception and absorption of Brecht's ideas into the contemporary theater scene.

Like Alkazi, two other outstanding directors of the post-independence period, Habib Tanvir and Utpal Dutt, were at different times in their careers intellectually challenged by Brecht's ideology, propositions, and practices. It was through their considerable efforts that students and practitioners were made aware of the phenomenal possibilities that a Brechtian encounter could yield.

Habib Tanvir

Habib Tanvir was among the first Indians actually to see Brecht's work. Returning to India in the late 1950s after studying at RADA in England, he stopped over in Berlin, availing himself of the opportunity to see some Berliner Ensemble productions like the *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Mother Courage*. Excited to find that Brecht had drawn from a number of Eastern performing traditions, he returned to India, inspired to make experiments of his own.

In India during the 1950s, the repercussions of the trauma and blood-bath of the partition of the country into India and Pakistan were still being experienced. As communal strife between Hindus and Muslims continued, the task for India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was also to bind together a diverse people, whose languages, religions, and ethnic differences were already beginning to cause rifts. Nehru's slogan became "unity in diversity," making the notion of one nation, as one indivisible whole, a national agenda to be realized. To achieve this Nehru proposed the cultivating of a "pan-Indian" identity—that is, a single, unified cultural identity—for a diverse people.

Nehru recognized the crucial role artists could play. He called upon the support of the most eminent musicians, dancers, painters, cinema directors, writers, and theater practitioners of the day to share his vision that a "modern Indian" culture could be created, by linking city to village and past to present, by harnessing India's vast storehouse of past traditions for contemporary usage. Soon after independence and on a wave of patriotism, artists willingly pledged their support to Nehru in the reforging of a modern, national, cultural identity.

Habib Tanvir became part of this euphoric moment. On his return to Delhi from Europe, he was driven by a strong desire to stage a Sanskrit classic in a *new* way. Choosing to stage Shudraka's (third to fifth century CE) classic *The Little Clay Cart*, he found that no guidelines were available to stage a classic, other than those laid out in the *Natya Shastra* (between 200 BCE and 200 CE). One possibility, he felt, was to explore existing Indian

folk theater traditions, along with narrative strategies he had observed in Brecht productions. This inspired him to look again at our traditions in a new light.

Produced in Hindi in 1958, *The Little Clay Cart* used actual folk performers from a rural area for the proletarian characters. The influence of Brecht on this production basically lay in the manner in which Tanvir reorganized and reshaped the material so as to focus on its political dimensions. The central love story was set against a political uprising. The play climaxes when the hostile masses, which have so far hovered on the fringes, take center stage. Masks were used for certain characters in order to distance them. Songs, using melodies from Chhattisgarh, were sung both by a narrator and the characters, as a means both of interpreting the fable and commenting on the action.⁴

Tanvir's *The Little Clay Cart* was one of the earliest attempts to combine classical and folk traditions, along with some Brechtian narrative devices, in presenting a classical Sanskrit text. However, the impact of Brecht was limited to Tanvir as a creative individual. The dissemination of Brecht on a national level was the task undertaken by Ebrahim Alkazi. We will now briefly take a look at the particular circumstances that prevailed in the country when Brecht was strategically and purposefully inducted into our midst.

After Tanvir

Nehru's call to take on a nationalist agenda in the 1950s had, by the 1960s, taken on a new coloring. As millions migrated from smaller towns and the rural countryside to the megalopolises, the common man experienced a severance from his roots. The search for jobs, the experience of living in the urban slums of modern India's newly built-up cities and of working in monotonous jobs, became the subject matter of a remarkable spate of new plays by Indian writers such as Dharamvir Bharati, Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, and Adya Rangacharya. Each of them, writing in his or her own mother tongue, gave voice for the first time to the volatile and unstable conditions that prevailed.

These plays had in common their alienated, disturbed, practically schizophrenic characters, who were paralyzed by uncertainty, registering an angst and existential despair that often manifested as explicit violence. These playwrights had no shortage of themes. What they lacked was a form. Schooled basically in the European/American tradition of realistic playwriting, they now felt that realism had outlived its efficacy, as it was too rigid, too inflexible to capture the sense of rupture, fragmentation, and unease experienced by the city dweller. They looked beyond Ibsen—some finding Camus and Sartre, others Pirandello, and yet others finding Beckett inspirational.

Another segment of writers felt it necessary to move away from the Western tradition altogether, and locate connections with our own indigenous sources. This "Theater of Roots" phase was an effort on the part of theater practitioners to locate the "Indianness" of their identity.⁵ This point was increasingly stressed at seminars and symposia on playwriting from the mid-1960s onward.

In response, the Sangeet Natak Academy, India's national academy for the preservation and dissemination of traditional art forms, now began organizing festivals of traditional Indian theater. Performers from the rural countryside, where they continued to perform as part of religious rituals, were showcased for the first time in the major cities: an exposure that was extremely beneficial. For one, we discovered a rich repository of performing traditions that were still current, and therefore very much available for research and study. For our playwrights, it clarified that these were not "literature-" based traditions, but "performance-" based traditions, in which the "performance text" was "bodily" transmitted to forthcoming generations.

For the modern Indian playwright, by now schooled for over 150 years on Western dramatic literature, these performing traditions, though exciting, used a bewildering array of elements and codified dramatic conventions, which for the most part were foreign to their modern theatrical vocabulary. How would playwrights actually use these traditions? It is within this conundrum, of modern playwrights trying to make sense of their own legacy, that Brecht made a significant entry onto the contemporary Indian stage.

Alkazi and the National School of Drama

For the most part these debates and discussions regarding a national identity took place in New Delhi, the new cultural hub, toward which artists from across the country began to gravitate. Ebrahim Alkazi, in 1962 the newly appointed Director of the National School of Drama (NSD), had clear views regarding national and cultural identity and was outspoken during seminars.

Before coming to Delhi, Alkazi had established his own theater company and a small theater training institute in Bombay, and had acquired a formidable reputation as one of the prime movers in all the arts. Creating spaces where the winds of internationalism could be embraced in aesthetic encounters, Alkazi's aim was to ignite the imagination of young students and stimulate them to produce art and theater that would be reflective of our times.

It was while training at RADA and the British Drama League during the late 1940s and early 50s that Alkazi had absorbed the rich postwar cultural scene as it evolved in England. He observed how young institutions like Dartington Hall were cultivating modernity by opening their doors to

cultural inputs from across the world.⁶ Here he was exposed to the ideas of people like Hallie Flannigan, Michelle Saint Denis, and Michael Chekhov. His interest in painting led Alkazi to the International Center for Contemporary Art (ICA), where Roland Penrose and Herbert Read were engaged in exposing the British public to the European avant-garde for the first time, through pathbreaking exhibitions. Closer to home, it was Rabindranath Tagore's Vishwabharati University in Shantiniketan that inspired Alkazi to make of the NSD a very liberal and broad-based theater training institution that included a study of the interrelatedness of the arts. Describing the inclusive syllabus he designed for the students of the NSD, Alkazi said:

The systematic study and practical performing experience of Sanskrit drama, modern Indian drama, traditional Indian forms, Asian drama, and Western drama gives the student such a solid grounding and such a wide perspective that he cannot possibly pursue an erratic course later in his professional career. It also enables him to see each form of dramatic expression as part of a historical process, in relation to its own time and period, and as one element in a continuing universal movement.⁷

Alkazi's brand of internationalism was very important at this juncture, when different factions were rooting for a return to the indigenous—each with its own agenda. For some it was a postcolonial response, by a once subjugated people, to reclaim and assert its national identity. However, for right-wing forces it was the moment to exorcise the “unhealthy” influence of the West, which should be banished once and for all from cultural theory and practice, in order to make way for the revival of a “golden/Hindu past.”

These were the elements who deliberately misconstrued Alkazi's internationalism as “pro-Westernization,” and often questioned his suitability as director of a “national” institution where, they asserted, the focus should be only on “Indian” theater to the exclusion of all else. Alkazi fielded such criticism with restrained calm. In the midst of fierce battles in the academy regarding the meaning of “national,” Alkazi stood his ground, fiercely guarding the liberal views he eschewed. “No art can be labeled as ‘authentically Indian.’ Creativity does not conform to national boundaries,” was the gist of Alkazi's assertions, as he defended the independence of the artist to freely absorb from any international tradition. At the same time he advocated the restrained use of folk traditions, since they reflected a lifestyle, he asserted, that was alien to ours in the cities.⁸

Looking at the vexed situation where the deep issue of Indian modernity could be hijacked by vested interests, Alkazi sought to propose alternatives. He felt that an in-depth understanding of a seminal figure like Brecht, whose new ideas were not limited to being “German,” but were born out of a “confluence” of theatrical legacies between East and West, could perhaps

pave the way forward toward a dynamic future for Indian theater. With reference to Brecht he said:

If I were to commit myself to what form contemporary theater should take, I would say that we should strive for an approach such as that of Epic Theater for several reasons. In the first place, the classical Indian theater itself tends in that direction. It is imbued with a large number of conventions, which make that kind of approach not only feasible, but also characteristic of Indian theater. A large number of these traditions and conventions have filtered down into the folk forms—the use of music, dance, speech, song, the use of the simplest type of conventions, the use of a type of montage which you have in the Epic Theater, the breaking up of the flow of the action, the discontinuity of the action, the distancing or the alienation of the spectator from the action on the stage, as well as of the actor from his role . . . all this, I think, is part of the Indian tradition.⁹

From the mid-1960s onward Brecht's Asian aspects began to be discussed. For example, Dr. Lothar Lutze from Heidelberg University gave a talk on "Indian Classical Drama in the Light of Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory and Practice."¹⁰

We were excited by the fact that Brecht used conventions similar to those found in our traditions, but for an entirely different purpose. We used music and dance in order to savor the nuances of emotions expressed in a variety of idioms, whereas Brecht designed music and song to be elements of disruption within a basically prose text—in order to awaken the spectator from the somnolence of illusionistic theater. Brecht's narrative was deconstructed into short, pithy, bullet-like episodes—in order to pinpoint, examine, analyze, excavate, and unearth—the given social and political conditions—in order to alter and change them. The episodic construction of an Indian tale, on the other hand, served the purpose of uncovering layer after layer in depth, to reveal yet another facet of an emotion, a situation, or a character. Brechtian theater was active theater . . . it was a socially engaged theater. It was not a theater of meditation or contemplation, but theater as a manifestation of an unjust social reality that demanded to be altered. Indian tales reiterated faith, not seeking alteration but reaffirmation.

Alkazi was well aware of these differences, and was convinced that an intense, long-term immersion in the study of Brecht had the potential to usher in a new era in Indian theater.

The following year, in 1968, Alkazi was invited to represent India at the *Brecht Dialog*, organized by the Internationales Theaterinstitut (ITI) and the Brecht-Zentrum at the Berliner Ensemble. On the sidelines of this visit, Alkazi officially confirmed that the study of Brecht would be incorporated into the curriculum of the NSD, India's premier theater training institution. What followed over the next few years, then, was the study of Brecht under

the supervision and guidance of international Brecht experts whom Alkazi insisted on having as our first guides into Brechtian theater.

Carl Weber and Fritz Bennewitz

Alkazi believed that a student could learn more through actual practice than through volumes of theory. He initiated the process by inviting Carl Weber, who had been an assistant to Brecht at the Berliner Ensemble, to stage Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in 1968, in a Hindustani translation. Vanraj Bhatia was invited to compose an original musical score. It is this *Modelbook* production, directed by Carl Weber, that has gone down in Indian theater history as our first "authentic" Brecht production.

Indian playwrights like Mohan Rakesh hailed it as pathbreaking, opening up the possibilities of a new episodic form of writing that was nonlinear, while for the actors exposed so far to a Stanislavskian approach, it was a learning curve to understand the difference between "being" the character and "demonstrating" and "showing" the character. To their amazement actors discovered that the principles of *Verfremdung* had indeed always been practiced in our own traditions . . . and that it was easier to inculcate a Brechtian acting style through this more familiar connection.

When one looks back, one begins to understand the enormous fallout that this single production generated. More than one hundred people—including students, faculty, stagehands, carpenters, musicians, designers etc.—involved in this production were exposed, firsthand, to a *Modelbook* production, which had originally been directed by the master himself. It was these one hundred people, then, who were partly responsible for carrying forth Brecht's ideas into the future.

Alkazi followed up this exercise the very next year by extending an invitation to Fritz Bennewitz from the German Democratic Republic to direct *The Threepenny Opera*. I happened to be in Weimar at the time, where I was a student observer of Brecht production. I was, in fact, attending Bennewitz's rehearsals of *Days of the Commune* when he suggested that, as part of my apprenticeship, I should return to India with him and assist him on the *Threepenny* production. I readily agreed.

Needless to say the Bennewitz production, again a *Modelbook* one, was met with an enthusiastic and overwhelming response. Alkazi made a point of travelling with these productions to Bombay and Calcutta in order to share the Brechtian experience with these two cities, which had relatively long and intense contemporary theater histories of their own.

Brecht, Folk, and Asian Theater at the NSD

To Alkazi the Brecht connection was contiguous with developing links between Indian and Asian performing traditions. An exposure to such

international legacies, he felt, would provide a springboard for the development of a new Indian modernism, contextualized within Asia.

At the NSD, therefore, Brecht began to be taught in conjunction with the Kabuki and Noh traditions of Japan. Shozo Sato, for example, was invited to direct *Ibaragi*, a Noh text. It was during these very years that the study of Indian folk theater was also introduced into the NSD curriculum. *Yakshagana* gurus like Shivaram Karanth were invited to direct the students in traditional productions.¹¹

Exciting possibilities were presenting themselves for a cross-fertilization of Brechtian, Asian, and Indian traditions, not only to the students, but to Alkazi himself. This manifested itself in 1975 when Alkazi restaged Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug* (The Age of Blindness). Alkazi had produced this play before, but he now challenged himself to conceive of the same text in an entirely new treatment. Culling elements from Kabuki, Noh, and Brechtian theater to create a presentational style of performance, Alkazi collaborated again with composer Bhatia, who had the experience of both the Weber and Bennewitz productions behind him. Alkazi introduced a formal, Kabuki-like chorus of about twenty persons, who narrated portions of the text through a kind of chanting and spoken/sung treatment. With a cast of over seventy-five performers, the characters of the Mahabharata were costumed in an eclectic mix of traditional Indian and Japanese styles with their faces painted with Kabuki and Kathakali-inspired makeup. Performed in the open air, against the massive, scarred ruins of Delhi's Old Fort, the production assumed epic proportions, and was a precursor to the creation of a new, modern, Pan-Asian aesthetic.

Between 1968 and 1977, then, the NSD was a veritable cauldron, a laboratory where an extraordinary amount of study, research, and practical experimentation was underway, with Indian folk theater, Brechtian, and traditional Asian theater all being explored for contemporary use. In supporting this kind of experimentation Alkazi was claiming multiple international legacies for creating a new contemporary Indian theater, furnishing his students with the requisite tools to shape a future postmodernism in Indian theater.

International Directors and Richard Schechner

We must remember that our Brechtian sources were not limited to those emanating from the GDR alone. The 1970s also saw a small but impressive list of the most avant-garde theater directors and serious academics from the West regularly visiting India to research older Indian performance traditions, to study their structure, training methodologies, their transmission techniques, their relationship to yoga and meditation etc. Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Schechner, Eugenio Barba, Philip Zarelli, Peter Brook, and later Ariane Mnouchkine were very much among them. Their own creative work

and research reflected the close connections between Brecht and traditional Eastern theater. After all, it was Brecht, along with Artaud, who had introduced the West to Eastern traditions to begin with. Our interactions with these foreign directors and scholars helped us to gain a perspective on Brecht, and on how he was being assimilated in a wider international and intercultural context.

One of our most significant and valuable encounters was through Richard Schechner's outstanding production of *Mother Courage*, which he brought to Delhi, Calcutta, and Bombay in 1975. The Brechtian experience this production offered was not cool and rational; it was the reverse. It assaulted the senses, provoking us, the audience, into a tactile encounter with the play's situations, arousing in us a visceral sense of horror and terror. It became evident that this very physical treatment was the director's political gesture. Here was an example of how a "German" text had been transformed by its directorial treatment into a piece of environmental theater that was more a part of the American avant-garde scene of the 1970s than of the East German tradition of classical Brecht productions of the 1950s, which we had been used to. Here we witnessed a powerful intercultural encounter between Brecht and the American avant-garde that became, for us, a lesson on how a text could be opened up and reevaluated for a different time and space.

The response to *Mother Courage* in India excited Schechner tremendously and he returned in 1981 to direct Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* for the Repertory Company of the NSD in Hindi. My husband Nissar Allana designed the sets for this production, while I designed the costumes. Once again this experience became a learning one. Schechner deconstructed the Russian text and, using several Brechtian dramaturgical strategies, combined them with ideas that emanated from the perambulatory, processional nature of an Indian performance tradition, the Ramlila, research into which had been Schechner's preoccupation for decades.¹² Exploring the performance structure of Ramlila and utilizing it in a modern production of Chekhov, Schechner created a piece of environmental theater, where the audience literally moved to different locations for the different acts. Here the physical journey undertaken by the audience across the so-called family estates heightened the sense of the decline and decay of a whole class of landed gentry.

It was becoming evident that an international, intercultural dialogue between our past traditions, Brecht, and the present, was the exciting way forward toward contemporary theater practice.

Indian Productions of Brecht

While the NSD was more or less in the vanguard of the experimentation with Brecht, whereby he was subsumed within a larger Asian/Indian/

international context, there was also a growing interest in Brecht's own texts. Besides Fritz Bennewitz, who was regularly invited to direct a large number of them, many Indian directors too began to experiment with straight translations, while others, in an attempt to make the texts more meaningful to Indian audiences, adapted them as complete cultural appropriations. Using Indian dialects, music, names, geographical references, and rituals, Brecht was relocated into specific and distinctly Indian backgrounds. This extreme "Indianization" of a Brechtian text often led to the criticism that such productions had lost interest in Brecht's radical politics. Others felt that by indigenizing the content of Brecht, we had made him too familiar, so that the element of alienation or "estrangement," so intrinsic to Brecht, had vanished.¹³

Political Theater

But of course there were a growing number of theater practitioners who had begun to commit themselves totally to radical politics. By the mid-1970s the political situation in the country had deteriorated further, with a shift in the equations of caste, class, and gender politics. Growing regional aspirations led to widespread unrest among students and workers, leading the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi, to declare a national state of emergency in 1975. Opposition leaders were arrested, civil liberties suspended, censorship of the press and mass media enforced.

In response, theater activist groups were formed, with Safdar Hasmi (1954–89), for example, establishing the Jan Natya Manch (JANAM) in Delhi. Inspired by the politics of Brecht, Safdar strongly believed that art was a hammer to forge reality, not a mirror to view the degraded state of a capitalist order. He believed that the need of the hour was street theater. Now in response to the state of emergency Safdar wrote one of his first street plays *Kursi Kursi Kursi* (Chair! Chair! Chair!), a criticism of Indira Gandhi's blatant violations of democratic norms. The following year Safdar Hashmi became a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Utpal Dutt

In Bengal Utpal Dutt (1929–93), radical playwright, director, and actor from the 1950s onward, continuously experimented with political theater and perhaps, of all the Indian directors of his generation, he was the one most critically involved in a continuous conversation with Brecht—at times acquiescing to the latter's beliefs, at other times opposing them. These conversations with Brecht appear in a number of essays in the series by Dutt entitled *Towards a Revolutionary Theater*. Nineteen sixty-four saw the Brecht Society of India being established in Calcutta, with Satyajit Ray, the famous film director, as its president and Utpal Dutt, who spoke and wrote German fluently, as the editor of its magazine, *Epic Theater*. Designed by

Satyajit Ray from 1967 onward, the magazine began to serialize *Himmat Mai*, Dutt's Bengali adaptation of Brecht's *Mother Courage*.

Under the banner of his company, "People's Little Theater," Dutt wrote and directed a large number of plays using Indian and world history as resource and site, to reassess, reclaim, and seek redressal of issues affecting the common man. These plays could be considered the fully fledged arrival of a theater of political protest.

Badal Sircar

Another Bengali playwright of distinction, and a contemporary of Utpal Dutt, was Badal Sircar (1925–2011) who succeeded in creating a space for political issues to be discussed in collaboration with the audience. Moving away from proscenium theater, Sircar sought to communicate directly with the audience by creating a common space that audience and actors could share, without the division of the "fourth wall." Working in unfurnished rooms, streets, parks, or village squares and performing without sets, Sircar's ideas were influenced by Brecht, Augusto Boal, and Eugenio Barba, where he fused the strengths of Western-influenced urban theater with the aesthetics of traditional, rural-based theater, and proposed an alternative that he named the "Third Theater" or a "Theater of Synthesis."

Conclusion

Through the 1980s it was clear that artists from different fields— theater, music, dance, painting, poetry, literature—across the nation were seized by a sense of betrayal and loss of idealism and had begun to produce work that could be considered independent India's first self-conscious, and dissenting, subculture. There was no doubt that Brecht had played a tremendous role in this transformative process. Redefining their roles as poets and seers, artists were becoming social agents and participants in the process of self-definition, constructing through their practice a vantage point from which to relate to their own social and political realities.

It is quite extraordinary that over sixty years, through the performances and the publications of Brecht's plays, short stories, poems, and critical writings, available by now in scores of translations and adaptations, in a cross-section of Indian languages, Brecht has been absorbed and accommodated into the very mainstream of contemporary Indian culture. And not just theater, literature, but all the arts. Nalini Malani, the famous Indian woman artist and "theater maker" who has created a sizable body of work that includes paintings, theater pieces, video plays, and large installations based on Brecht and Heiner Müller texts, and who now lives mainly in Paris, says:

You know when I talk about Brecht in the West; people say “what do you have to do with Brecht?” When I tell people about the kind of history that we had in 60s, 70s and 80s, you know, we were in alignment with East European countries and that we had, in Bombay, what was called . . . the People’s Publishing House, where you could buy literature from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union at very, very cheap rates, and the whole set of Brecht, whole sets of the Russian writers—everything was available—so that one could delve into that whole culture, the background of that culture. So, you know, we need to remind people of that history—we have that background.¹⁴

And this was true too for a large number of experimental filmmakers of the same period, like Mani Kaul, Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani, Sayeed Mirza, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Mrinal Sen, and Ketan Mehta. It was Brecht who gave them ideas relating to new cinematic forms—and I quote Ketan Mehta, filmmaker, who refers to this:

I was searching for a form which was not completely geared towards catharsis, one that left scope for triggering of more ideas, and placing questions before the spectator, instead of satisfying them with a given “destiny” that provided no sense of discovery . . . In short, I was searching for a form that “reveals” conditions . . . instead of “dramatizing” them . . . showing the world as “evolving” instead of “static” . . . viewing the human being as a “process,” instead of a “given.” These ideas of Brecht directed not only my own search, but I feel they become important for any filmmaker today.¹⁵

Looking back to that same period, for Gieve Patel, a contemporary painter from Bombay, Brecht was a seminal figure in the evolution of his work. Patel says:

I think that my generation felt the need to address the reality on the streets. In this context Brecht was very important to us . . . a great presence. I used to see whatever Brecht productions that were being performed . . . There was no direct influence on my work, but one imbibes things through osmosis. For instance the political figures in my paintings are just there, they are kind of straight-faced, common, you know . . . which you will find in a Brecht play. When Brecht talks about corruption, it’s not with bleeding morality, but he states it, as a fact! The way that Brecht uses factuality, this is among the things that one imbibed . . .¹⁶

Another painter who felt the deep and intrinsic impact of Brecht was Sudhir Patwardhan, one of the earliest artists of the 1970s to import the local environment of a city like Bombay, its look, its feel, its explicit and encoded

histories, onto the canvas. Sudhir's work centers around the urban industrial worker whom he depicts viscerally, revealing him in situations of dominance and enslavement. These powerful visualizations begin to lose their significance as symbols with universal qualities, and acquire a specificity of class, occupation, region, and ethnicity. Patwardhan says:

I think the element of class is extremely important and it was throughout the 70s, that I was preoccupied with questions like . . . "How do I paint an individual who is also representative of a class, and not reduce that individual's life to his class identity?" Another question was . . . "Since I am an outsider, not belonging to the class I depict, do I have the right to be the spokesperson of that class?" So these were the questions one raised . . . about what gives you the right?

And then he continues:

Also somewhere along the line, one began to feel that one needed to put some distance, between what one felt and the way in which the world had to be represented, and this, I think came from Brecht. The artist's response . . . his emotional response, his involvement, sympathy, empathy . . . all these go into a work, but this is not what the work is actually about. The artist's actual work is to work out the relationship between the artist and society . . ., between different elements in society, so that one can bring to the artwork multiple viewpoints, multiple voices or multiple perspectives . . . and this idea is Brecht's.¹⁷

I will conclude with one last quote from Nalini Malani, the woman artist whom I referred to earlier. When I met her a few weeks back, I asked her, "is Brecht still relevant to you?" And her answer was, "You know what people like Brecht, who are relevant, do? They simply . . . release their ideas into the future."¹⁸

Notes

¹ Manifesto of the All India Writers' Association, adopted at the Foundation Conference in Lucknow, 1936.

² Malini Bhattacharya, "The IPTA in Bengal," *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 2 (Jan.–March 1983): 9.

³ Samik Bandyopadhaya at a seminar entitled *Bertolt Brecht '80, 1898–1978*, organized by Max Mueller Bhawan and ICCR, Calcutta.

⁴ Vasudha Dalmia, *Poetics, Plays and Performances: The Politics of Modern Indian Theater* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 261.

⁵ The "Theater of Roots" describes a phase from the mid-1960s onward, when for close to two decades there was a shift away from the Western three-act form of

realistic drama and a concurrent attempt to relocate contemporary Indian theater within its own, indigenous lineage.

⁶ Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst established the medieval Dartington Hall as a charitable trust in 1935 and invited artists, entrepreneurs, and activists from across the globe to develop sustainable ways of enriching life through the arts.

⁷ Alkazi interviewed by Reeta Sondhi for *Enact*, nos. 169–71, 1978.

⁸ Alkazi at a “Roundtable Seminar on the Contemporary Relevance of Folk Theater,” SNA, New Delhi, 1971.

⁹ Ebrahim Alkazi interviewed by Nissim Ezekiel, *Indian Express*, January 17, 1971.

¹⁰ This talk was based on Lothar Lütze’s essay, “Indian Classical Drama in the Light of Bertolt Brecht’s Dramatic Theory and Practice,” in *Yearbook 1962* (New Delhi: Max Mueller Bhavan, 1962).

¹¹ Yakshagana is a traditional theater form that combines dance, music, dialogue, costume, makeup, and stage techniques with a unique style and form, found mainly in the coastal districts of Karnataka, India.

¹² Ramlila (literally “Rama’s lila or play”) is a dramatic folk reenactment of the life of Rama, ending in a ten-day battle between Rama and Ravana, as described in the Hindu religious epic, the *Ramayana*.

¹³ Arun Naik, “Brechtian Experiment in Marathi,” *Enact* 145/146 (Jan./Feb. 1979): 13.

¹⁴ Nalini Malani, artist and theater maker, interviewed by Amal Allana, March / April, 2016, Mumbai.

¹⁵ “Ketan Mehta on Bhavani Bhavai,” *Journal of Arts and Ideas* (1981): 53.

¹⁶ Gieve Patel, interviewed by Amal Allana, March / April, 2016, Mumbai.

¹⁷ Sudhir Patwardhan, interviewed by Amal Allana, March / April, 2016, Mumbai.

¹⁸ Nalini Malani, interviewed by Amal Allana, March / April, 2016, Mumbai.

Ost trifft Ost: Recycling Brecht in Indien

Dieser Artikel untersucht die entscheidende Rolle der Brecht'schen Ästhetik in den späten 1960ern und frühen 1970ern bei der Erschaffung einer neuen Richtung des politischen Theaters in Indien. Meine Hypothese ist, dass die Entstehung dieser neuen Variante ein Resultat der Erschaffung eines "theatralischen Idioms" im Gestischen Realismus durch das Recycling der Brecht'schen Ästhetik war. Ich untersuche ein solches Beispiel der Brecht'schen Ästhetik—den Gestus, ein Brecht'sches Stilmittel das eine Verbindung zwischen Körper, Geschichte und Gesellschaft herstellt. Während ich zum Einen die Rolle betone, die der Gestische Realismus spielt, schlage ich darüber hinaus vor, dass das Stilmittel des Gestus abhängig ist von den sozialen und politischen Kontexten des Zielpublikums, was heißt, dass die indische Version des Brecht'schen Theaters sich weiterhin in eine neue und unterschiedliche Richtung im Vergleich zu ihrem europäischen Gegenstück entwickeln wird. Anhand der Aufführung von *Teen Take Ka Swang* (Die Dreigroschenoper, 1970) vom ostdeutschen Regisseur Fritz Bennewitz problematisiert und erweitert dieser Artikel den Bereich der Brecht-Forschung in Indien. Allgemein gesprochen analysiert der Artikel die Fähigkeiten des Recyclings, den Diskurs der Peripherie angemessen zum Ausdruck zu bringen.

This paper probes the crucial role of Brechtian aesthetics between the late 1960s and early 1970s in creating a new strain of political theater in India. I argue that the formation of this new variant was the result of the creation of a "theatrical idiom" of *Gestic* Realism through the recycling of Brechtian aesthetics. I examine one such instance of Brechtian aesthetics—that is, of *Gestus*, a Brechtian device that establishes a nexus between body, history, and society. Besides underscoring the role played by Gestic Realism, I further propose that the device of *Gestus* is dependent on the social and political contexts of the target audience, which means that the Indian version of Brechtian theater will continue to swerve into something new and different from its European counterpart. Drawing upon the performance of *Teen Take Ka Swang* (*The Threepenny Opera*, 1970) by the East German director, Fritz Bennewitz, the paper problematizes and expands the purview of Brechtian scholarship in India. Broadly, the paper examines the capacity of recycling to articulate the discourse of the periphery.

East Meets East: Recycling Brecht in India

Prateek

In this paper, I argue that between the late 1960s and early 1970s, Brechtian theater in India should be understood as the name for a form of political theater that instilled the ideal and the practice of political aesthetics into the fabric of Indian theater.¹ I propose that this politicization of Indian theater was the result of the creation of a new “theatrical idiom” of *Gestic Realism* through the implementation of Brechtian aesthetics.² The idiom of Brecht’s *Gestic Realism* goes beyond a photographic reproduction of an immediate reality and it encourages the activity of unmasking society’s hidden causal complexities. In contrast to realism and naturalism, where ideology is hidden or covert, Brecht’s *Gestic Realism* makes ideology visible by “revealing the causal complex of society/unmasking the ruling viewpoints as the viewpoints of the rulers/writing from the standpoint of the class that has in readiness the broadest solutions for the most urgent difficulties besetting human society/emphasizing the factory of development/concretely and making it possible to abstract.”³ In the Indian context, this idiom of *Gestic Realism* was significant on two counts. First, it differed from the prevalent conventions of political theater in India, which were either Socialist Realist (content-based) or naturalistic (mimetic). Second, the “unstageability” of certain aspects of *Gestic Realism* provided both a resistance to the bourgeois institution of theater, which according to Brecht “can stage anything: it ‘theatricalizes’ it all,” and a sense of recognition to the Indian audience.⁴ If this resistance was due to the aesthetics of *Gestic Realism*, which got produced in the psyche of the activated audience rather than onstage, then the recognition was primarily because of a connection between *Gestic Realism* and the “poetic realism” of traditional Indian theater.⁵ I analyze one such instance of Brechtian aesthetics—that is, of *Gestus*, a Brechtian device that establishes a “visible connection” between “the actor’s body” and its relationship with “social contexts.”⁶ Besides highlighting the formation of a new theatrical idiom through this analysis of *Gestus*, I argue that the device of *Gestus* is dependent on the social and political contexts of the target audience, which means that the Indian version of Brechtian theater will continue to be different from its European counterpart. Importantly, the Indian production requires a new *Gestus* that remains comprehensible to the local audience. Drawing upon insights from Fritz Bennewitz’s *Teen Take Ka Swang* (The Threepenny Opera, 1970), his first adaptation

of Brecht in India, I propose that the Brechtian device of *Gestus* played a crucial role in creating both a new variant of political theater in India and an Indian version of Brechtian theater. Although Bennewitz—the resident director at the Deutsches Nationaltheater between 1960 and 1990 in the East German city of Weimar, German Democratic Republic (GDR)—was the second German director (Carl Weber was the first one) to come to India to disseminate Brechtian theater, I have chosen his production partly because he was the first one to introduce the “proper” method of adapting Brecht as Indian actors learned the art of how to implement Brechtian aesthetics such as *Gestus*.⁷ I selected Bennewitz partly because he understood the nuances of cultural and historical sensitivity, and wrote in favor of them. In many of his interviews, he discussed the idea of embedding the dramatic text within the context of the country of production. In one interview, he confirmed that the role of his theater was to offer an “experience” to the audience based upon its own “social, cultural, ethnic development.”⁸ Focusing on his productions in India, he articulated in another interview his idea of “integration” or “assimilation” of the dramatic text into the specific contexts of India, when he noted that integration means “absorbing the play by the Indian social and cultural sensitiveness.”⁹ Rolf Rohmer marked out this aspect of Bennewitz’s vision when he called his theater a “historically aware” phenomenon with the power to influence society.¹⁰ This theatrical vision allowed Bennewitz to incorporate the cultural and political contexts of the target audience. It is surprising that until now there has been no sustained study of Brechtian aesthetics and how it reformed the idea of political theater in India.

Before I begin with my investigation of how the dissemination of the new “theatrical idiom” of Gestic Realism created both a new variant of political theater in India and an Indian variant of Brechtian theater, let me clarify my usage of the term “recycling” in the subtitle and how it links to the project of Brechtian theater in India. The verb “recycling” was coined in 1922 to refer to the industrial process of making something “new” from the old, and in its evolutionary trajectory it eventually came to be associated with “waste material” within the cultural logic of late capitalism. Extending this connection of recycling with “waste” and “new” in the context of Brechtian theater in India, two obvious sites of deliberation are: has the circulation of Brechtian theater been a “waste” or has it succeeded in formulating a revolutionary political aesthetics?; and, is the relation between the “new” (Indian strain of Brechtian theater) and the old product hierarchical? Rather than presenting recycling in its most recognized cliché avatar associated with “resemblance,” I argue that, in the Indian context, this relation is of what Michel Foucault calls similarity. Elucidating on this relation, Foucault writes:

Resemblance presupposes a primary reference that prescribes and classes. The similar develops in series that have neither beginning nor

end, that can be followed in one direction as easily as in another, that obey no hierarchy, but propagate themselves from small differences among small differences. Resemblance serves representation, which rules over it; similitude serves repetition, which ranges across it.¹¹

It was this free play of interpretation rather than the re-presentation of the old that allowed the Indian variant to be politically relevant while it communicated with the social and cultural contexts of the target audiences. Building on this idea of similarity, I propose that this act of recycling of Brechtian theater in India was carried out through a repetition that is “less than one and double” (to borrow a phrase from Homi Bhabha).¹² Bhabha used this phrase to indicate the spread of knowledge disseminated by the British in colonial India and how this knowledge was articulated “syntagmatically with a range of differential knowledges and positionalities that both estrange its ‘identity’ and produce new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power.”¹³ I argue that Bhabha’s model of the dissemination of knowledge can be extended to understand the dynamics of recycling in the circulation of Brechtian aesthetics in India. In proximity with this model of recycling, I demonstrate how differential knowledges and positionalities present in the Indian sub-continent transformed Brechtian theater and gave rise to the Indian variant. Additionally, I show that the recycling of Brecht in India was not wasteful but created new sites of resistance. The recycling of Brechtian aesthetics was important because in the modern world of advanced capitalism, a new way of representation grounded in social science needs to be developed: human relations have become reified and the old method of directly representing the outside reality will not work. Therefore, I see “recycling” as an act of unleashing the discourse of periphery (Indian variant of Brechtian theater) that challenges the universality and absoluteness of a mainstream narrative. Thus for me, the term “to recycle” (in its verb form) refers to the process of embedding the Eurocentric discourse within a particular historical and political context of India—that is, peripheralizing the mainstream—to create pockets of resistance. In other words, this discourse is similar to what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls “provincializing.” Chakrabarty addresses the concept of “provincializing” while examining the question of how the mythical figure of Europe is taken to be the original site of the modern in non-Western countries. Thus, “to provincialize Europe was then to know how universalistic thought was always and already modified by particular histories, whether or not we could excavate such pasts fully.”¹⁴ Using the discourse of recycling within the orbit of Brecht, I argue that the very notion of Brechtian theater is larger than what Brecht wrote and thought. In this paper, I plan to “provincialize” Brechtian theater, that is, to theorize how Brechtian theater is a product of “particular” intellectual and historical traditions, rather than

a “universal” category that is resistant to particular histories. Throughout my investigation of *Gestus*, an aesthetic unit of Brechtian theater, I explore Brechtian theater as a “concept” rather than a self-evident object. Obviously Brecht did not write about India or in India and even when adapted in India something was transformed, challenged, reinflected, and rethought. Not surprisingly, Brechtian theater in India is not a mirror image of its German brethren. It is necessary to briefly map the trajectory of existent political theater in India, as I do it in the first section, because then it becomes easier to see how the introduction of Gestic Realism contributed to the formation of a new strain of political theater in India.

I

Political theater as a concept emerged very early in India during the colonial period, when it was used as a vehicle to resist colonial discourse. The first important drama of social protest was Dinabandhu Mitra’s Bengali play, *Nil Darpan* (published in 1860). The play dramatizes the merciless treatment of Bengali indigo planters by the British planters as they were forced to sow indigo in their fields. The play evoked public emotions “in Bengal against British rule and paved the way for a host of patriotic works written along similar lines elsewhere in the country.”¹⁵ One such patriotic work, which was one of the earliest examples of political theater in the Hindi belt, was Bharatendu Harishchandra’s 1881 political allegory *Andheri Nagari* (Dark City). Unlike *Nil Darpan*, which directly criticized the British planters by depicting the plight of the farmers, Harishchandra in his play allegorized the harrowing condition of India under British rule by depicting the fate met by a guru’s disciple in a strange dark city, a reference to India under colonial rule. The play was written in the melodramatic style of the Parsi theater, which was well-suited for propaganda theater. Harishchandra was probably inspired to use veiled allegory to propagate nationalism because of the implementation of the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876 and the Vernacular Press Act of 1878 by the British.¹⁶

If the first wave of political theater in the Hindi belt employed allegory using the conventions of melodrama, then the second wave dealt with realism—especially Socialist Realism.¹⁷ Richmond underlines this shift when he comments that “[u]ndoubtedly, the triumph of Socialist Realism in Russian art and literature during the previous decade stimulated sympathetic Indian playwrights and producers.”¹⁸ The Indian People’s Theatre Association (hereafter IPTA), founded in 1943 as the cultural wing of the Communist Party of India, facilitated this transition since it helped in promoting the dissemination of Socialist Realism. The major success of this phase was Bijon Bhattacharya’s Bengali drama, *Nabanna*, staged by IPTA in 1944. The performance’s theme was the Bengal famine of 1943, in which millions of Indians died. One of the chief strategies employed by IPTA “for

making political propaganda palatable to the common people was to garb it in the familiar forms of traditional theater of a region.”¹⁹ In her article, published in this issue of the journal, Amal Allana, a theater director and also an assistant director of the production of *The Threepenny Opera* (1970), has underlined the significance of the IPTA in disseminating the idea of political theater in colonial India. However, the IPTA, which seemed to be the driving force behind the political theater, dwindled with independence and the rise of Indian nation-state. Nandi Bhatia elaborates in her study of the IPTA that, “at a time of nation building in the life of the newly independent nation, all cultural productions that appeared to be subversive or political were obliterated from state-controlled university curricula and various government-funded cultural organizations. It is no coincidence that at this juncture, the trends of New Criticism and modernism were taken to be ideally constituted for defining culture.”²⁰

Bhatia’s reflection on the IPTA was indicative of the change that came in postcolonial India. Under this new climate, loyalties and allegiances changed. Discussing one instance of such change, Qamar Azad Hashmi, the mother of slain theater activist Safdar Hashmi reveals that:

Unfortunately a section of the left-wing intellectual and political workers, who had played a prominent role in these [anti-imperialist] movements, chose, after Independence, to become the right hand of the ruling Congress party. Accepting commendatory copper plaques and other benefits doled out by the government to erstwhile “freedom fighters,” they sought compensation for their sacrifices during the struggle, compromising more and more with the ruling party as the years went by.²¹

In the wake of this dwindling of old forms of political theater, postcolonial Indian playwrights sought a new political form to help them in what Bhabha calls “narrating the nation.”²² Bennewitz’s introduction of Brechtian aesthetics provided an answer to the quest for this new political form. Perhaps the interest in this new aesthetics was the result of its resemblance with the precolonial traditions of India. Balwant Gargi, an Indian theater director who met Brecht, recounts this similarity when he writes: “[w]hile watching Brecht’s theatrical devices, they were discovering the wealth of their own tradition and neglected folk forms.”²³ Moreover, the Gestic Realism of Brechtian theater resembled the poetic realism of Indian theater in its stand against the naturalistic theater: “[t]he most important problem of the modern era in the theater, however, is the basic contradiction between the symbolism of the Indian heritage in drama, with its poetic realism, and the naturalism of the Western theatre which percolated into India, devoid of its own organic sensibility, poetry and mechanical perfection.”²⁴

These similarities did not escape the notice of Ebrahim Alkazi, the director of the National School of Drama. Contextualizing the usefulness of

Brecht and his strategies to create a politically sensitive theater in India, he averred in his speech in the Brecht *Dialog* of 1968 that “[j]t is my personal belief that Lenin, Brecht and Gandhi will go down in history as the three greatest personalities of the twentieth century.”²⁵ Equating Gandhi further with Brecht he observed that “[b]oth had implicit faith in the working class and peasants and identified with ordinary people and also with illiterates.”²⁶ Finally, he presented both Gandhi and Brecht as the champions of “brotherhood and humanity.”²⁷ Impressed by the function of Brechtian theater to address the larger sociopolitical issues, Alkazi ensured that Indian theater got to engage with Brechtian theater by inviting Bennewitz. As Bennewitz remembers: “the concept was aired to bring Brecht’s concept and method of theater together with the traditional theater of Asia, Africa, Latin America. Under those auspices, I came first to India in 1970 on a production-oriented workshop at the National School of Drama.”²⁸ It is evident from these observations by Indian writers and theater directors that the fascination for Brechtian aesthetics began as a romantic exercise to articulate the importance of the nation-state by revisiting the lost precolonial traditions. However, as I show in the next section, it took the form of a critique of the nation-state and its incapability to eradicate social problems and evils such as poverty and the dowry system. That would probably have been the reason for the choice of *The Threepenny Opera* that remained associated with the climate of anxiety and disaster. In regard to the need for an American production of *The Threepenny Opera*, the cultural critic Theodor Adorno, in a 1942 letter to Kurt Weill, the music composer of the original production, writes that America was “not yet ready to accept the authentic *Dreigroschenoper*, which is inseparably tied to a climate of crisis.”²⁹ Despite *The Threepenny Opera*’s initial topicality, it was easy to transfer to the historical and cultural backgrounds of India. Like England, India had a stratified class system as the poor suffered and the rich lived happily. As an aftermath of two major wars—one with China in 1962 and the other with Pakistan in 1965—the late sixties in India were a climate of political ferment. Both these wars had a disastrous impact on India’s economic growth, which was compounded by famines in which thousands died. The food shortages that followed in the wake of famines triggered armed uprisings of poor peasants in Naxalbari and adjoining areas. Politically, the 1960s marked the collapse of an era of hope that came with independence in 1947 and the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, in particular, who died in 1964. The country, on account of inflation, political unrest, and famines, found itself amid poverty that remained widespread and deep.

Importantly, the new aesthetics was both suited for social critique and went beyond the tradition of Socialist Realism, which seemed to lose its appeal both after the death of Stalin in 1953 and the demise of the IPTA in 1949. The introduction of this aesthetics based on Brecht’s principles was significant because it marked a formation of a variant of political

theater that drifted away from the ideals of Socialist Realism, which was defined by Adorno as “boy meets tractor literature.”³⁰ Moreover, the importance of this new political theater can be gauged from the fact that this was the first time since independence in 1947 when a director politicized the proscenium through poetics rather than through the content of the play. This means that unlike the theater based on Socialist Realism, the new Indian political theater based on Brechtian aesthetics was not, primarily, a content-based phenomenon built upon the principles of the agitprop theater of the Soviet Union. In contrast to this propagandist form of political theater, it deployed aesthetics as his chosen weapon to generate resistance. This resistance worked on two levels. First, it opposed the social injustices perceived as responsible for society’s problems, such as capitalism and poverty. Second, it resisted the mechanics of bourgeois theater—that is, it revolutionized the theater apparatus by moving away from mimetic representation strategies. Tellingly, it enabled a critique of society through the presentation of content using Brechtian aesthetics. Brecht himself underscored this power of form in his refusal to separate form from content. The Brecht-Lukács debate of the 1930s was a good example of Brecht’s commitment to poetics.³¹ Specifically in the context of the play, Brecht has commented that “*The Threepenny Opera* engages with bourgeois ideas not only as content, in that it represents them, but also through the way it represents them.”³² For Brecht, the aesthetic form of Gestic Realism was as radically political as the content of the play and without its existence Epic Theater couldn’t be staged.

Having underlined both the critical turn that came in Indian political aesthetics in the wake of Bennewitz’s introduction of Gestic Realism, and the importance of this turn in postcolonial India, in the next section I examine the production and demonstrate how Gestic Realism was incorporated.

II

The first three performances of *Teen Take Ka Swang* took place on April 13, 14, and 15, 1970, and were the outcome of a two-month-long production workshop conducted by Bennewitz between February 19, 1970 and April 12, 1970, with the students of the National School of Drama. The play was translated into Urdu through the combined efforts of Surekha Sikri and Sheila Bhatia, who translated the prose and songs respectively. I provide a quick description of the performance and show that despite its resemblance to the original production, which was directed by Erich Engel and stage-designed by Caspar Neher on August 31, 1928, it remained a variant of it.

Neither the setting of the play, the Victorian neighborhood of Soho in London, nor the names of the characters were Indianized. Furthermore, the costumes remained almost loyal to the original production as male characters wore black tuxedos, bow ties, and hats, and women wore skirts or

half-pants along with beach hats. The resemblance between this production and the original at the level of vestimentary practices (including the wedding dress worn by Polly) and setting were obvious. Despite these resemblances between the two productions, my analysis of a photograph of the marriage scene in the Indian production, where Macheath carries the bride in his arms, presents a significant difference. Importantly, this scene critiqued the bourgeois system through “a series of pregnant moments [or *Gestus*]” (to borrow the words of Roland Barthes).³³ On analyzing the performance text, we find the persistence of the dramatic device of *Gestus* and how it remained central to the process of recycling. Particularly, I look at three such pregnant moments—the “bodily gesture” of holding the bride, the “physical posture” of holding the lantern, and the “visual gesture” of looking at the audience—to highlight Bennewitz’s use of *Gestus*. The overall picture that emerged out of this scene with Bennewitz’s implementation of *Gestus* was of pervasive commodification of human relations. Moreover, the use of *Gestus*, a non-mimetic device, contributed to the creation of a new “theatrical idiom.” Altogether, the study of gestural system is an articulation of the process of recycling.

Importantly, Bennewitz’s representation of the marriage scene clearly highlighted what Brecht called “an intimate connection between sentiment and swindle.”³⁴ The photograph of this scene, published in the book *The Theatre of E. Alkazi*, exhibits a stage that is set at an angle that marks a clear split between the background and foreground.³⁵ The foreground highlights a crest portraying a unicorn and a panther on the wooden palette. The background presents Mackie Messer, aka Macheath, carrying his bride Polly Peachum over the threshold in her wedding dress, along with one of his gang members. The gang member stares at the bride while holding a lantern in one hand in a self-conscious, stylized manner, and a gun in the other. Unlike the gang member, Macheath looks attentively at the audience. What is interesting about the scene is the economy of the props (only crest and table) on the stage, and how these props contribute to the larger arc of the *Fabel*, which is in accord with Brecht’s note in 1931: “the bourgeoisie suffer from a delusion that explains their fondness for robbers: that a robber is not a bourgeois.”³⁶ The set, with its limited use of the props, did not create a truthful view of real life, but a view in which reality was “depicted in quotation marks” (to use a phrase from Bradley) as the audience found itself face to face with the newly married bride and her husband on the stage.³⁷ Significantly, Bennewitz’s use of the wood with minimalist props defied the conventions of illusionistic theater, as the set resembled the acting space of the studio rather than the real location. Not only did it work well to aesthetically distance the audience but it also articulated the original setting of Brecht’s play inside the stable.

The crest, visible both on the wooden palette and table, worked like an insignia of some bourgeois enterprise. It seems that Macheath, in the

background, was placed to play the role of a seasoned employee of this bourgeois enterprise who knew how to present the commodity to the audience/buyers. One such buyer in the scene was Macheath's gang member, while the bride herself was the commodity on display. Bennewitz amplified the gesture of commodifying human relations by letting Macheath carry the bride in his arms as if she were an object to be auctioned by a seasoned salesman of some bourgeois organization. Clearly, in the Indian context, the gesture of holding the bride, especially in the wake of the lantern and Macheath's gaze, arrested and unsettled the narrative. With this gesture, the postcolonial intertext of Brecht's play was fully embedded in the immediate cultural and political contexts of India, and it was fully intelligible in the particular cultural language of its audience, and thus it was "both a version of the Western original(s) and a self-sufficient performance vehicle in its own right."³⁸ Not surprisingly, the gesture would have been immediately recognized by the audiences who were aware of the social evil of the dowry system. Simply put, dowry is the money or gifts offered to the groom by the bride or her relatives for the marriage. Paradoxically, rather than buying her a subject position and a higher status in the social hierarchy, the act of dowry transforms a woman into a commodity and an inferior human being. This apparent paradox at the heart of the dowry system can be explained: "[t]he idea of the bride being acquired . . . as a gift (along with her *daaj* [dowry]) . . . underscores the unambiguous construction of the woman as movable property in marriage. It is this reification of woman . . . as gift . . . that makes all bridgetakers in some sense superior to all bridegivers."³⁹

Furthermore, it is the presence of money in its transactional avatar that turns the sacred activity of marriage into a bourgeois undertaking. Although the Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in 1961 in India, it couldn't contain the rampant growth of the social evil. A newspaper article in an English daily in India in 1969 clearly states that "[i]n India when parents plan the marriage of their ward, the question of dowry remains an indispensable factor in the settlement of such arranged marriages."⁴⁰ Moreover, the theme of dowry remained one of the chosen topics of discussion in Bollywood movies, which were known to Bennewitz as he mentioned to his partner Waltraut Mertes in his letter of February 20, 1970, that Bollywood movies are "very important for me because I will get to learn about Indian life . . . for example, about religious morals, castes, etc."⁴¹ Explicating the role of this scene, Brecht in his "Notes on the *Threepenny Opera*" points out that,

it is important here to show how the bride, in all her carnality, is put on display just at the moment when she is definitively reserved for one purchaser. In other words, just as the supply is about to be cut off, the demand must be pushed back up as high as it will go, one last time. The bride is coveted by everybody, but the bridegroom is "the lucky winner."⁴²

So with the *Gestus* of holding the bride, Bennewitz symbolized the triumph of the stylized gesture over the metaphysical meaning of marriage. This victory was significant because it allowed Bennewitz to highlight the bourgeois character of marriage.

To further augment this commodification of human relations and a swerve toward the capitalist nature of marriage, Bennewitz constructed the figure of the buyer in the scene with a lantern. Unlike the gesture of holding the bride in his hands, the “posture” (*Gestus*) of holding a lantern demonstrated a greater degree of ambiguity in terms of its signification. Brecht in the play never mentioned lanterns, and the most accessible adaptation of the play, in the form of G. W. Pabst’s film version, used a candelabrum to create the Victorian world of Soho. So what inspired Bennewitz to use the lantern over the candelabrum? I argue that this change typified the urge to sing a new song; a song that wanted to articulate a view beyond the essence of the Western model of Brechtian theater. This change was important to facilitate the reenactment of Brecht in India on two accounts. First, it articulated the socioeconomic conditions of the country since lanterns were widely in use in 1960s India, while the use of candelabra was uncommon. Second, the production deliberately refused to mythologize the grandeur of the original, and thus reshaped the discourse of recycling along the line of similarity rather than resemblance. Irrespective of this change, the attack on bourgeois values continued with the help of the *Gestus* of posture. One thing that can be assumed from the bandit’s posture as he holds the lantern was that he wants to illuminate the bride as if checking the genuineness of the object. In other words, the lantern’s light was used to calculate the worth of the bride, who was intelligently framed by Bennewitz to be just an object on display. Importantly, the significance of the posture allowed the lantern to become more than just a lamp, as Bennewitz linked the use of the lantern to sociopolitical circumstances. Within the context of this pose, the lantern functioned more like the magnifying glass in Victorian literature, in which a popular trope involved miserly aristocrats using the device to calculate their coins. Thus, the bandit’s act of holding the lantern to test the worth of the bride de-individualized him and connected him to the social actions of the bourgeois class. Moreover, this heightened use of *Gestus* pointed toward the antinaturalistic aspect of the performance, and helped in the creation of a new “theatrical idiom.”

The eschewal of metaphysical tendencies associated with marriage continued with the “visual gesture” of seeing, which foregrounded the idea of what Brecht calls “complex seeing.”⁴³ Strangely, in all the surviving photographs of the production, Macheath is found to be gazing at the audience rather than looking toward other characters on stage. I propose that the gaze of Macheath, another example of *Gestus*, imparted a new meaning to the Brechtian text in both its acts—of breaking the fourth wall and

“the destitution of the old myths of ‘depth’” (to borrow a phrase from Alain Robbe-Grillet).⁴⁴ Importantly, while Brecht never used the gaze as a *Gestus* in his production of the play, Bennewitz used it to question and activate the audience members by bringing them back to “real” things rather than letting them burrow deeper into some metaphysical and transcendental world of marriage related to the old myths of depth. Therefore, the *Gestus* of gaze was structured to decimate the traditional role of the artist—one who unravels some fragment of a disconcerting secret after descending into “the abyss of human passions”⁴⁵—and to remind the audience of the connection between their miseries and ruling viewpoints.

Significantly, Bennewitz’s use of the direct gaze bestowed upon Macheath a chorus-like quality. This quality of not being involved deeply in the events onstage made him a heightened example of Brecht’s idea of a chorus. By offering a good example of the active consumer on stage, it seems that Macheath in Bennewitz’s performance became qualified to “call on spectators to free themselves from the world represented on stage and from the representation itself.”⁴⁶ Although Brecht did not do something similar in his production, in his “Notes on the Mother” (1933) he advises that “to combat the process of ‘free’ association and to prevent the spectator becoming ‘immersed’ in the events on stage, small choruses can be positioned around the auditorium to demonstrate the correct attitude to the spectators and invite them to form opinions, call upon their own experience, and exercise control.”⁴⁷ With this act of looking at the audience rather than looking at the newly acquired possession of his wife, Macheath created a powerful instance of *Gestus*, which clearly posed the question: who is to be blamed for this condition of women in particular and society in general? Strategically, Macheath didn’t answer this question, but rather looked at the audience. The denouement of the moment was certainly Macheath’s gaze, which differed from those of the other actors in that it was directed toward the audience. Perhaps the gaze stripped the marriage of all transcendental meanings and adjectives, which projected it as a “holy” and “divine” union of two souls, by positioning it as just another form of bourgeois transaction. Therefore, the gaze took exception to “adjectival mania”—a desire for the psychological framing of characters—that still remained a dominant mode in the Indian theater of the 1960s.⁴⁸ So this visual act of gaze “alienated” the audience by defying the widely circulated and most acknowledged image of marriage as an institution associated with piety. Interestingly, Bollywood played an important role in solidly establishing this relation of marriage with righteousness. Clearly, the gaze underscored a non-prescriptive nature since it did not offer one way of looking at things but forced the audiences to think for themselves. Brecht was known for offering this approach as we have noticed in the essay “Friedrich Wolf–Bert Brecht: Formal Problems Arising from the Theatre’s New Content” (1949):

Now you may say: I [Brecht] use my art to represent conditions just as objectively and forcefully as they are in real life, and so I force the spectators themselves to decide between good and evil. You, Wolf, start by putting your finger on the sore point even on the stage; you transfer the decision to the stage, and this is too painful a method for the present day audience to hear.⁴⁹

Through his deep and emotionless gaze, Macheath extended the question to the audience as to who should be blamed. One reviewer could understand the power of the gaze when he wrote: “The whores of Old-Delhi sit in their filthy holes at G.B. Street [a street notorious as the red light district in Delhi]. It may well be that they also fear their Tiger Browns and love their Mackies, it may well be that Brecht—like it says in the playbill—has something to say to Indians.”⁵⁰ Significantly, the empowered gaze worked to erase the fine distinction between the audience’s self and Macheath’s Other. It became a trigger announcing the imminent crisis of civilization should the audience fail to prevent this occurrence. Furthermore, this spectacular, questioning gaze enabled Bennewitz to generate a politically sensitive dramatic text; that is, “a kind of report on the aspects of life that spectators wish to see on stage.”⁵¹ Moreover, “alongside these aspects, spectators also see plenty of things they do not wish to see—they see their wishes not only fulfilled, therefore, but also criticized (they see themselves not as subjects but as objects), and this theoretically puts them in a position to confer a new function on the theatre.”⁵² This analysis of the production has equipped us with three instances of *Gestus* by which Brecht was localized and politicized in India. Moreover, the introduction of Gestic Realism by Bennewitz helped in questioning the Western tradition of naturalism, which came to India with colonization, and in bringing the new theater closer to the poetic realism of traditional Indian theater.

In summation, this paper underlines the unstable character of universal definitions like that of Brechtian theater in its attempt to articulate the discourse of the periphery. In its act of selective repetition—“less than one and double”—the recycled variant of Brechtian theater enacted resistance and challenged ideas that tend to maintain that Brechtian theater exhausted its possibilities in 1970s India. The recycling of Brechtian theater in general and *Gestus* in particular in India was significant because first it helped in the introduction of a new theatrical idiom, which in turn formed a non-mimetic strand of political theater in India. Second, by showcasing the culturally specific nature of *Gestus*, I have demonstrated how Brechtian theater in India is more than the site of derivation and passive influence; it is a site of innovation and free will. Altogether, this paper has recounted challenges to the clichéd definition of recycling by reading recycling as a Foucauldian act of “charged” similarity rather than “dispiriting” resemblance.

Notes

I would like to thank the University of Queensland for the Graduate School International Travel Award, which allowed me to spend a term at the University of Oxford while researching this article. I am also thankful to the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, University of Oxford, for providing me with the resources and allowing me to attend the Brecht seminar convened by Professors Tom Kuhn and Marc Silberman.

¹ Throughout the paper, by India I refer to the Hindi belt that extends through North India from Rajasthan to Bihar. I focus on the Hindi belt primarily because the influence of Brechtian theater has been underanalyzed here.

² Since the paper explores the use of *Gestus* in the Indian context, I prefer *Gestic Realism* over other similar terms in circulation such as cognitive realism.

³ Bertolt Brecht, "The Popular and the Realistic," in Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Tom Kuhn, eds., *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 203.

⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "Notes on *The Threepenny Opera*," in *Brecht on Theatre*, 71.

⁵ The term "poetic realism" encodes the primary ideal of traditional Indian theater, according to which, Indian theater is "a poetic art, concerned to interpret life and not to copy life." Mulk Raj Anand, "Indian Theatre in the Context of the World Theatre," in *Indian Drama in Retrospect* (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 2007), 282.

⁶ David Barnett, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 95.

⁷ Uttara Baokar, the actor who worked with both directors, highlights this fact when she reveals that "[a]ctually, in the first Brecht play, [Weber's] *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, in which I played the role of Grusha, I didn't really come to grips with the practical side of the theory at all . . . So it was as Polly Peachum [in Bennewitz's production of *The Threepenny Opera*] that I finally understood in practice what I had known in theory all along." Uttara Baokar, "Uttara Baokar: A Spirit of Endurance," in Amal Allana, ed., *The Act of Becoming: Actors Talk* (Delhi: National School of Drama, 2013), 206–10.

⁸ Geeta Lal, "Theatre for the Masses: Interview with Fritz Bennewitz," *Hindustan Times*, March 27, 1983, 6.

⁹ Fritz Bennewitz, "Some Notes on Experiences and Methods of Intercultural Cooperation on Stage with my Indian Counterparts," 1989, AO-G 07: Texte von Fritz Bennewitz, Fritz Bennewitz Archive, Leipzig, 2.

¹⁰ Rolf Rohmer, "Approaching Interculturalism with Brecht: Fritz Bennewitz's Theater Work in Asia," *Brecht Yearbook* 36 (2012): 297.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. and ed. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 44.

¹² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 139.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), xiv.

¹⁵ Farley Richmond, "The Political Role of Theatre in India," *Educational Theatre Journal* 25, no. 3 (1973): 319.

¹⁶ The first of these acts was to police anti-colonial Indian theater, the second to better control Indian language newspapers and scripts.

¹⁷ The term "Socialist Realism" was coined in 1932 though it came into currency only after the 1934 All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. The doctrine of Socialist Realism remained associated with the task of educating working classes in the spirit of socialism. It gained enormous momentum under the aegis of the secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, Andrei Zhdanov.

¹⁸ Richmond, "The Political Role," 322.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 324.

²⁰ Nandi Bhatia, *Acts of Authority, Acts of Resistance: Theater and Politics in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 92.

²¹ Qamar Azad Hashmi, *The Fifth Flame: The Story of Safdar Hashmi*, trans. Madhu Prasad and Sohail Hashmi (Delhi: Viking, 1997), 8.

²² Homi Bhabha, "Narrating the Nation," in *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 306.

²³ Balwant Gargi, "'The Caucasian Chalk Circle': From Three Angles," *Times of India*, June 29, 1969, v.

²⁴ Anand, "Indian Theatre," 287.

²⁵ Ebrahim Alkazi, "Berichte," in *Brecht-Dialog 1968: Politik auf dem Theater* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1968), 246.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 247.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Fritz Bennewitz, "Interview Sunday." November 6, 1988. AO-G 07: Texte von Fritz Bennewitz. Fritz Bennewitz Archives, Leipzig, 1.

²⁹ Cited in Kim H. Kowalke, "The Threepenny Opera in America," in Stephen Hinton, ed., *Kurt Weill: The Threepenny Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 92.

³⁰ Theodor Adorno, "Reconciliation under Duress," in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1977), 173.

³¹ During the 1930s, the political critic Georg Lukács and Brecht came up with their independent and contrasting views on modern literature. Both of them sought literary traditions that could be used to fight against the fascist onslaught of the world. For Lukács, it was nineteenth century realism that could be the answer while Brecht promoted twentieth century modernist forms. In contrast to Lukács's promotion of the forms developed by Balzac and Tolstoy, Brecht encouraged thorough inspection of realist devices before they are deployed.

³² Brecht, "Notes on *The Threepenny Opera*," 71.

³³ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), 73.

³⁴ Brecht, "Notes on *The Threepenny Opera*," 75.

- ³⁵ *The Theatre of E. Alkazi: A Modernist Approach to Indian Theatre* (New Delhi: Art Heritage, 2016), 102.
- ³⁶ Brecht, "Notes on *The Threepenny Opera*," 73.
- ³⁷ Laura Bradley, *Brecht and Political Theatre: The Mother on Stage* (London: Oxford University Press, 2006), 73.
- ³⁸ Aparna Dharwadker, "John Gay, Bertolt Brecht, and Postcolonial Antinationalisms," *Modern Drama* 38, no. 1 (1995): 8.
- ³⁹ Veena Talwar Oldenburg, *Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 31.
- ⁴⁰ Cyril Rajah, "The Dowry Plus in Marriage," *The Times of India*, January 5, 1969, A viii.
- ⁴¹ Fritz Bennewitz, "Bertolt Brecht *Dreigroschenoper*," February 20, 1970, AO-G 05: *Briefe von Auslandsreisen*. Fritz Bennewitz Archives, Leipzig. 1.
- ⁴² Brecht, "Notes on *The Threepenny Opera*," 75.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 72.
- ⁴⁴ Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, Richard Howard, trans. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 23.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Bertolt Brecht, "Notes on *The Mother* (1933)," in *Brecht on Theatre*, 90.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ Zadie Smith, "Two Paths for the Novel," *The New York Review of Books*, November 20, 2008, 91.
- ⁴⁹ Wolf was a famous communist playwright who was critical of Brecht's dramaturgical approach. In his essay, written in the form of a dialogue, Brecht tried to explain his theatrical approach to Wolf. Bertolt Brecht, "Friedrich Wolf-Bert Brecht: Formal Problems Arising from the Theatre's New Content," in *Brecht on Theatre*, 266.
- ⁵⁰ Freimut Duve, "*Teen Take Ka Swang: Die Dreigroschenoper* in Neu-Delhi," *Zeit Online*, May 15, 1970, 2.
- ⁵¹ Brecht, "Notes on *The Threepenny Opera*," 71.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*

Brechts Erbe im zeitgenössischen britischen Drama: David Greigs *Die Ereignisse* als post-brechtisches Lehrstück

Vor dem Hintergrund einschneidender politischer, philosophischer und wirtschaftlicher Veränderungen, durch welche die Grundpfeiler des politischen Theaters in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten infrage gestellt wurden, untersucht dieser Artikel das brechtsche Erbe im Kontext des britischen Dramas im 21. Jahrhundert. Ausgehend von David Barnetts Begriff der "post-brechtschen Ästhetik" steht die Frage im Vordergrund, wie zeitgenössische Theaterautoren Brechts Modell angesichts der Herausforderungen von Postmoderne, Globalisierung und Neoliberalismus kritisch hinterfragen und für ihre Zwecke fruchtbar machen. Charakteristisch ist hierbei eine tiefgreifende Ambivalenz, die an die Stelle der optimistischen Ausrichtung von Brechts dialektischem Ansatz tritt. Dies spiegelt sich insbesondere in einer Aufwertung der emotionalen gegenüber der rational-analytischen Dimension wieder und resultiert in einer Spannung zwischen Einfühlung und Immersion einerseits und kritischer Distanz andererseits, wie die Analyse von David Greigs *Die Ereignisse* (*The Events*) zeigt. Als post-brechtsches Lehrstück greift *Die Ereignisse* zentrale Mechanismen der Lehrstücke auf, um zu einer ambivalenten Zuschauerhaltung zwischen Emotion und Verstand beizutragen, durch die komplexe politische und ethische Reflexionsprozesse im brechtschen Sinne initiiert werden.

This article explores Brecht's legacy in twenty-first-century British drama in the light of the profound political, philosophical and economic transformations that have challenged the foundations of political theater in recent decades. Based on David Barnett's understanding of "post-Brechtian aesthetics," the essay foregrounds the question of how contemporary British playwrights critically engage with Brecht's theory and practice against the background of postmodernism, globalization and neoliberalism to make it fruitful for their own approach. Characteristically, post-Brechtian theater replaces the optimism inherent in Brecht's dialectical model with a radical ambivalence. This is especially reflected in a revaluing of the emotional as opposed to the rational and analytical dimension of spectatorial reception, resulting in a tension between identification and immersion on the one hand and critical distance on the other, as the analysis of David Greig's *The Events* exemplifies. As a post-Brechtian *Lehrstück*, *The Events* employs central mechanisms of the *Lehrstücke* as a means of creating a dynamic tension between emotion and reason on the part of the spectators, which invites critical reflection on complex political and ethical issues.

Recycling Brecht in Britain: David Greig's *The Events* as Post-Brechtian *Lehrstück*

Anja Hartl

I

2016 marks not only the sixtieth anniversary of Bertolt Brecht's death, but also the sixtieth anniversary of the Berliner Ensemble's first visit to London, which had a catalytic effect on the development of political drama in Britain throughout the twentieth century. After early encounters with Brechtian theater practice from the 1930s onward, it is the year 1956 that marks "a clear starting point for the story of Brecht's reception and influence in Britain."¹ The Berliner Ensemble's productions, along with Brecht's writings, which were available in English from the mid-1960s onward, considerably influenced British playwrights and theater makers alike, "shak[ing]" British theater "out of [its] rooted complacency" and contributing to the creation of a vibrant political theater scene in Britain.² Indeed, the postwar situation in Britain provided fertile ground for Brecht's ideas and generations of playwrights, among them John Arden, Edward Bond, and Caryl Churchill, have taken on his aesthetic and theoretical legacy to spur the development of leftist political theater.³ Significantly, Brecht's approach to theater has remained a major shaping force in British playwriting and has played a decisive part in "a social and political turn in theatre" that has revitalized contemporary drama at the turn of the twenty-first century.⁴ Yet, while Brecht has continued to represent a vital source of inspiration for British dramatists, fundamental interrogations into the forms and functions of political art in the wake of recent political and philosophical developments, culminating in postmodernist ideological relativism, the end of communism, and the increasingly all-encompassing power of globalization, have challenged traditional notions of political theater in general and of Brechtian Epic Theater in particular.

With an insistence on the continued relevance of Brecht's dialectical model of theater, this essay seeks to investigate the challenges of recycling Brecht for the contemporary British stage and to examine how, with what aims, and with what consequences playwrights in Britain have productively reinterpreted and developed Brecht's method since the 1990s.⁵ Critically engaging with Brecht's legacy in the light of the philosophical, political, and social transformations of the last decades, playwrights turn

to the experiential as a way of both taking on Brecht's ideas and adapting them to the context of the twenty-first century. This renewed emphasis on the affective and visceral serves to create a strong ambivalence between critical distance and experiential involvement on the part of the audience. As I propose, it is this ambivalent relationship between reason and emotion that gives rise, in Brechtian fashion, to a political and ethical impetus, and therefore represents the core of post-Brechtian aesthetics. After some terminological reflections on the definition of post-Brechtian theater and the significance of the *Lehrstück* for my understanding of the concept, I will illustrate my argument by drawing on Scottish playwright David Greig's dramatic oeuvre, which prominently reflects post-Brechtian features. By way of example, I will turn to one of his more recent plays, *The Events* (2013), which engages in a post-Brechtian reinterpretation of the *Lehrstücke* and their participatory aesthetics. Combining both *Verfremdungseffekte* and affective appeals to the spectators, *The Events* creates an unresolvable tension between the rational and the experiential as a prerequisite for activating audiences.

II

My understanding of "post-Brechtian" emphasizes the political and social commitment at the heart of Brecht's project as well as the crucial role attributed to the audience in the process of interpretation. Hence, what is retained of Brecht's method in post-Brechtian theater at the turn of the twenty-first century is its "politicized,"⁶ dialectical core and, therefore, its focus on providing "a radical insight into the way society and its citizens work with a view to changing both of them."⁷ Based on this premise, David Barnett's definition of post-Brechtian aesthetics represents an attempt to reconcile Brecht's political and theoretical stances with the implications of post-modernist ideological relativism and uncertainty, which have given rise to postdramatic theater. The fact that post-Brechtian theater is defined in contradistinction to the "aesthetically similar" but "philosophically discrete" postdramatic mode is particularly valuable for my exploration of Brecht's legacy in contemporary British drama,⁸ where the postdramatic has not had the same pervading influence as in Germany and where Brecht's method can thus still develop its critical potential by disrupting predominantly realist and naturalist styles.⁹ Taking his cue from Adorno's concept of negative dialectics, Barnett argues for a post-Brechtian concept of dialectics that still serves as a "practicable tool of social analysis" to promote change while no longer offering a way of harmonizing the contradictions exposed in the plays because of a lack of interpretive guidance.¹⁰ Instead, the dialectical tension between thesis and antithesis is not reconciled and it is this Adornian-inspired emphasis on the multifaceted nature of the contradictions exposed that mirrors the contemporary impression of a "non-teleological

openness" and therefore offers a less harmonious and less optimistic,¹¹ but richer and more complex potential for intervention.¹² This, in turn, makes it possible to fully and uncompromisingly explore the complexity of life in the twenty-first century in the context of post-Brechtian theater, since the ideological "narrowness" of Brecht's dialectical model can be left behind.¹³

Contemporary British drama can give expression to this post-Brechtian insistence on the open quality of dialectical oppositions through an experiential turn, which reemphasizes the emotional dimension as a vital component of (post-)Brechtian aesthetics alongside *Verfremdung* and critical detachment, and thereby engages the audience members holistically in the performance, with their mind, body, and feelings. Thus, playwrights reinterpret Brechtian epic devices to facilitate both emotional and rational engagement or combine strategies that invite empathy with Brechtian techniques of *Verfremdung*, creating a dynamic tension on the level of the play's form that complicates the audience's interpretation of the play. Hence, post-Brechtian theater shifts the focus from stage to auditorium and attributes an altogether new role to the spectators: the members of the audience are not only involved in a critical analysis of the concerns raised, but are also viscerally immersed in the action and therefore experience the interpretive process and its intricate interplay between the rational and the experiential as a paradoxical state of in-betweenness. It is precisely out of this ambivalence toward reason and emotion that the political and ethical relevance of post-Brechtian aesthetics emerges. As Helena Grehan suggests, such an impression of heightened ambivalence "needs to be interpreted not necessarily as a negative experience or one in which individuals, or spectators in this case, are left floundering and directionless, but as something that has the potential to stimulate ongoing reflection, engagement and participation with the ideas raised by a work."¹⁴ By creating indeterminacy through an experiential turn, British dramatists replace the optimism inherent in Brecht's dialectical model with a more ambivalent and tentative relationship to what political theater can achieve, and thereby develop a post-Brechtian theater that successfully addresses political and ethical issues in an age of global disengagement, desensitization, and ideological relativism.

Significantly, this post-Brechtian shift in emphasis from the rational to the experiential has its roots in Brecht's own approach to theater. While Brecht himself never rejected the role of emotions for his Epic Theater, as he made explicit in the "Notes on the Opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*" as early as 1930, it is in particular the *Lehrstücke* that stand out from Brecht's oeuvre as predecessors to this experiential turn and, thereby, to major aesthetic trends of the twenty-first century.¹⁵ Even though the *Lehrstücke* use central Epic devices and strategies of *Verfremdung*, too,¹⁶ they have to be considered an aesthetically separate category because of their status as a musical genre and, above all, their participatory qualities,¹⁷ as Brecht's succinct definition makes clear: "Das Lehrstück lehrt dadurch,

dass es gespielt, nicht dadurch, dass es gesehen wird" (The *Lehrstück* teaches by being performed, not by being watched).¹⁸ Thus, the *Lehrstücke* connect spectatorial involvement in the performance with an educative purpose. Crucially, the participation expected from the spectators also entails an affective participation in the *Lehrstücke*—indeed, it requires a certain degree of identification and empathy, which is why Brecht describes the *Lehrstücke* as having “die emotionellsten Wirkungen” (the most emotional effects).¹⁹ Whereas John Willett, for example, is hesitant about the contemporary relevance of the *Lehrstücke*, I suggest that it is precisely their participatory aesthetics and experiential mode that pave the way for post-Brechtian aesthetics at the turn of the twenty-first century by intricately intertwining critical distance and emotional engagement.²⁰ While this testifies to the essential continuity between Brecht and tendencies in post-1990 theater practice in Britain, the radical shift in emphasis in post-Brechtian aesthetics from reason to a kind of reasoned experience, from stage to auditorium, and from a more certain and stable to a more tentative and ambiguous approach to political theater acknowledges the need to adapt Brecht’s legacy to the political and social context of the twenty-first century.

This necessity of critically engaging with Brecht’s ideas to make them productive for the contemporary stage is illustrated by David Greig’s dramatic oeuvre, which represents a prime example of post-Brechtian British playwriting. For a study of Greig’s recycling of Brecht’s model, the framework of experiential post-Brechtian theater as a theater of open dialectics provides an illuminating context both theoretically and practically.

On a theoretical level, Greig’s understanding of political theater, which he outlines in his manifesto “Rough Theatre,” mirrors the concerns of post-Brechtian aesthetics. The “rough” character the Scottish playwright envisions cannot only be detected in a play’s jagged, unruly form or delicate subject matter, but, above all, in Greig’s overall approach to theater as a locus for experimenting with dissension and antagonism. In this spirit, Greig calls for a political theater of resistance to “the management of the imagination by power” in the age of globalization and mediatization.²¹ This potential for resistance is achieved, in an Adornian vein, by foregrounding contradictions and it is the theater itself that represents an ideal forum for such a dialectical approach because of its inherent paradoxical nature, which blurs fiction and reality:

[T]heater is transcendent. It draws its transcendence from the inherent “negative dialectic” of theatrical performance. Adorno’s concept of negative dialectic rests on power of the contradiction. A contradiction disrupts rationality . . . Adorno suggests that we could imagine “normality” or “reality” as a *trompe l’oeil* painted on a cloth and held in front of the real world. The contradiction pulls at the fabric of the cloth. Eventually, if the contradiction is strong enough, the fabric of “reality”

will tear and we will be able to see, behind it, the world with its . . .
 rifts and crevices . . .²²

While the terminology of a theater of “transcendence” may at first sight seem inadequate in the context of post-Brechtian theater because of its strongly idealist and spiritual resonances, Greig’s understanding of the term, which he defines as “a gap or a moment of insight,” actually parallels Brecht’s intentions.²³ Thus, Clare Wallace argues that “[i]ts purpose is to delve beneath the surface of the mundane, and to challenge and transcend our conceptual or imaginative default settings as a means of producing some new experience of reality.”²⁴ Combining Brechtian and Adornian elements, Greig asserts that this potentially utopian moment of imagination and speculation in which the surface of reality opens up to reveal alternative scenarios is achieved precisely by emphasizing the unresolvable character of the contradictions inherent in the theater itself, where fictional and real world overlap, and, I would add, by foregrounding the tensions explored in the plays on the levels of both content and form. Significantly, as Greig explains, this “radical contradiction or paradox” is above all created by confronting rationality with irrationality:²⁵ with its emphasis on the “irrational,” “intuitive,” and experiential, Greig’s approach to political theater is essentially post-Brechtian in nature, reuniting appeals to critical detachment and invitations to imaginatively and affectively engage with the play.²⁶ In the following sections, I will illustrate the various facets of Greig’s post-Brechtian dramaturgy by drawing on *The Events*, which not only shares the key concerns of post-Brechtian aesthetics outlined above, but can also be read as an example of a post-Brechtian *Lehrstück*.

III

The Events, which premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe festival in 2013 before touring extensively both nationally and internationally, stands out from Greig’s eclectic oeuvre because it breaks new ground thematically, aesthetically, as well as dramaturgically. Inspired by Anders Breivik’s mass shootings in Norway, the play is set in the aftermath of a terrorist attack on a multicultural choir and stages the only survivor’s urge to understand the motives for the mass murder. In this ultimately futile quest for answers, Claire, the protagonist and leader of the choir, interacts with the antagonistic character of The Boy. Performed by one actor, The Boy assumes the multiple identities of the people Claire confronts in her desperate search—from the perpetrator to Claire’s partner to a psychologist, slipping in and out of character almost imperceptibly. While in this way focusing on Claire’s “healing process”²⁷ after the traumatic “events” to the extent that spectators might feel “caught in Claire’s mind,” *The Events* goes beyond this psychological dimension to explore urgent political and

ethical questions, especially regarding the challenges of living together in a community in the face of risk and violence.²⁸ This central concern, which is reminiscent of Brecht's investigations into the relationship between individual and society in the *Lehrstücke*, is embodied onstage by a real local community choir, with a new group of singers from the region where the play is performed specifically cast for every single show. As an emblem of local identity, the choir arguably lends the performance a certain degree of authenticity and immediacy, and provides the audience with an opportunity for identification. Yet, as I propose, it simultaneously represents an instrument of *Verfremdung* and introduces an element of critical inquiry into the transaction between stage and auditorium because of the conflicting functions it performs. Thus, while the dramaturgical setup with its two characters in close interaction with a choir bears strong resemblance to ancient Greek drama, this arrangement can also be read as an example of post-Brechtian aesthetics. More precisely, especially regarding its formal, musical, and participatory characteristics, *The Events* can be interpreted as a post-Brechtian *Lehrstück* that not only integrates amateurs as a chorus in the performance, but also implicitly invites the members of the audience to participate, as I will show in the following. Through its high degree of ambivalence, which replaces the straightforwardly didactic nature of Brecht's model, the play creates a tension between experiential involvement and emotional identification on the one hand and critical distance on the other, and it is this spectatorial oscillation that represents a prerequisite for encouraging critical reflection.

Formally speaking, the presence of the *Lehrstücke* in *The Events* manifests itself most clearly in its tendency toward condensation, particularly with regard to structure and character. The apparent simplicity of style and the "cool formality"²⁹ often identified as key attributes of the *Lehrstücke* can be traced back to Brecht's encounter with Japanese Noh theater, which, significantly, also features a choir as a central component onstage.³⁰ In the case of *The Events*, however, this Brechtian-inspired formal sparsity sharply contrasts with the intricacy of the play's subject matter and aesthetics, with highly complex implications for the audience's interpretation of the play.

Thus, the "rough" structure of *The Events*, whose "joins and bolts are visible," certainly reflects this compression: rather than pursuing a linear, chronological development, the play presents us with a scattered array of perspectives on Claire's and, by extension, the community's attempts at coming to terms with the traumatic experience.³¹ Yet, rather than being clearly separated from each other, the unconnected scenes almost indistinguishably blur into each other; they have no specification of place, time, or context. Consequently, the audience experiences a lack of orientation that mirrors Claire's confusion and desperation. Simultaneously, this structural indeterminacy also serves to estrange conventional patterns of spectatorial

reception, thereby denying identification and promoting a more distanced, analytical approach to the play.

Instead of employing conventional structural devices, Greig repeats motifs and phrases in the dialogue and the choir's songs as a way of orchestrating the play, thereby creating a rich web of associations. For example, images, metaphors, and terms semantically close to the central topic of community reappear in various contexts throughout the play, triggering associations, appealing to the audience's imagination and thereby guiding their interpretation. Yet, playing with polysemy and contextual denotative shifts, *The Events* immediately undermines these attempts at creating meaning. This effect is particularly strong with regard to the frequently recurring word "tribe." For instance, The Boy's "atavistic"³² understanding of the "tribe" as the ideal community he is striving for (see *TE* 11–22) is challenged by Claire's diametrically opposed use of the term as a synonym for her multicultural choir: "We're all a big crazy tribe here" (*TE* 12).³³ Consequently, the play convolutes any straightforward interpretation, challenges clear-cut distinctions and, instead, encourages a more nuanced reading of the text and a subtler approach to its subject matter. Thus, while formally minimalist and condensed, *The Events* is associatively rich and complex, thereby appealing not only to the spectators' analytical attitude, but also to their imagination. In this respect, *The Events* illustrates the post-Brechtian shift from (rational) interpretation to (experiential) association identified by Barnett, who argues that this post-Brechtian "suggestiveness" underscores an involvement on the part of the spectators "which goes beyond mere rational comprehension."³⁴

Moreover, minimalism as a central aesthetic principle applies to the *dramatis personae*, too, since only two actors are needed alongside the local choir for performing the play, which enhances the confrontational quality of the interaction between Claire and The Boy. This seemingly clear-cut dichotomy between protagonist and antagonist is challenged, however, by the multiple identities The Boy adopts throughout the play. These shifts in identity unexpectedly occur between, but also within the scenes to the extent that the different identities, such as the killer's and Claire's partner's, indistinguishably overlap (see, for example, *TE* 20 and 48), thereby further complicating the audience's deciphering of the action on stage. As Marilena Zaroulia cogently argues, Greig chooses an "elusive, in-flux mode of representation" to emphasize that, in the case of The Boy, "character is not understood through psychology."³⁵ Instead, functioning as a "blank canvas,"³⁶ The Boy is above all defined by the various conflicting perspectives offered by the people Claire encounters in the course of the play, such as The Boy's father, the leader of the right-wing party The Boy joined or a friend—and therefore through the eyes and, in Brechtian spirit, in terms of his relationship with the community.³⁷ The fact that The Boy's identity is never settled and can only be approached socially and in context

thus invites ethical interrogations by “challeng[ing] ideological positions that reproduce specific, often racially or ethnically driven understandings of self and Other.”³⁸ It is in this complication of our stereotypical assumptions that the play goes beyond the psychological level to offer a timely reflection on pressing ethical concerns, as Zaroulia summarizes: “[T]he work’s political potential lies in the performance’s structure, its dramaturgy that emerges through the elusive relation between the actor’s appearance, the onstage meeting between the two actors and the choir *and* that which audience members understand the actor to stand in for at any moment.”³⁹

By foregrounding the audience’s complex, because unstable, relation with *The Boy*, *The Events* also draws attention to the importance and problems of processes of identification and empathy as constitutive mechanisms of communities and, on a metatheatrical level and as a clearly Brechtian comment, of the theater itself. Hence, while drawing the audience in through its heightened emotional quality, the play employs *The Boy* as “an acute version” of Brechtian *Verfremdung*.⁴⁰ Both the explicit role-playing and the consequent lack of a clear identity undermine any conventional treatment of character and thereby promote a distanced attitude by repeatedly frustrating the spectators’ attempts at determining *The Boy*’s identity and at understanding and engaging with the character. The resulting critical, inquisitive approach to the character of *The Boy* is also encouraged by the acting style, since the actor “never succumbs to ‘acting’ and instead just speaks the lines with clarity and conviction, allowing us [the spectators] to consider the ideas without being swayed by his emotion.”⁴¹ Such a post-Brechtian treatment of character, which both invites and denies identification on the part of the spectators, leads to a differentiated attitude between emotional involvement and critical distance as a prerequisite for engaging with the play’s subject matter as embodied by *The Boy*. In the case of *The Events* and its dramaturgical setup, this critical appeal is particularly resonant on a metatheatrical level, where the play probes, in post-Brechtian spirit, the chances and limits of empathy, thereby also self-reflexively drawing attention to the audience’s own status as an ephemeral theater community, turning the spectators themselves and their relationship with the stage into the object under scrutiny.

This complex involvement of the audience in the play is, however, above all induced by the local choir, which is arguably the most unusual, most distinctive, and indeed most decisive element of *The Events*, since it embodies, as an onstage community, the central concerns of the play. The audience’s experience of the performance is in particular shaped by the contradictory roles the choir fulfills. Thus, while the choir can be said to represent the ideal of a harmonious community, it was also the target of “the events,” that is, the fictional terrorist attack in whose aftermath the play is set, and therefore simultaneously symbolizes the possible dangers inherent in any community and its constitutive processes of inclusion and

exclusion. In addition, the status of the choir is equally undecided, since it is “ambiguously placed” between fiction and reality—a problematic constellation I will address in more detail below.⁴² While its authenticity as an actual local choir is emphasized, it also stands in for the absent fictional choir whose members were killed in the attack. Moreover, given Claire’s attempts at coming to terms with the traumatic experience by setting up a new choir, it serves as a powerful prospective symbol of a potential community of the future, which is initiated by the play and set as a task for the audience to complete outside of the theater. Intricately intertwined with these observations is the fact that conflicting dramaturgical functions, arising from the complex history of the chorus as both a key device in drama and as an instrument of Brechtian *Verfremdung*, contribute to the equivocal nature of the choir in *The Events*. It is this inherent indeterminacy of the function of the choir that Greig exploits and, in post-Brechtian spirit, radicalizes, thereby complicating the audience’s interpretation of the play.

Historically speaking, the chorus, which stands at the beginning of the Western dramatic tradition, with ancient Greek tragedy developing from ritual practices that involved a chorus as a central component, has always fulfilled diverse, seemingly incompatible functions. Thus, already in antiquity, the chorus served as a “drawbridge” determining the audience’s relationship with the stage, ranging from intimate immersion to lack of engagement with the action: “Via the chorus, the spectator can be drawn on to stage or distanced from it; he [sic] can be virtually enmeshed in the scenic situation or barred from (naïve) access to it.”⁴³ Over the centuries, the importance of the chorus declined; as a result, it “was soon seen as an artificial element,” thereby developing into a key “epic technique that was often used to create distance.”⁴⁴ Indeed, the chorus represents a crucial element of Brechtian dramaturgy especially in the context of *Verfremdung*, where it is employed “[t]o combat the process of ‘free’ association and to prevent the spectator becoming ‘immersed’ in the events on stage.”⁴⁵ As Martin Revermann has shown in his study on Brechtian chorality, choruses and songs play a pivotal role throughout Brecht’s oeuvre.⁴⁶ Particularly the *Lehrstücke*, whose status as a musical genre has been established by Klaus-Dieter Krabiell, make ample use of the chorus and *Lehrstücke* like *The Decision* are intended to invite active participation of socialist workers’ choirs in the performance.⁴⁷ In this context, however, it is important to note along with Joy H. Calico that such a use of the chorus and of choral music in the *Lehrstücke* is geared more toward providing collective experience than *Verfremdung*, “facilitat[ing] communal participation”⁴⁸ with the risk of producing “a quasireligious effect” reminiscent of the ritual origins of the chorus in ancient Greek drama.⁴⁹ Indeed, throughout its history, the chorus has been characterized by this “essentially ambiguous nature,” reuniting both “cathartic and ritual power” and “distancing force,” an ambiguity that also shaped Brechtian aesthetics.⁵⁰

The extent to which Greig capitalizes, in post-Brechtian manner, on this inherent ambivalence of the chorus in *The Events* is particularly manifest with regard to the songs employed in the play, which stand out because of their eclectic mix of musical styles. On the one hand, some of the choir's songs serve to accompany and support Claire's healing process; these are soothing tunes and harmonious melodies that offer comfort and provide "almost a cleansing feeling," as Greig himself describes the experience.⁵¹ In this respect, the local choir, which has been described by Brantley as "one of the nearest contemporary equivalents of the Greek chorus,"⁵² can clearly be attributed a "cathartic and ritual power" that draws on the "affective quality" of collective singing in general and of the specific selection of tunes in particular.⁵³ For example, the local choirs are invited to contribute their "own song" to the performance, selected with the intention of "offer[ing] a strong sense of the choir's identity" (*TE* 6). While this serves to make the singers themselves feel at ease on stage, this song does not only strengthen the choir's sense of community, but also furthers feelings of togetherness that reach out to the audience. Such a sense of intimacy, which invites spectatorial attachment and connection with the choir, is also conveyed by the powerful hymn "How Great Thou Art" (*TE* 32). Moreover, the choir not only intervenes with songs, it also performs a more active role, for instance by participating in a shamanic ritual initiated by Claire in an effort to further her healing process, which is reminiscent of the origins of the chorus outlined above (see *TE* 40–42). All these examples reflect the potentially "cathartic and ritual power" of the choir, which, in these cases, has a stabilizing and affirmative function, strengthening the bond between stage and auditorium and endorsing the ideal of the empathetic, harmonious community it seems to embody.

On the other hand, however, this naïve affirmation of community, along with tendencies toward catharsis, is radically undermined by a more subversive, "distancing" function of the choir's interventions. Challenging Claire's quest for understanding, the choir critically comments on the events on stage with gestic songs, thereby also promoting an interruption of the audience's processes of identification. The disruptive quality of these songs results not only from their "rough" style and content, which contrasts sharply with the more soothing tunes of the play, but also from the fact that they critically gesture, in Brechtian spirit, to the wider political and social context. Thus "The Song of Gavrilo Princip," whose lyrics take up the perpetrator's ideology, which is repeated throughout the play, intensifies in climactic fashion the inherent tensions and risks inside any community: "By the time he was my age Jesus had founded a new religion. / By the time he was my age Bob Geldof had saved Africa. / By the time he was my age Gavrilo Princip had fired the shot that started World War One. / If I'm going to make a mark on the world I have to do it now" (*TE* 49). Focusing on Gavrilo Princip as the key reference and role model for the terrorist,

the song serves to establish a historical link between the fictional terrorist attack of the play and Gavrilo Princip's killing of the archduke of Austria, and thus also critically gestures to issues of heroism and nationalism. Furthermore, The Boy's favorite song "Bonkers" and the shallowness in society it addresses provide another disturbing element for the audience (see *TE* 27). This song particularly encourages a critical distancing from the action on stage through its choral performance as "high art," which considerably estranges the hip-hop style and lyrics of the original.⁵⁴ Thus, the juxtaposition of these different songs results in an unresolved tension between affirmative identification with and critical distancing from the choir on the part of the audience. As Talya Kingston writes in her review of *The Events*, the choir

was both the best example of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* . . . and the purest example of an onstage chorus as the representation of a collective of citizens. We were swept into the emotional harmonies of well-known Christian hymns like "How Great Thou Art," and then promptly pulled out of the action by the choir's clearly unchoreographed movements around the stage and reading of lines.⁵⁵

Crucially, it is "the choir's clearly unchoreographed movements" during the performance that reveal the singers' amateurism and enhance the play's improvisational quality, thereby further complicating the audience's relationship with the choir. This heightened amateur quality of *The Events* testifies to the substantial evidence of the *Lehrstücke* in Greig's play: designed by Brecht specifically for amateurs, the *Lehrstücke* turn spectators into producers and invite them to actively participate in the performance. Indeed, it is by virtue of their emphasis on amateurism, participation, and experience that the *Lehrstücke* can be identified as early forerunners of contemporary trends toward participatory and immersive performance as well as toward "staging real people."⁵⁶ These contemporary repercussions of the *Lehrstücke* have undoubtedly shaped the role of the choir in Greig's *The Events*, which particularly emphasizes the improvisational and unprofessional nature of the singers' impromptu involvement. Apart from music rehearsals, the members of the choir are only provided with very little information about their role within the play prior to the show. Witnessing the events on stage for the first time, they are as unprepared for the performance as the offstage audience and have to interact spontaneously with the professional actors playing Claire and The Boy, for example by reading out parts of the dialogue or improvising and contributing text spontaneously (see *TE* 41 and 52). The success of the performance essentially depends on the amateurs' willingness to participate and cooperate. For the audience, this emphasis on the choir's "ordinariness" promotes a certain degree of authenticity, which is, however, immediately compromised,

since the singers' "unchoreographed" contributions also serve as a *Verfremdungseffekt*, demystifying the performance and precluding sentimentalist identification.⁵⁷ Most critically, the intimate staging of this spontaneous involvement clearly radicalizes Brecht's intentions with regard to amateur participation in the *Lehrstücke*. While the singers may experience the play more intensely and may engage more consciously in the political and ethical concerns raised, this strategy may also yield undesired results. What seems particularly problematic is the potentially manipulative quality of the singers' participation, since they have hardly any real agency and lack influence on the precise nature of their participation. Moreover, a possible discomfort may result from this impromptu involvement, thereby preventing rather than furthering a genuine engagement with the play's difficult subject matter. As Meg Mumford and Ulrike Garde highlight, "[a]t that uses non-professional performers and/or their vulnerability as a vehicle for making meaning, or for effecting artistic and social change, takes the risk of reiterating or magnifying that vulnerability and of creating its causal factors."⁵⁸ In the case of *The Events*, the success of this cooperation certainly depends on both the members of the choir and the relationship that is established between them and the professional actors—a relationship that has to be negotiated anew with each local choir during the show itself. While a potential discomfort and clumsiness on the part of the choir may prevent a valuable experience for the singers and may cause irritation in the audience, such an "irruption of the real" and the resulting "*undecidability*" between authenticity and artificiality may also, in a post-Brechtian and indeed post-dramatic spirit, inspire critical involvement by raising ethical concerns on the part of both singers and spectators.⁵⁹

Therefore, it is the connection that is established between the choir and the audience that potentially gives rise to political and ethical considerations and that is thus decisive for the interpretive success of this truly ambivalent constellation. Significantly, the relationship between stage and auditorium in *The Events* is above all influenced by the confrontational stage design, since the choir, as an onstage audience, faces, mirrors, and thereby affects the offstage audience's experience of the play.⁶⁰ Indeed, while the choir may intervene verbally, musically, or corporeally in some phases, it witnesses the action as an onstage audience in others, sitting down on the rostrum in those scenes that do not require the singers' participation. Nicholas Ridout explains that "reciprocal spectatorship" raises our awareness as to our own status as members of an audience community and thereby encourages ethical considerations.⁶¹ In this respect, it is significant that Ridout compellingly argues for the contemporary relevance of the *Lehrstücke* as precursors to present-day interrogations into ethics and politics because of their emphasis on "the capacity for decision-making" and "the availability of political and ethical options"—a characteristic *The Events* capitalizes on.⁶² While, by definition, the *Lehrstücke* were strictly

speaking not directed at an audience, they were still “staged for nonperforming audiences more often than performing ones,” which testifies to their usefulness for both amateur performers on stage and spectators, whose involvement is inspired in *The Events* by means of this mirror constellation.⁶³ This effect particularly crystallizes in the play’s last lines, which represent a final appeal to offstage participation, when Claire turns to face the audience to address The Boy and the choir on stage as well as the spectators in the auditorium:⁶⁴ “Come in. / Don’t be shy. / Everyone’s welcome here. / Why don’t you sit with us and if you feel like singing—/ sing. And if you don’t feel like singing / Well that’s OK too. / Nobody feels like singing all the time . . . Are we all here? Good. Sing” (*TE* 68). Encouraged to make an ethical choice, the offstage audience thus finds itself in a strongly ambivalent situation: it is enticed to get involved and sing along on the one hand while also acutely aware of the potential implications of this decision on the other. The revised edition of the play makes this contradiction even more explicit:⁶⁵ during the choir’s last song “We’re All Here,” on which *The Events* finishes, some singers disturb the harmony by singing “I’m not.”⁶⁶ In addition, The Boy, who moves away from the choir to the back of the stage during this scenario, is visually excluded from the community.⁶⁷ Hence, rather than conveying an either fatalistic rejection or romanticized affirmation of community, the choir embodies the profound ambivalence that runs through the play. By emphasizing the unresolvable nature of this tension between distance and participation, reason and emotion, the play ends, in post-Brechtian spirit, on a moment of “transcendence” and potentiality: the spectators are invited to continue the unfinished and unfinishable task of resolving the ethical and political challenges of living together in the face of risk and violence.⁶⁸

IV

While the conditions and contexts of political theater have radically changed at the turn of the millennium, Brecht’s approach to theater has continued to inspire playwrights and theater practitioners, in particular in the British context, where authors and directors actively engage with Brecht’s legacy. As I have argued, the challenge of adopting Brecht’s method for the contemporary stage resides in initiating a dialogue between Brecht and the philosophical and political transformations of the past decades. Thus, against the background of a potentially postideological and globalized world, post-Brechtian theater reevaluates Brecht’s model, replacing its optimism, which is grounded in Brecht’s dialectical understanding of history, with a more tentative approach to what political theater can achieve. As a wider trend in contemporary British drama, post-Brechtian theater in Britain gives expression to this shift in emphasis through an experiential turn that reemphasizes the emotional dimension as an important part of spectatorial reception. As

my analysis of *The Events* as a post-Brechtian *Lehrstück* has illustrated, the *Lehrstücke* play a considerable role in this context, especially regarding their experiential, participatory aesthetics. Drawing on and developing Brecht's ideas, *The Events* creates an unresolvable tension between identification and insinuation on the one hand and critical detachment and reflection on the other. It is through this intricate interplay between the rational and the experiential that the audience is invited to engage with the ethical and political interrogations of the play in a way that is in line with Brecht's intentions while also taking into account the radically different context the theater responds to. In this respect, the analysis of *The Events* as a prime example of post-Brechtian aesthetics has opened up fruitful paths for the exploration of the potential of Brecht's dialectical method for the contemporary British stage, where playwrights continue to creatively and productively rethink, reimagine, and recycle Brecht's legacy.

Notes

- ¹ John Willett, "Ups and Downs of British Brecht," in Pia Kleber and Colin Visser, eds., *Re-Interpreting Brecht: His Influence on Contemporary Drama and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 76.
- ² Michael Billington, "Bertolt Brecht: Irresistible Force or Forgotten Chapter in Theatrical History?," *The Guardian*, September 18, 2013, accessed September 18, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/sep/18/bertolt-brecht-arturo-ui-revival>.
- ³ See Janelle Reinelt, *After Brecht: British Epic Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 1–16.
- ⁴ Florian Malzacher, introduction to *Not Just a Mirror: Looking for the Political Theatre of Today*, in Florian Malzacher, ed. (Berlin: Alexander Verlag/Live Art Development Agency, 2015), 11.
- ⁵ This essay is part of my PhD project with the working title "Experiential Brecht: Post-Brechtian Aesthetics in Contemporary British Drama."
- ⁶ David Barnett, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 5.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁸ David Barnett, "Performing Dialectics in an Age of Uncertainty, or: Why Post-Brechtian ≠ Postdramatic," in Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll, and Steve Giles, eds., *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 66.
- ⁹ Barnett, *Brecht*, 217.
- ¹⁰ David Barnett, "Toward a Definition of Post-Brechtian Performance: The Example of *In the Jungle of the Cities* at the Berliner Ensemble," *Modern Drama* 54, no. 3 (2011): 353.
- ¹¹ Paola Botham, "Howard Brenton and the Improbable Revival of the Brechtian History Play," *Journal for Contemporary Drama in English* 2, no. 1 (2014): 171.

- ¹² Barnett, "Performing Dialectics," 52–53.
- ¹³ Barnett, "Toward a Definition of Post-Brechtian Performance," 344.
- ¹⁴ Helena Grehan, "Aalst: Acts of Evil, Ambivalence and Responsibility," *Theatre Research International* 35, no. 1 (2010): 9–10.
- ¹⁵ See Bertolt Brecht, "Notes on the Opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*," in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Tom Kuhn (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 65.
- ¹⁶ Brecht, "Zur Theorie des Lehrstücks," *BFA* 22.1, 351.
- ¹⁷ See Klaus-Dieter Krabiel, *Brechts Lehrstücke: Entstehung und Entwicklung eines Spieltyps* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1993), 295.
- ¹⁸ Brecht, "Zur Theorie des Lehrstücks," *BFA* 22.1, 351. Translations from the German are mine unless otherwise stated.
- ¹⁹ Brecht, "Über rationellen und emotionellen Standpunkt," *BFA* 22.1, 500.
- ²⁰ See John Willett, introduction to John Willett, ed., *Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays: Three* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), xviii.
- ²¹ David Greig, "Rough Theatre," in *Cool Britannia? British Political Drama in the 1990s*, ed. Rebecca D'Monté and Graham Saunders (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 214.
- ²² Greig, "Rough Theatre," 220.
- ²³ David Greig, interview by Nadine Holdsworth, *Modern British Playwriting 2000–2009: Voices, Documents, New Interpretations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 270.
- ²⁴ Clare Wallace, *The Theatre of David Greig* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 10.
- ²⁵ Wallace, "Yes and No? Dissensus and David Greig's Recent Work," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 26, no. 1 (2016): 35.
- ²⁶ Greig, "Rough Theatre," 220.
- ²⁷ Actors Touring Company, "Choir Information Pack," PDF, 8.
- ²⁸ Ben Brantley, review of *The Events*, by David Greig, directed by Ramin Gray, New York Theatre Workshop, New York, *New York Times*, February 12, 2015, accessed September 18, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/13/theater/review-in-the-events-a-shooting-leaves-a-survivor-in-purgatory.html?_r=0.
- ²⁹ Willet, introduction, xii.
- ³⁰ See Stephen Parker, *Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 277.
- ³¹ Greig, "Rough Theatre," 213.
- ³² Paola Botham, "From Tribe to Chorus: David Greig's *The Events*," TCG Circle, accessed September 19, 2016, <http://www.tcgcircle.org/2014/07/from-tribe-to-chorus-david-greigs-the-events/>.
- ³³ David Greig, *The Events* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013). Further references appear as *TE* in the essay itself.
- ³⁴ Barnett, "Toward a Definition of Post-Brechtian Performance," 349.

- ³⁵ Marilena Zaroulia, “‘I Am a Blankness Out of Which Emerges Only Darkness’: Impressions and Aporias of Multiculturalism in *The Events*,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 26, no. 1 (2016): 74.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ³⁷ See *ibid.*, 76.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ Botham, “From Tribe to Chorus.”
- ⁴¹ Dan Hutton, review of *The Events*, by David Greig, directed by Ramin Gray, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, A Younger Theatre, August 4, 2013, accessed September 18, 2016, <http://www.ayoungertheatre.com/the-events-david-greig-traverse-actors-touring-company/>.
- ⁴² David Pattie, “*The Events*: Immanence and the Audience,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 26, no. 1 (2016): 55.
- ⁴³ George Steiner, *Antigones: How the Antigone Legend Has Endured in Western Literature, Art, and Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 166.
- ⁴⁴ Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, trans. Christine Shantz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 54.
- ⁴⁵ Brecht, “Notes on *The Mother* (1933),” in Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Tom Kuhn, eds., *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 90.
- ⁴⁶ See Martin Revermann, “Brechtian Choralities,” in *Choruses, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Joshua Billings, Felix Budelmann, and Fiona Macintosh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- ⁴⁷ See Krabiell, *Brechts Lehrstücke*, 295.
- ⁴⁸ Joy H. Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 23.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.
- ⁵⁰ Pavis, *Dictionary*, 55.
- ⁵¹ David Greig, interview by Clare Wallace, *Contemporary Theatre Review* 26, no. 1 (2016): 248.
- ⁵² Brantley, review of *The Events*.
- ⁵³ Zaroulia, “‘I Am,’” 78.
- ⁵⁴ Actors Touring Company, “Choir,” 9.
- ⁵⁵ Talya Kingston, review of *Caira*, by David Harrower, and *The Events*, by David Greig, *Theatre Journal* 66, no. 2 (2014): 266.
- ⁵⁶ Meg Mumford and Ulrike Garde, “Staging Real People: On the Arts and Effects of Non-Professional Theatre Performances,” *Performance Paradigm* 11 (2015): 7.
- ⁵⁷ Pattie, “*The Events*,” 59.
- ⁵⁸ Mumford and Garde, “Staging,” 12. I am grateful to Meg Mumford for drawing my attention to these issues.
- ⁵⁹ Lehmann, *Postdramatic*, 100. See Pattie, “*The Events*,” 55.

⁶⁰ See Pattie, “*The Events*,” 54–55.

⁶¹ Ridout, *Theatre*, 15.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶³ Calico, *Brecht*, 17.

⁶⁴ See Pattie, “*The Events*,” 59–60.

⁶⁵ David Greig, *The Events*, revised ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 2014), 65.

⁶⁶ Actors Touring Company, “Choir,” 10.

⁶⁷ See Zaroulia, ““I Am,”” 80–81; Wallace, “Yes,” 38.

⁶⁸ See Zaroulia, ““I Am,”” 80; Pattie, “*The Events*,” 49–54; Botham, “From Tribe to Chorus.”

Eine Zukunft des Lehrstücks? Andres Veiel und Gesina Schmidts *Der Kick* und die Wiederverwertung der Form

Zu der Zeit, als Brecht seine Lehrstücke erst konzipiert und verfasst hatte, hat diese innovative Form des Theaters die Grenzen zwischen Zuschauer und Schauspieler dadurch verwischt, dass die sogenannte "Große Pädagogik" die Versammelten eingeladen hatte, theoretische Probleme dialektisch durcharbeiten. Im Kern der Lehrstück-Theorie und -Praxis liegt die Frage nach dem Verhältnis des Individuums zum Kollektiv. Laut Brecht soll das Lehrstück in der Zukunft wieder aufgeführt werden, aber obwohl der Regisseur Text einfügen darf, muss die "strenge" Form des Lehrstücks intakt bleiben. Dieser Beitrag analysiert ein Lehrstück aus den frühen Jahren des 21. Jahrhunderts, *Der Kick* von Andres Veiel und Gesina Schmidt, und fragt danach, welche Funktion das Lehrstück in einem neuen Kontext haben kann. Während Brechts Lehrstücke als kollektive Übungen für das dialektische Mit-Denken in der Wirklichkeit des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts geschrieben wurden, legt das Beispiel von *Der Kick* dar, dass die Wiederverwertung der Form des Lehrstücks eine Antwort auf eine wachsende Entfremdung und Isolierung des Individuums im sozialen Leben bietet. Durch Modifizierung der Form des Lehrstücks lädt *Der Kick* eine aktive Zuschauermenge der Mitdenkenden ein, die dialektische Totalität der neuen Wirklichkeit zu begreifen, und das Subjekt als komplexes soziales Wesen zu verstehen.

When Brecht first conceived of his *Lehrstücke*, this innovative form of theater sought to undo the distinction between actor and audience, employing the methods of the so-called "major pedagogy." In turn, the *Lehrstücke* were to invite both actors and audiences to collectively undertake a dialectical investigation of a theoretical problem, with the relationship between the individual and the collective lying at the heart of these plays in both theory and practice. For Brecht, the *Lehrstücke* are to be reused, but although the director can insert passages of text, their "strict" form must remain intact. This contribution studies a *Lehrstück* from the early twenty-first century, Andres Veiel and Gesina Schmidt's *Der Kick*, and asks what function the *Lehrstück* can have in a new context. While Brecht's *Lehrstücke* were written in response to the political and social realities of the early twentieth century, *Der Kick* demonstrates that recycling the form of the *Lehrstück* can offer a panacea to the increasing alienation and isolation of the individual in contemporary society. In deploying certain formal strategies of the *Lehrstück*, *Der Kick* invites an active audience to grasp reality as a dialectical totality and to understand the subject as a complex social being.

A Future for the *Lehrstück*? Andres Veiel and Gesina Schmidt's *Der Kick* and the Recycling of Form

Michael Wood

In a short piece written in 1937, Brecht turns his attention once again to the *Lehrstücke*—or learning plays—with which he had been busy until only a few years before. The note is important in understanding Brecht's innovative *Lehrstücke* for many reasons, including how they reconfigure the relationship between audience and actor and how these plays are to be performed. But the comment is particularly illuminating with regard to how Brecht conceives of the afterlife of this subgenre of his works: “Die Form der Lehrstücke ist streng, jedoch nur, damit Teile eigener Erfindung und aktueller Art desto leichter eingefügt werden können” (The form of the learning plays is strict, but only so that parts that one has come up with oneself or that are topical in nature can be integrated all the more easily).¹ It is the form of these plays that is set in stone, but it is up to the director, should he or she so choose, to insert parts between these scenes. Above all else, Brecht's comment provides a compelling indication that he was aware not only that his plays could be reused and altered, but also that, in being reused and altered, their form would remain intact.

Given his conviction that the theater need respond to the changing shape of reality and social relations (see, for example: “Über Stoffe und Formen,” *BFA* 21, 302–4), Brecht conceived of a rigorously strong relationship between form and context in his thought and his works. His own efforts at restaging and revising his plays in his lifetime likewise demonstrate how he saw that even written texts would require adaptation to answer alterations in the dialectical composition of the world he inhabited. His *Lehrstücke* are no exception. These radical experimentations with form from the late 1920s and early 1930s were conceived and executed amid the struggle for a socialist future before the flourishing of Nazism in Germany. His alterations, no matter how light, to *Der Lindberghflug* (Lindbergh's Flight, 1929–30), culminating in his 1949–50 version of the text as *Der Ozeanflug* (The Flight Across the Ocean), are a case in point. And in the context of the establishment of a postwar socialist state in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Brecht recognized that the *Lehrstücke* would once again be significant in using the theater as a political tool for overcoming the contradictions of a new social reality. Despite this recognition, his productions with the Berliner Ensemble included only one play that comes close to being described as a *Lehrstück*: his new production of *Die Mutter*

(The Mother, 1930–31) premièring in January 1951. Yet his play *Büsching*, worked on in the early 1950s and based on the GDR *Held der Arbeit* Hans Garbe, was to signal Brecht's return to writing *Lehrstücke*. It was to remain a fragment. For Brecht the form of the *Lehrstücke* contained within it the promise of a “learning theater of the future” that would harness the power of the theater, once it had been released from the fetters of the institutions of bourgeois theater.² Without using the word himself, one could go so far as to say that Brecht demonstrated an awareness that his works and his method would be recycled in the future.

Given Brecht's convictions regarding the resilience of the *Lehrstück's* strict form, I shall discuss what I call the “recycling of form” in a recent *Lehrstück*, Andres Veiel and Gesina Schmidt's *Der Kick* (The Kick, 2004). The recycling of form, as I understand it here, consists in harnessing the fundamental formal properties of one thing and using them for another purpose altogether, for which they are well suited. Yet if it is the “strict” form of Brecht's *Lehrstücke* that are to remain in one piece in any future recycling, then one might ask what that strict form is and whether and how it is affected in the process of recycling. Indeed, what role can the *Lehrstück* play in a new context altogether?

Despite composing their text over seven decades after Brecht began working on his *Lehrstücke*, Veiel and Schmidt give an unmistakable indication that they situate *Der Kick* within the tradition of the *Lehrstück* and foreground their understanding of its form and content by bestowing upon the play the subtitle “Ein Lehrstück über Gewalt” (A *Lehrstück* about Violence). Veiel and Schmidt are by no means the first playwrights since Brecht to refer to works as *Lehrstücke*. And indeed *Lehrstücke* since Brecht are marked by a great degree of formal variation. Max Frisch's *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* (The Fire Raisers) and Helmut Baierl's *Die Feststellung* (The Statement of Fact), both of which premièred on stage in 1958 and on opposite sides of the iron curtain, for instance, provide striking examples of contrasts in historical approaches to writing a *Lehrstück*. In each case, the author in question considers himself to be following and/or modifying the theory and practice of the *Lehrstück*; and each author does so with his own understanding of the subgenre's fundamental formal characteristics. Nevertheless, in its form Veiel and Schmidt's text is clearly indebted to its Brechtian predecessors. On a superficial level, the presentation of a past action that must be reenacted and learned from neatly illustrates that Veiel and Schmidt see *Der Kick* as a successor to the likes of Brecht's *Die Maßnahme* (The Measures Taken/The Decision, 1930–31). Yet *Der Kick's* debt to Brecht's *Lehrstücke* lies in its adoption of the fundamental formal methods of the *Lehrstücke* in setting out to engage its audiences in a process of dialectical thinking in order to find collective solutions to current problems. Like Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, *Der Kick* is concerned with presenting a situation through which the audience becomes active in finding, and potentially

addressing, the contradictions in human social comportment. Yet while Brecht's *Lehrstücke* hinge on the notion of collective *Einverständnis*, that is agreement or consent, about a particular course of action, *Der Kick* seeks collective *Einverständnis* that some course of action must be found to save individuals from being brutalized by prevailing social conditions. And it does so by deploying means borrowed and adapted from Brecht's own *Lehrstücke* and his writing about them, and repurposing them for a different context. If we are to understand how the form of Brecht's *Lehrstücke* can be recycled for a new context and how Veiel and Schmidt's *Der Kick* offers a possible future for the *Lehrstück*, it would be worth taking a closer look at some of these plays and attempting to tie down a definition of their "strict" formal properties.

Learning to Think Dialectically

To lay down hard-and-fast rules of what defines a *Lehrstück* is not as easy as it might initially seem. Not least, the *Lehrstücke* are not entirely homogeneous and Brecht made some seemingly contradictory remarks about their purpose. His 1937 comment, for example, that "[d]as Lehrstück lehrt dadurch, dass es gespielt, nicht dadurch, dass es gesehen wird" (the *Lehrstück* teaches through being played, not through being watched), is often taken to mean that it is only for actors and that an audience has no place in a *Lehrstück*.³ This, however, jars with his assertion in 1930 when discussing the "Große Pädagogik" or major pedagogy of the *Lehrstücke*, which "hebt das System Spieler und Zuschauer auf. Sie kennt nur mehr Spieler, die zugleich Studierende sind" (It abrogates the system of actors and spectators. It only recognizes actors who are simultaneously students).⁴ He follows this by writing that "das imitierende Spielen [wird] zu einem Hauptbestandteil der Pädagogik" (imitative acting becomes a major part of pedagogy).⁵ Brecht may be understood to be indicating that one can only learn from a *Lehrstück* by partaking in acting it out. But we find some sense in which his studious theoretical spectator of Epic Theater, who "studiert" (studies),⁶ applies to the *Lehrstück*. As the lattermost citation makes clear, studying is in itself a form of activity, and Brecht goes so far as to deconstruct the boundary between seeing and acting. In a short note penned in 1930 entitled simply "Theorie der Pädagogien" (Theory of Pedagogies), Brecht casts himself as a thinker, stating: "Die bürgerlichen Philosophen machen einen großen Unterschied zwischen den Tätigen und den Betrachtenden. Diesen Unterschied macht der Denkende nicht" (Bourgeois philosophers draw a major distinction between those who are active and those who are contemplative. Those who think do not draw this distinction.)⁷

According to this understanding of the activity of watching, thinking, and analyzing, the *Lehrstücke* can be interpreted as plays that engage all assembled to become active participants in a process of dialectical thinking.

That is, the audience is invited to consider the contradictions inherent in certain situations and find new ways of thinking about and perhaps solving these very same contradictions. In this sense, both those onstage and offstage are collectively involved in the same thought experiment to find answers to the questions posed in the *Lehrstück*. As Reiner Steinweg notes in his 1972 study, the *Lehrstücke* are concerned with finding ways of placing our theoretical assumptions in everyday life under dialectical scrutiny and making us think about the immediate pragmatic implications of action.⁸ This dialectical thinking is not, however, something that is merely left to the end of the play, but something in which the audience is continuously involved throughout: as Hans-Thies Lehmann demonstrates, the situations examined in *Lehrstücke* are processual and under constant review.⁹ One thing that differentiates this dialectical examination from Epic Theater *per se* is that rather than historicizing action, in Roswitha Mueller's words, it "has left bourgeois society behind" and is concerned with acquiring attitudes "that are necessary for a strategy in the political struggle towards socialist society."¹⁰ These attitudes are not merely necessary in the struggle toward socialism, but are necessary in undoing the assumptions underlying bourgeois consciousness and the conventions in thought and action that have given rise to it.

In *Die Maßnahme*, one member of a party of communist agitators in China jeopardizes the mission to spread propaganda by empathizing with the suffering of individual Chinese coolies and attempting to better their immediate situation. The rest of the agitators kill the Young Comrade, and we bear witness to the process that led them to this action. The agitators recognize that killing the Young Comrade is unthinkable to some degree, stating: "*Furchtbar ist es, zu töten*" (*It is / A terrible thing to kill*).¹¹ They are aware that the murder of the Young Comrade would appear at odds with their own emotional connection to another human being. But the awfulness of killing another has its roots much deeper than in individual feeling, as murder also represents a deviation from legal, ethical, and social codes. In these lines, Brecht's text uncovers and estranges a particular *Haltung* (attitude) with regard to taking another individual's life that would find itself echoed in the thoughts of *Die Maßnahme*'s audiences and actors. Yet in this situation, kill they must. Without doing so, both their lives and the future of their project of spreading communist propaganda in China will be jeopardized, with the further result that the lives of Chinese coolies will continue to be wretched. Again, in *Der Jasager* (*He Said Yes*, 1930), a boy recognizes the necessity of his death for the sake of sparing the lives of his travelling companions on a perilous journey in the mountains: it is a custom designed to defend collective interests. In each of the above cases, the person who is to die gives his *Einverständnis*, acquiescing to his own death.

While this may sound like a distinctly authoritarian position to take on the expendability of the individual,¹² we should bear in mind that the

dialectical process does not always end in the destruction of an individual at the hands of the collective. In *Der Neinsager* (He Said No, 1930), rather than assenting to being thrown into the valley to save his travelling companions, the boy states that he will not allow himself to be killed. *Der Neinsager* finishes with the words:

So nahmen die Freunde den Freund
 Und begründeten einen neuen Brauch
 Und ein neues Gesetz
 Und brachten den Knaben zurück.
 Seit an Seit gingen sie zusammengedrängt
 Entgegen der Schmähung
 Entgegen dem Gelächter, mit offenen Augen
 Keiner feiger als sein Nachbar. (*BFA* 3, 72)

[In this way the friends took their friend
 And founded a new Custom
 And a new law
 And they brought the boy back.
 Side by side they walked in a knot
 To confront disgrace
 To confront laughter, with eyes open
 None more cowardly than his neighbor.¹³]

In the case of *Der Neinsager*, the boy's refusal to be *einverstanden* with his death represents a break with the norms of social behavior in this context. Faced with this deviation from norms, the present situation shows that prevalent ways of thinking must be reassessed and new customs formed as a result. The only way to arrive at this conclusion, however, is by placing the relationship between necessity and convention under dialectical scrutiny, and laying the contradictions both within and between the two bare for the audience. In undertaking this dialectical study of a practical problem, the theoretical assumptions underlying action must be challenged and reconfigured. To borrow Steinweg's words, the *Lehrstück* "lehrt, die Wirklichkeit genauer wahrzunehmen" (teaches to perceive reality more closely).¹⁴

As the above examples show, at the heart of the *Lehrstück* is a concern for how to theoretically account for individual action and the relation it bears to collective agency. For Brecht, with his Marxian understanding of the individual as, in Marx's words, the "ensemble [*sic*] der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse" (the ensemble of social relations), individual activity must always be regarded as necessarily influenced by the social conditions of the time.¹⁵ Indeed, as Brecht put it, the "individual" is a "dividual," that is something whose "Teilbarkeit ist zu betonen (als Zugehörigkeit zu mehreren Kollektiven)" (divisibility is to be emphasized [as belonging to numerous collectives]).¹⁶ That is, for Brecht, the individual is not a

sovereign being whose agency can go unchecked, but is necessarily concatenated in larger collectives upon which its actions also have an effect. The *Lehrstücke* therefore foreground that the status of the individual too must be examined: if the individual seems to endanger the greater good, it may have to be sacrificed; but if it is not to be sacrificed, its further existence must have a place in a process of collective self-understanding. Not only, therefore, is the *Lehrstück* to engage a collective of people in the theater for the purposes of finding practical solutions to problems, but it also asks its audience to consider the ramifications of individual actions and try to undertake collective dialectical thinking to the ends of carving out a new space for the individual.

While the struggle for socialism provided the backdrop to Brecht's treatment of individual action within a societal whole in the 1920s and 1930s, the difficulties of engaging collective action to recognize the social complexity of reality and challenge the sovereignty of the individual have by no means disappeared. Yet historical reality has changed and possibly presented obstacles to the *Lehrstück* form. Heiner Müller, for example, argued that Brecht's attempts to write his *Büsching* in the early 1950s in the style of a *Lehrstück* ultimately led to the project's failure, as there was no longer a discernable, fixed working class in the GDR to which his new play could appeal;¹⁷ nor, in Müller's opinion, could Brecht's classical Marxist materialist dialectics cope with the new, more complex contradictions to be found in reality.¹⁸ While it is not necessarily the case that the world itself is more complex, it may be said that dialecticians are now more open to accept that the world contains a multitude of different possible contradictions, making the search for new syntheses harder and demanding that they be achieved on different terms.¹⁹

Not only is the dialectical complexity of reality more difficult for the playwright to grasp than when Brecht was composing his earlier *Lehrstücke*, but it is matched by an increased level of individualism and contingency. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the first Cold War, the repudiation of socialism has been rubber-stamped by the doctrines of neoliberalism. Looking at the present state of play in his analysis of the historical relationship between theater and citizenship, for example, David Wiles writes that “[t]he power of capital and the loneliness of the consumer are functions of modern individualism.”²⁰ Indeed, Bernd Stegemann traces the isolation of the subject in postmodernity to neoliberal market forces, in which the sovereignty of individual freedom has led to a form of “*Bindungslosigkeit*” (disconnectedness).²¹ For Stegemann, this disconnect has some alarming repercussions: “Das postmoderne Lebensgefühl, in dem die Kontingenz allgegenwärtig ist, ist . . . der entlarvende Ausdruck für eine Gesellschaft von Unmündigen: Man ist davon gelähmt, wie kompliziert alles ist, und hofft auf eine einfache Lösung, und bis dahin macht man so weiter wie bisher” (The postmodern attitude to life, in which contingency

is ubiquitous . . . is therefore the exposed expression of a society of passivity: one is paralyzed by just how complicated everything is and hopes for a simple solution; and until that point, one just carries on as before).²² In sum, the present condition appears to prize difference and individual sovereignty at the cost of any form of recognition that this complexity inheres in a dialectical whole, full of connections and contradictions. And as a result of this, change is unlikely to come about. As David Barnett has recently written, however, “[i]n a world that *appears* to offer no alternatives to capitalism, Brecht invites theater-makers to search for contradictions, to investigate what goes unmentioned and to draw attention to untold stories. Brecht allows us to challenge the view that ‘there is no alternative’ to contemporary capitalism by teasing out the *processes* it uses to establish such opinions.”²³ Indeed, if Brecht’s method enables us to challenge the hegemony of contemporary capitalism, it can also present ways of combatting its symptom, postmodern individualism. It is in this context that we can talk of Veiel and Schmidt recycling the *Lehrstück* in a way that is not so dissimilar to its original usage. While the *Lehrstücke* in Brecht’s day plumbed the depths of the relationship between the individual and the social whole, *Der Kick* repurposes the form and function of the *Lehrstücke* and posits a future for the *Lehrstück* in a society that increasingly overlooks its own dialectical complexity. This change of context is central to studying the recycling of form in Veiel and Schmidt’s *Lehrstück*, *Der Kick*: almost eight decades after the première of Brecht’s first *Lehrstück*, *Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis* (The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent, 1929), the *Lehrstück* appears to have a function granted by its insertion into a new context.

Learning from Violence

Much like many *Lehrstücke* before it, *Der Kick* considers the death of an individual at the hands of a larger body of people. On the most basic level, this body of people consists of those directly involved in the immediate circumstances surrounding a death. The text provides a verbatim treatment of the real case dealing with the murder of one young boy by three others in Potzlow, an impoverished village in the former GDR: on an alcohol-fuelled night on July 13, 2002, Marcel and Marco Schönfeld, along with their friend Sebastian Fink, all with connections to Neo-Nazi groups and ideology, bullied and beat their friend Marinus Schöberl. In the end, Marcel, who was sixteen at the time, recreated a scene from the 1998 film *American History X*, making Marinus bite the curb before kicking his head. As this kick did not kill him, the youths finished the job with a rock. The boys buried the body nearby where it was later discovered by a friend of Marinus. The text of *Der Kick* deals with the aftermath of the murder, presenting excerpts from the trial, newspaper reports, and interviews with the perpetrators, their parents, friends, and selected inhabitants from Potzlow.

Der Kick shares with a number of *Lehrstücke* that it presents details from the past that are to contribute to reaching a decision in the present. Yet unlike its literary forebears it contains no chorus, nor does it organize its materials chronologically in the process from perpetration to judgment; it contains no dialogue other than sections from Marcel's interrogation and lacks any form of stage directions. Instead, the text consists of extracts of materials, each attributed to the person who originally uttered or wrote them. Thus the extracts occur more or less in a vacuum, other than being presented in the context of the murder of Marinus and the prosecution of Marco and Marcel. The curation of the excerpts is often guided by the connections between them. Where, for example, Marinus's mother, Birgit Schöberl, speaks of waiting up for her son to come home, this is followed immediately by an extract from the *Märkische Oder-Zeitung* in September 2002, announcing that Marinus has been missing since July and giving a description of his appearance.²⁴ The concatenation of the texts also fashions conceptual links: Marcel describes how the teenage boys drank an excessive amount on the night of Marinus's death; and directly following this we hear from one of the boys who had been present, Achim Fiebranz, who begins his testimony by conceding that he has barely progressed beyond the educational level expected of a nine-year-old (*K*, 15). As the text progresses, however, these conceptual links are made less explicit as statements addressing matters including unemployment and the presence of right-wing extremism in the former GDR are juxtaposed with descriptions of the murder itself. Despite its ostensible formal dissimilarities to Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, however, *Der Kick* shares much of the latter's formal arsenal for collapsing the boundaries between actor and audience.

For Veiel and Schmidt, character takes second place to the relations that individuals bear to one another. The text of *Der Kick* weaves together a cast consisting of people with whom it is made almost impossible to identify, precisely because the play presents so many contradictory pieces of information and attitudes. Birgit Schöberl, for example, states that her son was a loving, introverted child, who would always let her know where he was and "konnte nicht zurückschlagen" (wouldn't hurt a fly, *K*, 28). This, of course, does not tally with what we have heard about Marinus so far: not only did Marinus have a history of theft, but he spent his last night in this life drinking with asocial teenagers, when his mother had no idea where he was. Tellingly, it is Jutta and Jürgen Schönfeld, parents of Marco and Marcel, who have already mentioned that Marinus's parents "haben sich nie um ihr Kind gekümmert" (never looked after their child, *K*, 24); and that Marinus "immer geklaut hat überall" (was always stealing stuff everywhere, *K*, 24). The Schönfeld parents note that Marco's moped had been stolen, and that "[j]etzt vermuten wir langsam, dass der Marinus das war" (now we've slowly come to suspect that that was Marinus, *K*, 24). As a result of the testimonies we receive and the way in which they are organized, no

concrete picture emerges of the victim of this crime. Brecht's technique of demonstrating that one course of action has been decidedly followed over another—the “not/but”—comes to fruition here as a means of demonstrating the various overlapping and contradictory motives of the *dramatis personae* in their decisions to speak of each other in a certain light.

Perhaps one of the greatest contradictions to pile up throughout this play is that, although a murder has been committed and a boy killed, no one is willing to accept any form of culpability for it. Marcel, the younger of the two Schönfeld brothers, and the one who dealt the kick to Marinus's head, attempts to shift the blame for Marinus's death by saying that the idea of dealing a last, fatal blow was his brother's, and that he agreed to it. Almost everyone involved in the larger picture attempts to evade any form of culpability for what has happened. Marco and Marcel's father states: “Wir haben alles getan, was man tun kann. Wir haben unsere Kinder gut erzogen” (We did everything you can. We raised our children well, *K*, 22). Alarming, the lawyer cited even attaches culpability to Marinus for his own death, saying:

Nach unserer Auffassung hat das Opfer Schöberl nach den ganzen Misshandlungen sein eigenes Todesurteil gesprochen, indem er gesagt hat: Ich bin Jude. Hätte er zu diesem Zeitpunkt gesagt, spinnt hier nicht rum, ich bin doch euer Kumpel Marinus, ich glaube nicht, dass der Tötungsakt dann über die Bühne gegangen wäre. Das ist kein Vorwurf, sondern einfach eine Feststellung. (*K*, 23)

[In our judgment, after all of the abuse, the victim Schöberl uttered his own death sentence by saying: “I am a Jew.” If he had said at this point, “stop mucking about, I'm your pal Marinus,” I do not believe that the fatal act would have been carried out. That is not an accusation, but simply a statement of fact.]

The mayor of Potzlow shirks civic responsibility and goes on the record as saying: “Potzlow ist ein ganz normales Dorf. Wir haben hier einen Taubenzüchterverein und eine Freiwillige Feuerwehr” (Potzlow is a completely ordinary village. Here we have a pigeon-breeding society and a volunteer fire brigade, *K*, 31); and the mayor of the larger area that includes Potzlow states: “Ich glaube, der Marinus war zur falschen Zeit am falschen Ort. Es hätte ebenso gut ein anderer sein können” (I believe Marinus was in the wrong place at the wrong time. It could have happened to anyone), before shrugging Marinus's death off with the expression, “Wie das heute is [*sic*] unter Jugendlichen” (Kids these days, eh!, *K*, 31;). By placing these testimonies next to one another, a much more disturbing contradiction emerges: this may be any old, ordinary village, which has, incidentally, been awarded the accolade of “Most Beautiful Village in Germany” only a couple of years before, but this ordinariness is such that it is apparently perfectly normal for such horrific acts to occur here.

The final word of the play is given to a letter by Marinus's mother, Birgit Schöberl, who writes:

Haben Sie als Anwälte eigentlich ein Gewissen? Denken Sie an die unbeschreibliche Qual, die Schmerzen, die Angst, die Marinus erleiden musste. Er ist das Opfer, nicht diese Bestien. Das sind tickende Zeitbomben. Die tun das wieder. Einmal Mörder, immer Mörder. Ich habe Hass, Wut und Verachtung für diese Bestien. Die verdienen kein anderes Wort. Die haben genau gewusst, was sie taten in ihrer Kaltblütigkeit.

Suchen Sie keine Schlupflöcher, sondern führen Sie sich vor Augen, dass dieser Mord eingeplant war und keine Reue oder Bedauern gezeigt wird.

Diese Familie Schönfeld hat eine glückliche Familie zerstört: denken Sie an Marinus' Schwestern. Sie haben ihn geliebt und angebetet. Ich weiß, wie unsere Töchter leiden.

. . . Diese Bestien verdienen kein Gnade. Die müssten so umgebracht werden wie unser Sohn.

So, nun wissen Sie, wie unser Marinus war. Fluch den Bestien, denken Sie an die Gerechtigkeit. (*K*, 61–62)

[Do you, as lawyers, actually have a conscience? Think of the indescribable agony, the pains, the fear that Marinus had to suffer. He is the victim, not these monsters. They are ticking time bombs. They will do it again. Once a murderer, always a murderer. I have hatred, rage and contempt for these monsters. They deserve nothing else. They knew exactly what they were doing in cold blood.

Do not look for a loophole, but recognize that this murder was premeditated and no regret or remorse has been shown.

. . . This Schönfeld family has destroyed a happy family. Just think of Marinus's sisters. They loved him and worshiped the ground he walked on. I know how much our daughters are suffering.

These beasts don't deserve mercy. They should be killed just like our son was.

So, now you know what our Marinus was like. Damn the beasts; think of justice.]

Placed at the very close of the play, Birgit Schöberl's letter might appear as a last word on what has happened. As a heartfelt plea from the mother of the victim, it provides an emotional response to what has happened and contains an appeal for sympathy from those hearing the letter. But, as with the rest of the text, it forbids identification with its speaker by undermining the premises of her argument and disclosing the factors determining why she has written what is in her letter. Notably, Marinus's mother asks for justice, but she has indicated that this justice would require that Marco and Marcel are killed in turn. Given her mention of the suffering of her own

family, this form of justice would also cause pain and suffering to another family, that is, the parents of Marco and Marcel Schönfeld. Furthermore, her assertion that the murder was planned does not tally with any of the statements we have heard; nor does her assertion that we know what Marinus was like correspond with the evidence so far presented about him. In placing Birgit Schöberl's plea for justice at the end of this piece, Veiel and Schmidt conclude by asking what form justice might take in the treatment of the murderers as well as outlining the contradictions inherent in how some individuals make sense of the world. But the "eye for an eye" logic of Marinus's mother, for example, shows that there are greater issues at stake than merely that of how murderers should be punished. Indeed, to return to the subtitle of the text, "Ein Lehrstück über Gewalt," the violence being inflicted and investigated is no longer to be understood on a purely individual level.

Der Kick begins by focusing on the individuals involved. The very first testimony is that of Jutta Schönfeld, talking of the media hype surrounding her sons' actions and her subsequent ostracization from the community. But as the play develops, Veiel and Schmidt gradually create a much larger picture of events. Testimonies are introduced relating to social degradation in the area since German reunification and the normality of youth brutality in the village. Moreover, materials concerning Marco and Marcel's experiences at school are combined with accounts of how they fell into Neo-Nazi groups. As Veiel writes in the extensive materials he appended to the printed text of the play, "[u]nser Ziel war es, die Hintergründe der Tat so weit es geht zu verstehen, ohne damit für den Mord Verständnis zu entwickeln" (Our goal was to understand the backgrounds of the act so far as possible without developing any sympathy for the murder, *K*, 283). This is telling. Veiel and Schmidt's text leaves no stone unturned: social deprivation, a schooling and prison system both found lacking, a history of brutal violence and extremism compounded by a desire to cover it up, a present of marginal social circles in which youths physically and mentally bully one another, parents embellishing their care for their children for the sake of saving face, a media full of violence, and a media concern with whipping up public indignation and fury all play a part in a much more complex picture of the contradictory backgrounds to this action. Without comprehending the nuances of the full circumstances surrounding this murder or recognizing the contradictions in their behavior, each individual is forced to reject culpability. Yet in presenting nuance and complexity in the form of contesting pieces of contradictory information, Veiel and Schmidt ask audiences of *Der Kick* to engage in a process of dialectical thinking that will challenge their assumptions about the simplicity of the crime and recognize the larger social factors at play in it and the contradictions between these.

Instead of asking the audience to identify with characters, the text of *Der Kick* is composed in such a way that it encourages the audience to identify the

social conditions underlying the actions and interpretations of the *dramatis personae*. At the center of Brecht's conception of the *Lehrstück* is the belief that the actors acting a *Lehrstück* can be socially influenced by repeating certain ways of acting and adopting specific attitudes; not only can repeating positive actions be useful, but so too can the repetition of asocial ones.²⁵ In a note from around 1930 on the performance of *Lehrstücke*, Brecht writes that typical behavior might be portrayed, “[d]enn es gibt ein gewisses praktisches Verhalten des Menschen, das ebenfalls Situationen schaffen kann, die dann neue Haltungen nötig machen oder ermöglichen” (for there is a certain practical comportment that can also give rise to situations which, in turn, make new attitudes necessary or possible).²⁶ Given the importance Brecht attaches to the performance of certain actions in the acquisition of new attitudes by those performing them, we might go so far as to say that it is only the actors per se who have anything to learn from the *Lehrstück*. Thus, the agitators in *Die Maßnahme* are each to experience playing the part of the Young Comrade in order to gain insight into the larger social and ideological forces determining the Young Comrade's politically wrong actions. No such stage directions are written into the text of *Der Kick*. Yet there is nothing stopping a director from deciding to divide the roles in *Der Kick* in a way whereby actors would be able to play different roles.²⁷ But, as stated above, even the studious audience of the *Lehrstücke* is acting by partaking in a dialectical thought process. In Steinweg's words, “[d]as Publikum wird *handelnde Person* in dem Sinne, in dem man von einem CHOR als ‘dramatis persona’ sprechen kann” (The audience becomes an actor in the sense that one can speak of a chorus as a member of the *dramatis personae*).²⁸ That is, those not physically engaged in the process of performing the *Lehrstück* are actors in a dialectical thought experiment that challenges the assumptions underlying individual and collective actions. *Der Kick* is composed in such a way that it forces its audience's perspective to constantly shift between individual agents and to recognize the myriad contradictions present in the society of individual brutality and moral bankruptcy depicted. In so doing, they can recognize the social influences upon the positions adopted and the need for change.

A Future?

As I have argued, it is the dialectical search for a collective practical answer to a problem in a complex society that Veiel and Schmidt so clearly take from the *Lehrstück*. Its approach to recycling the major pedagogy of the *Lehrstücke* is to engage those both onstage and offstage in a dialectical thought experiment about practical responses to theoretical issues. That is, it recycles the central “strict” formal characteristic of the *Lehrstücke*. While the audience's active participation in the form of studying might seem to fall short of the imitative playing that lies at the heart of the *Lehrstücke*'s major pedagogy (“[Die Große und die Kleine Pädagogik],” *BFA* 21, 396),

even Brecht's productions of the *Lehrstücke* created a role for the audience that did not merely consist in the inclusion of audience questionnaires. And much like Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, *Der Kick* gives no answer to the questions it poses. But its means of inviting its audience to become active participants in a dialectical thought process is the first step in noticing that the individualization and refusal to accept a bigger picture of social being that characterizes our time must come to an end. In this light, *Der Kick* offers an example of a post-Brechtian take on the *Lehrstück*: instead of offering hard-and-fast answers to problems that are presented in convenient binary forms, borrowing Barnett's words, we could say that *Der Kick* is composed "to explore the fullness and complexity of reality, which is still understood to exist as a material, dialectical whole."²⁹

Arguably, the figures represented in *Der Kick* all suffer from a case of what Stegemann—after Hegel—terms abstraction: these individuals have removed themselves from a larger social nexus of interaction and instead interpret themselves and their actions according to their own personal interests.³⁰ Yet, as Stegemann reiterates, "[d]ie Widersprüche des Lebens sind nicht nur das Problem des Individuums, sondern sie sind immer auch der Ausdruck für die gesellschaftlichen Widersprüche, in denen man zu leben gezwungen ist" (the contradictions of life are not just problems for the individual, but are always the expression of the social contradictions in which one is forced to live).³¹ Indeed, if anything is to be done to prevent something like this from happening again, collective action must change the present collective circumstances shared by all, including the Schönfeld brothers.

It is perhaps worth noting my usage of the indefinite article when talking about a future for the *Lehrstück*: I am in no position to be doctrinaire about what this future may be or how the *Lehrstück* should be recycled. Veiel and Schmidt's recycling of Brecht shows a future for the *Lehrstück's* form in a new context, from which there will necessarily be waste products. Having said that, however, Brecht's *Lehrstücke* clearly address the need for an assessment of collective interest over and above the interests of a single individual; as Frederic Jameson writes, Brecht was writing "against an individualism which was necessarily part and parcel of bourgeois culture."³² This may therefore lead us to think that the context of *Der Kick* is not all that different from the historical context in which Brecht was convinced that the theater required radical renewal. Even over eighty years after the first performance of *Die Maßnahme*, it is high time for the *Lehrstück* to say to its audience: "Ändere die Welt: sie braucht es! / Wer bist du?" (Alter the world, it needs it! / Who are you?).³³

Notes

¹ Bertolt Brecht, "Zur Theorie des Lehrstücks," *BFA* 22.1, 351. All translations from the German are my own unless otherwise indicated.

² Elizabeth Wright, *Postmodern Brecht. A Re-Presentation* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 113.

³ Brecht, “Zur Theorie des Lehrstücks,” *BFA* 22.1, 351.

⁴ Bertolt Brecht, “[Die Große und die Kleine Pädagogik],” *BFA* 21, 396; English translation: Bertolt Brecht, “The Major and the Minor Pedagogy,” in *Brecht on Art and Politics*, ed. Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles (London: Methuen, 2003), 88.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Bertolt Brecht, “Anmerkungen zur Oper *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*,” *BFA* 24, 78–79; English translation: Bertolt Brecht, “Notes on the Opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*,” in Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Tom Kuhn, *Brecht on Theatre*, 3rd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 65.

⁷ *BFA* 21, 398; English translation: Bertolt Brecht, “Theory of Pedagogies,” in *Brecht on Art and Politics*, 89. See also Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (New York: Verso, 1999), 82.

⁸ See Reiner Steinweg, *Das Lehrstück. Brechts Theorie einer politisch-ästhetischen Erziehung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1972), 118.

⁹ See Hans-Thies Lehmann, “Lehrstück und Möglichkeitsraum,” in *Das Politische Schreiben. Essays zu Theatertexten* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2002), 373–75.

¹⁰ Roswitha Mueller, “Learning for a New Society: the *Lehrstück*,” in Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 108.

¹¹ Bertolt Brecht, *Die Maßnahme [Fassung 1930]*, *BFA* 3, 97, emphasis in original; English translation: Bertolt Brecht, *The Decision*, in *Brecht. Collected Plays: Three*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1998), 87. Emphasis in original.

¹² See, for example, Adorno’s critique of Brecht’s political program, which demonstrates an especial suspicion of *Die Maßnahme*: Theodor W. Adorno, “Engagement,” in *Noten zur Literatur*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 421–22.

¹³ Bertolt Brecht, *He Said No*, trans. Arthur Waley, in *Collected Plays: Three*, 59.

¹⁴ Reiner Steinweg, *Lehrstück und episches Theater. Brechts Theorie und die theaterpädagogische Praxis* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes und Apsel, 1995), 19.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, “[Thesen über Feuebach],” in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* in 43 vols, ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED (East Berlin: Dietz, 1956–1990), vol. 3 (1978), 534.

¹⁶ Brecht, “Individuum und Masse,” *BFA* 21, 359.

¹⁷ See: Heiner Müller, “Fatzer ± Keuner,” in *Werke* in 12 vols., ed. Frank Hörmigk (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998–2008) (hereafter referred to as *W*), vol. 8: *Schriften* (2005), 228.

¹⁸ Heiner Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht. Leben in Zwei Diktaturen*, in *W* 9, 179.

¹⁹ See, for example, David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2014).

²⁰ David Wiles, *Theatre and Citizenship: The History of a Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 223.

- ²¹ Bernd Stegemann, *Kritik des Theaters*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2014), 23.
- ²² Bernd Stegemann, *Lob des Realismus* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2015), 16.
- ²³ David Barnett, *Brecht in Practice. Theatre, Theory and Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 208–9. Emphasis in original.
- ²⁴ Andres Veiel and Gesina Schmidt, *Der Kick. Ein Lehrstück über Gewalt* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 2009), 27. Hereafter, page references are given in parentheses in the body of the text with the abbreviation “K.”
- ²⁵ Brecht, “Zur Theorie des Lehrstücks,” *BFA* 22.1, 351. This note from 1937 would do well being compared with Brecht’s earlier short piece, also entitled “Zur Theorie des Lehrstücks” (*BFA* 21, 397), which was composed in 1930 during his most productive period of work on the *Lehrstücke*.
- ²⁶ “Über die Aufführung von Lehrstücken,” *BFA* 21, 397.
- ²⁷ It is worth noting, however, that in both the Basel and Berlin premières of the play and the film made from the play, all directed by Veiel, the text was shared out between two actors. As opposed to swapping roles, each actor spoke the words of the same spoken parts throughout the performance, each time signaling a return to the role by adopting the physical comportment of the person whose lines were being uttered.
- ²⁸ Steinweg, *Das Lehrstück*, 88. Emphasis in original.
- ²⁹ David Barnett, “Towards a Definition of Post-Brechtian Performance: The Example of *In the Jungle of the Cities* at the Berliner Ensemble, 1971,” *Modern Drama* 54, no. 3 (2011): 344.
- ³⁰ See Stegemann, *Lob des Realismus*, 107.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ³² Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 79.
- ³³ Brecht, *Die Maßnahme [Fassung 1930]*, *BFA* 3, 89; English translation: Brecht, *The Decision*, 79.

I-Doc und Brecht: *18 Days in Egypt*

Eines der Ergebnisse der digitalen Revolution war die Entstehung des I-Doc—einer Form der nichtfiktionalen Darstellung, die das Internet als Distributionsplattform nutzt. Der Realitätsauftrag des I-Docs, die dadurch ermöglichte Benutzerinteraktion und die Fähigkeit dieser Form, unterschiedliche Medien zu emulieren, lassen stets an Brechts Ideen denken, die in Texten wie *Der Dreigroschenprozess* ausgedrückt und in zahlreichen künstlerischen Arbeiten umgesetzt wurden. Der vorliegende Aufsatz untersucht die brechtschen und pseudo-brechtschen Aspekte von *18 Days in Egypt*—einem hervorragenden I-Doc über den Sturz Hosni Mubaraks—wobei vor allem der Frage nachgegangen werden soll, auf welche Weise dieser Film dem Begriff der dialektischen Form entspricht.

One result of the digital revolution has been the emergence of the i-doc—a form of nonfictional representation that uses the internet as a distribution platform. The i-doc's realist mandate, the user interaction it enables, and the form's ability to emulate different media all evoke Brecht's ideas as expressed in such texts as *The Threepenny Lawsuit* and applied in an array of his artworks. The article explores the Brechtian and pseudo-Brechtian aspects of *18 Days in Egypt*—an outstanding i-doc on Hosni Mubarak's toppling—with an emphasis on how the work corresponds to the notion of the dialectical form.

The I-Doc and Brecht: *18 Days in Egypt*

Nenad Jovanovic

As has been widely noted, social media has played a central role in the series of protests and uprisings that has swept the Maghreb and Middle East since 2010. In the regions whose political regimes often exerted complete control of the official news outlets, the spread of information and communication among the millions of participants in these events was made possible by the various products of the ongoing digital revolution. The graffiti “twitter” sprayed onto the wall of a building in Cairo’s Tahrir Square—featured in the documentary project this article will discuss in relation to Brecht’s concepts and techniques—can serve as a synecdochal testimony to the relevance of new technologies to what the West refers to as the Arab Spring.

Presumably on account of Egypt’s position as the largest Arab country and the longevity of Hosni Mubarak’s rule, his ouster received more global resonance than any other event in the series, as confirmed by the volume of commentary that the January 25 revolution has generated. The John P. Roberts Research Library catalogue search I conducted on September 10, 2016, using the phrase “Arab Spring” in combination with the names of five countries where the wave of demonstrations and protests manifested itself most forcefully (Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen), yielded the following results: Egypt—144 books and 5418 articles; Libya—72 books and 3617 articles; Syria—79 books and 3826 articles; Tunisia—91 books and 3672 articles; Yemen—42 books and 1991 articles.

Mubarak had not yet been ousted when the American journalist Jigar Mehta and Egyptian software developer Yasmine Elayat joined creative forces to launch *18 Days in Egypt*, a web platform where documents of the revolution could be posted, consisting of streams that combined text, images, and sound. The democratic expression of the Egyptian people’s political will was thus to receive a creative analogy in the shape of a work based on the Internet’s decentralized, uncensored, and widely accessible nature. Already the combination of the work’s novel form and topical subject evoke Brechtian aesthetic predilections, but a closer analysis reveals more profound affinities and differences alike.

I refer to *18 Days* as a “project” to suggest both its status as a work in progress and the impossibility of defining it in terms of a single medium. Like many web-specific artifacts, *18 Days* makes use of the internet’s ability to emulate numerous media, and switch among them instantaneously

and seamlessly. As is frequently the case when technological and aesthetic innovations are simultaneous and coalescing, terminological confusion exists about the new media: different terms are often applied to the same type of medium, and different types of media are often described by the same term. A case in point is Ludovica Fales's "Real Time Memories of a Revolution: The *18 Days in Egypt* Interactive Platform as Instant Archive," the only scholarly text on the titular work I have been able to access.¹ In her introduction to *18 Days*, Fales adopts the understanding of transmedia storytelling developed by Henry Jenkins, who introduced the term into critical discourse. Jenkins succinctly defines the products he and other authors identify as "stories told across multiple media."² Fales proceeds to characterize *18 Days in Egypt* as a "very specific kind of documentary transmedia platform, where the interaction between different layers is not represented by an actual interaction between different media—like TV, cinema and the web—but rather by a very specific encounter between the web itself and reality."³ This implicit stretch of Jenkins's definition fails to acknowledge how this purportedly "very specific" instance of encounter between a medium and the objects of its representation distinguishes itself from analogous instances involving other media, ranging from language to television. In other words, Fales's discussion does not convincingly justify the inclusion of *18 Days* within the category of transmedia.

In a concise yet comprehensive essay, Siobhan O'Flynn offers a tidy taxonomy of what she calls documentary's metamorphic forms.⁴ In the light of this analysis, *18 Days in Egypt* can be classified as a crowd-sourced i-doc, meaning that it (1) consists of the material provided by the website's users, and (2) allows the users to choose what content to access and in what order, and (3) uses the internet as a primary distribution channel.

O'Flynn notes the activist orientation of many i-docs and transmedia documentaries, whose participatory strategies she sees as embodying Brecht's vision of transforming the passive spectator into what she calls the active spect-actor. But the contemporary media landscape, she proceeds to observe following Catherine Belsey, "complicates the efficacy of what Brecht proposed as the contradictory text designed to challenge the passivity of consumer-oriented audiences."⁵ O'Flynn claims that the creator's control over the meaning-making process involved in the production and reception of media objects has waned, a result of the widespread practices of disruption, remixing, creating, and distribution of texts that digital technology facilitates and—often—encourages.⁶

While O'Flynn attributes a Brechtian character to the political project underlying many web 2.0 works—their content—there is much in their formal operations, too, that bears comparison with Brecht. His writings on film and radio are of particular relevance here, and the decision by Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell to include Brecht's 1932 article "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication" in their anthology on new media

appears well-founded in light of the text's commonalities with contemporary discourses on the subject.⁷ Like Brecht's other writings on the then new medium, the article demonstrates at once his dissatisfaction with what the radio *is*, and his enthusiasm for what it might *become*. The article was written when Brecht was developing his *Lehrstück* model, and often echoes its idea of dissolving the spectator-actor boundary.⁸ Arguing that the radio should be two- instead of one-sided, an apparatus that needs to understand "how to receive as well as to transmit . . . , how to bring [the listener] into a network,"⁹ Brecht foreshadows the concept of interactivity lying at the internet's core.

Parenthetically, it should be pointed out that not only Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, but his *Schaustücke*, too, employ techniques aimed at repositioning the spectator from a passive observer into an active participant. The viability of this concept has been contested by the cognitivist paradigm, which presently dominates academia.¹⁰ But today's equally intellectually fashionable discipline of new media studies has been mobilizing the activity/passivity binary to convince us of the benefits of its objects for our psychophysical wellness. In an early page of their *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, Martin Lister, Jon Dovey, Seth Giddins, Iain Grant, and Kieran Kelly thus interrogate the critical approaches to the new media that "seek to show that the dominant preoccupation with new media's difference, with the way that it outstrips and parts company with our old, passive, *analog* media, is an ideological trick, a myth."¹¹

In his writings about the radio, Brecht cautions against the medium's development along the lines of an outlet for traditional artistic expression, as this would come at the expense of the radio's ability to function as a platform for the exchange of "real information." Besides the collapse of the boundary between the work and its recipient, the statement hints at the radio's perceived documentary mandate. As such, it is reminiscent of Brecht's earlier writings on the use of film in Epic Theater. In "Less Certainty!!!," for example, he writes that "[t]he cinema's potential is to be found in its capacity to collect documents,"¹² a point elaborated on in "From the ABCs of Epic Theater": "Film in its own right can be used in the epic theater as a kind of optical chorus. In this case it is a good idea to maintain realism—that is, not to construct, let alone design something."¹³

Both of these quotations recommend traditional theatrical elements as sources of overt stylization, implying that the role of the medium's added, novel elements ought to be that of providing emphasis through contrast: the constructedness of the performance proper would thus be made all the more pronounced by the supposed nonconstructedness of the incorporated film scenes. This view rests on the following logic: representational media develop toward ever greater verisimilitude, and a representation obtained with a given medium's latest technological incarnation is likely to be perceived as transparent, devoid of human intervention, natural.

A similar argument is made by André Bazin in a series of writings, perhaps most forcefully in “The Myth of Total Cinema.”¹⁴ But whereas Bazin attributes a religiously metaphysical nature to cinema’s ability to credibly reproduce reality as manifested to sight, Brecht sees the medium’s photographic nature as suitable to representing not the abstract causes of human actions, but only their concrete effects. It is to this perception that one can attribute Brecht’s proposals for stylization in cinema, which often recommend regression to a previous stage of the medium’s technological development. Writing at the pinnacle of silent cinema in the mid-1920s, Brecht thus recommends the use of daguerreotype-style photography, while in a text written nearly full three decades later—when color photography was becoming a global standard—he requests black-and-white stock to be used for a planned screen adaptation of *Mother Courage*.¹⁵

Many new media theorists would contend that caveats against the potentially deceptive truth effects of images and sounds do not apply in the contemporary, media-saturated landscape, with its media-literate population. The “born digital” are likely to be adept at both critical analysis *and* production of the various media that can be simulated by the computer, which minimizes the likelihood of their confusing representations with subjects thereof. Indeed, one has difficulties imagining that a reaction comparable with the apocryphal but credible shock experienced by the contemporary viewers of *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* (Auguste and Louis Lumière, 1896) might be elicited by a contemporary media work in the idiom that Brecht would describe as “surface realist.” The reason for this is self-evident: old media are perceived, whereas the new media are used, and the act inevitably involving the consideration of a given new media work as an artifact. Also, Brecht’s precepts for the use of peripheral cinematographic properties such as film grain or contrast are not readily adjustable to the internet, where the appearance of media content can dramatically vary as a result of the technical differences among computers and internet connections. And the mentioned factor is but one that can affect the appearance of a visual or aural recording as accessed through the web.

The notion of contradiction O’Flynn mentions in relation to activist i-docs, however, suggests a continued relevance of Brecht’s ideas for politically engaged media practices. She applies to participatory media in general, and to i-docs and transmedia documentaries in particular, Catherine Belsey’s notion of the interrogative text: the kind that invites the reader “to construct meaning out of the contradictory voices” that the text provides.¹⁶ O’Flynn proceeds to conclude that “[m]eaning today is no longer provided, controlled, and conveyed solely by the authored text as either Brecht or Barthes conceived.” It is worth noting in this context that ample indicators exist that both writers did grasp the role of the recipient in the meaning-making process. For an example of Brecht’s understanding of the perceiver’s interaction with the art object, one should look no further than

his “Notes to ‘Mahagonny,’” whose focus freely alternates between performance and its spectator.¹⁷ Barthes’s most sustained commentary on Brecht, “Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,” posits a similar relationship between the artwork and its perceiver.¹⁸ In one of the essay’s introductory statements, Barthes situates the artist (“author”) and the recipient (“reader, spectator, or voyeur”) within the same category of subjects from whom representation can arise: “There will still be representation for so long as a subject (author, reader, spectator or voyeur) casts his *gaze* towards a horizon on which he cuts out the base of a triangle, his eye [or his mind] forming the apex.”¹⁹

Pertinent to the previously made suggestions that the participatory documentary hardly constitutes a seismic departure from Brecht, the period that saw the form’s advent also experienced a rise in popularity of nonparticipatory documentaries—authored texts. Just as a documentary of today can be participatory or not, both kinds of documentaries may and may not present contradictory elements whose collective meaning is different from their individual ones. This is to say that both kinds of documentaries *can* be dialectical—a term that O’Flynn avoids using, presumably on account of its association with communism, and the associated tendency in contemporary academia to adjust all critical concepts to the condition in which political theory is out of favor.²⁰

Dialectics has been traced as far back as I Ching divination texts (relatively recently, by Chenshan Tian, and—implicitly—by Brecht in *Buch der Wendungen*).²¹ The term’s breadth of meanings necessitates an explanation for this context. In his “Afterword to the Second German Edition” of *Capital*, Karl Marx posits a (Communist) revolutionary character of dialectics:

[I]t is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.²²

As possible additional guidelines for approaching dialectics as Marx’s favored method of research, it is useful to consult Bertell Ollmann, particularly in light of the fact that his brief definition that follows shares a key word with this discussion’s previous paragraph. “[D]ialectical research,” writes Ollmann, “is primarily directed to finding and tracing four kinds of relations: identity/difference, interpretation of opposites, quantity/quality, and *contradiction*” (emphasis mine).²³

Having established some definitions, I turn to the question of how dialectical the formal operations of *18 Days* are. First, some statistics. The

website comprises 365 files that in many ways resemble a typical PowerPoint presentation. If the assumption is correct that no contributor used more than a single name, the content of the website in its most current version is the work of seventy-five authors (excluding Mehta and Elayat). The website does not display the dates of uploading, but I can attest that no video has been added to the website since the beginning of this research in February 2016.

The moving lens-based image occupies a privileged place among the elements employed, illustrating D. N. Rodowick's view that what he calls the cinematic metaphor also remains dominant in new media.²⁴ The exact number of streams that include films (in the broadest sense of that term) cannot be identified, as dozens of streams have been removed from the website. That this is not an instance of the creators' editorial control can be inferred from the fact that streams of no discernible relevance to the topic have remained on the website for the several months this researcher has been visiting it. To offer the example of just one of the latest additions to the database, a video vaguely but appropriately entitled *Experiment* shows flashes of lightning in the cloudy night sky.

Most of the films on the website rely on the textual commentary provided through accompanying slides as principal or ancillary sources of meanings (typical examples are many interviews with the protesters). Some films, however, could function also as stand-alone pieces. One example is *What I Saw*, included in the stream entitled *Catching up with a Revolution*, which documents the journey of an emigré from Cairo from his adopted country of the United States back home, to personally take part in the revolution.²⁵

In its ambition and scope, *Catching Up* stands out in the database, which comprises mostly brief streams addressing single topics. I will limit the following list of examples to those that are most represented: (1) various clashes that occurred prior to, during, and after the time frame indicated by the title; (2) portraits of various representatives of the Mubarak regime; (3) portraits of the revolution's victims; (4) portraits of the presidential candidates; (5) interviews with the participants in, and sympathizers of, the revolution; (7) sexual harassment of female protesters; (8) the revolution as it occurred outside of the country's capital.

As one of my examples has already suggested, a large number of streams does not conform to the spatial and temporal coordinates proposed by the project's title. For instance, one of the streams depicts a public demonstration organized in Spain in support of the Egyptian uprising, whereas another one summarizes the revolution that brought King Farouk's rule to an end.²⁶ Both can be seen as examples of Brechtian historicizing,²⁷ but the relationship between the space and time of the actual revolution and their representation in the i-doc has more pertinent implications for my topic.

In their analysis of the Egyptian revolution, Aly el Raggal and Heba Raouf Ezzat (2015) adopt Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome to

explain how the revolution spread across the country horizontally, through a series of seemingly spontaneous outbursts made possible by the city's chaotic urban structure.²⁸ "Rhizomes," they write, "are about lines of interactions and not centers and pivots and not even nodes in networks, they are multiple, plural and different, and they are fluid and nomadic."²⁹ Interactions, networks, multiplicity, plurality, fluidity, and diversity—all these words regularly crop up also in the writings of such new-media experts as Lev Manovich—and el Raggala and Ezzat's notion of the rhizomatic structure fully applies to *18 Days*. Like its subject, the work grows laterally, at an irregular pace, with individual streams being created in places as mutually distant as Egypt and Spain, freely incorporating content from the official media and other submissions to the platform, and allowing contributors to edit the streams collectively.³⁰

Some of the imagery has recommended itself for repeated use on account of its emotional intensity (as is the case with the scene where a man, heading to Tahrir, professes his readiness to die for the revolution). In light of the website's mandate to serve as a database of firsthand testimonies of the revolution, one might infer that new meanings are forged through combining the cited scene—widely distributed also elsewhere on the web—with the various ones that surround it in different streams. But, as typical for the i-doc as a whole, these latter elements typically amount to mere variants of an "I was there" statement (the "I" being configured typically through the use of the first-person voice in the written commentary on the images), rather than working to negate or challenge the meaning of the scene described.

Some of the streams, however, show more formal sophistication. A case in point is the stream that satirically comments on the following metaphor made by Mohamed Morsy in his interview for *Time*: "The world stage is very difficult . . . It's a spaghetti-like structure. It's mixed-up."³¹ The stream adapts a verbal sign (the word "spaghetti") into a visual one (a photograph of the dish) in a fashion that deliberately ignores the difference between the former's arbitrary, and the latter's nonarbitrary nature, seeking to construe Morsy's reasoning as banal.³² (A charitable reading of his words would take into account that he had not spoken English regularly in three decades before to the interview,³³ and recognize the reference to spaghetti as an awkward attempt to translate into English the word "koshari"—a pasta-based mishmash that is the staple of Egyptian cuisine.) One can venture the hypothesis that the bulk of the streams eschew connotation in favor of denotation so as to assert their authenticity and thereby answer the website's call for genuine documents, documents that will—considered together—at once transcend and preserve the plurality of perspectives put forward through the individual streams. The logic underlying this reasoning belies an antinarrative bias that also informs the database/narrative dichotomy established by Lev Manovich. (Manovich defines the database as a

cultural form that “represents the world as a list of items and refuses to order this list”³⁴ and adopts Mieke Bal’s definition of narrative as a cultural form that features “a series of connected events caused or experienced by actors.”) Only a page later, Manovich states that “[r]egardless of whether new media objects present themselves as linear narratives, interactive narratives, databases, or something else, underneath, on the level of material organization, they are all databases.”³⁵ This claim is based on the identity he postulates of new media objects as digital codes,³⁶ and is one among the book’s numerous contradictions resulting from its frequent shifts of perspective from a phenomenological to an ontological one.

Both narrative and database can be seen as attempts “to make meaning out of the world,” as Manovich formulates it, but it is doubtful that the user of a new-media work based on automatic recordings of visual and/or aural phenomena—such as *18 Days*—can make meaning out of the work without first identifying the causal and spatial-temporal, as well as—concomitantly—causal, relationships among the events represented; in other words, without first establishing the representation’s story. Our cognitive hardwiring (to use a term that might appeal to Manovich) arguably makes arranging events according to their occurrence in space and time, and to their mutual relationships, intrinsic to the way we process information. This is to suggest that we have a natural predilection for narrating. Arguing otherwise, Manovich cites Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* as an example of a precomputer era database, even though the mentioned film satisfies all the criteria of narrative Manovich employs: it provides a coherent sense of space and time (a contemporary Soviet city), and features a character with a clear, albeit simple narrative trajectory (a filmmaker photographing, editing, and screening a film on a day in the city’s life).

Contrary to what Manovich posits, database and narrative are not necessarily “natural enemies.” Debra Beattie suggests the same when she notes that the perceiver/user retains an impulse for narrativizing the elements of a text regardless of the way in which those elements are ordered. The ideational distinction between a story and the manner of its telling is, of course, nothing new. One notable twentieth-century example pointing to it is the *fabula/syuzhet* dichotomy in Russian formalism, defined by Boris V. Tomashevsky as follows: “[T]he story [*fabula*] is the aggregate of motifs in their logical, causal-chronological order; the plot [*syuzhet*] is the aggregate of those same motifs but having the relevance and the order which they have had in the original work.”³⁷ Another example is the relationship between Brecht’s *Fabel* and the wide array of stylistic devices that can be deployed to make the *Fabel* more apparent. Mehta and Elayat’s intention to produce a conventional—that is, noninteractive and linear—documentary film from the various streams uploaded to their *18 Days* website can serve as further evidence that the desire for a *Fabel* survives the structuring of recorded events as a database. But this intention also raises the important

question of Mehta and Elayat's subjecting the variety of perspectives the i-doc is currently attempting to elicit to a singular authorial vision, whose coherence will ineluctably depend on tempering the dialectical contradictions that have—or might—arise among individual streams. The question can also be formulated as that of the creators' entitlement for taking ownership over the "truth" of the Egyptian revolution, of reducing the website's different perspectives—the multiplicity of which O'Flynn rightly sees as the *raison d'être* of documentary new media collaborative projects such as this—to their own perspective.

The creators' plan to take *18 Days* from the hands of the many to the hands of the few—in an inversion of Brecht's hope for the medium of radio quoted above—is curiously similar to the trajectory of the Egyptian revolution itself. The event began as a spontaneous outburst of collective political will by Egyptians of both genders and different religions and social classes, only to be snatched from them by an entity with a single political valence. This outcome has led the scholars Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds to persuasively interrogate the view of the United States' secretary of state John Kerry that the July 2013 military coup in Egypt restored the country's democracy.³⁸ Kerry's oxymoronic statement brings to mind "Die Lösung,"³⁹ Brecht's lyrical response on the failed workers' uprising of June 17, 1953 in East Germany. The short poem's exposition states that the country's Writers' Union reacted to the event by issuing a statement that the people had forfeited the government's confidence, which could be won back only by redoubled efforts.⁴⁰ Brecht's sarcastic rhetorical question that follows is: "Would it not be easier / In that case for the government / To dissolve the people / And elect another?" Contra Kerry and in line with Brecht's analytical incisiveness, Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds proceed to conclude that Egypt's first democratic experiment is now over.⁴¹ It remains to be seen whether Mehta and Elayat's edited film will acknowledge the parallelism between its own formal procedures and the 2013 seizure of power by the military junta, thereby inviting the viewer's political response to it in the manner of a Brechtian artwork. If it does not, the film might prove useful only despite itself, as a work that nonreflexively implies the betrayed possibilities of both its medium and the Egyptian revolution.

Notes

¹ Ludovica Fales, "Real Time Memories of a Revolution," in *Cinema and Art as Archive: Form, Medium, Memory*, ed. Francesco Federici and Cosetta G. Saba (place of publication not identified: Mimesis International, 2014), 245–63.

² Henry Jenkins, Ravi Purushotma, Katie Clinton, Margaret Weigel, and Alice J Robison, as quoted in Fales, 250.

³ Fales, 252.

⁴ Siobhan O’Flynn, “Documentary’s Metamorphic Form: Webdoc, Interactive, Transmedia, Participatory and Beyond,” *Studies in Documentary Film* 6, no. 2 (2012): 141–57.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁷ *New Media: Theories of Practices of Digitextuality*, ed. Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2003), 29–32.

⁸ For Brecht’s own concise theoretical articulation of the technique, see “Die Große und die Kleine Pädagogik” (*BFA* 21, 396). An English translation is available in *Brecht on Art and Politics*, ed. Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 88. Reiner Steinweg’s *Das Lehrstück: Brechts Theorie einer politisch-ästhetischen Erziehung* (Brandes & Apsel: Frankfurt am Main, 1995), which uses Brecht’s cited note as a departure point, remains the most extensive critical discussion of the concept.

⁹ *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio*, ed. Marc Silberman (London: Methuen, 2000), 42.

¹⁰ For an influential film studies expression of the paradigm as related to Brecht, see Murray Smith, “The Logic and Legacy of Brechtianism” (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 130–48.

¹¹ Martin Lister, Jon Dovey, Seth Giddins, Iain Grant, and Kieran Kelly, *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3.

¹² *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio*, 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Volume 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 17–22.

¹⁵ See Brecht’s “File Note [Courage Film]” (*Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio*, 24) and “The Film Mother Courage” (*Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio*, 26).

¹⁶ Catherine Belsey, as quoted in O’Flynn, 52.

¹⁷ *BFA* 24, 78–79.

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, “Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,” in *Screen* 15, no. 2 (1974): 33–40.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁰ A link between communism and dialectics is most authoritatively established by Karl Marx in the “Afterword to the Second German Edition” of his *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 12–22.

²¹ Chenshan Tian, *Chinese Dialectics: From Yijing to Marxism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005); Brecht, *Buch der Wendungen* (*BFA* 18, 45–194).

²² Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 20.

²³ Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx’s Method* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 15.

²⁴ See part 3 of D. N. Rodowick’s *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 90–188, and particularly the section “The New Media” (93–99).

- ²⁵ *Catching up with a Revolution* (Ethar Hasaan), *18 Days in Egypt*, <http://beta.18daysinegypt.com/#/explore> (accessed April 12, 2017).
- ²⁶ King Farouk (1920–1965) ruled Egypt and the Sudan from 1936 to his overthrow in the 1952 military coup d'état.
- ²⁷ For Brecht's delineation of historicizing as a defining technique of *Verfremdung*, see *BFA* 22, 646.
- ²⁸ "Egypt: Can a Revolution Be Negotiated?," in *Arab Spring: Negotiating in the Shadow of the Intifadat*, I. William Zartman, ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 80–115.
- ²⁹ El Raggal and Raouf Ezzat, "Egypt," 88.
- ³⁰ Proceeding from, on the one hand, El Raggal and Raouf Ezzat's insight and the "generalized anti-Hegelianism" (with antidialecticism as an inevitable corollary) expressed by Deleuze explicitly in *Difference and Repetition*, Paul Patton, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), ix, and, on the other hand, Brecht's indebtedness to Hegelian dialectics via Marx, one could construe a logical relation where *18 Days* and the Egyptian revolution are Deleuzian and therefore anti-Hegelian, that is antidialectical and non-Brechtian in nature. But the intricacies of both Hegel's and Deleuze's argumentation preclude pursuing that line of thought within the space of this essay.
- ³¹ Richard Stengel, Bobby Ghosh, and Karl Vick, "Transcript: TIME's Interview with Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi," *Time*, November 28, 2012.
- ³² *Morsy's Moment in TIME* (Carmel Alyaa Delshad), *18 Days in Egypt*, <http://beta.18daysinegypt.com/#/explore> (accessed April 12, 2017).
- ³³ Stengel, Ghosh, and Vick, "Transcript."
- ³⁴ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 225.
- ³⁵ Manovich, 228.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.
- ³⁷ Boris V. Tomashevsky, "Thematics [Tematika]," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 68.
- ³⁸ Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 227.
- ³⁹ *BFA* 12, 310.
- ⁴⁰ The wording here is a paraphrase of Derek Bowman's translation of the poem "The Solution," in Bertolt Brecht, *Poems 1913–1956*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (New York: Methuen, 1976), 440.
- ⁴¹ Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds, *The Arab Spring*, 125.

Recycling Brecht: Creative Responses

When we think of the many ways in which Brecht's work, ideas, and texts have been and are being received, refashioned and recycled, we should of course think—and perhaps in the very first place, rather than at the end of this volume—of the use and usefulness of Brecht in the creative arts, in literature, and the theater in the first instance, but not just there: also in film, in multimedia dialogue, in the visual arts, and so on. Brecht himself was a restless experimenter, and many since have been inspired by his experiments to go on and continue that method, in sympathy with or, occasionally, in bitter opposition to Brecht's own spirit. As we have seen, Brecht entertained a lively dialogue with a very wide range of literary and cultural traditions, always weighing up what he could take from them, adapt, and develop. His innovations often come about in the process of recycling the old, for example his "Epic Theater" as a form of reception of the theater of antiquity and of the Early Modern. As a writer, Brecht was of course not only an innovator in the theater, but also opened up new (and old) poetic forms, experimented with subject matters and registers previously thought "unliterary." He experimented with what were then new media: writing poems to be distributed as records, plays for the radio, and film treatments, and he created his own multimedia and cross-genre works, the photo-epigrams of *War Primer*, and even made a "Proposal to combine architecture and lyric poetry." What fruitful territory this is! It is hardly surprising that later artists have taken up the challenge to continue and develop the experiments.

It is less easy for a primarily academic conference to reflect this sort of work *in practice*. But for the Oxford symposium we were determined also to develop a cultural program, and the pieces that follow are the best we can do by way of traces of all such activity—the work that can at least somehow be represented in linear written form. Some of this work also leaves a more lasting trace, in the form of photographs and filmic accounts, on the website of the Symposium: <http://brecht.mml.ox.ac.uk/ibs-symposium>. When this is taken down, we hope to transfer at least a proportion of the material to an Oxford University media and research archive and/or to the IBS website.

The academic program was punctuated by discussions and roundtables. The first of these was a discussion between Tom Kuhn and the American playwright and film writer Tony Kushner, an edited version of which is reproduced here. Kushner comments on his own understanding

and reception of Brecht and has particularly interesting things to say about the creation of the *Fabel*, from the writer's point of view. Other inspiring discussions, which we are unfortunately unable to represent here (for considerations of both space and intractability) included the director and radio star Jürgen Kuttner (in conversation with Erdmut Wizisla and Günther Heeg), director Lisa Channer, theater critic Lyn Gardner, playwright Simon Stephens, and director Di Trevis (in conversation with David Barnett), and poet and translator David Constantine and playwright Mark Ravenhill (in conversation with Brecht biographer Stephen Parker).

The cultural program accompanying the symposium began and ended with an impressive and varied program of short films: *Our Sign is the Stone* (2016), a documentary of Di Trevis and Decca Muldowney's work with a theater group in Palestine and their adaptation of *The Mother* to their own experience; Peter Voigt's documentary films on Brecht's work practices, *Bild und Modell* (1998 and 2004); *Witness 11* by Sean Mitchell (2012), a fictionalized account of Brecht's testimony before HUAC; a short by Richard O'Connor, called *Marianne* (2013) and based on some short diary entries by Brecht; and finally Zoe Beloff's *A Model Family in a Model Home* (2015). Beloff gives a riveting account of how she developed this film in a short essay in this section of the *Yearbook*.

In addition there were musical performances. Australian diva Robyn Archer performed a program of songs by Brecht and others, accompanied by Michael Morley. And mezzo-soprano Lore Lixenberg, with Richard Uttley, performed songs by Hanns Eisler (mostly to texts by Brecht) as well as two new cycles of music commissioned especially for this occasion: an untitled group of settings of short Brecht poems by Richard Thomas, and a cycle called *Exile* by Niels Rønsholdt. These latter two both used new translations into English by Tom Kuhn and David Constantine, translations that are forthcoming in their *Collected Poems of Bertolt Brecht* (New York: Norton-Liveright, 2018).

And there were theatrical offerings: the premiere of a new English version of *Fatzer* (by Tom Kuhn), directed by Di Trevis and Tom Bailey, the text of which is forthcoming in *Brecht and the Writer's Workshop* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2018); an experimental promenade performance developed out of the *learning play* model and entitled *Violence & Learning*, by Henrik Bromander and John Hanse, an excerpt of which is reproduced below; a multimedia event by Phoebe Zeitgeist Teatro, inspired by Brecht's *Baal* and entitled *Cantieri Bavaresi #3 EKART*; and a performance-lecture on Brecht's *Die Bestie* (The Beast) by Hans-Martin Ritter, which is also published here. There were also theater writing and performing workshops hosted, respectively, by Sarah Moon and by Di Trevis and Dominic Muldowney.

Finally, translation, as a form of recycling and a wonderful opportunity to renew and reflect on Brecht's own texts, was also much in evidence

at the symposium, as must already be apparent. Among the contemporary work: Tom Kuhn's work was variously on display; David Constantine, in addition, held a workshop on "Translation as Close Reading"; Antony Tatlow introduced his new translation and edition of *Bertolt Brecht's Me-ti: Book of Interventions in the Flow of Things* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016); and Charles Osborne, again in a paper reproduced here, reflected on the process of translating *The Business Affairs of Mr Julius Caesar* (Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016). Playwright Mark Ravenhill concluded the symposium with a workshop entitled "Recycling *Coriolanus*" in which he presented various versions of the play, on the page and on screen, for discussion and debate.

The interview, texts, and essays that follow are, then, just a fragment of the several processes and practices of creative-artistic response to Brecht's work that were on display at the Fifteenth Symposium of the International Brecht Society, held at St. Hugh's College, Oxford, June 25–29, 2016. The rich cultural program was supported in particular by the Toepfer Foundation (Hamburg), by the North Wall Theatre, by St. Hugh's College, by alumni and friends of St. Hugh's College, and by friends of the International Brecht Society—to all of whom we are very grateful.

—The Editors

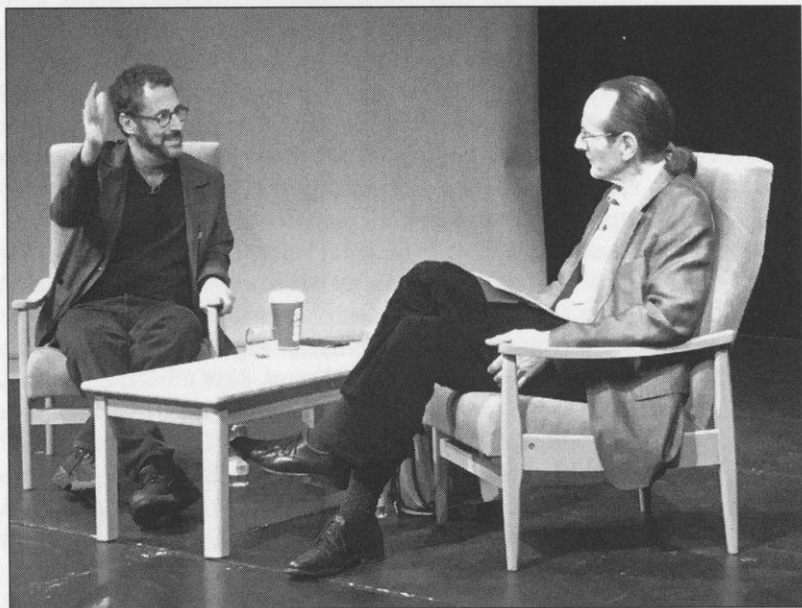


Fig. 1. Tony Kushner in conversation with Tom Kuhn.
Courtesy of the Writing Brecht Project.

Constructing the *Fabel*: Tony Kushner in Conversation with Tom Kuhn

Tom Kuhn

The first event of the Recycling Brecht symposium took place on June 25, 2016 (the day after the Brexit vote result was announced) at Oxford's North Wall Arts Centre, with multi-award-winning playwright Tony Kushner in conversation with Brecht scholar Tom Kuhn.

Kuhn: It's not every day that you get to introduce the greatest English-language playwright since . . . (maybe) Pinter! But Tony is a man whose works demand superlatives of us. His great 1994 play *Angels in America* is one of those truly exceptional works which is—perhaps a little bit like the *Three-penny Opera*—always playing somewhere in the world. In fact if you have a private jet at your disposal, you're just in time to set off for the second half at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg.

For that play Tony won a Pulitzer Prize, two Tony Awards, and then in 2013 a National Arts Medal from Barack Obama. His plays are extraordinary in the breadth of their intellectual and formal ambition, and in their political and moral passion. I wanted to say he's created a whole new theatrical language for a generation, but I think actually there are so few people who can tread in his footsteps and develop what he's done—who have either the writerly skills or the chutzpah to bring *Angels* to America or a *Homebody* to Kabul.

He's also a great Brecht fan—which is why he's here. He's translated *The Good Person of Szechwan* and adapted that and *Mother Courage*—the latter was of course a triumph on Broadway in 2006 with Meryl Streep.

We're here to talk about Brecht, and the importance of Brecht for your work and in your work, but I can't resist first asking you what you make of the most recent political developments in this sad country of ours.

Kushner: What do you mean? [*laughter*] I arrived in London on Thursday night and turned on the news at my hotel to see if any of the referendum results had started to come in. And they started to come in around ten, but by eleven my eyes were . . . and I fell fast asleep. And somebody, one of the Tories, had just announced that it was going to be a very good day for Remain, and so I fell asleep feeling good and then woke up to horror. I mean

it's astonishing, it's really a great shock. For the past hour before coming over here I was reading about when Donald Trump came to Scotland and how happy he was to be in Scotland, which was so excited about leaving the EU. And oceans of vitriolic tweets started appearing from irate Scots people, calling him all sorts of things . . . And now people in the States have picked up on this and are collecting some of the horrifying things that Scots people are calling him, like "mangled apricot hellbeast" (that's one of the more polite ones). It's just genius.

But it's very frightening; it does feel terrifyingly like the thirties in certain ways, with this right-wing demagoguery attaching itself to an unformed, inchoate, frantic anger and fear among large populations of lower-middle-class and working-class people, and preying on xenophobia and racism. And I guess there's the possibility that this is really going to bring some of the dreadful people to power. There's a real panic in the United States as of yesterday that this might actually mean that Trump, who has been doing a spectacular job in the last few weeks of demolishing his own campaign, could be in the ascendant again; but I don't think actually the problem here will translate. We have problems of our own, God knows, and we're not nearly as good as you guys at calling the people that cause those problems names . . .

Kuhn: I don't know about that, when I think about the invective that you wrote for *Mother Courage*, you had some very choice little epithets there that we could perhaps reuse.

Kushner: I can't remember any of that, I'm sure! I had a long exchange with Frau Brecht-Schall about that. When I first sent my version to her, she wrote back and said, "It's OK but why do you have to use the F word?" (She actually called it "the F word.") And I said, well, I think your father's work was not particularly polite and for a modern audience's ears, if it doesn't have that word then it won't sound earthy enough. So she let me keep it.

Kuhn: I think that's absolutely right, of *Mother Courage* in particular, because there's that South German Catholic invective, that "Himmelherrgottsakrament" stuff, which you can't translate as "Heaven Lord God Sacrament," so you have to do something more contemporary with it, absolutely.

My other pre-question question is about success. Brecht came to be very mistrustful of the success of *The Threepenny Opera*; he thought that if people liked it that much, he must have done something wrong. Do you ever have that feeling about *Angels in America*?

Kushner: No. My nickname for it is "the franchise." I'll forgive any critic for trashing anything that I do except *Angels in America*. My motto is "Don't fuck with the franchise," because it's done wonderful things for me. No, I don't feel that way. I obviously have a very different relationship to my audience than Brecht had with his audiences; and Brecht of course

spent an enormous amount of time, thirteen years, without an audience in a sense, during which time he worked on texts which were intended to achieve a kind of classic stature as opposed to the experimental work that he was doing before he went into exile, so . . . I'm not entirely sure, I mean he was very nervous—by the time *Mother Courage* was touring England and he said, you know, people talk faster there so don't be so slow, we don't want to sound like Germans. . . . He was concerned about his reception and pleased with it, and he certainly profited handsomely from *The Threepenny Opera* as well.

Kuhn: It's true also that he didn't have the opportunity to develop it. He attempted to with the *Threepenny* film but of course failed to take advantage of that in the way he wanted to. Whereas you've presumably been able to follow *Angels* through its various stages. Do you watch its progress through school curricula and things like that?

Kushner: No. I'm turning sixty this summer, and I was initially somewhat surprised to learn that it was assigned to undergraduate courses. Because of course the world has changed a lot, but it's now regularly taught at high schools and that still seems shocking to me. I grew up in Louisiana in the 1960s and 70s and we wouldn't have had a play that had anal sex on the stage! But . . . kids are different nowadays. I had an interesting exchange with Rebecca Miller, who's a friend of mine. She asked me to go to the second preview of Ivo van Hove's production of *The Crucible*, which is on Broadway right now. She was in the middle of finishing her new film, and has a somewhat complicated relationship to her father's work, as the curator of Arthur Miller's plays. She was nervous because a number of cuts had been made to the text, and we had a long discussion about how much one can or should try to control one's work once it's out there. There are many copies of *Angels in America* out in the world, and I sort of feel that people can do whatever they want with them.

Kuhn: Do you really feel that? As a writer for the theater you always have to let it go, to some extent, as soon as it goes into its first production.

Kushner: To some extent you have to let it go, or you'll end up killing it in its cradle. When it was first done in France, the French translation was sent to me, and I could basically see that it was adhering to the subject at hand. But of course five days later another translation arrived by some very irate person, who knew the work of this other translator and knew that he was an idiot and would have completely screwed it up . . . So I was sent these two translations and there was a great deal of agony about which one was exactly right. And around that time I thought, I'm just going to kiss it on the head and let it go. And that's mainly worked; Ivo van Hove's production of *Angels* in Amsterdam, which was an enormous success, and he cut about two hours of text from the play. And I went to see it and loved it, I could see

what he'd cut and I was a little bit shocked by some of it, but it worked and I think that's thrilling and exciting.

And one of the things I've learned from Brecht, and from Shakespeare, is . . . I think it's great that there are variant versions of the ending of *Galileo*, and several different versions of *Hamlet*. It helps to make a play more unpredictable if the text is actually going to be in flux.

Kuhn: I'm sure you're right, but that is a problem with Brecht too, because he kept control of his versions to a very large extent. There were new ones but they were authorized by him for new occasions; and he was quite dodgy about translations although he couldn't really control what happened to the translation. And of course he set up Modelbooks which he always said were not meant to prescribe exactly what the production looked like but just make it possible to learn from what people had done and make thoughtful progress—but of course, in fact, they were to some extent an attempt to keep a hold of the work in the theater.

Kushner: Well, as is always true of Brecht, there's that and then there's the other thing: and the other thing is that, starting perhaps with *Edward II*, and certainly throughout his entire career, the ferocity with which he devoured other people's texts, and tore texts apart, and when you read accounts of his rehearsal methods with the Berliner Ensemble and there's this assemblage process that—as far as we can tell—attended the writing of the plays . . . It encourages people to treat the texts with less sacrosanctity than might otherwise be the case. And if you think of somebody like Heiner Müller, who was arguably Brecht's immediate inheritor, there are texts that can't be performed without an immense amount of interpretation, because there's so little information on the page about exactly what's supposed to be happening on stage. So I think the effect of Brecht on playwriting has been more in the emancipatory than proprietary direction.

Kuhn: Let's go back to the beginning. You've talked about your first encounters with Brecht at Columbia University and your ambition to be a playwright a little bit like Brecht, and one of the people who played a big role in those early years was Carl Weber, who was himself of course an assistant of Brecht's in the 1950s. Can you tell us a little bit about how that relationship worked, and what Carl brought to your understanding of Brecht and the theater?

Kushner: Well I was an undergraduate at Columbia University and there was—thank God—no theater major, you had to study liberal arts not fine arts, which I think is a very good thing. I think I read Brecht for the first time in a Modern Drama class in my third year; it was also the year that Richard Foreman did his *Threepenny Opera* for Joseph Papp—a production that I still think is one of the two or three most important productions of my theater-going life. I saw it eight times. It really was astonishing,

and the recording has recently become available for the first time; it was blocked for a long time. And I became obsessed with reading Brecht and trying to understand Brecht, and I started reading Marx so that I could understand Brecht.

Kuhn: There's a nice parallel there: Brecht started reading Marx in order to understand the world, and you need to read Marx in order to understand Brecht.

Kushner: Well, I had a degree of American Cold War thinking to overcome. And it took Brecht a while to get there; he did write all those plays before he caught the bug. When I graduated from Columbia I'd decided that I wanted to be a writer, but I was afraid to own that ambition and thought that maybe I should be a director, so I started looking at directing programs, and in an issue of *Yale Theater* I saw a picture of Carl working with Ronnie Davis of the San Francisco Mime Troupe. They were starting a thing called "Epic Theater West," an attempt to study Brecht method and apply it to theater. And I remember that in the picture Carl had his hair cut like Brecht, that sort of Caesar haircut, and he'd worked with Brecht, so I decided I *had* to go and work with him. So I applied to the directing program at New York University, and was rejected the first time, auditioning with a piece by Brecht ("The Beggar and the Dead Dog" . . . it was a terrible role, I didn't know what the hell I was doing). Then the second year I auditioned with my own piece and got in, and then studied with Carl for three years, and he basically used what I think Benjamin describes as the *plumpes Denken Geschichtslinie*, the fat-thinking-storyline . . . Carl called it the *Fabel*, and he used it as a tool for directing, but it was actually a dramaturgical method, an attempt to find a way into the spine of the play that the writer intended, without worrying too much about the writer. But it was very difficult and we always got enormously frustrated, as one is when one reads for instance Brecht's account of *Gestus* and thinks, "What is that?" (I just read a great essay by Simone Weil, saying if you ever want to embarrass a Marxist ask them to explain what historical materialism really is, and they'll become incredibly red in the face and frustrated; no one has ever been able to explain it. She has a point.)

So it's taken me a long time to understand the idea of a narrative as being more than a series of plot points, but a combination of story and *Inhalt*—depth, ideology, and intellectual intention and analysis. And Carl made us literally construct outlines based on that, and there was great frustration in doing that work but it was also enormously valuable to me in the writer that I eventually became. I still do it, and I think a lot of playwrights do, even those who aren't as enamored of Brecht as I am. The necessity of an outline, and an outline that isn't just working out the points of the plot.

Kuhn: Yes it's sort of "plot as argument" rather than "plot as sequence of events." How do you do that in your own practice? What are the mechanics of deciding the progress of a *Fabel*? I can understand the issue of discovering it in a written work in order to put it on, or in order to write about that work, but creating it is a different matter.

Kushner: It's a combination . . . a kind of dialectic . . . for me it's a matter of struggling between the forward momentum of the drama and the entropic pull of depth and complexity; and the necessity of creating a machine that is both lunging forward and also demanding of the audience, or inciting in the audience an appetite for the thing to stop, to be absorbed more fully, which I think happens if the play is in contact with something of real significance below the level of surface plot and psychology.

[*At this point Kushner briefly compares playwriting to screenwriting: he remarks that the drafting process is different for screenwriters, because they have to produce "treatments"—a synopsis of the film before writing it, "as if you've seen the movie and are now describing it."*]

Kushner: You need to wait until the various levels of drama start to chime together, which is part of the process of working on a *Fabel*. Sometimes you find that half the outline is just discussions of ideas, or you derail your own outline by writing a long, eight- or nine-page essay about whatever particular thing is worrying you; and then you just keep redoing and redoing it until eventually you start to hear dialogue. At that point I know it's probably time to start writing, though it's also a good way to avoid writing—as is reading. Anything that helps you avoid actually making up the names of characters and pretending you know who these people are and what they're going to say, which is just a miserably difficult moment.

Kuhn: What's fascinating about that as a process, and probably applicable to Brecht as well, is that we tend to think of him and other intellectual playwrights as engaged in a very rational project of construction. But you're saying that you also have to let go of that, in order to feel relationships as you're writing. That's something that's often overlooked when people write about Brecht, because they're expecting him to be expounding an argument and that's what they're looking for, and they lose all sight of the things that don't fit into that.

Kushner: And when he began writing the "big Brechts," the plays by which he's known . . . There are so many scenes that are so sublimely constructed, and entire plays whose construction is remarkable. There's that great thing in his diary, in the 1950s, when he says I've been sitting here trying to edit *The Good Person of Szechwan* to make it shorter, but I can't see a way of making it less than six hours, so this is another good argument for shortening the working day so that we can all spend more time [in the theater].

It's like *Hamlet*; if you remove the things it seems easy to remove, then it does massive damage to the spectacular beauty of the large argument that the play is making. The way that the play really dissects the process of commodification and also the mystery of goodness. You can't do anything with it, it's really beautifully constructed. But before he began doing those plays, things like the *Baden Baden Play for Learning* are in a way deconstructing themselves at the same time as they are constructing.

Kuhn: How about *Mother Courage*? You've said before that's one of your favorite plays.

Kushner: I directed it, right after graduating I was hired to direct it with the graduate acting students at NYU and I did a sort of mash-up of the *Baden Baden Play for Learning*, *He Who Says Yes*, *He Who Says No*, and Heiner Müller's *Herzstück*, which is of course a kind of riff on the Mr. Smith clown play. And it was a wonderful production; I was very proud of it. The thrill of working on the text is that the cast has to learn at least some fundamentals of Marxism in order to be able to understand what the hell is going on; so it is a teaching play for the actors, it forces you into a very painful and complicated encounter with your own assumptions, and the necessity of going to sources that can try to explain the origins of this disturbing form of theater.

There's a section of the *Baden Baden* play where it says "pages of evidence" and that's it, so I took that as freedom to do whatever I wanted.

Kuhn: And how easy is it to do precisely that sort of work in the States? Brecht in America always seems to be a particularly problematic chapter because he's not taught to actors . . .

Kushner: Or if he's taught he's taught so terribly. I went to a Brecht conference at the University of North Dakota, and the students were doing a production of my version of *Good Person of Szechwan* and I said, I want to attend the conference because I'm interested to hear what people are saying about Brecht, but I don't really think I want to see a student production of this very difficult play. But they said, please see the play. So I saw the play, and it turned out to be great, and then I went to the conference and that was horrendous, because there was this persistent notion that the "V-Effekt" ("A-Effect" back then) could be married to Marx's idea of the worker's alienation and it doesn't have that meaning at all. So there were a lot of demonstrations of how you work with actors and teach them this effect by making them do *appalling* things. And some of it is Brecht's fault, because he didn't have time—and probably never would have—standardized his theory.

Kuhn: He never would have, that's the point. There is the *Kleines Organon*, where he does sort of bring it together, but that's a retrospective attempt,

and he was coming back to Europe so it was a sort of calling card—as if to say: Look, I have something to say in the theater. But otherwise he was always adapting his theory and changing his vocabulary, and *Gestus* is of course one of the victims of that process because the meaning never really settles down.

Kushner: Yes, and “distanciation” as well. It’s like the story of the Supreme Court justice who said of pornography, “I know it when I see it.” There are certain actors that you can point to and say: This is an actor that Brecht would have loved, or that you know Brecht loved, somebody like Laughton, or Ethel Merman. Weigel told Eric Bentley that Merman was her first choice for an American actor to play *Mother Courage*; she may have been joking but I don’t think so. It makes complete sense to me because Merman really, in a certain sense, like Jack Nicholson, is one of those actors that can do a sort of inside and outside thing at the same time. I’ve yet to hear anyone who’s come up with a particularly foolproof way of teaching that to actors. Some actors I think are born to do that and some maybe not.

Kuhn: But all of those actors can at least in some of their great roles have an ironic relationship with the role, and Laughton being Henry VIII is a fantastic example of that; there’s no way he’s just embodying Henry VIII.

Kushner: Yes, there’s not a disappearance. But there are some actors who are immensely great but who do vanish into behavior, and I don’t think would ever really be able to play anything that had . . . [*trails off*]. I’m not sure that Laughton knew that he was in any way . . . it’s tricky . . .

But when it’s really working, when you’re seeing an actor doing it, part of what’s disturbing about it—and I think this is what Brecht intended—if there’s too much of the actor outside, it doesn’t work. It has to be somewhat fugitive and ephemeral, it comes out at moments and then disappears, there’s a back and a forth which is obviously what he intends. You don’t write scene eleven of *Mother Courage* if you’re uninterested in empathy. I don’t care how much of a straw demon he made of Aristotle; a stone would weep, and I’ve seen people try really hard to ruin that scene.

Kuhn: It’s clear there’s an alternation between total emotional engagement and then the standing next to it and saying, “What was that all about?”

Kushner: And when you read accounts of Berliner Ensemble productions, in Berlin and then on the road, no one says, “Oh this was so great, I was only *thinking* at the end and not feeling anything.”

[*Kushner talks briefly about Eric Bentley as writer and critic.*]

Kushner: Eric Bentley tells a story about going to a bar with Brecht and Weigel after seeing a Berliner Ensemble production of *Mother Courage*, and he says to Weigel, you seemed to age between the lullaby to Kathrin

when she's dead and starting the next scene. You didn't leave the stage but you seemed to get fifteen years older, and she said, "That was easy, I took my teeth out. The only problem is there's no pocket on my costume."

Kuhn: You've worked with or at least witnessed an actor who is perhaps the opposite, Daniel Day Lewis, as your Lincoln. How did that feel? He is somebody who *embodies*, and it's hard to see those moments of departure from the role.

Kushner: I think he does and he doesn't. Actors of great intelligence, and he's enormously intelligent, do bring a certain degree of distance. He goes into the character; he told me several weeks before we started filming Lincoln that he was going to stop talking to me, after a year of talking about the film, until the film was done. And then he went into the character, and Spielberg called him "Mr. President." And people laugh at that, but on the other hand when you see this man pretending to be Abraham Lincoln while these giant cameras are pushing into his face, and he maintains this belief in himself as Lincoln. So whatever it takes to do that, it's an absolutely superhuman feat.

I think there's almost an authorial quality to his characters; there's a construction there as well. And I think it's one of the reasons he doesn't do that many. I think it's true of Nicholson as well, and Vanessa Redgrave; there's a certain sense of both absolute spontaneity and a considered, constructed thing, that both seems at moments to be spontaneous and also seems to be prepared.

[*Kushner gives an example from Lincoln of Day Lewis's "authorial" acting.*]

Kuhn: Before you made *Lincoln* and *Munich* with Spielberg, you had said that the only reason to write for the cinema was to make a bit of money.

Kushner: Health insurance and to meet Meryl Streep.

Kuhn: Would you say that still, or are you able to bring some of the Brechtian of your playwriting into your film writing as well?

Kushner: I think Brecht would hate my plays, which makes me very sad. I hope he wouldn't hate the two versions of *Courage* and *Szechwan*, but I don't think he would care very much for my work, so I'm not too worried about that. I wouldn't write a film that I didn't care about and believe in, not so much because of my sterling moral character but because I just don't think I could do it.

Kuhn: What I'm thinking is that in both those films there's a sense of a purposefully mediated narrative, it's not a narrative which you simply enter. In *Munich* of course Avner experiences the events partly through the television and the film ends with a shot of the Twin Towers. And these things create a

narrative frame, which give the film a very different meaning from a simple sequence of events, and I thought of that as perhaps cognate to the *Fabel*.

Kushner: Maybe. I feel as a screenwriter that I'm to a degree subservient to the vision of the director. I love working with Steven because he actually allows me to collaborate; although it's his decision finally, and I've lost a number of arguments about things that matter to me in the process. But I feel that we're closely enough attuned politically that I'm very proud of the two films that we've made and I'm very excited about the one that's coming up.

I think that playwrights are not necessarily great constructors of plot, of narrative, I think that our real job is the dialectic, is the argument, and finding a way to embody it (if you're a narrative, realist playwright, that is). And so I think filmmakers and novelists have a lot more in common than filmmakers and playwrights, and the novel has more in common with film—in terms of its relationship to the audience—than film has with theater, which has a very different relationship to the audience.

When Steven and I work, I write a very, very long first draft—the first draft of *Lincoln* was 500 pages long, and had to then be reduced to about 160 pages—and there's a great struggle that goes on for the next five or six drafts, that I now realize is about Steven trying to identify a narrative spine for himself, the story that he's going to tell. Because I think it's pretty much inarguable that he's one of the greatest, if not the greatest cinematic narrator; he invented an entire language of telling a story through film, and it's astonishing to watch. There's a machine in there that's constructed to construct narrative. Once we've found that [narrative spine], he lets me stuff back in some of the things I really care about, but in every attempt there's always one scene that isn't purely about driving the narrative forward, that he identifies, he almost always reads it back to me, that he really loves. And invariably that's turned out to be the scene that's at the heart of the content, of the *Inhalt*, the inner depth of the film, and then I have room to expand.

[*Kushner notes that it is unusual for screenwriters to go onto the set during filming, joking that the reason Spielberg invited him on set during the filming of Munich was so that he'd have somebody to share the blame for the highly controversial plot. Kushner praises Spielberg as a highly successful businessman and producer as well as a "very serious artist" who "takes great risks."*]

Kuhn: We think of those sorts of collaborative relationships—writers with directors—more normally in the theater. Is that an experience you've had as well? I notice there are particular directors you've worked with on numerous occasions, is there an input from them in the writing process as well?

Kushner: There's a great David Mamet line: "Film is a collaborative process, bend over . . ." Theater is absolutely a collective enterprise, there's

no way around it. The living thing will at some point cease to be what's going on in the rehearsal room, where one has a hope of making one's opinion felt, and be on stage. The power relation shifts radically, and the act of reading and interpreting . . . You have certain legal rights because it's your script and you rent it to people, you can always refuse to allow them to make the changes they want to make, but it's essential to the life of the play itself that you enter into it with the courage to collaborate, which does actually require courage, it requires trust in other people, that you may not actually really trust. But you need to go forward and give everyone a chance to invest in the material and that requires a degree of fortitude and to some extent a retiring of one's ego. That's just axiomatic in working in theater. I love it, but it also makes life as a playwright difficult, because it's very hard to leave the rehearsal room, to leave that wonderful collaborative space, and then become a writer in private. I can't do what Brecht did, or at least I haven't been able to so far. I've been asked to do a short miniseries for HBO, which was my idea, and because I'm a little overwhelmed right now I'm trying to write with someone I've worked with a great deal, as a sort of script editor. It's very hard, I'm used to being alone. But it's no fun to be alone, it's very difficult to go off and have no one but yourself and the people you've made up for company. So that's a struggle and I think for many playwrights, their work starts to dry up because they struggle too much, and they start to appear in their own plays, that's a sure sign of danger, or they do what O'Neill did, and pronounce anathema on the theater practices of the day and then more and more refuse to have anything to do with a living production, which is also a problem. Striking a balance and maintaining it is very difficult.

Kuhn: Or they become manically protective like Beckett did. Writing how many seconds long a blackout can be and so on.

Kushner: Yes, and if you see the films of Beckett's plays in German, you can see, as John Lahr says, it's the dead weight of authority in the room, it's not good. One of the thrilling things about reading about Brecht in rehearsal, sometimes it sounds like it must have been just incredibly difficult and shatteringly chaotic and disturbing, and some of the really early productions like the *Threepenny Opera*, it just sounds like he was lucky that nobody killed him, but when he had time—and perhaps too much time—the amount of conversation in the room and the openness is a really thrilling thing.

Kuhn: It is extraordinary to read about, isn't it? He tended to work alone in the morning and then gather people around him in the afternoon, and although we have accounts, it's still almost impossible to imagine what the dynamics of those conversations could possibly have been and how you come out with the next stage of the work out of that. And of course a lot of

the relationships were very good, relationships of equals, as well as there being some exploitative ones.

Kushner: Was the work in the morning given over more to the “private” writing, the poems, for example?

Kuhn: Not only, no. One thing that he did in the mornings was to write poems, but he also took the write-ups of the previous afternoon and evening’s work and went through them, and then took them out into the group again in the afternoon. It is an amazing process to imagine.

Kushner: And to some extent by the time he was in charge of the ensemble, the writing begins to . . . there are magnificent poems, but there are no great plays after he was in exile. Though of course it’s unfair to judge that, he was very young when he died and living in very difficult circumstances almost his entire life.

Kuhn: Yes, those relationships weren’t easy to maintain because of the countries that he moved through and the circumstances in which he worked. And as you say he died young, so we sometimes think of an old Brecht but there never was an old Brecht.

Kushner: One of the things that’s complicated about loving him—because you do love a writer whose work you love—you develop a sort of defensive posture towards him, and he’s somebody who needs a certain amount of defending. In the United States there is the complicated question of authorship—which was kicked into a ridiculous high gear by John Fuegi’s unforgivable biography, announcing to the world that he never actually wrote any of these plays, that they’re all written by these women that he’d imprisoned in the gulag of his affections, and they were all frantically signaling to John Fuegi to come and liberate them. Which of course is madness.

And it says a lot that that took hold in such a way at a moment when, and in a country where, the notion of the individual was also attaining its most psychotically hypertrophic development, when impurity was . . . when everything had to be the work of one god. So it’s complicated, and then on the other hand there are things like the story of Elisabeth Hauptmann and how he treated his collaborators not as well as he possibly should have.

Kuhn: Well there’s a very good film of Elisabeth Hauptmann talking in later life, after Brecht’s death, about what he enabled her to do, and how his presence was not so much vampiric as precisely enabling. So yes, those relationships are complicated.

At this point, the conversation opened up to the audience, with the first question about a controversial recent US production of Mother Courage set in the Congo (directed by Brian Kulick). Kushner reflects on the problems with moving the setting of Mother Courage, and that it is not about

“a plucky indomitable lady who won’t let the horrible deaths of her three children get her down . . . which is as stupid as saying the play is pacifist.” He goes on to call the play “one of the greatest ever written.”

The second question picked up on Kushner’s comments on Marxism, asking if it is also important to understand Brecht’s particular interpretation of Marxism. Kushner: “Brecht’s Marxism is a deeply personal and enormously complicated and fluctuating thing.” He aligned himself at different times with Leninism, Trotskyism, and Walter Benjamin’s Marxism. “I would say that you can’t do Shakespeare without reading Marx either. The main function of theater, for Shakespeare as well as Brecht, is the teaching of critical consciousness . . . To make people recognize that if you aren’t able to look beyond the surface of things and see the artificiality of things, the human construction of things, and the operations of ideology within the sphere of the natural world, you will be one of the rude mechanicals. You will be one of the people who went on Thursday to vote to leave the EU and then woke up on Friday and said ‘Oh shit, what have we done?’” . . .

The final question was about the version of Angels in America for television, and the work of the director Mike Nichols.

—Transcribed and edited by Charlotte Ryland

The full conversation is available to view on the Writing Brecht YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B18EfR7XK98>.

Bertolt Brecht's *The Beast*—Detours and Blind Alleys of the Art of Grasping Reality, or Narrative as Discourse: Questions about an Open Dialectic of the Aesthetic

In Brecht's story *The Beast*, a former governor responsible for pogroms in Russia attempts to land a role based on himself, but his desolate condition masks his resemblance to the character. Moreover, the "bestial" aspect of his conduct and suggestions remain enmeshed in his banality. It is the professional actor who transforms these suggestions into an "impression of real bestiality" through "art." The story probes the conventions of an existence in which "bestial" thoughts and actions are at home, and explores the potential for art to capture and mediate them. Brecht's story was presented at the *Recycling Brecht* symposium as part of a *lecture performance*. This practical "test" questions whether a performance can in itself develop discourse quality, including whether an unbroken partisanship tends to make the inconsistency of the world unrecognizable or whether an "open dialectic" is fundamentally inherent in the aesthetic realm. The models for the narration are the *teichoscopy* and Brecht's model *Street Scene*, which here becomes a place of contradictions and contradicting.

Brecht's Erzählung *Die Bestie* beschreibt Probensituationen einer Film-Produktion. Es geht um die Rolle eines Verantwortlichen für Pogrome in Russland und die Darstellungsversuche des ehemaligen "Schlächters" selbst, der infolge seiner desolaten Verfassung aber unerkannt bleibt. Auch das Bestialische seines Verhaltens und seines Spielvorschlags bleibt in banaler Alltäglichkeit verborgen. Erst der professionelle Schauspieler bringt diesen Vorschlag zu einer Wirkung, die den "Eindruck wirklicher Bestialität" durch "Kunst" vermittelt. Die Erzählung stellt Fragen an die Konventionalität einer Existenz, in der "bestialische" Gedanken und Handlungen zuhause sind, und die Möglichkeiten der Kunst, dies zu erfassen und zu vermitteln. Ästhetisch geht es um Fragen "naturgetreuer" Darstellung und die Differenz zwischen aktueller Person und gespielter Figur. Auf dem Symposium *Recycling Brecht* wurde die Erzählung als *lecture performance* vorgestellt. Dabei stellt sich die Frage, wieweit ästhetisches Handeln in sich selbst Diskursqualität entwickeln kann und ob ungebrochene Parteilichkeit womöglich die Widersprüchlichkeit der Welt verwischt und eine "offene Dialektik" dem Ästhetischen nicht notwendig innewohnt. Modelle des Erzählens waren die *Mauerschau* und Brecht's Modell der *Straßenszene*, das sogesehen zu einem Ort der Widersprüche und des Widersprechens wird.

Brechts *Bestie*: Umwege und Irrwege der Kunst, die Wirklichkeit zu erfassen oder Erzählen als Diskurs. Fragen zu einer offenen Dialektik des Ästhetischen

Hans Martin Ritter

Prolog: Straßenszene und Mauerschau als Modelle des Erzählens

Mein Vortrag betrifft das Feld wissenschaftlich-künstlerischer Forschung und ist ein Versuch, Erkenntnisse aus der künstlerischen Praxis zu gewinnen, und umgekehrt, in die künstlerische Praxis einzubringen. Brechts Erzählung *Die Bestie* ist als Vorlage besonders geeignet, weil sie Fragen künstlerischer Gestaltung zum Gegenstand hat.¹ In der Erzählung beschreibt Brecht eine Probensituation im Rahmen einer Film-Produktion—ein Casting besonderer Art. Es geht um die Rolle des Gouverneurs *Muratov*—verrufen als brutaler “Schlächter” während der Pogrome in Südrussland vor dem ersten Weltkrieg—und die Versuche des ehemaligen Gouverneurs selbst, diese Rolle zu “spielen.” Er bewirbt sich aufgrund seiner “Ähnlichkeit,” wird aber nicht erkannt—infolge seines Alters und seiner inzwischen desolaten und ärmlichen Verfassung; auch das “Bestialische” seines Wesens bleibt in einer banalen Alltäglichkeit verborgen. Die Erzählung stellt Fragen zu dieser Art Banalität und Konventionalität einer Existenz, in der “bestialische” Gedanken, Gefühle und Handlungen zu Hause sind, und Fragen zu den Möglichkeiten der Kunst, beides zu erfassen und zu vermitteln. Dabei geht es um die Opposition von schauspielerischer Gestaltung und der szenischen Rekapitulation von Ereignissen durch Betroffene bzw. verantwortlich Handelnde—aktuell: “Experten des Alltags,” d.h. auch um das Problem der ästhetischen Wirkung von Handlungen und Personen, die so sind, wie sie sind.

Brechts Erzählung entstand 1928. Sie knüpft in der Sache an verschiedene damals aktuelle Filme und Filmerzählungen an. In diesen Vorlagen ist das entscheidende “dramatische” Moment jeweils die Entdeckung der authentischen Person, der “Bestie,” im Verlauf der Proben. Brecht ist an diesem Effekt offensichtlich nicht interessiert. Die Aufdeckung erfolgt beiläufig am Schluss, und zwar ausschließlich für den Leser. Sie erfolgt auch weniger, um Ahnungen zu bestätigen, als um herauszustellen, dass sich hier ein Filmteam intensiv mit einer “authentischen” Person befasst—schlicht

gesagt: einem Verbrecher, ohne diese Person zu erkennen, selbst da nicht, wo sie sich in der Wahrnehmung von Augenzeugen "sehr naturgetreu" verhält. Brecht interessiert dagegen offensichtlich eher die Diskrepanz zwischen Aspekten der *Wirklichkeit* und den Mitteln der *Kunst*, sie festzuhalten und zu gestalten.

Dieter Wöhrle hat 1988 die Erzählung als Beispiel "ästhetischer Filmkritik" untersucht und verwendet dort den charakteristischen Begriff "dialektischer Prosa."² Dieser Begriff verweist auf einen immanenten Charakter der *Erörterung* innerhalb einer Erzählung: ihre *Diskursqualität*. Das originäre Anliegen des Erzählens, Vergangenes zu vergegenwärtigen oder sich in Vergangenen zu bewegen, wird dadurch zum Versuch, Vergangenes in seinen Widersprüchen zu klären und Standpunkte zu bestimmten Fakten und ihren Widersprüchen zu gewinnen. Mir erscheint es sinnvoll, diese Diskursqualität des Narrativen, in den *performativen Qualitäten* des Erzählens aufzusuchen. In der Art, wie sie in sich beginnen zu argumentieren und mit möglichen Widersprüchen umzugehen. Performative Qualitäten des Erzählens äußern sich generell in einer *doppelten Zuwendung*: Der Zuwendung zu erinnernten oder vorgestellten Ereignissen und der Zuwendung zum Zuhörer und ihrem Wechselspiel. Dieses Wechselspiel bewegt sich zwischen der Annäherung an Vergangenes bis hin zu Momenten der Identifikation und Momenten des Ausstiegs aus dem Geschehen in die Gegenwärtigkeit des Miteinanders. Damit verbunden ist auch ein Wechselspiel in der Qualität des *erzählenden Blickes*. Im Sinne der Wechselwirkung wissenschaftlich-künstlerischer Sichtweisen habe ich in meinem Vortrag über diese Phänomene, insbesondere das diskursive Moment, nicht nur geredet, sondern sie vorab performativ vollzogen. Dabei spielten zwei Modelle des Erzählens eine Rolle: Brechts *Straßenszene* und die *Mauerchau* oder *Teichoskopie*.

Zur Diskursqualität im Performativen hat Brecht in seiner Abhandlung zur *Straßenszene* Wichtiges ausgeführt (*BFA* 22.1, 370–81). Brecht beschreibt dort die Aussageweise eines "Augenzeugen" bei einem Unfall. Wesentliches Moment ist das der *Rekonstruktion*. Sie erfolgt teils in Bericht und Kommentar, teils darstellend. Die darstellenden Momente dienen der Veranschaulichung, genauer: dem *Beweis* strittiger Details. Sie sind in der Argumentation deutlich abgesetzt und ausgestellt. Charakteristisch ist nach Brecht "der unvermittelte Übergang von der Darstellung zum Kommentar" (*BFA* 22.1, 378). Aber durch immanente oder begleitende Kommentare enthalten auch darstellende Momente in sich diskursive Qualität. In seinem Aufsatz entwickelt Brecht auf diese Weise sein Grundmodell eines Theaters aus dem Gestus des Erzählens und Argumentierens. Mir geht es hier um eine Rückübersetzung des Modells in den Vorgang des *Erzählens*. Dadurch entsteht das Modell eines recherchierenden, analysierenden und kommentierenden Erzählens im Umgang mit Widersprüchen. Auch da wird die

darstellende Rekonstruktion von Haltungen und Handlungen durch immanente Akzentuierung und Bewertung zum *performativen Argument*.³

Neben dem Modell der *Straßenszene* spielte in meinem Versuch einer Realisierung die Erzählweise der *Mauerschau* oder *Teichoskopie* eine Rolle. Sie ist das Modell einer unmittelbar *gegenwärtigen* Beobachtung und Beschreibung von Vorgängen, um Zuhörern einen Eindruck oder ein Bild von etwas zu vermitteln, das sie nicht sehen können, sondern sich "vorstellen" müssen. Die Vergegenwärtigung des Ereignisses, die dem Erzählen grundsätzlich eigen ist, wird in der *Mauerschau* also radikalisiert: Wir sehen das, wovon wir sprechen.⁴ In der klassischen *Mauerschau* handelt es sich dabei oft um die Emotionalisierung von Ereignissen—man denke an den Ursprung in Homers *Ilias*, die Beobachtung des Kampfes zwischen Hektor und Achill von der Stadtmauer aus oder an die Verwendung in Dramen Kleists. Auf die Geschichte Brechts bezogen, erscheint die Erzählweise der *Mauerschau* weniger emotionalisierend als dokumentierend, und gegenüber dem eher subjektiven gestischen Ausschnitt im Modell der *Straßenszene* eher als Instrument *objektiver* Wahrnehmung: Orte werden etabliert, situative Details oder Handlungen und Haltungen beschrieben. Die Erzählformen der *Straßenszene* und der *Mauerschau* wechselten in meiner Realisierung schnittartig, sie überlagerten sich hie und da oder waren durch eher referierende Passagen unterbrochen bzw. verbunden. Ob im Erzählvorgang das Modell der *Straßenszene* oder das der *Mauerschau* verwendet wird, ist in manchem eine subjektive Entscheidung—allerdings nicht nur: differenzierte Momente von Haltungen und Handlungen als plastisch gestisches Ereignis zu vermitteln, leistet eher das Modell der *Straßenszene*, die *Mauerschau* kommt mit Bildmotiven charakteristischer Haltungen oder eines Vorgangs zum Zuge. Diese subjektiven Entscheidungen bedeuten allerdings auch, dass andere die Vorgänge durchaus anders sehen und wiedergeben könnten.

Die Geschichte

Die Performance der Erzählung als Basis für die folgende Analyse erfolgte im Rahmen des Vortrags an dieser Stelle. Da sie hier nicht wiederzugeben ist, wird zur Orientierung über den Ablauf des Geschehens stattdessen eine *poetische* Zusammenfassung in der Art eines Erzählgedichts eingefügt:

brechts bestie

da steht er: der lange dünne mensch
vornübergebeugt, schlechte haltung
hat mühsam hergefunden
aus den quartieren des elends
hofft auf kleines geld und

will seine rolle spielen
in dem film über den schlächter
der ähnlichkeit wegen
der alte: die *bestie*

sie lachen, probieren ein wenig
begrinsen seine versuche, böse zu sein:
eine deputation juden verhören soll er
aber er hört nicht hin
will sie nur abführen lassen
ist keine *bestie*—trotz aller ähnlichkeit
so jedenfalls sieht es der regisseur
beklagt die verlorene zeit
mit der *bestie*

doch da macht der alte selbst einen vorschlag
so wie er sie sich denkt: die *bestie*
nimmt einen apfel und reicht ihn dem juden
friss, sagt er und weiß
der wird ersticken vor angst:
denn während er kaut mit aufgerissenen augen
der jude, unterschreibt wie gewohnt
so dass der es sieht
das todesurteil: die *bestie*

der regisseur konsterniert, doch der schauspieler
der da neben ihm lauert, fängt feuer
schiebt den alten zur seite und spielt ihn aus
unter beifall, den vorschlag der *bestie* . . .
der ähnliche aber macht sich davon
mit kleinem geld—unterwürfig grüßend
zurück in die elendsquartiere
unerkannt als der, der er war:
der schlächter, die *bestie*⁵

Haltungen

Die Erzählung wird eröffnet durch den Satz: “Wie vieldeutig die Haltung eines Menschen sein kann, zeigte unlängst ein Vorfall . . .” Das ist der Grundimpuls des Erzählens. Es geht um Haltungen und um die Prozesse, in denen sie entstehen und in denen sie wirksam werden, und dabei nicht zuletzt um ihre Vieldeutigkeit. Allerdings geht es offensichtlich nicht nur um Haltungen der “Bestie” bzw. des *Ähnlichen*. Auch die Haltungen anderer, die des *Chef-Regisseurs*, des *Assistenten*, des *Schauspielers Kochalow* etwa, werden in bestimmten Details ausgestellt. Und neben den

sozialen Haltungen des *Ähnlichen* sind es auch seine *dargestellten* Haltungen bzw. seine *darstellenden* Handlungen. Wie werden diese Haltungen und Handlungen jeweils beschrieben und vergegenwärtigt?

Die Haltungen des *Ähnlichen* werden bei Brecht detailliert und mit wiederkehrenden Attributen beschrieben: Zu Beginn steht er da, wie durch ein Foto markiert: "der lange dünne Mensch," "die Mütze in der Hand, abwesend in dem Gewimmel der Komparsen und Atelierarbeiter." Dreimal ist von seiner "vornübergebeugten schlechten Haltung" die Rede: Bei seinem Auftritt im ersten Versuch ebenso wie am Ende der Versuche, als er "vergessen" und "gequält vor sich hinstarrend" dasitzt, während der Regiestab das "Wesen der Bestie" erörtert, und schließlich nach seinem eigenen Regievorschlag, als er "vornübergebeugt, dürr, aufgereggt und erloschen" vor dem Chef-Regisseur steht und auf Antwort wartet. Auch die Haltung, mit der er sich an der Pforte verabschiedet, passt dazu: Er grüßt "unterwürfig den Portier." Schon im ersten Spielversuch des *Ähnlichen* kehren zudem eine Reihe von Charakteristika seines Alltagsverhaltens in seinen Darstellungen wieder: So blättert er etwa "ganz abwesend" in der Zeitung. Dem Attribut "abwesend" entspricht, dass er die Regieanweisung, Mütze und Säbel an den Wandrechen zu hängen, vergisst und sich "ohne abzulegen an den Schreibtisch" setzt, auch dass er "die sich vermeigenden Juden" gar nicht ansieht und "den Übergang zum Verhör" nicht findet. Auch in der Wiederaufnahme der Szene bleibt er "abwesend": Nimmt den Apfel, verspeist ihn "gewohnheitsmäßig" und malt dazu "Buchstaben aufs Papier." Er lässt sich auch durch das Anliegen der Deputation in dieser Abwesenheit nicht stören, winkt, ohne zugehört zu haben, mit fahriger Geste "mitten im Satz" ab und erwartet, dass die Deputation "abgeführt" wird.

Im Erzählvorgang werden diese Haltungen des *Ähnlichen* zunächst gleichsam als *Momentaufnahmen* oder *Mauerschau-Miniaturen* präsentiert—etwa: ". . . und so stand der lange und dünne Mensch, die Mütze in der Hand, abwesend in dem Gewimmel der Komparsen und Atelierarbeiter . . ." Oder: "Beinahe eine Stunde stand der Mann so, immerfort auf die Seite tretend, um Platz zu machen, am Schluß ganz hinter ein Pult gedrängt, als . . ." Auch die Beobachtung des ersten Versuchs insgesamt, einschließlich der Episode mit den Äpfeln, lässt sich als eine ausgedehnte *Mauerschau* verstehen. Die Aufmerksamkeit richtet sich hier auf das Abgleichen von Drehbuch und Aktion: Haltungen und Handlungen des *Ähnlichen* werden Zug um Zug auf die Vorgaben bezogen—etwa: "(Deputation wartet, Auftritt Muratow.) Der Ähnliche tritt hastig durch die Tür. Hände nach vorn in den Taschen, schlechte, vornübergebeugte Haltung."

Das Erzählmodell *Straßenszene* erfasst dagegen zunächst eher Haltungen dem *Ähnlichen* gegenüber: Neben einzelnen Momenten bei der Entdeckung des *Ähnlichen* an der Portierloge etwa den Eingriff des *Regieassistenten* und seine Haltung: Sein Grinsen, seinen schlendernden Gang in die Szenerie, die Art und Weise seiner szenischen Hinweise: "'Jetzt

kommt das Äpfelessen,' sagte er aufmunternd. 'Muratow war bekannt für das Äpfelessen. Seine Gouverneurstätigkeit bestand außer in seinen viehischen Erlassen hauptsächlich im Äpfelessen. Die Äpfel bewahrte er in dieser Schublade auf. Sehen Sie, da sind die Äpfel.' Er öffnete eine Schreibtischschublade . . ." Auch die Kritik des *Chefregisseurs* an dem ersten Versuchsansatz erfolgt straßenszenenartig: "'So benimmt sich keine Bestie,' sagte er. 'So benimmt sich ein kleiner Beamter. Sehen Sie, Sie müssen denken. Ohne Denken geht es nicht. Sie müssen sich diesen Bluthund vorstellen. So im kleinen Finger müssen Sie ihn haben. Kommen Sie nochmal rein.'" Das gilt ähnlich für den Beitrag der beiden *jüdischen Komparsen*, ihre Einschätzung des "allerersten" Spiels des Ähnlichen und seiner Haltung als "ziemlich naturgetreu," und vor allem ihre Kontroverse mit dem *Hilfsregisseur*, der auf die Anmerkung der Augenzeugen "bei ihrer Unterredung habe übrigens Muratow keinen Apfel gegessen" selbstgewiss ablehnend reagiert ("'Muratow hat immer Äpfel gegessen,' sagte er schneidend. 'Waren Sie denn überhaupt dabei?'"). All dies legt eine Rekonstruktion in der Art der *Straßenszene* nahe. Das Erzählmodell der *Straßenszene* sammelt hier seiner Funktion nach "Beweise" für eine Argumentation, genauer: Es bewirkt Argumentation im Performativen. Das gilt letztlich auch für das Arbeitsergebnis im zweiten Versuch des Ähnlichen. Diese Inszenierung oder "Abrichtung" spiegelt weniger Haltungen des Ähnlichen als die des *Chef-Regisseurs*, vor allem der Figur des *Muratow* gegenüber: "Brust heraus, Schultern zurück, eckige Kopfbewegungen," ein "Geierblick" usw. Dies stramme, militante Gegenbild zu dem, was der Ähnliche von sich aus anbietet, ist sein Bild der "Bestie," auch wenn es ihm am Ende nicht gefällt. Die unwirsche Reaktion des *Regisseurs* ist damit Teil dieses Vorgangs: "Lieber Mann, das ist nicht, was wir uns heute unter einer Bestie vorstellen. Das ist kein Muratow!" Dabei mischen sich die Erzählformen gelegentlich durchaus: Straßenszenenartig rekonstruierte Haltungen erscheinen im Tableau einer Mauerschau und umgekehrt.

In der letzten Phase des Geschehens gilt dann die Erzählweise der *Straßenszene* gezielt der Haltung und der Aktionsweise des Ähnlichen, der sich hier mit einem eigenen Vorschlag exponiert. Dieser Vorgang wird—wieder als eine Art Beweisaufnahme—Zug um Zug rekonstruiert und demonstriert, denn hier offenbaren sich—verstärkt und getrieben durch "die Angst, sein Brot zu verlieren"—offensichtlich originäre Haltungen des Ähnlichen. Die "Bestialität" des bürokratischen Desinteresses und der fehlenden Wahrnehmung des Gegenübers, die seinen ersten Versuch bestimmte, entfaltet sich hier aktiv ins Zynische: "Ich glaube, ich weiß, was Ihnen vorschwebt. Es soll eine Bestie sein. Sehen Sie, das können wir doch mit den Äpfeln machen. Nehmen Sie einfach an, ich nehme einen Apfel und halte ihn dem Juden vor die Nase. 'Friss!' sage ich." Die Erzählweise der *Straßenszene* schließt auch hier die Reaktionen auf den Vorschlag ein—das Gegenüber des Ähnlichen und des konsternierten Regisseurs und

dessen Argwohn, "dass der Alte ihn verhöhnen wollte," und ebenso die Einmischung *Kochalows*—das Abservieren des Ähnlichen: die brutale Armbeugung und die Übernahme, das Ausspielen des Vorschlags—gehört dazu: "Glänzend. So meint er das." Der Abgang des "ehemaligen Gouverneurs" "durch die Regenschauer des Herbstabends" in die "Quartiere des Elends" ist dagegen wie eine abschließende Kamera-Einstellung: Eine letzte *Mauer-schau*. Sie zeigt noch einmal das Bild des ehemaligen Gouverneurs, wie es in der Erzählung immer wiederkehrt: Unterwürfig und vom Elend geprägt.

Betrachtet man den *Ähnlichen* und das *Filmteam* im Wechselbezug der Haltungen, so muss der *Ähnliche* in einer Art Doppelexistenz wahrgenommen werden: In einer Diskrepanz zwischen der früheren Existenz—als Gouverneur, als der "Urheber blutiger Metzeleien": als "Bestie," "Bluthund" und "Schlächter"—und seiner aktuellen Existenz als machtlose Elendsfigur. Die Frage ist, wie weit frühere Haltungen und Verhaltensweisen noch in seinem aktuellen Auftreten vorhanden und wie weit sie durch neue Umstände gebrochen oder überlagert sein könnten. Die wiederkehrenden Momente von "Abwesenheit," der Blockade, auch seine Unterwürfigkeit ließen sich auf seine derzeitige Verfassung wie natürlich auch auf die ungewohnte Situation vor der Kamera zurückführen: Diese könnte ihn einschüchtern und sein Verhalten "dämpfen." Dennoch erscheinen die im Spiel wiederkehrenden Alltagshaltungen folgerichtig. Da der *Ähnliche* kein Schauspieler ist und ihm offensichtlich eine "eigene Phantasie" fehlt, bleibt ihm das gewohnte Verhaltensrepertoire. Er "stellt sich diesen Muratow so vor," wie er selbst gewohnt ist zu handeln, wenn er sich überhaupt—im schauspielerischen Sinn—etwas "vorstellt," und er verfällt vermutlich gerade da ins Gewohnte, wo er von Regieanweisungen abweicht oder sie vergisst. Auch wenn diese Alltagsroutine den Vorstellungen des *Chef-Regisseurs* widerspricht—*ästhetisch* und auf die *Wirklichkeit* bezogen: die *Komparsen* als Zeitzeugen finden in dem "Gewohnheitsmäßigen und Bürokratischen" ihre Erfahrung wieder. Wie abgeschwächt auch immer, erscheint sein Verhalten im ersten Versuch also durchaus wirklichkeitsnah. Die *Inszenierung* des Regisseurs dagegen, diese Kunstfigur aus stereotypen, vermeintlich charakteristischen und bühnenwirksamen Haltungen einer "Bestie," erfordert für jede Aktion eine ästhetische Anstrengung. Anstrengende Vorgänge sind dem *Ähnlichen* aber offenbar fremd. Er kann sie nicht mit Leben füllen, sie bleiben leer—zum Ärger des Regisseurs.

Die aktuelle Erscheinung des *Ähnlichen* als machtlose Elendsfigur löst im *Filmteam* überwiegend Haltungen der Überlegenheit oder gar Überheblichkeit aus. Ein durchgehendes Motiv ist das Gelächter oder *Grinsen*. Mit dem *Grinsen* stellen sich Demütigungen ein. Die simplifizierenden Vorschläge des *Assistenten*, auch die Anrede "mein Sohn" haben etwas Herablassendes. Der Ton des *Chef-Regisseurs*—nach seinem grinsenden Rundblick noch fast väterlich—wird nach dem misslungenen zweiten Versuch schroff und verächtlich. Der Schauspieler *Kochalow* schiebt ihn

schließlich “mit einer brutalen Armbewegung einfach weg.” Diese Haltungen sind von einer gewohnheitsmäßigen Machtausübung des sozial Stärkeren gegen Schwächere bestimmt. Da das Team von seiner Identität bis zum Ende nichts weiß, charakterisiert es die Haltung gegenüber dem *Ähnlichen* generell. Dessen aktuell unterwürfige Haltung unterstützt diese Behandlung von oben herab. Dieses Machtgefälle ändert sich kurzzeitig mit dem Vorschlag des *Ähnlichen*. Sein Vorschlag enthält das banale Moment seiner bisherigen Versuche, gibt ihm aber eine neue “bestialische” Nuance: Er benutzt seine Vorliebe, Äpfel zu essen, um den Führer der Deputation in “Todesangst” zu versetzen. Dabei aktiviert und schärft er erstmals Haltungen, die ihm bisher eher passiv unterliefen. Er denkt auch hier nicht ästhetisch, sondern pragmatisch, und es ist ihm bewusst, dass diese Mischung aus Freundlichkeit und Zynismus etwas Bestialisches an sich hat. Der *Chef-Regisseur* verliert hier mit der Fassung erstmalig auch seine Dominanz: sieht “ihn starr an.” Vermutlich spürt er, wie da etwas original Bestialisches seine Regie-Bemühungen auf ästhetisch unangestrengte Weise ebenso unterläuft wie übertrumpft. Sein Argwohn, “dass der Alte ihn verhöhnen wollte,” wie er da “vorgebeugt, dürr und aufgeregte und erloschen” vor ihm steht und auf eine Reaktion wartet, wird durch *Kochalows* Eingreifen jedoch beiseite gewischt. Ob das “Verächtliche,” das der *Regisseur* zu sehen glaubt, tatsächlich dem Blick bzw. der Haltung des *Ähnlichen* oder seiner Selbstwahrnehmung geschuldet ist, bleibt offen. Dass der *Schauspieler* Feuer fängt, lässt wiederum darauf schließen, dass der *Ähnliche* in seinem Vorschlag etwas überraschend unverstellt Eigenes, etwas originär Bestialisches gezeigt hat.

Erzählen als offener Diskurs

Die Erzählung wird gerahmt durch den eröffnenden Satz: “Wie vieldeutig die Haltung eines Menschen sein kann, zeigte unlängst ein Vorfall . . .” und den kommentierenden Satz am Ende: “Es hatte sich eben wieder einmal gezeigt, daß bloße Ähnlichkeit mit einem Bluthund natürlich nichts besagt und daß Kunst dazu gehört, um den Eindruck wirklicher Bestialität zu vermitteln.” Diese Sätze scheinen die Erzählung zur Exempelgeschichte zu machen. So richtungsweisend der eröffnende Satz als Grundimpuls erscheint, so offen bleibt allerdings seine Zielrichtung. Um welche Art “vieldeutiger Haltungen” geht es, und welche sind vor allem gemeint? Auch die doppelte Ebene von Wahrnehmungs- und Wirkungsweisen *sozialer* und *ästhetischer* Haltungen und Handlungen und die Art, wie sie sich ineinander schieben, verwischen klare Argumentationslinien. Und wo findet sich der *Standpunkt*, von dem aus argumentiert wird? Die *Straßenszene* ist als Modell eines recherchierenden, kommentierenden Erzählens und als ein Modell der “Beweisaufnahme” auf Genauigkeit der Beobachtung und Darstellung hin angelegt, aber auch auf Stringenz in der Argumentation

von einem Standpunkt aus. In Widerspruch dazu umreißt Brecht in der Erzählung, die ja mit *Haltungen* und gestischen Momenten argumentiert, weder einen eindeutigen Fokus von Haltungen, noch markiert er einen Standort, von dem aus sie zu betrachten wären.

Was also ist das Ziel dieser argumentativen Erzählweise, was will sie letztlich klären? Der Hinweis zu Beginn etwa, der "Vorfall" habe "etwas Entsetzliches an sich gehabt," bietet keinen eindeutigen Angriffspunkt. Wo wäre es zu suchen? "Etwas Entsetzliches" zeigt sich zwar in der Erinnerung der *Komparsen*, auch im Vorschlag des *Ähnlichen* selbst, aber das sind Teilaspekte, nicht der "Vorfall" im Ganzen. Ist es—aufs Ganze gesehen—vielleicht eher die Ahnungslosigkeit der Beteiligten in Bezug auf die Identität des *Ähnlichen*, oder darüber hinaus die Ahnungslosigkeit der "Kunst" dem wirklichen Charakter des Bestialischen gegenüber? In dieser Ahnungslosigkeit ist das Gelächter zu Hause, das Begrinsen des *Ähnlichen*, die herablassende Behandlung, auch die Brutalität, mit der *Kochalow* ihn nicht nur körperlich, sondern auch als Kandidaten wegschiebt und seinen Vorschlag usurpiert. Demgegenüber sind die Bilder des *Ähnlichen* fast mit Anteilnahme gezeichnet; fast könnten sie Sympathien für ihn und Antipathien gegen das Filmteam wecken—Leser oder Zuhörer müssten ja über weite Strecken des Geschehens zumindest unsicher sein, ob der *Ähnliche* mit dem Gouverneur identisch ist. Und selbst die Aufdeckung im Schlussbild des "mühsam" durch den Herbstregen in die "Quartiere des Elends" abgehenden alten Mannes—als "der ehemalige kaiserliche Gouverneur Muratow" erst im letzten Absatz dekuviert—enthält eine Spur Mitgefühl. Brecht spielt also mit Momenten sozialer Empathie oder *Einfühlung*, um sie im Augenblick der Entdeckung jäh abzuschrecken und in Widersprüche zu verstricken. Auch die Momente des "Entsetzlichen" sind damit Teil eines argumentativen Vexier-Spiels.

In ähnlicher Weise wie dem Diskurs über soziale Haltungen fehlt auch dem eingebetteten Ästhetik-Diskurs—trotz detailreicher Beobachtungen—eine klare Argumentationsstruktur und das eindeutige Ziel einer diskursiven Erörterung. Interessant ist, dass Brecht den für ihn zentralen Begriff des *Realistischen* vermeidet. Der Begriff des *Naturgetreuen*—zunächst fast positiv getönt—bekommt dagegen mehr und mehr etwas Verdächtiges—vor allem dann, wenn das von der Regie angestrebte *Naturgetreue* sich mit ästhetischen (und sozialen) Klischees verbindet. In gewisser Weise führt Brecht hier die Haltungen und Methoden des Regieteam vor, sowohl was ästhetische Konzeptionen und den Umgang mit Wirklichkeiten, als auch was den Umgang mit Menschen betrifft. Bezeichnend ist, dass nur der Schauspieler *Kochalow* in dem Vorschlag des *Ähnlichen* das dramatisch Wirkungsvolle entdeckt: Das "Entsetzliche" einer simplen, scheinbar "freundlichen" und darin um so teuflischeren Geste. Wenn *Kochalow* mit "schauspielerischer Phantasie" das dramatisch Wirkungsvolle dieses Vorschlags ausspielt, folgt er im übrigen exakt den späteren Vorgaben

Brechts aus dem *Kleinen Organon*: “Die Beobachtung ist ein Hauptteil der Schauspielkunst. Der Schauspieler beobachtet den Mitmenschen mit all seinen Muskeln und Nerven in einem Akt der Nachahmung, welcher zugleich ein Denkprozess ist. Denn bei bloßer Nachahmung käme höchstens das Beobachtete heraus, was nicht genug ist, da das Original, was es aussagt, mit zu leiser Stimme aussagt. Um vom Abklatsch zur Abbildung zu kommen, sieht der Schauspieler auf die Leute, als machten die ihm vor, was sie machen, kurz, als empfahlen sie ihm, was sie machen, zu bedenken” (BFA 23, 86). Denn—so sagt es der *Philosoph* im *Messingkauf*—an den *Schauspieler* gewendet: “Wenn du fertig bist, sollte dein Zuschauer mehr gesehen haben als der Augenzeuge des ursprünglichen Vorgangs” (BFA 22.2, 795). Aber auch wenn *Kochalow* das am Ende zu gelingen scheint—zumindest im Rahmen der Ästhetik des Filmteams—lässt der resümierende Satz am Ende doch Zweifel offen, ob dieser Begriff der “Kunst,” die für die Darstellung und den “Eindruck wirklicher Bestialität” nötig wäre, hier nicht ironisch gemeint ist. Die Lösung, die diese “Kunst” findet, verwertet zwar das Angebot der *Wirklichkeit*, verzerrt sie aber sofort “schweißtriefend” ins Dramatische, so dass den Zuschauenden unter diesem “Eindruck wirklicher Bestialität” nurmehr begeistertes Händeklatschen bleibt.

Zusammenfassung

Die Erörterung sozialer Haltungen und ästhetischer Standpunkte in dieser Erzählung hinterlässt kein eindeutiges Fazit, sie erzeugt vielmehr eine *diskursive Unruhe*: Die geschilderten Details sind zwar von präziser Deutlichkeit, zeigen sich aber ohne klar strukturierte moralisch-ästhetische oder argumentative Koordinaten. Diese Offenheit in der Zielrichtung der Argumentation zwingt Erzähler wie Zuhörer, den Diskurs selbst zu vollziehen und sich ihm mit eigenen Koordinaten zu stellen. In dem wenig später entstandenen Aufsatz *Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater?* schreibt Brecht: “Was immer an Wissen in einer Dichtung stecken mag, es muss völlig umgesetzt sein in Dichtung” (BFA 22.1, 114). Diese Maxime Brechts wäre hier z.B. so abzuwandeln: Was immer an Argumentation oder Erörterung in einer Geschichte stecken mag, es muss völlig umgesetzt sein in den Erzählvorgang. Anders gesagt: Es muss im *Erzählten* verschwinden, muss aber zugleich in jedem performativen Moment des *Erzählens* neu in Erscheinung treten—in einem gedanklichen Dialog zwischen Bildproduktion und möglicher Bilddeutung.

Es ist daneben auffällig, dass die Versuche des *Ähnlichen*, durchaus auch ein “Experte der sozialen Realität,” minutiös aufgelistet werden, während Details der Darstellung Kochalows “unbelegt” bleiben; nur ihre faszinierende Wirkung wird geschildert. Das stellt immanent die Frage, was wir von der “Kunst” erwarten: Detaillierte Aufschlüsse über die Wirklichkeit—ggf. einschließlich ihrer Banalität im Detail—oder fesselnde

emotionale Wirkungen? Diese könnten zwar auf Erfahrungen und Vorstellungen möglicher Wirklichkeiten beruhen, aber ebenso auf konventionellen Übereinkünften, wie diese Wirklichkeiten zu sein haben. Die Vorstellungen vom “Wesen der Bestie,” die im Filmteam erörtert werden, und gerade die Bilder, die der *Regisseur* im Kopf hat darüber, “was wir uns heute unter einer Bestie vorstellen,” was “ein Muratov” ist und wie er dargestellt werden sollte, reiben sich jedenfalls erkennbar an den film- und bühnenunwirksamen Banalitäten der Wirklichkeit. Die Frage ist, wie weit eine solche “Kunst” diese Wirklichkeiten überhaupt erfassen, deuten und erfahrbar machen kann.

Fazit: Brechts narrative Dialektik ist eine “offene” Dialektik. Er überlässt es Akteur wie Zuhörer/Zuschauer/Leser, sich den Widersprüchen selbst zu stellen, oder schärfer: Er fordert dazu auf. Er verhindert damit ein einverständiges kollektives Kopfnicken, sucht es vielmehr zu stören und mit wiederkehrendem “Kopfschütteln” zu durchsetzen—in der Hoffnung, dass dadurch unterschiedlichste (Denk-)Früchte herabfallen (vgl. *BFA* 23, 227–28). Der “offene” Diskurs, den Brecht mit seinen offenen Argumentationslinien anstößt, wird damit selbst zum Modell eines ästhetischen Umgangs mit Wirklichkeiten: Zu einem Modell wider diese Art des einverständigen kollektiven Kopfnickens. Es fragt sich allerdings, ob dieses *Offenhalten der Widersprüche* dem Ästhetischen nicht grundsätzlich und notwendig innewohnt oder innewohnen sollte, das heißt: Ob es nicht eine Forderung an jeden Versuch ist, Wirklichkeit durch Kunst zu erfassen.

Anmerkungen

¹ Bertolt Brecht, “Die Bestie” (*BFA* 19, 294–99). Im Folgenden werden die zahlreichen wörtlich zitierten Stellen aus der Geschichte nicht eigens mit Seitenzahlen angegeben.

² Dieter Wöhrle, *Bertolt Brechts medienästhetische Versuche* (Köln: Prometh Verlag, 1988), 44.

³ Vgl. dazu einschlägige Vorarbeiten: Hans Martin Ritter, “Die *Straßenszene* Bertolt Brechts und die Kunst des Erzählens,” *sprechen. Zeitschrift für Sprechwissenschaft* 1/87 (1987): 54–67; englische Fassung: “Bertold Brecht’s *The Street Scene* and the Art of Storytelling,” *On Narratives. Proceedings of the Tenth International Colloquium on Speech Communication June 22–27, 1986*, ed. Hellmut Geißner (Frankfurt am Main: Scriptor, 1987); und Ritter, “Bertolt Brecht ‘Die Bestie’—Erzählen als Diskurs,” *sprechen. Zeitschrift für Sprechwissenschaft* 30, Nr. 57 (2014): 68–76.

⁴ Vgl. dazu: Ritter, “Sprechkunst und Theater—Versuche zur ‘Mauerschau,’” *sprechen. Zeitschrift für Sprechwissenschaft* 1/98 (1998): 43–55; und Ritter, *Sprechen auf der Bühne* (Berlin: Henschel, 2009), 253 ff.

⁵ Erschienen in Ritter, *die welt durch die wir irren. gedichte* (epubli: Berlin, 2015).

A Model Family in a Model Home oder ein Märchen vom fiktiven Kapital

Während er in Los Angeles arbeitete, schrieb Brecht zahlreiche Filmkonzepte, in denen er das Unmögliche versuchte: Die Formeln der Filmindustrie herauszufordern und Arbeiten zu produzieren die sowohl populär als auch radikal waren. Eines dieser unrealisierten Projekte war *A Model Family*, inspiriert durch einen Artikel im *Life* Magazin (1941), in dem ein Wettbewerb um die typischste Farmersfamilie Ohios beschrieben wurde. Der Preis war ein Wochenaufenthalt in einem Modellhaus auf der Landesmesse. Der einzige Nachteil war, dass dieses Zuhause öffentlich ausgestellt wurde und sich so in eine Bühne verwandelte, auf der die Familie ihr Alltagsleben aufführen musste. Dieser Essay diskutiert Brechts Notizen als Ausgangspunkt für meinen eigenen Film *A Model Family in a Model Home*, in dem ich Brechts Ideen aus den vierziger Jahren in die Zeit der Immobilienkrise 2008 versetze, um das Konzept des "Model Home" als einen Katalysator für den Ausbau städtischer Außenbezirke zu untersuchen, der zu unkontrollierter Spekulation und zahlreichen Zwangsvollstreckungen führte. Der Essay erwägt, inwiefern gerade die Unabgeschlossenheit der brechtschen Notizen ein produktiver Ausgangspunkt sein könnte, um Geschichte selbst als veränderbar zu zeigen. Um dieser Aufgabe gerecht zu werden, braucht es eine neue Form für den Dokumentarfilm.

Working in Los Angeles, Brecht wrote numerous film treatments in which he attempted the impossible, to challenge the formulas of the film industry and create works that were both popular and radical. One of these unrealized projects was *A Model Family*, inspired by an article in *Life* magazine (1941) that described a competition for Ohio's most typical farm family. The prize was a week's stay in a model home at the state fair. The only drawback was that this home was open to the public, turning it into a stage on which the family was forced to perform its daily life. This essay discusses Brecht's notes as a starting point for my own film *A Model Family in a Model Home* in which I take his ideas forward from the 1940s to the 2008 housing crisis to explore the concept of "the model home" as a catalyst for the suburban expansion that led to uncontrolled speculation and massive foreclosures. This essay considers how the very fact that Brecht's notes are incomplete can be a productive starting point to try to make apparent history as something that is itself open to change. To undertake this task requires a new form or structure for the documentary film.

A Model Family in a Model Home or a Tale of Fictitious Capital

Zoe Beloff

I am an artist and filmmaker. I think of my work as a process of drawing timelines between past and present that might help us imagine a future against the grain of reactionary ideology. For me the best place to start is with fragments: ideas cut short; abandoned victims of forces beyond their control; forces of culture, politics, and economics.

I find myself drawn back to a certain time in history, roughly from the 1920s through the 1940s. I believe we can learn from the work of artists and filmmakers who attempted to communicate with a mass audience in a way that was both critical of the status quo and optimistic in that they wanted to show that things can be other than they are. It was during the economic crisis of 2008 that I started to think that Brecht's writing might help us understand what was going on. And it seemed to me here in the United States that the best place to look to him for guidance was in Los Angeles. As I researched his work in Hollywood, I became intrigued by his sketches for films that he had not been able to realize. One in particular caught my attention, *A Model Family*. Only a few typed notes and some scrawled notebook entries remain. One reads as follows:

A MODEL FAMILY

ein bild der zerstörung: zertrümmertes wohnzimmer, brief eines anwalts über scheidung, zeretzter frauenhut. überschrift: a model family home. man sucht die familie unter 80 familien aus. was alles nicht in betracht kommt....

am vorabend der ausstellungseröffnung ein krach, bez ein irrtum. mann¹

Brecht based his idea on an article in *Life* magazine from 1941, "A Model Family in a Model Home," that describes how an Ohio farm family won a prize, a week in a model home at the state fair. The drawback was that the home was open to the public twelve hours a day. I felt that its themes, architecture as a representation of social and economic relations, surveillance, spectacle, and the commodification of family life resonated in our century.

Brecht's work in Hollywood has often been considered a failure. On the contrary, I would like to suggest that his ideas were merely lying in wait for us. I imagined how interesting it would have been if Brecht had had the opportunity to make a film about ordinary working people in the Midwest; then it dawned on me that since he did not have the opportunity to realize his vision, it was up to me. Rather than create a pastiche of a film he might have written, my task would be to make his project relevant today. In this essay, I will discuss Brecht's notes as a starting point for my own film and consider how an unfinished work, even the barest literary fragment, can be a productive entry point. This way of working shows us how history itself is open to change always in relation to our present circumstances. The very fact that I was working with a fragment required active participation on my part. I could not simply illustrate but had to speculate and improvise. There was no fixed structure, no narrative closure. Indeed many different filmmakers could each make their own very different film based on the same material.

Out of the many scenarios that Brecht sketched out while in Los Angeles only one film, *Hangmen Also Die*, was actually completed. Of course the film industry was and is a for-profit machine. But nonetheless Brecht never took the elitist position that the radical and the popular are antithetical. On the contrary, I would argue, Brecht's interaction with the central engine of American popular culture, the Hollywood studios, was itself a political project. Even though he was in exile desperately trying to earn enough money to keep himself and his family going, he refused to do hack work just to pay the bills. While the studio executives talked about "catering to an audience," that is dumbing things down to the lowest common denominator, Brecht wanted to do something much harder. He aimed to engage their audience but also invite them to think. Brecht put it clearly in his essay "Against Georg Lukács," in which he wrote that one must not assume what ordinary people like and want; one must not second-guess their taste.² It is these kinds of assumptions that keep working people oppressed in the first place. He saw no contradiction between being popular and radical. And it is this idea that I think we need to hold on to today.

Brecht took Hollywood cinema seriously. Living in Los Angeles he sometimes went to two matinees a day and thought that gangster films were the best documentary representation of American life.³ When he incorporated popular culture into his own work, it was not to wrest it away from its roots but to make it more interesting and thought provoking. Cinema is a medium that is accessible and affordable to almost everyone. He was an enormous admirer of Chaplin and indeed one can imagine his sketch for *A Model Family* as a comedy about one family's adventure at the state fair where everything goes wrong!

From the beginning I conceived of Brecht not as a master to be emulated but as a collaborator and comrade across time. To work with his ideas

I had to take on several roles. On the one hand I was the ventriloquist or medium through which his concepts might be realized. On the other hand, I felt it important to be the “bad” student, someone who talks back and thinks for myself, always aware of the great distance between us.

I wanted to make this relationship clear within my own film, a cinema essay that explicates Brecht’s ideas and then follows their lead from the 1940s to the present day. There are always two voices in dialogue: that of the narrator, that is myself, and Brecht’s own voice. The film opens with a prologue. Brecht is explaining his relationship with the film industry to the committee at the HUAC hearings. The viewer hears his voice but sees a series of drawings that look like those of a court reporter. Of course I am that reporter. I could have chosen to use archival footage. But I decided not to. Archival film can too easily create the illusion of real presence. It gives the audience members the illusion that they are there, when they are not. Drawing in contrast is clearly partial, subjective, and incomplete. In reality I as the director can only convey the events secondhand, and what is shown is clearly my interpretation.

Accused of making revolutionary works, Brecht describes himself simply as a playwright and poet. He is both introducing himself to the panel led by J. Parnell Thomas and introducing himself across time to a contemporary audience who at least in America may well never have heard of him. It is important to me not to assume the audience comes with insider knowledge. I aimed to emulate Brecht’s down-to-earth approach to a project. He wanted to invite his audience to think about the situations he depicted, calmly and objectively. He wanted to re-present everyday life to us in such a way that we could understand how economic forces shape our lives. He thought that a newspaper report was the best model for dialogue and dramatic action.⁴ But that didn’t mean that the film should be dry or dull. He believed in creating a montage of disparate elements so that the audience could look at a subject from different points of view. His co-writer on *Hangmen Also Die*, John Wexley, recalled that Brecht wanted to incorporate film clips, posters, songs, and even a chorus into his Hollywood films.⁵ In the spirit of a movie that celebrates everyday life, I constructed my entire film in the vernacular format of the twentieth century 16mm, incorporating drawings, home movies, newsreels, instructional and promotional films, so that *A Model Family in a Model Home* is itself a “home movie” about a home.

Part 1 introduces the audience to Brecht’s thoughts on American architecture, in which he describes Los Angeles as a city of gleaming facades that hide something much darker. We see home movies of Hollywood: hotels, shiny cars, mansions, Grauman’s Chinese Theater, and the studios in gorgeous supersaturated Kodachrome, but at the same time I wanted to show through the voice-over that Brecht’s years of exile taught him to sense impermanence everywhere. We hear him read his poem “On thinking about Hell”:



Fig. 1. Brecht at the HUAC hearings, still from
A Model Family in a Model Home, 2015.

The houses in Hell, too, are not all ugly.
But the fear of being thrown onto the street
Wears down the inhabitants of the villas no less than
The inhabitants of the shanty towns.⁶

He ends with a line from his journals, “The landscape here lies behind plate glass and I involuntarily look for a little price tag on this chain of hills or that lemon tree. I also look for the price tag on people . . .”⁷ These words introduce the key themes of the film, that in America everything and everyone is for sale and one’s home is only as solid as one’s last paycheck.

The second part of the film, titled *Reconstruction*, begins after Brecht leaves the United States. I, the narrator, explain that today it is up to us to realize Brecht’s unfinished scenarios. He is represented here as a ventriloquist’s doll, “Little Bertie,” so that it is clear that I am the one putting words in his mouth. The sequence opens with Bertie relaxing in the garden reading *Life* magazine. A story catches his eye, “A Model Family in a Model Home.” The article in *Life* was a report on the residency of the Frank Engel family in a model home at the state fair. The Engels hailed from Berlin, Ohio, and were the proud winners of a competition for “Ohio’s most typical farm family,” sponsored by the local newspaper, the *Columbus Dispatch*. The only drawback was that the model home was open to the public, who marched through their living quarters from dawn



Fig. 2. Brecht as a ventriloquist doll, still from
A Model Family in a Model Home, 2015.

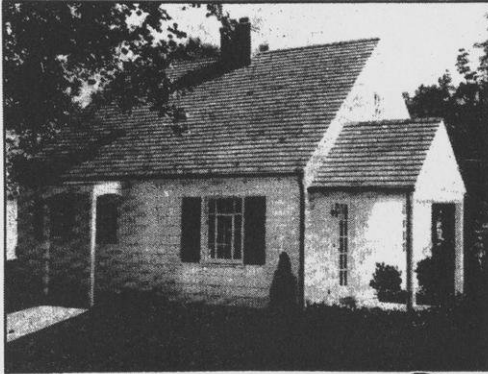
to dusk. Brecht imagined what might have been the result; family quarrels, smashed furniture, and a divorce.

Brecht read *Life* not only to improve his English but also to learn about the American way of life. Living in Los Angeles, reading the popular press, he must have been well aware of the public's fascination with the very American ideal of the "model home" that burned most brightly in the illumination of movie-star mansions by Hollywood's glamor magazines. While these homes were far beyond the reach of ordinary people, the magazines would also include set designers' tips on home decoration aimed at the middle-class housewife.⁸ While Brecht's compatriot Douglas Sirk would go on to reveal these palatial homes as "both throne room and torture chamber," to use Walter Benjamin's evocative phrase, of the American haute bourgeoisie, Brecht himself chose to focus instead on the "aspirational home" of the worker.⁹ The one in question, illustrated in *Life*, could be purchased for just \$4,000.

A Model Family is in part about the nightmare of visibility. *Life* described the Engel family stay in the model home thus: "the mere business of living was a domestic strip tease."¹⁰ Brecht must have sympathized. He was well aware that, as an "enemy alien," he himself was being monitored by the FBI.¹¹ However I do not think that surveillance was his central interest in this story. While I am sure he understood how disconcerting it was

This "KEN-DICK Built"
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 FARM HOME

as Featured at the Ohio State Fair



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 IN GREATER COLUMBUS...**

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See this beautiful farm home—a dream for the housewife and a practical, convenient "farm conscious" plan for the men. Specifications call for sound construction with complete insulation for both winter and summer comfort.



KEN DICKERSON

A Tribute to "KEN-DICK Homes"

We feel it was a distinct honor to be chosen by The Dispatch to construct this TYPICAL FARM HOME—a recognition to KEN-DICK BUILT HOMES that have become a symbol of construction quality at volume production prices.

Built by Ken Dickerson

Since 1928 Ken Dickerson has engaged in construction work about Columbus—and for the past five years KEN DICKERSON, INC. has developed its present "house production" methods—with a crew of specialists for each individual operation, building six to a dozen houses with the work of each crew of craftsmen co-ordinated with the progress of construction. Through these modern methods we speed construction and save you money.

Demonstrates Low Cost Housing

This practical demonstration of low cost housing was initiated by The Columbus Dispatch and jointly sponsored by The Dispatch and the Ohio Homes Foundation. It was essential that the home reflect the trend of farmers who want to have comfortable but inexpensive homes. It was also vital that there be no sacrifice of quality.

**Pioneers
 in Low Cost Housing**

We are pioneers in LOW COST CONSTRUCTION — and through years of pioneering we have perfected volume home production methods that are practical and thrifty for the home builder. Our homes always exceed the stringent FHA specifications. We specialize in homes costing less than \$5000 and we can definitely prove that our volume buying, power machinery methods and production policy save you hundreds of dollars.

KEN DICKERSON INC.

Builder of "Ken Dick Low Cost Homes"

3127 W. Broad St. RA. 4693 Columbus, Ohio

Fig. 3. Advertisement in the Columbus Dispatch, August 24, 1941.



Fig. 4. Still from a home movie made by an Ohio Farm Family.

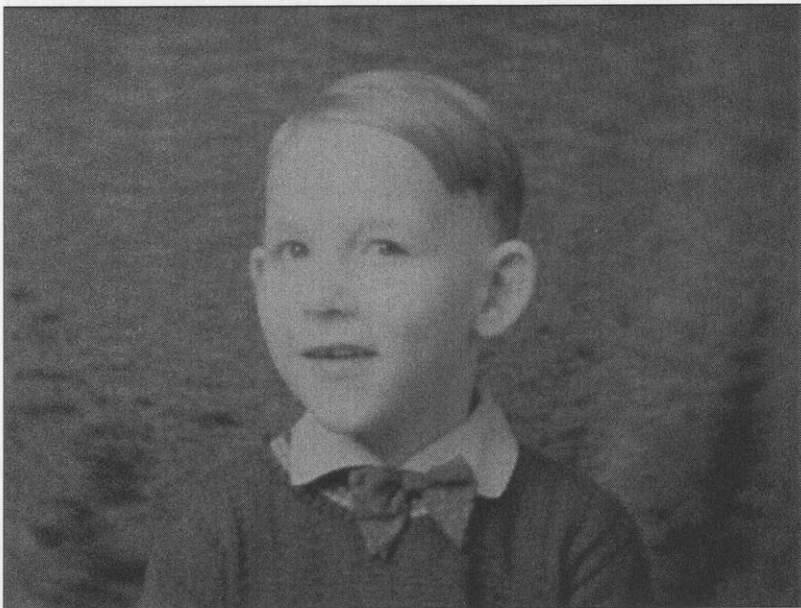


Fig. 5. Headshot, still from *A Model Family in a Model Home*, 2015.

to find oneself on a kind of stage, forced to perform one's own life for an endless series of spectators that traipsed through the living room and stared in the kitchen window, I do not think he was interested in using the story to make a statement on the prurient interests of the public or the exhibitionism of ordinary people. Quite the contrary, Brecht did not want to sensationalize working people or turn them into objects of ridicule. If he imagined that the Engel family destroyed everything including themselves as a family, it was for a different reason. And to understand this, I would have to learn more.

It was important for me not only to reconstruct the story Brecht wanted to tell but to imaginatively reconstruct his working methods, how he would prepare and go about presenting the story so that it would include ordinary working people at every stage of its construction. So there is no simple demarcation between documentary and drama. Brecht alludes to the idea of the staged documentary in his HUAC testimony when he mentions that he made a documentary in Germany.¹² He is referring to *Kuhle Wampe or Who Owns the World*, which, although it was staged, clearly documents the economic crisis. To document for Brecht was not simply to film life unfolding in front of the camera, but rather to use this as a starting point to analyze the economic and political forces at work so people can understand why.

I imagined how he would have tried to learn everything he could about the American farm family so that he could show actors how to represent them. Following Brecht's discovery of the story, the next sequence in my film shows a home movie made by an Ohio farm family proudly documenting themselves at work and play; feeding chickens, milking cows, plowing the fields with an old car. A woman swings from a branch, family and friends picnic by the lake, grilling sausages and toasting the cameraman with beers. This is not the Engel family. But that is not important. What is important is that the family members present their lives for themselves and their friends, an affectionate self-portrait in stark contrast to the objectification the Engel family experienced at the state fair as they posed for Alfred Eisenstaedt, *Life* magazine's staff photographer, and the passing throngs of spectators.

The following sequence also comes from a home movie from the same period in Ohio, close-ups of ordinary people posed simply against a curtain. Old and young face the camera with humor, reluctance, or downright grumpiness. I suggest it could be a local casting call and I wrote the narration based on Brecht's ideas about casting: "How to behave in front of the camera, how to project the text is something that can be taught. I want show that interestingness of the actor depends on the interest he brings to the social phenomena that he is concerned with in his acting. The audience watching people like themselves can judge the American family rationally and impartially."¹³



Fig. 6. Editorial cartoon in the *Columbus Dispatch*, August 23, 1941.

But how would Brecht have analyzed the situation of the model family trapped in the model home for all to see? Since his short scenario provided only a few clues, I set out to research the story myself. Only after discovering more about the actual events at the Ohio State Fair did his notes begin to make sense to me. Alfred Eisenstaedt took almost a hundred photographs of the event. Brecht saw only the ones that were published in the magazine. I was able to review all the outtakes as well. I read articles and advertisements published in the *Columbus Dispatch*, the newspaper that sponsored the competition.

It became very clear that *The Model Family in the Model Home* was a marketing ploy. The *Columbus Dispatch* ran lengthy articles about all of the

companies that built and furnished the home. Everything in the house had a large price tag affixed to it. The lamps were still wrapped in cellophane.

A lady in a white coat, the “home economist,” demonstrated the latest kitchen appliances to Mrs. Engel and the passing multitudes. The photographs made concrete—in the most literal way—what Brecht had already observed about life in Los Angeles, that everything, even people, comes with a price tag attached. In contrast to the freewheeling home movies of the Ohio farm family of the previous sequence, here the film presents a selection of the Eisenstaedt photographs, which are carefully framed and set up. Here the family members are simply objects among other objects.

The competition held out the promise that “Ohio’s Most Typical Farm Family” would be honored at the state fair. Instead they were simply used as living advertisements. Their job was to move the merchandise. It was hard, unpaid labor. The intimacy of family life was just one more commodity that was on view. I imagine that Brecht wanted to show that it was against this alienation that the family rebelled, destroying not only the model home but themselves as a model family. They simply refused to be exploited.

To bring Brecht’s notes to life, my film returns to “Little Bertie” the ventriloquist’s doll. Himself a model, this time he’s looking at an architectural model of the model home. He peers in the windows excited by the sounds of smashing pots, pans, and furniture declaring, “For the first time they do not follow the script . . . They break the rules. They cannot, they will not, play the role of Model Family. They tear off their blue ribbons, the same ones awarded to prize livestock. In an act of desperation they turn on the Model Home where everything is for sale . . . From wreckage can something new begin . . . Yes! A battlefield . . . everyone runs amok . . . A scene of destruction: a demolished living room, a letter from a divorce lawyer, a frazzled lady’s hat.” I want to show that he respected working people and believed that against all odds they had the courage to challenge injustice.

Throughout the film, I inserted shards of World War II newsreel, a reminder that while the Engel family captivated the readers of *Life*, war raged across Europe. Studying copies of the *Columbus Dispatch* it became clear that the heightened promotion around the state fair was part of a collective psychic drive to block out, at all cost, the horror that was engulfing the rest of the world. In fact on the first day of the fair the newspaper stamped a map of Ohio, with a cornucopia spilling out of it, over almost the entire front page, blocking out articles about the World War including a report of the siege of Leningrad. Again I took my cue from Brecht. Even when he did not write about the war, his journals were full of photographs of the conflict overseas ripped from the newspapers. Indeed I believe that this irreconcilable split was in part the reason that Brecht hated America. With Europe and Russia plunged into hell, how could Santa Monica be so pleasant? It seemed indecent, utterly wrong.¹⁴



Fig. 7. Realty Office, Wentzville Missouri, still from *A Model Family in a Model Home*, 2015.

However the core of my film, the real conflict introduced by the events at the state fair, revolves around the economics of home ownership. Brecht left the country in 1947 at the very inception of the postwar housing boom. One could say that the marketing of mass-produced suburban homes to ordinary Americans began with competitions like the one that staged the event “A Model Family in a Model Home.”

Part 3 of my film, titled “Socialism or Capitalism?,” presents the economic choices that faced rural Americans at the time when Brecht was writing in the 1940s. Without commentary, I present two films that make this choice starkly apparent. *By the People, For the People*, produced by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, shows socialism in action. Farmers form cooperatives to bring electricity to rural America. The film shows neighborhood meetings where farmers debate ways and means of putting this new idea to work. They sign up for membership. In cooperatives farmers own their electricity, run their own companies, and are not beholden to commercial interests.

The second film, *Homes Unlimited: A Tale of Free American Enterprise*, produced by the National Homes Corporation, a company that built prefabricated houses, presents the capitalist model. The film’s idealized vision of home ownership is clearly inspired by the motion pictures

of Hollywood. Accompanied by a lush orchestral score, a young couple peruses photographs in a real estate office. A family enters a perfectly furnished ranch house for the first time. The narrator explains how individual home ownership benefits business.

I present these two films not as historical facts but as potentials that for a moment in the 1940s could have led in different directions. Of course we know the outcome. Americans overwhelmingly chose individual home ownership. In the final part of the film, “Fictitious Capital,” set in 2015, we see the results.

My narration explains how in the capitalist model, homes have not only use value but exchange value. Home ownership becomes a form of saving for the people in them, an asset. But over the last thirty or forty years home ownership has become a form of speculation. In the twenty-first century, finance has evolved. Today’s model home is constructed with what Marx called “fictitious capital,” that is money that is produced purely through the manipulation of assets by various financial instruments, that includes bundling mortgages and selling risk. The credit system manages production and demand. The banks fund the developers to build the subdivisions. The developers need a market so the financiers lend money to families to buy their houses. And because they regulate supply and demand they can also manipulate prices and in the case that all the homes are foreclosed on they still make profits off the fees. The film shows how the landscape of the rural Midwest has changed since 1941. Giant malls with big box stores have replaced local merchants that furnished the model home. The city sprawls into the country; the farm home has been eaten up by the subdivision.

The housing crisis of 2008 was caused by uncontrolled speculation that led to massive foreclosures. Ordinary people lost upwards of forty billion dollars in assets. Six million lost their homes. The film shows what happened in Missouri. The film documents what are technically known as “zombie subdivisions.” Not subdivisions taken over by blood-sucking zombies, but subdivisions that were foreclosed on or never finished, where forlorn street lamps stand beside unfinished streets and grass grows up through the cracks. The film ends with a song “Supply and Demand” from Brecht’s play *The Measures Taken*, rewritten for today. It is sung not by a merchant but by a banker because today it is the bankers who control supply and demand in the housing market. Here is one of the verses:

The market makes it efficient
 I found a way there’s nothing to lose
 The risk has all been traded
 Eager buyers took on debt
 That debt’s been sold and bundled
 If these homes are all foreclosed on

It will not affect me
There are far too many homes anyway

What is a home, actually?
Do I know, do you know,
Don't ask me my advice
God only knows what a home is
I only know its price.¹⁵

By sketching out different forms of ownership my film suggests that housing collapse was not natural or inevitable. And if the present system of finance is not working, ordinary people might be well to decide, like Brecht's model family, that they have had enough.

I conclude this essay more than a year after the film was completed with some speculations. I began by describing how Brecht's notes for *A Model Family* are by necessity incomplete, making them open to change and active collaboration across time.

In his essay *On the Concept of History* Benjamin described better than anyone how history is not something that is fixed and eternal: "Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing the past 'the way it really was.'" He passionately declares "that 'eternal' past of the historicist" is just sentimental rubbish. The task of the historical materialist is to blast a specific event or work out of time to see and use it anew.¹⁶ He invites us to rethink history as an act of liberation, to proceed in the spirit of irreverence. The present can redeem the past. The failures of revolutions past can become the not yet of their present or future fulfillment.

But on a much darker note, we only have to look around us to see the past rise up. I write this now on the eve of Trump's inauguration. His slogan, "make America great again," puts this very succinctly. But just when was America great and great for whom? Will he drag the country back to the Jim Crow era, segregation, and anti-Semitism? The *New York Times* has a new weekly column titled *This Week in Hate* documenting the outpouring of hate crimes since the election. Swastikas are everywhere, it seems.

Yes, the ghosts of the past are not dead and as they walk among us they have very real effects. Perhaps notes and fragments that are incomplete and provisional are the most honest way to represent just how much history is a contested territory. In this spirit I think of my film as a critique of documentary practice. In a conventional historical documentary, archival footage is used to illustrate the narration, to guarantee its veracity. For example, when we see a documentary on World War II with news footage of the invasion on the Normandy beaches and at the same time hear what happened in voice-over, picture and sound are locked in sync. Together they provide closure. Things could not be other than they were. The Nazis lost, the allies won, the images prove it.

In contrast where I use archival footage it is not as “evidence” but rather as different perspectives or lenses through which we can picture the world. I invite the viewer to speculate, to ask questions about what might have been. There was nothing inevitable about the choices people made or will make. Things can always be other than they are.

To come back to the example of World War II, the fascists lost that battle but it didn’t have to turn out that way and their contemporary incarnations on the far right are well on their way to being winners. I am haunted by the specter of Roy Cohn, Joseph McCarthy’s vicious young henchman who links the communist witch hunts that forced Brecht out of our country to our present politics. Because as fate would have it, in the 1980s Cohn, in his capacity as Donald Trump’s lawyer and friend, coached him in all the tactics of race-baiting and dirty tricks that he puts into play today.¹⁷ I am also well aware that rural Ohio overwhelmingly supported Trump in this last election and that if I made *A Model Family in a Model Home* today a year and a half later, my film might be different. I, like Brecht, would have to grapple with how to confront the fact that there are times and places when working people betray their own interests by falling for a swindler and a charlatan.

Brecht wrote:

For time flows on, and if it did not, it would be a bad prospect for those who do not sit at golden tables. Methods become exhausted; stimuli do not work. New problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change. Nothing comes from nothing; the new comes from the old, but that is why it is new.

To be true to that thought we must re-imagine his work in the light of our present situation; and the unresolved fragments of ideas might be the best place to start.¹⁸

I believe that the archive is only there for us to activate and that if we cannot, it is nothing.

Notes

A link to the film *A Model Family in a Model Home* and more information about the larger project *A World Redrawn: Eisenstein and Brecht in Hollywood* can be found at: <http://www.aworldredrawn.com>.

¹ Bertolt Brecht, “A Model Family,” notes for a film, 1914, BBA 158/65. © Bertolt-Brecht-Erben / Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin.

² Brecht explains that ordinary people must now be the subjects not the objects of politics and it is condescending to make assumptions about who they are and how they think. This is one of the reasons I use home movies; I want to incorporate how

people represent themselves. "Against Georg Lukács," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, Stuart Hood, trans. (London: Verso, 1977), 80–81.

³ James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 56.

⁴ Ronald Hayman, *Bertolt Brecht: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 116.

⁵ Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America*, 62.

⁶ Brecht, *Poems 1938–1956*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Eyre Methuen, 1976), 367.

⁷ Brecht, *Journals 1934–1955*, ed. John Willett and Hugh Rorrison (New York: Routledge, 1993), 193.

⁸ See Amy Lawrence, "Trapped in a Tomb of Their Own Making: Max Ophuls's *The Reckless Moment* and Douglas Sirk's *There's Always Tomorrow*," in *Film Criticism* 23, no. 2/3 (1999).

⁹ Thus Walter Benjamin describes the photographer's studio at the end of the nineteenth century with the oppressive draperies and painted backdrops, but the ornate Hollywood studio sets of the 1940s and 1950s could equally well fall into this category of faux opulence. See Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writing*, ed. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1985), 24.

¹⁰ *Life*, September 15, 1941, 42.

¹¹ Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America*, 36.

¹² In his HUAC testimony Brecht is asked about his visits to Moscow. He replies, "I was invited to show a picture, a documentary picture I had helped make in Berlin." Mr. Stripling asks him for the name of the picture. He replies, "The name—it is the name of a suburb of Berlin, Kuhle Wampe." [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Brecht_HUAC_hearing_\(1947-10-30\)_transcript](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Brecht_HUAC_hearing_(1947-10-30)_transcript) (accessed January 12, 2017).

¹³ Brecht, *Journals 1934–1955*, 284.

¹⁴ On his arrival in Los Angeles Brecht wrote "Almost nowhere has my life ever been harder than here in this mausoleum of easy going. The house is too pretty and my profession is gold-digging." Next to this text he pasted a picture of air-force bombers that were being shipped to Britain. See Bertolt Brecht, *Journals 1934–1955*, 157.

¹⁵ Cf. Brecht, *The Decision*, trans. John Willett, in *Collected Plays: Three* (London: Methuen Drama, 1997), 77–78. These new lyrics were written by Maggie Carson and Hannah Temple.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press Harvard, 1996–2003), 391, 396.

¹⁷ Jonathan Mahler and Matt Flegenheimer, "What Donald Trump Learned from Joseph McCarthy's Right-Hand Man," *New York Times*, June 20, 2016.

¹⁸ Brecht, "Against Georg Lukács," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, 82.

Gewalt & Lernen: Szenario 2

Der Hauptzweck der Aufführung von *Violence & Learning* besteht darin, als Beitrag zu der Diskussion über politische Möglichkeiten und Ziele von politischen Graswurzelbewegungen zu dienen, und die Teilnehmenden die politische Bewegung, der sie angehören, aus einer Mikro- wie auch Makro-Perspektive analysieren und erleben zu lassen. Die Aufführung ist von Bertolt Brechts *Die Maßnahme* inspiriert und wurde als ein kritischer Dialog zusammen mit Aktivisten aus der radikalen linken und Sozialbewegungsszene in Schweden entwickelt und aufgeführt. Die offenen Diskussionen, die der Aufführung folgten, haben eine konstante Entwicklung des Skripts ermöglicht, sowie zu anwachsenden Kenntnissen von politischem Aktivismus geführt. Nach einer kurzen Vorstellung des Kontexts und der Ideen hinter der Aufführung wird ein Teil des Skripts wiedergegeben.

The main purpose of the performance *Violence & Learning* is to contribute to the discussion about political means and ends in grassroots political movements, and for the participants to examine and experience the political movement in which they partake from a micro and macro perspective. The performance is inspired by Bertolt Brecht's *Die Maßnahme*, and it has been developed and performed as a critical dialogue with activist groups from the radical left and social movement scenes in Sweden. The open discussions that have followed the performances have facilitated a constant development of the script, as well as increased knowledge of political activism. The piece opens with a short introduction to the context and the ideas behind the performance, followed by part of the script.

Violence & Learning: Scenario 2

John Hanse and Henrik Bromander

Introduction

The script we are presenting below is one of four different scenarios from *Violence & Learning* by Henrik Bromander and John Hanse, which was performed at the International Brecht Society's Symposium in Oxford in June 2016.

The learning play *Violence & Learning* has been developed and performed in the context of left-wing activism in Sweden. The different variants of the play have partly been played out and developed in theater houses, but mainly in social centers, squatted buildings and other places of importance for the left-wing movement. This movement is also examined and discussed in the performance. Every performance has been followed by an open discussion, which aimed at being a starting point for further discussions—discussions that have been beneficial for us when gathering more material, and even changing the script for the next performance. The focus of these discussions has varied a lot depending on the place and the participators.

The starting point of the project and the structure of the play is inspired by *Die Maßnahme* (The Decision) by Bertolt Brecht. The idea is to make the participants, alongside the actors, reenact a number of fictional events such as a strike, a riot, and a blockade—all are of great material and symbolic value for the contemporary radical left. In a similar way that the police officers prepare themselves for crowd control (not only through lectures, but also by setting up and playing out scenarios), we can prepare ourselves physically for a discussion about political means and ends. We want to examine the embodied knowledge that is inherent in a certain action or situation, and in a larger context understand the tacit knowledge of a political practice or a social movement. The opportunity to move from the role of a bystander to the role of a participant, and vice versa, facilitates the possibility to scrutinize the political action itself. On a more general level, the performance enables a theoretical discussion about organized political practice.

Our main objective is that the performance should be a relevant part of the discussion about political means and ends in grassroots political movements, thus enabling the participants to examine and experience the political movement they are a part of from both a micro and macro perspective.

In the following script, the figure of the Young Comrade of *Violence & Learning* has, according to the four activists/actors, committed grave errors, thus inflicting great damage on the political struggle. These errors are what the four activists/actors are reenacting, in order to receive a judgment from the silent choir/the participants. The scenario that is presented here is the second scenario in the performance.

An English and a Swedish complete version of the script can be downloaded at www.violenceandlearning.com.

The Script

/ . . /

B, A SECOND ACTIVIST

We kept evolving. Just like the early social democrats, we slowly built a popular movement, without succumbing to passivity and assimilation.

D, A THIRD ACTIVIST

Just like the suffragettes, we were prepared to use broad alliances as well as direct action to achieve our goals.

A, A FOURTH ACTIVIST

Just like the right wing populists, we mixed the legitimate rage of the grass-roots with the strategic maneuvers of the well-informed to form a steadily growing threat.

B, AN ACTIVIST

And just like the Black Panthers, we built up a local presence, right where we lived, and we were ready to defend ourselves.

C, A SECOND ACTIVIST

The next major struggle our movement took part in was at an entertainment establishment in the central parts of town. A restaurant known for good but affordable food in the evening and eclectic clubs at night. A spot frequented by many, including us in the movement whenever we wanted to unwind from heavy work days and the burdens of activism.

C and A bring some audience members and form a pub setting.

A, AN ACTIVIST

Let's recreate one of these pleasant evenings. We are guests at this establishment.

D, A SECOND ACTIVIST

The owner of the restaurant had immigrated from southern Asia and had hired many countrymen using illegal contracts. An employer who refused

collective bargaining, but nonetheless put up posters for our demonstrations in the restaurant windows and saw to it that our stickers in the restrooms weren't torn down.

D brings some audience members to make up the kitchen staff, complete with chefs, dishwashers, etc.

D, A SECOND ACTIVIST

We'll reenact the hard work for chefs and busboys in the cramped kitchen.

B, THE YOUNG COMRADE

Even I, the Young Comrade, who this reenactment is all about, saw the opportunity to get an easy temp position and generous tips, so I started working as a waiter at the restaurant.

B brings some audience members to play the parts of the waitstaff and who then walk between the kitchen and the restaurant tables.

We are the waitstaff and have to hurry between the steaming kitchen and the noisy restaurant. But what I saw behind the scenes made me realize there was a need for organizing collectively.

C, AN ACTIVIST

What did you see that made you act?

B, THE YOUNG COMRADE

I saw people who had left their families behind and spent all their money on a one-way flight. I visited an apartment filled to the brim with tired and terrified workers. I saw the tampering with schedules and employment certificates, and I'm sad to say a corrupt union comrade was involved in this. I saw how little the workers were paid at the end of each month, but I also saw that their solidarity had them rather starve than not send anything at all back to those left behind. Meanwhile, I saw how all you activists sat on couches and drank watery beers to the victories of the movement and the fast approach of full communism. I urged you to start a boycott.

A, AN ACTIVIST

Thinking that one can remain untouched in a dirty system by making informed decisions as an individual consumer is idealist. One must eat, one must drink; only then can morals follow.

B, THE YOUNG COMRADE

That's a comfortable position to take, like a nice couch to relax on. There, from your couch, you can sit and clamor about idealism this and idealism that, while the rest of us stand and fight.

C, A SECOND ACTIVIST

Your demands for a boycott resonated with some, but were ignored by most. And those who avoided this particular establishment went somewhere else instead, where the conditions were equally poor.

D, A THIRD ACTIVIST

What did you do when the boycott proved ineffective?

B, THE YOUNG COMRADE

Along with some of the unregistered workers I formulated collective demands. We wanted to establish proper contracts and regular wages. But the employer's hold was strong. He had eyes and ears everywhere and soon found out what was brewing. Before long, my comrade and I had lost our jobs. It was no big deal for me since I could fall back on my studies. The unregistered workers were much worse off. They roamed the streets like haunted spirits and were driven to seek worse employment in even worse places. Others disappeared for good and dreadful stories were told about what fates they'd met.

A, AN ACTIVIST

What happened next?

B, THE YOUNG COMRADE

Overcome by anger, I went to the employer's home and put an axe through the door. He needed to learn not to mess with the working class. It felt good when the sharp edge pushed through those rustling fibers.

C, A SECOND ACTIVIST

What was the outcome of your action?

B, THE YOUNG COMRADE

Not much except a whiny report in the paper about a racially motivated hate crime directed at a racialized entrepreneur.

A, AN ACTIVIST

The individual deed is temporary and only benefits one's own group, if at all. Our actions must strive for concrete and realistic results, lest they be void of meaning. Our movement decided to take on the employer and make him sign a contract for collective bargaining.

C, THE EMPLOYER

I am the employer. My aptitude for numbers combined with an unsentimental attitude towards life has brought me from the dishwasher to an executive

position in a small but lucrative company. But I have not forgotten my roots. My way of honoring what I come from is to offer many of my countrymen work. You rich and well-groomed Westerners see me as a slave owner, but it is a simple fact that these young men and women earn many times more here than they would there.

A, AN ACTIVIST

That comparison is irrelevant. We cannot adjust our struggle to comply with poor conditions elsewhere. Our demands are on the here and now, not somewhere else.

C, THE EMPLOYER

If I were to raise wages to the so-called minimum, I would soon run out of resources and go bankrupt. It is simple mathematics. Your demands are a threat and can be compared to criminal actions. It is violence directed at my business.

D, AN ACTIVIST

Violence exists, and it comes in many forms. Violence is the husband's clenched fist hitting the wife at home, violence is the police club cracking the skull of the sixteen-year-old protester, violence is the military machine guns rattling off bullets into the Afghan night. But violence is also lowering wages, keeping people in perpetual insecurity, sending people to hospitals or mental institutions, and being able to fire them when they suddenly decide to speak out against it.

C, THE EMPLOYER

Your demands belong to a bygone era of striving for the common good. Since those days, most people, including politicians on your own end, have reconsidered. Now we march to a different tune, it all revolves around the individual and everyone wants to make their own decisions. What do you say to the majority of my employees who have chosen not to join your struggle? Why should you force your aging sentiments upon them?

A, AN ACTIVIST

There will always be parts of the class that choose not to fight or even fight against us, on the enemy side. Thinking that everyone will join is a delusion. Sometimes we will be many, sometimes we will be few, but we will never cease to be right.

D, A SECOND ACTIVIST

Our response to the employer's offer was therefore to organize a blockade outside his restaurant.

B, THE YOUNG COMRADE

A blockade we defended by any means necessary!

D, AN ACTIVIST

No, for tactical reasons we chose a nonviolent course of action. Let's recreate the blockade.

They have the audience stand, blocking the restaurant. Some are given leaflets to hand out.

D, A, POLICE OFFICERS

We are police officers who have been called here by a business owner who is concerned that people cannot access his restaurant. If that is the case, you are committing a criminal offense. You must disperse immediately.

C, AN ACTIVIST

Here it becomes evident that the primary role of the police is to secure property rights, when in fact they should be arresting those who oppress the weakest. Disregard whatever they have to say.

D, POLICE OFFICER (*determinedly walks toward the audience*)

We said disperse!

A, POLICE OFFICER

Now!

The police start pulling at people and shoving them. The activists tell people to stick together and link arms. They tell them to not back down.

D, A POLICE OFFICER

It's frustrating when people don't do as they're told. Fortunately, in recent years our arsenal has been expanded to better subdue and sap wills.

The police shoot pepper spray in an activist's face. The activist holds his or her face and screams as they back away. The remaining activists call for calm and get people to reclose the chain.

C, AN ACTIVIST (*sitting on the ground*)

My face burns like fire, but I tell myself that it isn't dangerous; as of yet, no one has died from pepper spray. It is important to remain calm even though the pain is great.

B, THE YOUNG ACTIVIST

We washed the activist's face with eyewash. Such things are important to bring to this kind of activity.

B shows the audience how to do it.

C, AN ACTIVIST (*reenters the chain*)

I was soon ready to be a link in the chain again. This inspired my comrades. You can beat us as much as you want, but our will is stronger than their violence.

A, A SECOND ACTIVIST

The next day, newspapers depicted the police repression in a, for us, favorable way. The use of pepper spray caused a stir even among liberal columnists who emphasized the fundamental value of the freedom of speech.

C, A THIRD ACTIVIST

Night after night, we maintained our blockade, with the police at a safe distance. Our numbers grew constantly as new faces joined our movement.

B, AN ACTIVIST

We taught simple tactics and inexpensive insurance to one, who then taught someone else, all according to the principles of multiplied knowledge. Soon we were many and well prepared.

They demonstrate how to wrap newspapers around one's arms to protect against blows from police clubs.

A, A SECOND ACTIVIST

The reactions varied among the many restaurant guests who were denied entry by our human wall. We will show you how the reactions were mixed.

C, A SYMPATHIZING RESTAURANT GUEST (*takes a leaflet*)

I am a sympathizing restaurant guest. I stand behind your demands and would have stood next to you had it not been this cold outside. Instead of drinking beers, I will go home and fall asleep in front of the TV. Good luck!

D, A TIPSY LIBERAL

I am a tipsy liberal. I oppose all forms of oppression and I react whenever people give themselves the right to make decisions for others. Who gave these anti-democrats the right to keep me from visiting this pub? That's what I think. After a few swigs of cognac, however, my opinions aren't quite as well articulated.

A, AN ACTIVIST

The tipsy liberal walked around and made fun of people's looks and sexual orientation and did everything to provoke a reaction.

C, A POLICE OFFICER

We saw this happen, but decided to stand back. Everyone has the right to express their opinion in this country.

A, AN ACTIVIST

Then he went up and spit in the Young Comrade's face.

The liberal walks up and spits in the Young Comrade's face.

B, THE YOUNG COMRADE

The bourgeois pig had been pushing it, but this was simply beyond the pale. I, The Young, Comrade, mildly reprimanded him. No more, no less.

The Young Comrade punches the liberal in the stomach. The liberal folds over and turns into a police officer.

A, AN ACTIVIST

We had agreed on a nonviolent course of action. To win this battle, we must be patient and passive, not impulsive and confrontational.

B, THE YOUNG COMRADE

Those are big demands to put on the many newcomers in our movement! How much should a person have to put up with in the form of insults and attacks?

A, AN ACTIVIST

One should not have to put up with anything, yet be prepared to face the cruelest forms of torture. No one is everyone and everyone is nothing. What's certain is that many more suffered as a consequence of the Young Comrade's actions.

C, D, POLICE OFFICERS

Having witnessed the violent attack on an innocent citizen, we immediately put on our helmets and initiated a charge.

The police attack. The activists call on people to defend themselves from the blows by using their arm padding, and to stick together. The police arrest an audience member, who is innocently singled out as the one who assaulted the liberal.

A, AN ACTIVIST

The police apprehended a young activist, who was innocently singled out as the one who had assaulted the liberal. We stayed and focused on upholding the chain.

The arrest is demonstrated in detail while the audience remains with linked arms.

C, POLICE OFFICER

The police entered via a shoulder hold and made their way to the person's back. They twisted the arm and forced the suspect into an armpit transition lock, on to a simple joint hold enabling them to move the person around. Like this.

D, POLICE OFFICER

The police performed a forceful balance break and used the leverage from the arm to bend the suspect at the hip while they stepped forward. They put a hand on the upper arm, near the elbow, to lock the entire arm. Stepped forward diagonally and pressed down with well-balanced force so that the suspect was placed face down, on the stomach. Then the police performed a shoulder hold and put body weight on the suspect.

B, THE YOUNG COMRADE

It was a clear case of excessive use of force. One of the police officers put his or her knee on the activist's spine while the other twisted an arm. When the young person screamed and tried to escape, they became even more violent. We began to call on people to organize a rescue attempt.

A, AN ACTIVIST

No, it was you, the Young Comrade, who did that. The rest of us stood in silence and saw it all happen. It is awful to see people we've fought alongside get hurt, but unfortunately those are the rules of the game. Here, the police are simply serving their purpose, no more no less. But that's not reason enough for us to act.

B, THE YOUNG COMRADE

But it has worked in the past. We know we can do it.

A, AN ACTIVIST

Thus spoke the Young Comrade, but what is right in one instance is wrong in another. If we always fall back on prior approaches we will never come up with new ones.

D, A POLICE OFFICER (*walks away with the arrestee*)

We were carrying out the order from our squad leader to make a symbolic arrest in order to deter and subdue. Our tactic is an interplay between frustrating inaction and relentless offensive.

C, A SECOND POLICE OFFICER

Sometimes it works well, other times it doesn't. It is not an easy job, but someone's got to do it. In any case, we pulled back for the time being.

D, AN ACTIVIST

Yes, but only for the time being. Night after night, we maintained our blockade, but we faced ever increasing resistance from the police. How numerous were our tears. How bruised and bloodied our beaten bodies? From the street corners, we could hear the horses breathing. Perhaps our will was not stronger than their violence after all.

A, A SECOND ACTIVIST

We abandoned the blockade as a tactic and had to come up with new strategies. Eventually, these strategies forced the employer to his knees. His restaurant went out of business and several of his employees were deported.

D, AN ACTIVIST

The individual price to pay was high, but our victory was larger. The rumor of our movement spread like wildfire among the city's entertainment establishments. Before long, almost all owners had agreed to collective bargaining and those who didn't were in big trouble. Meanwhile, the costs for eating out skyrocketed. Going out for a meal turned into a pleasure reserved only for those who could afford it.

C, A THIRD ACTIVIST

Our movement both multiplied and changed. For the first time, we began to seriously represent the class we speak for, and could start acting instead of reacting, setting the agenda instead of saying no to everything.

D, AN ACTIVIST

Our solidarity work for the newly arrived refugees continued unabated. We built a social center around an empty school and did much of the work that the authorities could not or would not do.

A, AN ACTIVIST

It had previously been a problem that comrades who had come from far away never became part of the movement. Unseen structures and unspoken rules made it hard for those not entirely familiar with the language and culture.

C, AN ACTIVIST

Our new way of doing politics turned all of this upside down as we broke with the old and opened up. Our movement saw a great influx of new

activists experienced in organizing to face resistance far more brutal than that of our enemies here.

D, A SECOND ACTIVIST

While the politicians waxed poetic about open hearts and compassion, their hands were tied by the European Community. From the highest level, the decision came to start a wave of mass deportation. To stop people from going into hiding, many were put into locked down detention centers.

C, A THIRD ACTIVIST

Several of our activists ended up in these prisons out in the woods. Tall fences and locked barracks separated us from them. Some of them were central to our activities and must be allowed to continue their work. We planned the operation in great detail. We built up an underground network for rescue and further escape.

A, AN ACTIVIST

The network was a chain, much like the one you stand in, but its links were invisible threads rather than strong arms. Let's recreate the network.

The audience members, who up to this point have stood with linked arms as part of the blockade, are made to stand in four groups of roughly six or seven people, each along with one actor.

/.../

Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar: Die Perspektive eines Übersetzers

Brechts Romanfragment *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar* wurde bereits vor sechzig Jahren veröffentlicht, aber erst vor kurzem ist das Werk in einer englischen Übersetzung erschienen. Zwei Aspekte der “Wiederverwertung” des Originals in einer englischen Fassung dürften hier interessant sein. Zum Ersten: Warum gibt es in englischsprachigen Ländern so wenig Interesse an Brechts bahnbrechendem Versuch, einen historischen Roman zu verfassen, in dem er seine Theorien mit seiner langjährigen Faszination an Caesar vereint? Die Reaktionen waren bisher doch eher verwirrt und irreführend, was vielleicht auf Esslins 1959 geäußerte Behauptung zurück zu führen ist, dass der Roman römische Lebensart und politische Verhältnisse zu modernisieren versucht, aber letztendlich “nicht überzeugt.” Welche abschätzige Grundhaltung verbirgt sich hinter dieser Meinung, die den Roman als kaum weniger als eine Allegorie der Entwicklung des Faschismus betrachtet? Zweitens: Könnte vielleicht eine Untersuchung spezifischer Gesichtspunkte des Übersetzungsprozesses ein besseres Verständnis unter nicht-deutschsprachigen Lesern fördern? Statt vorzugeben, dass eine Übersetzung jemals neutral, nahtlos und perfekt sein kann, wäre es nicht ein angemessener und Brecht besser gerecht werdender Ansatz, für fremdsprachige Ausgaben seines Werkes zunächst die Schwierigkeiten einer Übersetzung anzuerkennen, damit die daraus folgende Diskussion zu einem erhöhten Verständnis des Originals führen kann?

Brecht’s novel *The Business Affairs of Mr. Julius Caesar*, published in Germany sixty years ago, has only recently become available in English translation. Two aspects of “recycling” the original as an English version may be of interest. First, why has Brecht’s innovative attempt to write a historical novel incorporating his theories and his long-standing fascination with Caesar attracted so little interest in English-speaking countries? Response has been confused and misleading, perhaps rooted in Esslin’s claim in 1959 that the novel tries to modernize Roman life and politics but “fails to convince.” What attitudes may be at the root of a dismissive stance that generally sees the work as little more than an attempt to allegorize fascism as the rise of Julius Caesar? Second, can examining specific aspects of translating the work promote a better understanding of it among non-German speakers? Rather than pretending that the act of translating is objective, seamless, and perfect, would it be a more appropriate Brechtian approach for editions of his work in translation to acknowledge some of the issues involved, so the ensuing discussion can lead to an enhanced appreciation of the original?

A Translator's Perspective on *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar*

Charles Osborne

Some of you may be familiar with Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Having Philip*. But only if you are Bohemian. Or Moravian. That's the Czech translation of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. You can imagine the dilemma facing the translator: there isn't a Czech word with the twin meanings of "Earnest"—but there is a Czech expression "to have Philip" which means to be serious. It's a curious solution, but I have great sympathy with the translator. After all, a translator has to resolve all difficulties somehow: it isn't really possible to leave a gap. Which means, among other things, that a translator has to read the original very carefully and know precisely what's going on.

I'm going to comment on *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar* from the perspective of translation, in the hope of casting light on two fundamental questions: why has it taken sixty years for a translation of this work to be available in English, and what was Brecht trying to do?¹ Could his aims, or rather a negative perception of them by particular commentators, explain this delay? It should be borne in mind that the act of translating permeates this work in a variety of ways: Brecht translated Latin terms into German, which have now been translated into English, and there is also the historical translation from the conditions of ancient Rome to 1930s Germany (and to our time).

The novel features a narrator who journeys to the home of Caesar's former banker, Spicer, twenty years after Caesar's death in the hope of obtaining a diary kept by Caesar's secretary slave, Rarus: the narrator wants to write a biography of his idol, the "great man." The majority of the novel consists of extracts from this diary, framed by sections "in the present" in which Spicer provides the narrator with explanations of the period covered by the diaries, and there are brief conversations between the narrator and individuals who also knew Caesar: a former legionary, a lawyer, and a poet.

At one part of his diary Rarus describes a mob attacking Caesar's house (he always refers to Caesar as "C"):

In the darkness I shove C. behind a filing cabinet. Then they're inside the room, waving storm lanterns from the atrium . . . They kick the amphora over, and it smashes. Then they push the filing cabinet to one side. C. is standing there, cringing, with his kimono open at the front.²

Ah yes, those familiar terms from ancient Rome: atrium, amphora . . . filing cabinet? Was that next to the photocopier?

An office in ancient Rome would contain a cupboard with documents filed there. Brecht uses “Aktenschrank,” which can only really be translated as filing cabinet. A “Schrank” is a cupboard, so “Aktenschrank” may sound less specific than the English term, which conjures up the clear image of a steel box with wide drawers that pull out. But what was I supposed to call it in English? A filing cupboard? The files would have been scrolls. A scroll cupboard? More to the point, what was Brecht supposed to have called it?

Is Brecht modernizing Roman life by using present-day terminology? There is an interesting section early in the novel in which Caesar’s former banker scoffs at historians who are so ignorant of commerce that they don’t even know what short selling means (presumably since the financial crisis of 2008 we are all more familiar with that expression than Brecht’s readership might have been seventy years ago).³

We may be surprised by some aspects of life in ancient Rome as depicted here, especially commercial features such as joint-stock companies, Roman bankers who had branches in the provinces and could arrange letters of credit, or moneylending at high interest rates in provinces conquered by Rome. But this isn’t modernizing on Brecht’s part; these examples are all explicitly mentioned by one of the historical works he drew upon in his extensive research: *An Economic History of Rome*, published by Tenney Frank in 1927. Throughout the novel Brecht is recycling the works of reputable historians. He invents minor characters, and he presents as facts some things we only have rumors about, such as Caesar’s land speculation. This is what historians do, and the novel has a sound basis in historical fact, which distinguishes it from the majority of his work and is in itself a reason for it to be taken more seriously in the English-speaking world.

Brecht employs another technique that is, in a sense, the opposite of modernizing. There’s a scene in the novel in which Rarus goes along to an election in the hope of seeing his boyfriend. It includes a brief reference to the voting procedure: “Unmöglich, nahe an die Laufstege heranzukommen, über die die Wählercenturien an der Kasten für die Stimmtäfelchen geführt werden.”⁴ So an election seems to have involved “members” of the various “centuries” carrying “small tablets” along some sort of “catwalk” to put in a “box.” In order to translate that I had to discover exactly what the voting system was—and then I had to write it in English so it was no more explicit than the original.

The bewilderment we feel in such situations as readers reflects the general difficulty for anybody—even those closely involved—in understanding the financial and political intrigues underlying the entire action of the novel, from the failure of the Catiline conspiracy to the rise of Caesar. Even Rarus, the secretary slave privy to a great deal of inside information, is baffled by what is happening.

However, Brecht also uses this technique, this deliberate opacity, to encourage the reader to put some work into understanding the book. Brecht wants the reader, like a member of the audience in a theater, to be involved. He doesn't want the events depicted here to seem glib and inevitable. In 1938, as he was writing this book, he noted his awareness of one danger facing the historian—that he becomes a fatalist:

den CAESAR schreibend, das entdecke ich jetzt, darf ich keinen augenblick glauben, dass es so kommen musste, wie es kam. dass etwa die sklaverei, welche eine politik der plebs so unmöglich machte, nicht aufzuheben war. die suche nach den grunden für alles geschehene macht die geschichtsschreiber zu fatalisten.⁵

[I realize now, as I write CAESAR, that I mustn't believe for one minute things had to work out the way they did. That slavery, which made politics so impossible for the plebs, couldn't have been abolished. Searching for the reasons for everything that happened turns historians into fatalists.]

Brecht was keen to create a kind of historical writing that didn't make everything appear that it had to happen the way it did. Thus he employs startlingly modern terminology, and also descriptions that are puzzling and require more effort on our part, so we are surprised and eager to find out more. Presumably Brecht's hope is that as the reader starts analyzing the situation, he or she will come to the conclusion that things really didn't have to turn out the way they did. Naturally by implication this would lead us to the (revolutionary?) conclusion that nothing that exists in our present society—including all those features regarded as "mere common sense" by those with little imagination—has to be the way it is.

This desire also dictated the form of the book, with the framing device of the narrator being left incomplete, as it were. Perhaps it would be more accurate, in fact, to speak about the use of two framing devices in the novel: first we have the description of Caesar's activity in what purports to be a diary, establishing a certain distance immediately, and then we have the outer framing device of the narrator twenty years later reading the diary, recording his reactions and relating the sometimes contradictory comments he hears from other people.

As regards that framing device using the narrator, in the early sections we get a clear impression of a naïve young man, rather pompous and snobbish, who confidently expects confirmation that Caesar was a strong-willed individual who shaped history, just as the history books said (and still say today, for that matter). Later this unnamed narrator implies in several sections that he didn't succeed in writing his planned biography of Caesar. For example, when Caesar's former banker is explaining that Pompey delayed his return to Rome because he was busy making contracts with the city for

the collection of taxes (which isn't how it appeared to the vast majority of people at the time), the narrator implies that he was bored by this account and then says: "At that time I didn't realize that a purely economic analysis of a great political event—an occurrence of significance to the history of the world—could offer genuine insights."⁶

However, the character of the older narrator looking back isn't developed; he fades away in the book. As Barton Byg indicates, this is because Brecht could hardly have developed the character and at the same time maintained his challenge to the dominant view of history, a view that relies upon a single narrative (and narrator).⁷ If the narrator were able to provide the synthesis and write a definitive history of Caesar, which is the kind of resolution we expect in any story when a framing narrator is used, it would have defeated Brecht's aim. It would have destroyed the distance Brecht has created between us and the events here.

It seems to me that Martin Esslin's dismissive comments on this book, which I imagine shaped critical opinion in English-speaking countries for many years, are rooted in a rejection of precisely what makes the novel Brechtian. Alongside his assertion that "Roman life is modernized by the use of present-day terminology of finance and politics," Esslin claims that the novel "is intended to show a great man through the eyes of his contemporaries,"⁸ apparently ignoring one important aspect of the work completely: the device of the narrator and the crucial analysis of the task of the historian and the way history is transmitted. And Esslin concludes that "despite some witty passages, the novel fails to convince." Would more witty passages make it more convincing? Or is Esslin's criticism merely concealing his unwillingness to concede that economic forces played the decisive role allocated to them here?

More seriously, perhaps, is Esslin's failure to appreciate that the framing device Brecht uses here is fundamentally more sophisticated, with wider implications, than that used in plays such as *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis* (written just a few years later—perhaps simplifying or reworking the technique used here?). In that work, the story of Grusha and the baby, offering a new perspective on the whole idea of property and the rights associated with it, is supplied to the members of two communes in the framing device so they may learn from it, the implication clearly being that we as an audience can also benefit from this lesson. The framing device is therefore an example of an audience for the main point, as it were.

However, in Brecht's Caesar novel, while the story of Caesar's rise can certainly be applied in other instances (very recent history suggesting one comparison that could be trumpeted), it is far more than a simple allegory. And—crucially—the use of a narrator and his attempt to create a lucid and plausible narrative from past events is far more than a framing device in that sense. This novel is quite clearly as much about the way past events are interpreted, history is written, and judgments formed as about the rise of

one unprincipled demagogue. It is about the ways we arrive at a narrative that explains how we got where we are today and, by definition, what kind of future we should (and can) aspire to. It is about the act of writing and rewriting our stories.

I think this disparagement of the novel, and its subsequent neglect, is particularly regrettable since it provides a fascinating demonstration of Brecht's ideas about realism in prose, which goes to the heart of his debate with Lukács. Brecht refuses to use the traditional techniques of historical novels, with an omniscient author providing a tidy account of events including contrived explanations of things we don't know about—such as the voting system in ancient Rome. Brecht's point is that even past novels that may be considered realistic can't provide a template for today: "Realismus ist keine bloße Frage der Form. Wir würden, die Schreibweise dieser Realisten kopierend, nicht mehr Realisten sein." (Realism isn't merely a question of form. If we copied the style of those realists, we would no longer be realists).⁹

In *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar* the narrator is obliged to pay for the right to view the diaries, establishing at a very early stage the idea that payment or effort is required in order to achieve insight. Brecht obliges us to revise and recycle what the novel depicts, the interpretations of the various characters. With this book, where the diary is dated (realistically) from the founding of Rome, if you want to know what date 691 was in our time reckoning, you have to look it up. References are made to "democratic clubs," and we have to deduce for ourselves what these were, and to what extent—if at all—they were democratic in any meaningful sense of the world.

The institution of slavery is mentioned in the very first sentence of the novel. It appears to have played a key role in the failure of the Cataline uprising and to have exacerbated the economic hardships suffered by the free citizens of Rome. But the novel shows us how complex the situation is: Rarus, the slave, has security in his position and is wealthy enough to dabble in shares, and to provide financial support for his boyfriend, a free man who can't find a job in his trade—he is a perfume worker—because slaves are flooding the labor market. What role did the "slave problem" play in the transformation of the republic into a dictatorship? We have to decide.

The question of this novel's connection with themes of recycling or rewriting can be approached from various perspectives. For instance, it may be interesting to speculate on recycling this novel as a play, which is what Brecht originally set out to write. The "missing" character of the older narrator would be an interesting challenge, as would the long, complex passages of dialogue reported in the diaries.

Many years ago the work itself was recycled into another medium: experimental filmmakers Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet made a film (*Geschichtsunterricht / History Lessons*) in 1972 based loosely on the

novel. The film omits the diaries entirely and is set in the present day, with a young man driving around modern Rome—a movie camera on the back-seat of his Fiat—and talking to the characters of the banker, lawyer, etc. Straub and Huillet therefore concentrate entirely on the aspect of the novel that examines the role of a historian, someone trying to make sense of the present by analyzing the past.

In order to consider the degree to which this novel can be interpreted or rewritten as a critique, it is necessary to return to the distinction between the application of the story of Caesar's rise and the relevance of the depiction of how history is written.

It would be relatively easy, and a highly personal procedure, to outline situations that can be illuminated or placed in perspective by the story of Caesar's rise to power. Recent history provides ample evidence that the concept of a "strong man" who will return a nation to its rightful glory has enduring appeal. Without reducing this novel to the level of the simple allegory, comparisons can certainly be made with the rise of Hitler. Given Brecht's political beliefs and his widely stated aims in his writing, it hardly seems unreasonable to present here an example of a comparison focusing less on one individual.

Governments in a number of states today, particularly in the United Kingdom, are intent on privatizing the core functions of the state; one is tempted to wonder whether tax farming will be the next step. It was privatization of that sort that led to dictatorship in ancient Rome. Is it appropriate to compare ancient Rome and modern Britain? Rome was ruled by an elite that engineered hardships to encourage the electorate to vote for tough measures; these privileged individuals allocated among themselves the senior positions in the state, going on to hold lucrative posts in private companies after leaving office. Whereas in Britain today . . .

However, in my view an aspect of the work that has at least as much importance (and that was evidently missed entirely by Martin Esslin) is its contribution to an understanding of how a historical perspective is reached. The various views and judgments regarding Julius Caesar presented in the novel each have a certain validity, and the narrator's difficulty in arriving at a synthesis between them reflects the problem facing all of us: how can we comprehend a complex situation when there are different perspectives on it and each have some truth? What overriding criteria can be applied?

I write this on the anniversary of the incident in 2015 when 130 people were killed in Paris in attacks by the Islamic State. Two days later a professor of history at Harvard University, writing in the *Sunday Times* newspaper, drew a parallel between the state of Paris today and ancient Rome, which he claimed was destroyed by the fatally unwise decision to allow barbarians to become Roman citizens. Two weeks earlier the latest work by a professor of history at Cambridge University claimed that the extraordinary success

and longevity of the Roman Empire was due to its brilliantly wise decision to allow barbarians to become Roman citizens.

Are either of these views entirely true? Is the truth some kind of blend of both? Are we left impotent and passive because we can't choose between them, like the donkey in the ancient Greek fable that starved to death when it spotted two carrots, each the same distance away in opposite directions, because it couldn't choose which to take and therefore remained motionless? Brecht's narrator in this novel is not shown to have made up his mind which interpretation of Julius Caesar to believe. It seems unlikely that Brecht is advocating a position that is so balanced as to be stationary.

I should like to close by suggesting that in this work Brecht is attempting to say something profoundly significant about narrative. When we first meet the narrator he firmly believes the narrative of Julius Caesar that he has been taught (and that is still taught today): Caesar was a great man, a brilliant general, a passionate advocate of democracy who transformed his country and brought civilization to the whole of Europe. That story is undermined and contradicted throughout the book—but the narrator fails to come up with any other plausible, let alone compelling narrative. While it is difficult to state with any confidence the extent to which Brecht regarded this as a failure, it certainly leaves the reader with a sense that something is unfinished (by which I do not simply mean that Brecht didn't complete this novel; even if he had done so, I think it would still feel unfinished in this sense).

However, in emphasizing the crucial importance of narrative in persuading people to believe in a concept or an individual—and to vote for him or her—Brecht is providing us with the key to understanding a fundamental aspect of modern political development. If the situation is not written as a compelling story, if past events are not recycled in such a way that the majority of people can easily make sense of them and perceive a plausible way for the story to continue in future, then people will by and large not sign up for that story.

The symposium *Recycling Brecht* in Oxford in June 2016 began the day after a majority of voters in the UK referendum had indicated their support for leaving the European Union, by many accounts because they believed the narrative put forward with compelling audacity and considerable disregard for the truth by those advocating this step: that Britain would be refunded huge amounts of money and would once again become prosperous and powerful, as it had been in the days of their grandparents.

The deadline for contributions to this edition of the *Brecht Yearbook* was five days after Donald Trump was elected the next president of the United States of America, by many accounts because the electorate believed the narrative he put forward with compelling audacity and considerable disregard for the truth: that in him the USA would find simple, dramatic solutions to all its problems and everyone (except those individuals he

disapproves of) will once again become prosperous and powerful. And the fact that Trump was shown repeatedly to have no coherent policy, to have contradicted himself on numerous occasions, to be a liar, a failed businessman, a misogynist, a bigot . . . None of this mattered. Because he owned the narrative, he practiced rhetoric in a way perfectly tailored to appeal to his target audience.¹⁰

It therefore appears that a study of how narrative is created; how stories are written, rewritten, and recycled; how facts are manipulated or explored, has considerable relevance today. And this work by Brecht, for so long virtually ignored in the English-speaking world, makes an important contribution to that study.

Notes

¹ Bertolt Brecht, *The Business Affairs of Mr Julius Caesar*, trans. Charles Osborne (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

² *Ibid.*, 97.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴ Brecht, *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar*, *BFA* 26, 312.

⁵ *Journal* 23.7.1938, *BFA* 26, 312.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁷ Barton Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 120.

⁸ Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils* (London: Methuen, 1984), 282.

⁹ *BFA* 22.1, 409.

¹⁰ For an attempt to relate Trump more explicitly to Caesar in Brecht's novel see Barry Healy, "Julius Caesar: the Donald Trump of His Time?," *Green Left Weekly* no. 1120, November 29, 2016, 21.

Book Reviews

Zoe Beloff. *A World Redrawn: Eisenstein and Brecht in Hollywood*. New York: Christine Burgin, 2016. 152 pages.

New York-based artist Zoe Beloff talks with people from the past: rather than dead objects of study, they become her comrades and collaborators, she writes (6). In *A World Redrawn*, Beloff thus converses with Bertolt Brecht and Sergei Eisenstein, who both spent time in Hollywood but left without seeing their ambitions realized. Invited by Paramount Studios in the wake of the success of his *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), Eisenstein stayed for six months in 1930. The studio rejected all of his ideas. Brecht, on the other hand, arrived as a refugee from Nazi Germany and worked in the Dream Factory for six years, between 1941 and 1947. Of his many film treatments, only one was turned into a film: he co-wrote the script for *Hangmen Also Die*. Beloff's conversation with the two takes their experiences in Los Angeles as points of departure. The overall result is a quirky, smart, and thought-provoking book whose release follows an exhibition of the material and artwork compiled in *A World Redrawn* at the James Gallery at the Graduate Center, City University of New York in 2015.

Unlike a conventional academic, Beloff engages with Brecht and Eisenstein creatively. Not only does she analyze their ideas on art and politics, she adopts them in her films. *A World Redrawn* includes scripts to three of her short movies: *Two Marxists in Hollywood*; *The Glass House*, based on one of Eisenstein's ideas; and *A Model Family*, which draws on Brecht's notes for a play. In addition, the book offers three substantial academic essays: Beloff's *A World Redrawn* presents an in-depth look at her creative research process and practice. Hannah Frank pens a fascinating cross-cultural history of Russian and American animation in "The Potential of Pochta: Unlikely Affinities between American and Soviet Animation, 1929–1948." A delightful drawing of an Eisenstein-inspired character accompanies the pages of Esther Leslie's essay, "Those in Glass Houses Laugh," on the role of laughter in explicitly political art: for the span of twelve pages, *A World Redrawn* turns into a cheeky flipbook. The anthology also includes film stills and poster reproductions that are part of Beloff's visual oeuvre, and archival material, such as handwritten notes and sketches from the Bertolt Brecht Archive in Berlin and the Russian Archive for Literature and Art (RGALI) in Moscow. Beloff's unorthodox approach ultimately succeeds in demonstrating the acute timeliness of Brecht's and Eisenstein's thought.

The characters of the two artists that emerge from Beloff's substantial research respond to Hollywood with a mixture of fascination and disgust. Both men were admirers of Charlie Chaplin and Walt Disney for the ways these pioneers of the movie industry found to reach their public: social ills were portrayed with wit, not anger, in animation and slapstick. Yet Brecht and Eisenstein shared a deep sense of suspicion toward what Eisenstein called the "marvelous lullaby" of Hollywood's formulaic fare and felt ill at ease in "the mausoleum of the easy going," as Brecht described Los Angeles. Both wanted to activate and engage audiences by combining the popular with the radical. While Eisenstein was not averse to influencing his audience directly and forcefully, Brecht was wary of such manipulation. His ambition was to give audiences the intellectual tools and the critical distance to think for themselves (21). Beloff foregrounds "Brecht's and Eisenstein's dialogue with popular culture" to show it as "a political project" (19). While the scripts and film stills are no substitutes for the films themselves (available for free viewing online at aworldredrawn.com), they still offer a record and the opportunity to see Beloff's process unfold. Her work, without doubt, is closer to Brecht's analytical approach than Eisenstein's political spectacle.

Despite their humor, her films remain firmly grounded in the world of fine art and aim at an intellectual audience. In *Two Marxists in Hollywood*, child actors play Brecht and Eisenstein to suggest their enthusiasm, naïveté, and the in Beloff's mind still unrealized potential of their ideas. Each artist addresses the audience directly. Their respective monologues are shot in today's Los Angeles but include painted backdrops of each location as it would have looked in Brecht's and Eisenstein's day. More than simply add visual interest, this technique alludes to one of Eisenstein's cinematic propositions: rather than collage scenes together, he envisioned montage in one and the same frame. Thus, while the characters expound on their revolutionary ideas for the silver screen and radical popular art, Beloff puts their ideas to the test. Similarly inventive and self-referential techniques carry over to *Glass House* and *A Model Family*: graphic lettering, drawing, animation, dancing, 16 mm home movies, and a ventriloquist dummy reciting Brecht's 1947 testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

For *Glass House* (2014), Beloff turns to Eisenstein, who envisioned a completely transparent skyscraper, where total visibility reveals the willful oblivion of the wealthy for impoverished neighbors. Beloff stages his satire on capitalism with the specter of global surveillance added to Eisenstein's original vision. Brecht was similarly inspired by architecture to reveal the ideological structure of society, a parallel that made Beloff choose his 1941 sketch for *A Model Family*. A *Life Magazine* article on a farm family who won a contest to live in a model home at Ohio's state fair inspired Brecht. Outfitted with the latest appliances, the model home also

came complete with conspicuous price tags. Rather than revel in the honor of modeling domestic life as living advertisements for visitors, Brecht's family comes to resent the commodification of intimacy. What remains, in Brecht's words: "ein Bild der Zerstörung: zertrümmertes Wohnzimmer, Brief eines Anwalts über Scheidung, zeretzter Frauenhut. Überschrift: a model family home" (115).

Beloff's film *A Model Family* (2015) aims to convey alienation through different means. She includes both Brecht's interview with the House Un-American Activities Committee and his poetry to show an artist deeply alienated from the "cheerful looking people [who] come from nowhere and are nowhere bound. / And houses, built for happy people, therefore standing empty / Even when lived in. / The houses in Hell, too, are not all ugly. / But the fear of being thrown onto the street / wears down the inhabitants of the villas no less than / the inhabitants of the shanty towns" (122–23). Beloff visually juxtaposes Brecht's observations with the consequences of the 2008 housing crisis, when six million people lost their homes. Beloff thus sets Brecht's ideas in dialogue with the passage of the GI Bill, the rise of suburbia, the fantasy of home ownership for everyone, and the early 21st-century housing crisis. Her work may not achieve the translation of radical politics into popular form, but the effect of her conversation with Brecht's ideas is clear: his ideas have never seemed more indispensable or timely.

Christina Schmid, University of Minnesota

Andreas Rumler. *Exil als geistige Lebensform: Brecht und Feuchtwanger. Ein Arbeitsbündnis*. Berlin: Edition A. B. Fischer, 2016. 160 pages.

This readable and attractive book is an overview of the relationship between Bertolt Brecht and Lion Feuchtwanger between the year 1919, when the aspiring young playwright Brecht first appeared unannounced at Feuchtwanger's Munich door—he had brought an early draft of the play that later became known as *Trommeln in der Nacht*, and Feuchtwanger was impressed not only by the quality of the writing but also by the shabbiness of Brecht's outward appearance— and 1947, when Brecht paid a farewell call to Feuchtwanger at the latter's mansion, Villa Aurora in Santa Monica, California, shortly before his trip to the East Coast to be interrogated by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Even after Brecht's departure for Europe the day after his interrogation in Washington, DC, Brecht remained in contact with Feuchtwanger until his death nine years later, in August 1956. Feuchtwanger wrote to Brecht's widow Helene Weigel expressing consternation at his younger friend's death: "es fällt mir schwer, mich zurechtzufinden in einer Welt ohne Brecht. Wenn ich an Rückkehr nach Europa dachte, dachte ich immer zuerst an Brecht. Als er sich hier

auf der Terrasse des Hauses von mir verabschiedete und darauf drängte, daß doch auch ich bald käme, war ich sicher, daß wir uns nicht auf lange trennten. Brecht war mir trotz aller Gegensätzlichkeiten sehr nahe" (153).

Although the two writers never became close enough friends to use the familiar "du" form of address with each other, preferring instead the more formal "Sie," they had great respect for each other and also consulted and collaborated with each other on a number of important literary projects. Feuchtwanger's help was crucial for Brecht in his Munich years, when the older, more experienced, and better-known writer helped smooth Brecht's entry into the literary and theatrical world of the Bavarian capital. Together the two writers worked on plays like *Leben Eduards des Zweiten von England* and, much later, *Die Gesichte der Simone Machard*. Likewise, Feuchtwanger appears to have been the first to suggest to Brecht that he name his modern adaptation of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728) *Dreigroschenoper*. That title, of course, became Brecht's best-known and most financially lucrative theatrical work. Feuchtwanger immortalized the ambitious young playwright as Kaspar Pröckl in his remarkable novel *Erfolg* (1930), which recounts, in fictional form, the bizarre political-cultural milieu of Munich in the early 1920s, as Adolf Hitler was getting his start (at the same time, incidentally, as Brecht). After 1933, when the Nazis came to power, neither Brecht nor Feuchtwanger could safely live in Germany. Feuchtwanger fortunately happened to be outside the Reich, on a trip to the United States, at the moment when Hitler became chancellor of Germany. He settled in France, in the resort town of Sanary-sur-Mer, where he stayed for the better part of the next decade. In 1940, after the beginning of World War II, Feuchtwanger was viewed as persona non grata by the French government and was interned by the French government at the Les Milles camp (along with other luminaries like Alfred Kantorowicz and Max Ernst). A picture of the famous novelist Feuchtwanger standing behind barbed wire at the internment camp shocked intellectuals around the world. Feuchtwanger ultimately managed to escape over the Pyrenees to Spain and, eventually found a more secure refuge in California, where his home, the Villa Aurora (purchased in 1943), became the most important center for German exile intellectuals gathered in what became known as "Weimar am Pazifik." Today, appropriately enough, and thanks to the generosity of Feuchtwanger's widow Marta Feuchtwanger, the Villa Aurora serves as a home for German-speaking writers and artists, who can apply for residencies there.

Politically Brecht and Feuchtwanger were very different. Brecht had well-known left-wing and socialist tendencies, whereas Feuchtwanger was a bourgeois humanist with liberal politics. Although he was suspected of being a communist and heavily surveilled by the American FBI during his years in the United States, and although he even wrote a starry-eyed account of a 1937 trip to Moscow, in fact Feuchtwanger was never even a

socialist. He believed in progress and rationalism, but not in forced redistribution or nationalization. Moreover, Feuchtwanger, although he was not himself religious, came from a Jewish family, many of whose members perished in the Holocaust. A number of his works, particularly the novels *Jud Süß* (1925), *Die Geschwister Oppermann* (1933), and the Josephus Trilogy (*Der jüdische Krieg* [1932], *Die Söhne* [1935], and *Der Tag wird kommen* [1942]), addressed themselves intensively to Jewish history and the problem of anti-Semitism. These issues were less important to Brecht, who had a difficult time comprehending German anti-Semitism anyway, and who was extremely upset when his friend Feuchtwanger declined an invitation to go to postwar Germany to report on the International Military Tribunal against the major Nazi war criminals that took place in Nuremberg from November 1945 until October 1946. For Brecht it was incomprehensible that his friend would not take advantage of an opportunity like this: “Sie sind durch glück in eine position gekommen, wo man Sie auffordert zu reden, die deutschen antinazisten zu vertreten, Sie haben kein recht, Ihren roman weiterzuschreiben,” he told Feuchtwanger (130). It does not seem to have occurred to Brecht that his friend might have had deep personal and familial reasons for not wanting to return to a Germany in which so many of his friends and family members had been murdered by the Nazis.

Above all, in reading this book, one is impressed by the intense work ethic that characterized both men’s commitment to their craft, and by their generosity of spirit with each other. Andreas Rumler gives an account of the current state of research on Brecht and Feuchtwanger, but he does not go beyond it, and he does not claim to. Unfortunately, he gives a bit too much credence to John Fuegi’s discredited 1994 biography *Brecht and Company*, particularly in accounts of Brecht’s relationships with his female collaborators. Rumler is nevertheless largely sympathetic to Brecht and his work, and his interweaving of Brecht’s and Feuchtwanger’s lives is successful. The book does have a number of unfortunate copyediting and proofreading errors, but it is beautifully produced; a pleasure to hold and read; and contains, on the front and back covers, a useful side-by-side biographical summary of Brecht’s and Feuchtwanger’s lives.

Stephen Brockmann, Carnegie Mellon University

Frank Raddatz, ed. *Republik Castorf*. Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2016. 360 pages. Dorte Lena Eilers, Thomas Irmer, and Harald Müller, eds. *Frank Castorf*. Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2016. 184 pages.

To anyone outside the closely knit worlds of theater and cultural politics, the ongoing conflict about the directorial change at the Volksbühne Berlin may seem a little exaggerated. Like a storm in a teacup or like one big fuss,

the affair seems all the more incomprehensible because the change in question will take place only after an unprecedented twenty-six years, during which the Volksbühne, also known as Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, remained under the reign of Frank Castorf, who, after an already controversial career in pre-unified Germany (both East and West), had been installed as the theater's new head in 1992.

It is worth noting that the two books, which commemorate the past twenty-six years at the Volksbühne, have their focus clearly on Castorf and his dual function as the theater's artistic director and stage director. The title of the first, *Republik Castorf* (2016), published by Alexander Verlag in Berlin, suggests that the Volksbühne should be regarded as a state of its own, with Castorf as its ruler, while the second, *Frank Castorf* (2016), by the equally renowned publishing house Theater der Zeit, presents the Volksbühne as Castorf's chef d'œuvre, with other directors, curators, artistic staff, and dramatic advisers as a supporting cast.

This perspective, although it will offend some, is not entirely removed from the realities of the Volksbühne. The theater on the north side of Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz has never been a democratic institution—neither in its early years, when it played an important role in the political wars of pre-fascist Berlin, nor in the cultural wars that marked the first twenty or so years after German reunification. Nowhere in the interviews collected by Frank Raddatz for *Republik Castorf* is it suggested that Castorf should be regarded as a democratic ruler or a director who encouraged the ideal of equal footing or collaborative work. Instead, the recurrent metaphor is that of the more or less benevolent dictatorship (dramatic adviser Carl Hegemann even calls Castorf a “Stalinist”), combined with an artistic egocentrism and a pronounced lack of interest in the administrative or organizational aspects of theater management.

However, it is precisely this carelessness that also made him fearless as an artistic director, under whose reign the Volksbühne opened its stages and spaces to then-outsiders like Christoph Marthaler, Christoph Schlingensiefel, René Pollesch, and Herbert Fritsch. Like Castorf, these directors went on to transform the aesthetics of stage performances, and they have, each in their own way, succeeded in making theater a more inventive, more complex, and more challenging enterprise, one that could also be sexy and smart. Furthermore, under Castorf and his dramatic advisers Matthias Lilienthal and Carl Hegemann, the Volksbühne's program was expanded to include not only theater and dance, but also concerts, conferences, lecture performances (most famously the monthly “Video Clip Lectures” by Jürgen Kuttner), installations, films, and outdoor theater like the wonderfully anarchic “Rolling Road Show” of the early 2000s.

In a city coming to terms with its new status as a cultural and political capital, suddenly located in the center of Europe, people loved the Volksbühne. They also loved to hate it. While this divide was partly generational

(lots of eager students and new Berliners crowded in the Volksbühne foyers; lots of older theatergoers headed elsewhere), it is also plausible, as many interviewees suggest in *Republik Castorf*, to regard Castorf's Volksbühne as the theater for all those who wanted a little more time to deal with the rapid transformations that took place in Germany after 1989. Those transformations, lucidly commented upon in both publications by dramatic adviser Carl Hegemann, included the economic downfall and sellout of the East, the fast implementation of neo-liberalist principles, and a general shift in perspective that affected both communities and biographies. They also included the gentrification of certain Berlin neighborhoods at a near-breath-taking speed, and they left theater artists with the bewildering question of how they should react to political and economic developments that made their own work appear somewhat insignificant.

The claim that the Volksbühne was the only theater to develop an adequate response to German reunification, also recurrent in *Republik Castorf*, seems hyperbolic at best and at worst unpleasantly self-righteous. However, it must be noted that this is a claim most often articulated by interviewer Frank Raddatz himself and not by the actors, directors, advisers, and other Volksbühne staff who talk about life and work at this very particular institution. And while the Volksbühne was neither the only theater to address the challenges and mishaps of reunification, nor the only one to contribute to Berlin's reputation as a hub for innovative theater aesthetics, it stood for productions that were exceptionally exciting; diverse; and demanding; and also, at times, very entertaining. ("At times" is an important qualification here. Many Berliners, especially the more regular theatergoers, have at least one story about a thoroughly awful evening spent in the huge Volksbühne auditorium.)

As a memoir of the turbulent, sometimes stormy Volksbühne beginnings, *Republik Castorf* is both instructive and funny. The choice of Castorf as the theater's new director came as a surprise to many, and when he took over the derelict, somewhat neglected institution located a few hundred yards from Berlin Alexanderplatz, nobody expected that only a season later the Volksbühne would be nominated Germany's "Theater of the Year." Its reputation was growing quickly, due to works by Castorf, Marthaler, the choreographer Johann Kresnik (a Volksbühne member from 1994 to 1997), and the chaotic stage performances emceed by young Christoph Schlingensiefel. Yet, from the very beginning, the Volksbühne was also a theater famous for its actors, some of whom have contributed statements to the memoir, and whose exceptionality is praised by the various directors who worked with them.

There can be no doubt that the employment policy of the Volksbühne, albeit peculiar, contributed largely to the success of its productions. The famously sloppy management of the 2000s facilitated a culture of noncommitment, of comings and goings and extended leaves, in which many actors

signed on for one or two productions only and then went back to better-paid work in TV, the movies, or other theaters. On closer inspection, however, that willful, independent attitude, decidedly at odds with the dominant ensemble spirit of subsidized theater work in Germany, was already present in the early days. The Volksbühne actors never were an ensemble in the strict sense, but a group of highly idiosyncratic soloists running wild on the same stage.

To describe this experience, former and current Volksbühne actors repeatedly use the metaphor of a “state of exception.” From their remarks, it is also to be gathered that there has always been a lot of method to the Volksbühne’s madness: excessive demands and near-insurmountable difficulties that had to be confronted, not to “optimize” anybody’s performance but to create the freewheeling and often frightening energy that marks every good Volksbühne performance: from the durational craze of a Castorf production to the raving monologues of Pollesch characters, from the goings-on in Schlingensief’s performances to the breathtaking acrobatics in a play by Herbert Fritsch. (This theater probably holds the all-time record for broken arms, wrists, shins, and for performances cancelled at the last minute because of yet another accident onstage.)

In the history of antibourgeois aesthetics, acting as it was practised at the Volksbühne presented a most interesting alternative to the principles of role-playing and Stanislavskian psychology. Often applauded for its commitment and physicality, a Volksbühne performance could also teach you a lot about the actors’ ability to distance themselves from a dramatic text; and it is convincingly argued by René Pollesch in his interview that these performances have a lot more in common with the Brechtian V-Effect than may appear at first sight.

While the interviews in *Republik Castorf* have been assembled to honor the individual and collective memories of Volksbühne artists, *Frank Castorf* focuses on the external relations of the Volksbühne project: its guests, associates, and especially its international collaborators (Zé Celso, Staffan Valdemar Holm, Olivier Py, and many others), who helped to spread its fame all over the world. If the first book represents an attempt to explain what this singular theater meant (and still means) to those who contributed to its reputation, the second is designed with an interest to shape a more general reception, to discuss the Volksbühne in terms of influence and aesthetic heritage and to set the stage for its afterlife as the most exciting enterprise in German postdramatic theater.

Republik Castorf is informative; entertaining; and, at times, crazily narcissistic. *Frank Castorf* is evaluative; academic; and, at times, undeniably boring. Among the more interesting contributions in this publication, edited by Dorte Lena Eilers, Thomas Irmer, and Harald Müller, are, once again, the statements by those who have the closest ties with the Volksbühne: a collection of excerpts from various interviews with Castorf, the

first conducted in 1987, the last in 2016; a conversation about postideological malaise between Carl Hegemann and Boris Groys; and a few perceptive remarks by Matthias Lilienthal, now artistic director at Kammerspiele München and caught up in an ongoing conflict with the Kammerspiele's very conservative audience.

However, the most noticeable voice in *Frank Castorf* is that of Stefanie Carp, long-term dramatic adviser to Christoph Marthaler. First, because, in a context of near unbroken praise, her text represents a more nuanced point of view that is both affectionate and critical. Second, in a series of almost seventy statements (including some by technicians and prop masters), Carp is one of the very few female contributors and, besides Sabine Zielke, the only female Volksbühne associate who is not an actress, a cleaning woman, a cloakroom attendant, or a canteen worker. The striking differences in the careers of Carp, whose affiliations with the Volksbühne remained loose and who went on to become a theater director in Zurich and head of the next Ruhrtriennale festival, and Zielke, who has been under contract since 1989 and is now in charge of the decidedly marginalized literary events at the side stage Roter Salon, are emblematic of gender politics in Castorf's republic and of the fact that this theater has always had very limited uses for women.

Acting has been the most important of them, and the talents and force of Volksbühne heroines like Sophie Rois, Silvia Rieger, Kathrin Angerer, and Lilith Stangenberg remain undisputed. In all other artistic departments, however, women never ascended to more than the status of a personal assistant. (At best, they were guests, like Marthaler's outstanding collaborator and stage designer Anna Viebrock.) It is both ludicrous and annoying that neither publication cares to address this most obvious flaw in the Volksbühne project: the gender stereotypes, the unchanging divide of roles and functions, the fact that stage directors were allowed to remain or return while even the most successful actresses have largely been replaced by younger ones, and the stale chauvinism that is still present in so much contemporary theater work.

Those who are interested in a more independent perspective on the Volksbühne project and the cracks that have marked it from the very beginning, can only look outside the two commemorative publications and to another book published by the aforementioned Alexander Verlag. *Tagebuch einer Hospitantin* (Diary of an Intern), published in 2015, is the journal of Annika Krump, well-known chanteuse and show host in Berlin and former intern at the Volksbühne during its very early years of 1992–93. Krump's account is not overtly critical, and it is far from hostile. Nevertheless, amid the general mood of consensus and fond reminiscence, hers is the only voice beside Carp's that takes us away from the all-too-unanimous celebration of the Volksbühne's artistry and anarchy.

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Hans-Thies Lehmann. *Brecht lesen*. Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2016. 327 Seiten.

Der 1. Januar 2027 rückt näher und damit der siebzigste Todestag von Bertolt Brecht, der den weltbekannten Dichter und Theaterdenker gemeinfrei werden lässt. Entsprechend macht sich die Essaysammlung *Brecht lesen* schon einmal auf den Weg, den von Lehmann prognostizierten unvoreingenommenen Blick auf den Dichter jenseits der orthodoxen Rezeption und der politischen, literarischen und theaterästhetischen Klischees anzutreten, zugunsten einer Aktualisierung der Brechtforschung.

Lehmans Band versammelt insgesamt einundzwanzig neue und überarbeitete Essays aus den Jahren zwischen 1978 und 2016, die Brecht nicht jenseits, sondern als Teil der literarischen Moderne begreifen. Es gilt, sein Schaffen einerseits in der Ambivalenz zwischen Widerstand und Widerspruch zu perspektivieren, andererseits begreift der Theaterwissenschaftler Brechts Werk auch als Ergebnis taktischer Rücksichten und strategischer Unternehmungen der Allianzbildung. Er sieht dabei in Rekurs auf Adorno eine adäquate Brecht-Lektüre nur möglich, wenn weder die politische Dimension noch die artistische Darstellung ausgeblendet werden (240), eine Balance, die der vorliegende Band einzuholen versucht.

Der Ausgangspunkt der Zusammenstellung verschiedener Aufsätze über Brechts Gesamtwerk ist es, den Fokus stärker auf die lyrischen Arbeiten des Dichters zu lenken. Was zunächst in einem Theater-Band irritieren mag, wird im Hinblick auf den Zielgedanken der Monographie schnell deutlich: Der von der Forschung immer wieder hervorgebrachten Banalisierung und Didaktisierung von Brechts Lehrstücken gilt es durch die Verbindung von lyrischen und dramatischen Texten einen differenzierten und komplexen Blick auf den Autor und sein Wirken entgegenzustellen. Hierfür braucht Lehmann die Gedichte, über die er neu auf Brecht schaut, frei nach dem Motto: Wer solche Gedichte schreibt, könne keine banale, belehrende Theatertheorie entwerfen. Entsprechend umfasst der Band ebenso viele Lyrik-Aufsätze (Essays 3–5, 7, 16 und 18) wie Arbeiten zu den Theaterstücken (Essays 6 und 8–12).

Brecht, das macht Lehmann immer wieder deutlich, wollte kein bestimmtes Denken verbreiten, sondern Denkweisen verändern (234). Lehmann jongliert hierfür in einer zugänglichen und teils bildhaften Sprache zwischen Brechts Texten—seien es Gedichte, Lehrstücke oder epische Theaterstücke—and zieht intertextuelle Bezüge in einer Weise heran, die wohl nur ein echter Brecht-Kenner leisten kann. Über die Darstellung der schönsten und bedeutendsten Gedichte, aber auch über Fragment gebliebene Theaterstücke hinaus wendet sich Lehmann in weiteren Aufsätzen zentralen Themen wie dem Tod als Aktivum, dem Vergessen und der Verausgabung, der Sexualität sowie den Motiven Wasser oder Herbst zu (Essays 17, 19, 20). Ebenso schlägt er eine Brücke zwischen Brechts Werk und zeitgenössischen

Philosophien (Essays 13–15) und expliziert biographische Bezüge zu den für Brecht prägenden Denkern Marx und Nietzsche (Essays 1–2). Die in Brechts Texten angelegte Widersprüchlichkeit zwischen dem durch seine Nietzsche-Lektüre beeinflussten, bejahenden und aphoristischen Denk- und Schreibstil in Umkehrungen, Sprüngen und Widersprüchen einerseits und andererseits seiner beständigen Kritik am Bestehenden—von Marx'scher Prägung—wendet Lehmann produktiv: Er sieht in Brechts Auseinandersetzung mit Nietzsche die Bewahrung vor einer Erstarrung im Marxismus. Dieser Zugang zu Brecht, seine Ambivalenzen zu markieren anstatt sie zu glätten, eröffnet eine Perspektive auf ihn, die den Autor als eine Person mit vielen Gesichtern sichtbar macht.

Der andere, neue Brecht

In den ersten beiden Essays, die einen einführenden Charakter haben, zugleich aber im Stil atypisch für eine Einleitung bleiben, führt Lehmann seine Leser_innen durch eine "Fotogalerie." Neben den anarchisch-nietzscheanischen und den "Bürgerschreck" Brecht—evoziert durch seine Verortung innerhalb der Neuen Sachlichkeit—stellt er hier den weltberühmten Brecht, der trotz Erfolg nie aufgehört hat, in marxistischer Manier nah an der Arbeiterklasse zu bleiben. Darüber hinaus findet jener Brecht Erwähnung, der mit seinem Lehrstück als "revolutionärer politischer Theatermann" in die Geschichte einging sowie der Autor, dessen epische Theaterstücke heute aus dem Schulunterricht nicht mehr wegzudenken sind. Schließlich erscheint Brecht als Intendant des Berliner Ensembles und als konformer Staatsdichter auf der Bildfläche.

Mit Bewertungen hält sich Lehmann bewusst zurück, insofern er aus seiner Position heraus keine moralisch-persönlichen Urteile zu fällen vermag, vor allem im Hinblick auf Brechts umstrittenes Verhältnis zu Stalin (14). Den Autor in diesem Facettenreichtum zu lesen, gelingt über die Menge an different angelegten Essays, die nicht einen Blick auf Brecht, sondern viele Einblicke in sein Schaffen gewährleiten. Durch diese Verfahrensweise bedingt, erhalten wir am Ende keine Gesamtschau. Spätestens am Ende der Lektüre ist klar: es gilt mit der Essaysammlung nicht in Brecht einzuführen, sondern ihn in seiner Diversität und Andersheit darzustellen.

Mit dem Perspektivwechsel auf den "anderen" Brecht ist weniger gemeint, das noch kaum Betonte und Ungesagte herauszustellen und eine "neue Lesart" zu evozieren, als vielmehr die Andersheit in Brecht selbst hervorzuheben und eine Alterität kenntlich zu machen, die sich gerade nicht in der Dialektik aufheben lasse (33). Lehmann liegt daran, die Spalten in Brechts Werk als produktive Brüche und Öffnungen lesbar zu machen, um nicht nur den Widerspruch zwischen seiner Theorie und Praxis zu thematisieren, sondern so die ambivalente Anlage seiner (Theater-) Theorien sichtbar werden zu lassen. Er plädiert dafür, den Dichter nicht aus (post-) modernen Betrachtungsweisen herauszulösen, ja er warnt geradezu vor

einer einseitigen und vereinnahmenden Lektüre des Dichters als Übermittler klassischer, politischer Aussagen (163).

Zugleich verpasst es Lehmann aber nicht, auch ungewöhnliche Seiten an Brecht hervorzuheben, wie es—um ein Beispiel zu nennen—der Essay “Die Rücknahme der Maßgabe” beansprucht. Lehmann stellt darin Brecht als einen Denker vor, der sich als “Dichter des Maßes” (165) bezeichnen lässt. Auch der Aufsatz “Kafkas Bruder” verweist in Abweichung von der üblichen Rezeption auf eine noch unterrepräsentierte Anschauung, insofern verborgene Ähnlichkeiten zum bedeutenden Prager Schriftsteller herausgearbeitet werden. Hier wird Brecht eher neu als anders gelesen (222). Zugleich macht Lehmann aber an dem Kafka-Vergleich kenntlich, dass die Brecht-Orthodoxie alles getan hat, Brechts Nähe zu den modernen sprachkritischen und sprachskeptischen Ansätzen zu verwischen. Lehmann eröffnet eine neue Lesart eines Brechttextes, die den Dichter in seiner Alterität erscheinen lässt.

Die Polysemie in Brechts Gedichten

In diversen Essays bespricht Lehmann lyrische Texte aus der berühmten Gedichtsammlung *Hauspostille* unter dem Aspekt des variationsreichen Einsatzes von wiederkehrenden Motiven und Metaphern. Bereits im ersten Lyrik-Aufsatz betont er anhand des Textes “Vom ertrunkenen Mädchen” die Vieldeutigkeit der Embleme und die Unmöglichkeit, Brechts Texte schlicht als ein Abbild der Gesellschaft darzustellen; eine Darstellung der Polysemie, wie sie im Gedicht “Vom Schwimmen in Seen und Flüssen,” das im achtzehnten Essay besprochen wird, kulminiert. Anvisiert ist, einen Brecht sichtbar werden zu lassen, der sich als ein komplexer Denker erweist. Anhand des Mahagonny-Themas nimmt Lehmann in seinem Essay “Das Neue und der Genuss—Mahagonnygesänge” explizit auf die Verbindung von Lyrik und Drama Bezug und führt eine in sich ambivalente Lesart des Theaterstücks *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* vor. Über den Umweg der Lyrik gelingt ihm eine Kritik an der Brechtrezeption, die das Stück einseitig als einen Ausdruck kapitalistischer Kunst interpretiert. Lehmann weist den Vorwurf, Brechts Kritik sei falsch und oberflächlich, zurück und konfrontiert die Forschung vielmehr damit, das Thema Mahagonny falsch und oberflächlich beschrieben zu haben: “Daher führt es in die Sackgasse, nach einer fest definierten Position gegen die bürgerliche Gesellschaft zu fahnden, um dann ernüchternd festzustellen, Brechts Kritik sei falsch und oberflächlich. Stattdessen dürfte es sich so verhalten, dass das Thema von *Mahagonny* falsch und oberflächlich beschrieben ist, wenn man es als den Kapitalismus oder die kapitalistische Kunst definiert” (125).

Parallelen und produktive Verbindung zwischen Lyrik und Drama knüpft Lehmann ebenso im Hinblick auf die “Chroniken” und bekräftigt

darüber Brechts Ablehnung gegenüber der Idee allgemeingültiger Aussagen im Sinne einer Exemplarität (252).

Das Lehrstück als Leerstück. Brecht und die Zukunft des Theaters

Brechts Dramen lassen sich in Lehrstücke, wie sie die beiden Essays neun und zehn behandeln, und in epische Formen—Exempel hierfür stellen die Aufsätze sechs, acht, elf und zwölf dar—klassifizieren; in zwei Varianten eines neuen Denkens innerhalb der Sphäre des Theaters. Lehmann verortet Brecht am Anfang der Traditionsbildung des modernen und postmodernen Theaters (199) und stellt damit einen Brecht vor, der sich erstmals von der Idee der Selbsttäuschung auf der Bühne abkehrt und in ein Theater der Situation einführt (200). Brecht eröffne mit seinen Theaterimpulsen eine “Ästhetik der Spaltung” (215), die den Zuschauer_innen die eigene Bewusstseinsillusion vor Augen führe.

Die *Dreigroschenoper*, das Stück, das Brecht so berühmt gemacht hat, darf dabei natürlich nicht fehlen und eröffnet die Debatte um Brecht als Theaterautor und -theoretiker. Daran schließen Aufsätze zu den epischen Stücken *Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui* und Brechts *Galilei* an sowie *Die Maßnahme* als Höhepunkt der Versuchsreihe der Lehrstücke, die sich als mehrdeutige Stücke der Leere interpretieren lassen. Lehmann legt damit eine Brecht-Lektüre vor, die Abstand von der Vorstellung eines belehrenden Theaters nimmt lässt. Die Verbindung von Spielerischem und Politischem müsse nicht notwendigerweise zu einem intellektuellen Lehrtheater verflachen (117). Darüber hinaus hebt Lehmann besonders das Fragment gebliebene Stück *Fatzer* hervor, indem er selbigem einen Aufsatz innerhalb der Essaysammlung zuweist. Als ein Bruchstück, das Brechts politische und theatrale Selbstwidersprüche emblematisch verkörpert, wird es differenziert dargestellt und als ein radikales Fragment gewürdigt, das noch immer weiter zu denken sei (190).

Dass Brecht als Intendant und Dramatiker nicht nur das Theater der 1970er und 80er Jahre, sondern ebenso das Gegenwartstheater beeinflusst hat, wird vor allem mit dem Aufsatz “Fabel-Haft” deutlich, der das Erbe Brechts in der post-brechtianischen Ära nachzeichnet. Analog dazu, wie Brecht zu seiner Zeit das klassische Theater in Einzelteile zerstückelte und weiterverarbeitete, so wird er bis heute in seinen zentralen Aspekten—zu nennen sind die Ästhetik der Unterbrechung oder die Ausstellung der Theatermittel—tradiert; wenn auch nur noch implizit. Seine Theateransätze und -techniken erweisen sich zwar inzwischen unumstritten als überholt. Die Regisseure und Regisseurinnen Grüber, Mnouchkine, Brook oder Stein, sowie Kruse oder Haußmann machten und machen jedoch eines deutlich: Brechts Einfluss reicht bis in die Gegenwart (150). Lehmann arbeitet dies nachvollziehbar heraus, womit er Brecht zugleich als einen der wichtigsten Denker des deutschen Theaters vor dem Vergessen zu retten sucht.

Mehr Angebote, Brecht neu zu lesen, kann man kaum machen. Der Autor des Bandes erweist sich dabei nicht nur als ein Brecht-Kenner, sondern zugleich auch als ein Brecht-Liebhaber. Die Balance zwischen einer differenzierten Darstellung Brechts in all seinem schöpferischen Facettenreichtum und seiner Ambiguität einerseits und dem Versuch der Bewahrung Brechts vor kritischen Gegenstimmen andererseits, gelingt nicht immer ganz. Dies tut dem Band jedoch keinen Abbruch, vielmehr hebt es das Engagement der einzelnen Essays noch hervor. Kritisch anzumerken bleibt daher lediglich, dass vor allem in den Aufsätzen zu Brechts lyrischen Texten zu viele biographische Bezüge hergestellt werden, obgleich zu betonen bleibt, dass der Anspruch eines polysemischen Blicks auf Brecht und sein Werk bis zuletzt eingeholt wird. Die Lektüre des Bandes erweist sich insgesamt anschlussfähig für zukünftige, neue Diskurse über den kanonischen Autor Brecht.

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Bertolt Brecht. *Bertolt Brecht's Me-ti. Book of Interventions in the Flow of Things*. Antony Tatlow, ed. and trans. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. 193 pages.

Me-ti is a collection of reported dialogues, aphorisms, and anecdotes prompted by the Chinese philosopher Mè Ti or Mò Di, a critic of Confucius, who Brecht read in Alfred Forke's 1922 German translation. Brecht adapted the Chinese philosophical form to present examples from his reading of Hegel, Marx, and Lenin and to produce mini-narratives in response to the experience of political exile, his discussions with Karl Korsch, doubts about developments in the Soviet Union, and questions of the ethics of personal behavior. Modern figures are given a Chinese disguise and the whole is presented as if it were the record of philosophical discussions in a classical Chinese school. Brecht wrote the passages mainly in exile in Denmark but did not prepare them for publication. Any selection and ordering of the material might have produced different emphases, as a handbook for teaching dialectical thinking, a work on ethics and virtues, a coded discussion of the contradictions of Stalinism, or of Brecht's relationship with Ruth Berlau (Lai-tu).

Editors have produced quite different compilations from the material. Uwe Johnson's 1965 Suhrkamp edition presented the passages in the sequence found in the Bertolt Brecht Archive but starting with a selection compiled by Brecht's collaborator Margarete Steffin. Johnson highlighted its fragmentary nature, established the use of the title *Me-ti / Buch der Wendungen* and persuaded Brecht's widow, Helene Weigel, to agree to the inclusion of the Lai-tu stories. Klaus Völker's 1967 Suhrkamp edition

grouped thematically related texts, collected the Lai-tu stories at the end, and dropped the reference to the work as a fragment. Werner Mittenzwei's 1975 Aufbau edition organized the texts into a teleological sequence of five books, moving thematically from theory to revolution to the establishment of socialism. Jan Knopf and the co-editors of the 1995 volume 18 of the Berlin and Frankfurt edition (BFA) argued against editorial interventions not justified by evidence of Brecht's intentions and presented the texts in chronological order and where texts were of the same date, alphabetically. They dropped *Me-ti* from the title and insisted on *Buch der Wendungen*, selected different variants of certain texts from the previous editions and left textual inconsistencies uncorrected.

This English edition by the distinguished Brecht scholar Antony Tatlow constitutes a further editorial intervention in the archive material. The title is a challenge to the editors of the BFA. It is *Bertolt Brecht's Me-ti*. The decision to use the name of the semifictionalized "Chinese" philosopher belongs with the author. Indeed, the choice of *Me-ti* makes reference to the work easier. The formulation *Book of Interventions in the Flow of Things* is clumsy but understandable. It avoids the difficulty of translating *Buch der Wendungen* into English and the misleading *Book of Twists and Turns* that is sometimes used. Since this is a book of dialectics, the title includes the *Fluß der Dinge* and *Die Große Methode*. Both are necessary: the recognition of the inevitability of change and the need to learn how to intervene.

Tatlow's edition is "differently structured from the earlier alternatives" (36). He moves the more directly "Chinese" passages toward the beginning of the volume and gathers the Lai-tu passages at the end in a section he calls "The Third Thing" using Brecht's phrase for their shared political purpose. Otherwise, the passages are "loosely gathered around unfolding topics." The intention is "not to align these texts with a specific contention, whether intrinsic or attributed . . . but to allow the contradictions they explore to speak for themselves" (38). Tatlow usefully includes texts from the *Me-ti* material that the BFA excluded, such as "Mental Exercises" (59), "On Humor" (81), and "Thought in the Works of the Classics" (136). In some cases he chooses different text variants from the BFA, for example "Breaking the Rules" (85).

There is a substantial introduction and a list of "Attributable Names" linking the fictional "Chinese" figures and places to the historical ones that prompted them (He-leh for Hegel, Ka-meh Marx, Kin-jeh Brecht, Mi-en-leh Lenin, Su the Soviet Union, and so on). Brecht's mock historical preface then appears before the *Me-ti* sequence proper (43). Tatlow follows this "(Prefatory Note)" with explanatory editorial comment, referring to particular archive notes, which he identifies by their catalogue number (BFA). This establishes his method of placing comments immediately after each relevant passage, much in the manner of Forke's comments throughout his *Mê-Ti*. It also distinguishes Tatlow's procedure from the BFA, which does not give the

catalogue references for archive material referred to. Useful appendices list the individual passages and make it easy to cross-reference the translations with their BFA equivalents. Where the BFA “prints what is found in the type-scripts” (42), Tatlow corrects mistakes or potential confusions, particularly where Brecht was inconsistent in his use of “Chinese” names.

In the passage “On Gestural Language in Literature” Me-ti tells us “The poet Kin-jeh may take credit for renewing the language of literature . . . He employed a way of speaking that was both stylized and natural” (158). As part of this gestural language Brecht uses his own estranging vocabulary so that industrial workers are “Pflugschmiede” or “ploughsmiths” and factory owners “Schmiedeherrn” or “smithmasters.” Tatlow comments that this presents particular problems for the translator. “What may at first seem odd in English, either poorly or simply *mistranslated*, depends on conveying a similar effect” (37–38). Headworkers (also head workers) does indeed appear strange in English as a translation for Brecht’s *Kopfarbeiter* for intellectuals (109–10). At times though the English seems to diminish the political force of the German. The use of “middleclass” (one word) (138) or even “civic” (128) for “bürgerlich,” for example, obscures the political contradiction between proletarian and bourgeois. There are some more problematic formulations. The Leninist Party of the Workers or “Verein der Eigentumslosen” is translated as “Association of the Ownerless” (114) rather than of those “without property.” This is politically confusing. The purposefully illogical sentence “Die Frucht kommt vor der Blüte” is translated as “the fruit comes from the blossom” missing the point of the analogy with “the rain falls upwards from below” in the passage “The Treatment of Systems” (52). These quibbles aside, the translation conveys “the memorable clarity of the Chinese” (6) and is both stylized and natural.

This first full translation into English reinstates *Me-ti* as a relatively self-contained if fragmentary work and joins other translations from the *Writing Brecht* project to make available a very different Brecht to that familiar to an English readership. Tatlow’s authoritative critical apparatus details the historical context of *Me-ti*’s production and contested reception, the influence of Chinese philosophy, and the relevant debates within Marxist theory. There is much here to learn and enjoy both for English speakers new to Brecht’s philosophical prose and for those familiar with the earlier German editions. But while Tatlow’s edition places *Me-ti* firmly in the context of Brecht’s life and times, the test of its continuing relevance will be how far passages can be lifted free of these particular historical and biographical associations and be of use for contemporary critical interventions.

“Me-ti said: Thought is something that follows from difficulties and precedes action” (49). “Mi-en-leh taught: Introducing democracy can lead to dictatorship; introducing dictatorship can lead to democracy” (85).

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Branislav Jakovljević. *Alienation Effects: Performance and Self-Management in Yugoslavia, 1945–91*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016. 382 pages.

John Willett's 1964 translation of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* as "alienation" ties the term to labor theory and social relations while rendering less visible its association with early twentieth century Russian formalists such as Viktor Schlovsky, who proposed that a property of all art is to "make strange" our experience. Brechtian performance at its best interweaves both social and aesthetic defamiliarization. And in his extraordinarily careful study of performance in Yugoslavia, Branislav Jakovljević "makes strange" reductive historical narratives of midcentury artistic practices and of Yugoslavia's demise, in part, through reexamining "alienation" in its multiple valences. *Alienation Effects* roots shifts in "self-management"—as a historical collective labor practice and emergent technology of the individual—and ties these shifts to collective, institutional, and conceptual performance practices in post-World War II Yugoslavia.

Meticulous case studies embrace selected mass and micro-performances ranging from Youth Day festivals to artistic works that use the Yugoslav currency as canvas for commentary. Illustrations evoke performance aesthetics alongside the means of their circulation. Jakovljević weaves archival research (including political documents, conference papers, and exhibition photos), interviews, and his own memories with in-depth yet deftly synthesized framings of economic, cultural, and performance theory. He does so in lucid prose sparkling with dry wit and precise analogy. His argumentation can conjure a thunderstorm punctuating a private performance of *Waiting for Godot* in a Belgrade artist's studio while nuancing distinctions among humanist Marxist, psychoanalytic, and post-modern notions of alienation.

Jakovljević frames his study as an intervention in art historical and political narratives that position performance art's "social turn" within either dissident Eastern or critical Western European practice. He does so by offering Yugoslavia as a geographical and historical fulcrum point with 1968 at its center. Jakovljević carves out his argument with analytic lenses that embrace the *work* of art—as both object and process—addressing performance as a representational labor practiced within a set of cultural, political, and economic institutions. While not attempting to survey Yugoslavia's performance field, Jakovljević organizes his decade-by-decade study in three distinct periods rooted in shifts in self-management. Chapter 1, "Bodywriting," focuses on Yugoslavia's departure from Soviet economics and artistry in the 1950s and early 1960s. This chapter details the historical emergence of self-management as a political mandate of collective labor rooted in "dis-alienation." Chapter 2, "Syntactical Performance," dwells on the pluralization of self-management and how the tensions in its definition

and practice play out in large-scale student dissent in 1968 and smaller-scale conceptual performances in Belgrade's Student Cultural Center in the 1970s. Chapter 3, "Disalienation Defects," positions the 1980s as a macro-economic "performance" aligned with the postmodern turn in art practices. In this decade, Jakovljević argues, self-management as a collective practice thoroughly implodes. The study as a whole situates and expands upon the key words that mark its title while tracing the emergence and erasure of the worker as political subject, remapping the conditions that led to Yugoslavia's violent demise, and illuminating how performance practices index both of these arcs.

Each chapter complicates received narratives through rigorously researched and broadly situated performance readings framed within the book's titular key words. "Bodywriting" takes up mass spectacle, sculpture, painting, and modernist theater, disentangling each from mere formalist aesthetic analyses while evidencing interpretive mastery. Jakovljević roots the celebration of Youth Day in an elaborate system of associations and volunteer labor that models emergent principles of collective self-management, while also establishing how the rallies variously "performed" the Yugoslav state for a national audience. He links the diagrammatic scripting of bodies in such mass spectacles to the bodywriting of socialist realist sculptures and paintings that initially model an uplifting "choreography of labor." When associated with the soaring graphs of a planned economy, Jakovljević argues that these performances produced a new proletarian political subject, while recuperating collective labor as pleasurable and liberating rather than alienating. The chapter then traces Yugoslavia's shift from Soviet style state economic management to diffuse self-management, the accompanying movement of public art from stadiums to factories, and the representational subject from muscular to managerial. Yet, Jakovljević also argues that this shift incorporates a complex multilayered journey between aesthetics and political economy. He indexes these shifts through three productions of *Waiting for Godot* read through the lens of the productions' various labors and administrative (dis)associations. Having sustained a variety of argumentative, historiographic, and analytic threads throughout the chapter Jakovljević concludes by reframing locations of artistic production—not as dissident or colluding—but rather as "unlegislated" regions that point to the labor of sustaining state power.

Chapter 2 centers on the fragmentation of self-management in Yugoslavia and its manifestation in two core sites of performance: the June 1968 Belgrade student revolt and subsequent performance art events in Belgrade's Student Cultural Center (SKC). With erudite references to critical theory and Romantic theater, Jakovljević reads the revolt dramatically as a manifestation of the tension between self-management as authorized by the state and as practiced by the students. The latter part of

the chapter focuses on subject formation in the residue of the failed revolt and the shift in self-management from collective practice to individual technology as articulated by performance artists in the SKC. Jakovljević reads these performances syntactically—in which often ruptured bodies pierce through the idea of language as merely symbolic and alienation as singularly existential or social. In bringing these various threads together, he also foreshadows the emergence of Slobodan Milošević's fraught leadership.

In chapter 3, "Disalienation Defects," *Alienation Effects* continues to trace the arc of Yugoslavia's fragmentation and the concurrent dissolution of the self-managing subject. The chapter brings together close readings of political documents, such as the 1974 Yugoslav constitution, with deep readings of poststructural poetry, postmodern anti-art, and post-punk Slovenian performance practices. The artists and art institutions focused on operate as spontaneous harbingers of futility: they reject authorship, cite folkloric kitsch, place mourning banners on monetary currency. In doing so, Jakovljević proposes that these practices uncover a host of concealed ideological assumptions of an administered political system. The chapter is propelled by prose that marks how the events and energies conjured will lead to Yugoslavia's violent dissolution without falling prey to simplistic historiographic mapping from the position of the present.

Alienation Effects is slow-going in the best sense of the term: less a page-turner than a page returner. The analyses are carefully constructed to account for a range of performance labors and scales of reception while sustaining singularity, historiographic nuance, and theoretical sophistication. In Jakovljević's hands the destruction of Yugoslavia and concurrent obliteration of the laboring subject can be traced through performance circuits. While these circuits do not offer naïve hope, they can illuminate ideological fault lines and model the possibility of artistic spontaneity as a renewed practice of self-management. Thus alienation returns as a mode of response and responsibility to the other; as a practice of thinking otherwise.

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Karin Burk. *Kindertheater als Möglichkeitsraum: Untersuchungen zu Walter Benjamins "Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters."* Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015. 336 pages.

Karin Burk's monograph *Kindertheater als Möglichkeitsraum* is a welcome and inspiring investigation into Walter Benjamin's 1929 "Programm eines

proletarischen Kindertheaters.”¹¹ Benjamin’s pedagogical manifesto was commissioned by Gerhard Eisler and Johannes R. Becher in cooperation with Asja Lacis for the Karl-Liebknecht Haus, headquarters of the Communist Party in Berlin. It was intended as the conceptual basis for a proletarian children’s theater in Berlin, modeled on Lacis’s work in Latvia and Russia. Against the background of today’s reactionary pedagogical policies with their quantitative, product-, and competition-oriented goals, Benjamin’s “Programm” has lost none of its radical and provocative appeal.

Burk extrapolates Benjamin’s pedagogical manifesto through an investigation of the two main intellectual influences that shaped his writing of the “Programm”: Latvian theater director, pedagogue, actress, and critic Asja Lacis, on the one hand, and Bertolt Brecht, on the other. Her monograph is divided into three parts: the first is dedicated to Benjamin’s exchanges with Asja Lacis between 1924 and 1929; the second turns toward Lacis’s work as a director of a children’s theater in Latvia and Russia and her background in Russian avant-garde constructivist theater; and the third part offers a detailed reading of Benjamin’s “Programm,” which culminates in a comparison to Brecht’s concepts of *Gestus* and the *Lehrstück*. Burk’s explicit interest is in the “Programm” as the conception of a children’s theater that creates a *space of possibilities* [Möglichkeitsraum], allowing children to experience the full range of themselves and the world around them according to their own measure, free of any ideology (8).

Part 1 of Burk’s book traces Benjamin’s connection with Lacis: their first meetings in Capri and Berlin in 1924, Benjamin’s visit in Riga in 1925, their meeting in Moscow in 1926, and their final exchanges in Berlin in 1928–29. Throughout their shared history, Burk demonstrates Lacis’s crucial role in Benjamin’s turn toward an experimental and praxis-based communism, as well as her impact on his aesthetic developments. In their ongoing discussion, the street stands out as a crucial topos, one that appears in the jointly written essay “Neapel” via the notion of —“porosity,” in Benjamin’s *Einbahnstraße* (dedicated to and written under the influence of Lacis in Riga), as well as in the essay on “Moskau” and the *Moskauer Tagebuch* featuring Lacis as a key protagonist. Burk argues that the notion of the street encapsulated precisely those qualities of the “space of possibilities” that Benjamin wanted to invoke in his children’s theater text; the street represented to him a space imbued with revolutionary potentiality, a “threshold” that opens up possibilities to all sides, but also contains and facilitates the elaboration and negotiation of joint interests in the collective. Whether the streets of Naples, Riga, or Moscow, Benjamin was fascinated by this topography marked by improvisation, experimentalism, and

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, II.2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), 763–67.

dynamic collective interaction, spaces easily populated if not dominated by children as a collectivity in their own right.

Part 2 of Burk's monograph begins by underscoring Asja Laci's aesthetic background in Russian constructivism and avant-garde theater, demonstrating the ways in which formal innovations undertaken by the Russian avant-garde merged with advocacy for theater as a tool for social and political change. Burk then moves on to explore Laci's actual theater work with street children and orphans in Orel. These are some of the most intriguing sections of the book: first because they show how Russian constructivism prepared the ground for Laci's politically engaged children's pedagogy and second because Burk implicitly suggests affinities between the Russian and the German avant-garde, which will inspire the Brecht reader. Most important, these passages provide a fascinating introduction to Laci, a representative of avant-garde theater who realized many of the politico-aesthetic intentions that others only proposed theoretically.

As Burk shows, the political claims made by Russian avant-garde theater artists found fertile ground in Laci's activities. Spearheaded by Meyerhold, these artists, Laci included, advocated not only a revolution of theater but a theater of revolution, which implied the dismantling of all boundaries between theater, art, life, and politics. After Laci had finished her actor's training in St. Petersburg in 1918, she traveled back toward Orel in Latvia where she was to commence a career as a theater director. En route she encountered multitudes of street children who had organized into semicriminal gangs following the loss of their families in the turmoil of war and the October Revolution. Recognizing their trauma and state of neglect, Laci changed her professional plans and set up a children's theater in her old house in Orel. This theater was envisioned as a means of therapy, learning, and resocialization. It was organized according to Meyerhold's workshop concept and the idea of a "conditional theater," with emphasis placed on fantasy and improvisation along with scenographic "arrangement." Laci set up so-called "sections" of the different stagecrafts: drawing, music, prop making, rhythmic education, and gymnastics, offering a wide-ranging landscape of stimulating activity through which she hoped to reawaken the "dormant energies" of the children and draw them out of their trauma, lethargy, and depression (108–9). All of this was done with a strong emphasis on communal experience, solidarity, and the collective, while following an approach to theater making that was process- rather than product-oriented. Improvisation was the core of the children's theater; by contrast, public performance, which took the form of *carnevalesque* processions, was viewed as a mere "interruption" of the ongoing work. Only on demand of the children would a showing be set up. Burk shows that Laci's theater laboratory was organized according to the children's perceptual horizon, their interest, experience, and ability. Thus it was kept free of any specific educational intentions. When Benjamin ten years later in his "Programm" accentuated the role of the educator

as an "observer," this had recourse to Lacis's demand that "ideology was not imposed onto the children, they acquired what corresponded to their experience. Also us, the educators, learned and came to see things with fresh eyes" (*Revolutionär im Beruf*, 27).

Burk then proceeds in the third part of her book to her actual exegesis of the "Programm." She seeks to establish Benjamin's text as a politico-aesthetic statement in its own right, written with different emphases in mind than those predetermined by Lacis's practice. Given the background Burk provides, I would argue, these differences are subtle nuances rather than major contrasts, setting up a new line of argument that appears less convincing than her initial proposal to grasp the overall philosophy of the "Programm" through the notion of a "space of possibilities," a category that seemed to offer a close fit with both Benjamin and Lacis. Burk's main differentiation between Lacis's and Benjamin's pedagogical intentions consists in the latter's elaboration of the concept of the gesture, attesting to Benjamin's emphasis on the communicative dimension of his pedagogy, achieved through the child's bodily participation in the world of material objects as well as that of the collective (134).

In order to explore the meaning of this salient concept in the "Programm," Burk turns toward Benjamin's reception of Brecht's *Gestus* and *Lehrstück*, which preoccupied Benjamin from the early thirties onward as his contact to Lacis faded. While it is of course constructive to consider the Brechtian gesture and *Lehrstück* on a continuum with the "Programm," it would have been even more interesting to investigate the theoretical gaps that open up from within that continuum. For instance, the notion of "die kindliche Geste als Befehl und Signal" (Benjamin 766), which appears in the "Programm," but no longer in Benjamin's essays on Brecht, could have been illuminated more interestingly by way of contrast rather than assimilation to Brecht. Could we indeed conceive of a Lacisian notion of the gesture in Benjamin's work as opposed to one determined by Brecht? Moreover, Burk presents Brecht's *Lehrstück* as analogous to Benjamin's "Programm" because both approaches entail an abolition of the actor/audience divide and focus on an aesthetics of process rather than product. This is true, but Lacis and Benjamin's elaboration of process-based theater went so much further by eliminating any prescriptive dramatic text. Thus the "Programm" and the *Lehrstück* diverge in their respective attitudes to authority and authorship. Whereas the *Lehrstück* deliberately fabricates a confrontation of the child with authority, challenging her autonomy and decision making through clearly defined ethical and political questions, the heart of Lacis and Benjamin's children's theater was to pass all creative authority and authorship over to the child. The educator retreated into the role of an observer. This retreat of any adult authority before the child "as dictator" (Benjamin, 766) went hand in hand with the absence of any reenactment of plays. The child was to obtain full authorship of *all* creative processes, decisions, communal

engagement, and the temporal rhythms of her mimetic activity. Similarly, although the “Programm” and the *Lehrstück* both foreground violence and destructiveness in their conceptions of children’s theater, Brecht frames that contact with violence through scripted questions, while Benjamin and Laciš wanted to facilitate a freedom of play that would allow for destructiveness to be released as a productive and natural force of the child’s very being. In short, Burk’s category of the “space of possibilities” could have been pushed further in order to explore the differences between a Brechtian pedagogy of textuality and a Benjaminian pedagogy of space.

The third part of Burk’s study thus culminates in an interpretation of the “Programm” that positions Laciš as “background,” versus Brecht as true theoretical ally. In so doing, Burk misses an opportunity to shed new light on the Benjaminian notion of the gesture, which is already overly interpreted through Brecht. Moreover, by relegating Laciš to the background rather than the foreground of conceptual collaboration, Burk, against her own explicit intentions, replicates the framing of Laciš as muse rather than serious artist or theorist. The latter issue could perhaps have been prevented had she addressed the deeply gendered conditions that prefigure the intellectual exchange and collaboration between Laciš and Benjamin, rather than just those inherent in Benjamin publishing and scholarship. Benjamin’s offer “Ich werde das Programm schreiben . . . und deine Arbeit theoretisch darlegen und begründen” (126) could have been a poignant starting point to unpack the multiple questions of authorship implied in the complexities of collaboration between Laciš and Benjamin, including the gendered conditions that pervade the relation between practice and theory. This has been done lucidly in a parallel study of “The Programm” by Nicholas Ridout in *Passionate Amateurs: Theatre, Communism, Love* (2013).

Burk’s gender-unaware approach is not helped by the fact that she does not question her lack of fluency in Russian or Latvian, in which most of Laciš’s own writings were written. Her research on Laciš is almost exclusively mediated through Laciš’s 1976 autobiography *Revolutionär im Beruf* and Beata Paškevica’s 2006 monograph *In der Stadt der Parolen: Asja Laciš, Walter Benjamin und Bertolt Brecht*. Burk’s own discussion of Laciš thus remains filtered through Paškevica’s interests, which are biographical rather than conceptual. More disturbingly, in Paškevica’s bibliography we can find substantial sections of Russian, Latvian, and German writings by Laciš: six books and more than a hundred essays, articles, and reviews. The overwhelming majority of these are not referenced by Burk. This seems deeply problematic. Laciš as a theoretician and writer in her own right has not been given a chance to participate in the conceptual debate that is the topic of *Kindertheater als Möglichkeitsraum*.

However, these limitations aside, Burk’s discussion will nevertheless present a rich and up-to-date resource in the German language for any scholarship interested in the intertextual relations between Benjamin,

Lacis, and Brecht and in the radical pedagogy of avant-garde children's theater. The great strength of Burk's study consists in the meticulous care she takes to unravel the conceptual vocabulary that permeates the thinking and practice of all three vanguardists, and the new intratextual trajectories she identifies in the thought of Benjamin. In her research she draws on a multitude of disciplines: theater studies, philosophy, literature, pedagogy, and psychology, thus laying the foundation for new interdisciplinary connections that might inspire research also outside the field of theater and cultural studies, especially in pedagogy. Most important, the utopian light of Benjamin's "Programm," which shines clearly throughout Burk's book, brings into presence the model of a pedagogy that gives rise to hope and optimism, demonstrating lucidly the political potential of theater.

Phoebe von Held, London

Contributors

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Tony Kushner is an award-winning American playwright and screenwriter. For his play *Angels in America* he received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1993 and a National Medal of Arts from Barack Obama in 2013, in recognition of his life's work. He works regularly with Steven Spielberg, including on the critically acclaimed films *Munich* (2005) and *Lincoln* (2012). Kushner has engaged with Brecht's works since the beginning of his career, and has published translations of *The Good Person of Szechwan* and *Mother Courage*.

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Published for the International Brecht Society by Camden House, the *Brecht Yearbook* is the central scholarly forum for discussion of Brecht's life and work and of topics of particular interest to him, especially the politics of literature and of theater in a global context. It includes a wide variety of perspectives and approaches, and, like Brecht himself, is committed to the concept of the use value of literature, theater, and theory.

Volume 42 features a selection of the papers given and protocols of the events held at the International Brecht Society's "Recycling Brecht" symposium at St. Hugh's College, Oxford, in June 2016. The theme of recycling is understood both as a description of Brecht's own creative practice and as an activity applied to his works by others. The volume includes keynote papers by Hans-Thies Lehmann and Amal Allana on Brecht's reception of *Antigone* and on the reception and recycling of Brecht in India respectively. Other papers are on a wide range of topics, from Brecht's own "recycling" of Shakespeare and others, through the reception of his own works in a range of contexts and by later writers, to contemporary works that may be understood as post-Brechtian. The final section, introduced by an extended interview with American playwright Tony Kushner, documents additional creative responses to the theme.

Volume co-editors Tom Kuhn and David Barnett are, respectively, Professor of Twentieth-Century German Literature at the University of Oxford and Professor of Theatre at the University of York. Managing Editor Theodore F. Rippey is Associate Professor of German at Bowling Green State University.

Cover image: Brecht at the HUAC hearings, still from the film *A Model Family in a Model Home* by Zoe Beloff, 2015. © Zoe Beloff.

Cover design: Frank Gutbrod

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ISBN 978-0-9851956-5-6



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