

Brecht unter Fremden

19. – 23.6. 2019

CALL FOR PAPERS

16. Symposium of the International Brecht Society (IBS)

Brecht unter Fremden / Brecht Among Strangers

June 19–23, 2019 – Leipzig, Germany

Organized by the International Brecht Society (IBS) and the Centre of Competence for Theatre (CCT) at Leipzig University in cooperation with the Institute for Theatre Studies at Leipzig University and Schauspiel Leipzig

Bertolt Brecht was confronted with the alien throughout his life. He was exposed to it everywhere he lived, and in all venues he inhabited, he was as a stranger among strangers. Furthermore, he made the experience of the alien into the linchpin of his entire artistic project. His plays, prose, and poetry, as well as the texts he wrote about theater and the other arts, about politics and society, tell us that the experience of being alien is the precondition for the possibility of a future community among strangers. Brecht's intensive confrontation with the alien is more relevant now than ever in an era when, on a daily basis, fear and hatred of foreigners continue to demonstrate a fundamental inability to live among strangers even (or especially) in a period of increasing globalization and of societies affected by migration. The overarching goal of the symposium BRECHT UNTER FREMDEN/BRECHT AMONG STRANGERS is to make a contribution to cosmopolitan conviviality: living together as a stranger among strangers. The alien is not simply that which is exotic and distanced. It does not mean merely »aliens« (or foreigners) from other countries, together with customs and moral attitudes that may appear alien (or strange) to those who perceive themselves, however correctly, to be »at home.« A perspective that takes its cues from Brecht starts by exploring that which is radically alien in one's own world (culture, life history, personality): a strangeness that resists facile integration. It is only the experience of a fundamental strangeness within oneself that makes it possible, after Brecht, for people—whether »natives« or migrants—to live together as strangers among other strangers.

The topic of the symposium, in its historical, theoretical, regional, and praxis-oriented dimensions, will be explored and concretized by four central hypotheses:

Brecht must become alien to us (again). The canonization of Brecht and his epic theater in the East and West after his death have deprived him of the »sting of strangeness« (B. Waldenfels)—the very discomfiture that made Brecht into a contemporary who has something to say to the present. The domestication of Brecht has made a historicizing and alienating look at him urgently necessary: one that views Brecht, both in his own time and in his afterlife, as someone who always remained an alien body in alien surroundings. The perspective of a »Brecht among strangers« can be made productive to the extent that it is able to counteract Brecht's cooptation and domestication and succeeds in offering a glimpse of an »alien Brecht.« *The recovery of this alien Brecht is the first key task of the symposium.*

Via Brecht, we will work toward a theory of a contemporary »theater among strangers.« The dynamics of globalization are forcing us to reflect in new ways upon the very idea of theater itself. These dynamics insist that we take into account the changed and changing relationship between that which we may view as our own and that which can be viewed as foreign; between what appears near to us and what appears far from us; between the simultaneous and the non-simultaneous; and between migration and residency/»at-homeness». The dynamics of globalization call for a theory of the »transcultural theater« (G. Heeg). In contradistinction to the concept of the intercultural, a transcultural theater no longer makes a distinction between that which is culturally, and self-evidently, one's own and that which is self-evidently foreign. Rather, the concept of the transcultural focuses on the interrelationship between the »native« and the »foreign« within—and as an integral part of—what one might believe to be one's »own« domestic or »native« culture. Brecht's theater work therefore offers considerable possibilities for a contemporary transcultural theater. It is a »theater among strangers.« *The second key task of the symposium, following the clues left by Brecht, will be to work on a theory of the transcultural theater.*

In a globalized world, Brecht is urgently needed. It is time for a theater and a literature among strangers. The urgency of this need can be measured by the masses of refugees fleeing from war, starvation, and poverty by land and by sea, as well as by arson attacks in Germany and elsewhere against residences for refugees, and by the fear and hatred of »natives« for »foreigners« that such attacks instantiate and demonstrate. The critical junctures of globalization—from which no region of the world is exempt—are marginalizing entire countries and regions and leading directly to a backlash: the creation of fundamentalist movements throughout the world. The specific local and regional instantiations of these fracture zones demand differentiated and targeted artistic practices that are capable of confronting them. They call for a different Brecht, a Brecht who can be interrogated with a view to his transcultural relevance within the context of changed and changing cultural conditions worldwide. *The third key task of the symposium will therefore be to seek out the world's regional combustion points and to explore the ways in which a theater and a literature among strangers, following Brecht, can develop decisive agency in such a context.*

Theater in the wake of Brecht is a cultural practice for everyone, by everyone. Although Brecht was keenly interested in work with professional actors, he also strove for a broader understanding of theater as a fundamental cultural, social, and anthropological practice that is by no means limited to the arena of professional theater. A theater among strangers, following Brecht, therefore encompasses theater with nonprofessional actors. Theater as a cultural praxis for and by everyone is an excellent medium for exploring relationships with what may appear alien, and with those who may seem to be foreign. Brecht formulated the model of the *Lehrstück* (learning play) for his theater work with nonprofessional actors, and this model has subsequently experienced numerous further developments and instantiations. *The fourth key task of the symposium will be to continue work on the model of the Lehrstück within the framework of a theater among strangers.*

Submissions

Abstracts—of no more than 1,500 characters—for presentations, panels, short workshops, lecture performances, and related formats—with a time limit of twenty minutes, plus ten minutes for discussion—may be sent, by July 31, 2018, to: abstracts@brechtunterfremden.org. The symposium organizers will be happy to consider proposals for entire panels (with up to three presenters), or for mutual or intercon-

nected presentations. We particularly welcome submissions oriented to one of the four thematic complexes, described in further detail below. The languages of the symposium will be German and English. All who have submitted abstracts will receive information about acceptance or rejection by October 31, 2018 at the latest.

Sections

I. Brecht in Foreign Lands/Brecht the Foreigner: New Perspectives on Brecht's Time as a Migrant and Theater Work »after Brecht« in the GDR and the FRG

Departure from the homeland and a feeling of homelessness and foreignness were, in essence, the fundamental precondition for Brecht's work and life. Already in Augsburg, Munich, and Berlin, as well as during the period of exile and migration and ultimately in the GDR, Brecht was always fascinated by alienness and foreign countries. Likewise, what was supposedly his own remained fundamentally foreign to him and eventually became uncanny. By no means however do the »foreign« and the »uncanny« have clearly negative connotations for Brecht; on the contrary, they are an important impulse for productivity and labor. Brecht seized on the principles of estrangement and historicization as artificial, ludic processes enabling, within the realm of theater, an inquiry into the possibility of dissolving alienation (Marx) itself. Theater work »after Brecht«, in the GDR as well as in the FRG, turned into a twofold space of foreignness in the familiar, and familiarity in the foreign. For various reasons, almost all of Brecht's »students« and »successors«—like Egon Monk, Peter Palitzsch, Benno Besson, Manfred Wekwerth, Ruth Berghaus, or Peter Konwitschny—shared their teacher's fundamental experience of foreignness. This raises a question: What is it that turned those practitioners who got their start with Brecht into aliens? »La colombara ha aperto gli occhi—the dovecote has opened its eyes,« one could apply an Italian proverb to the circles of Brecht's collaborators and students. This means that the experience of being foreign is a fundamental precondition for a refusal to remain perched, with closed eyes, in domesticity—both today and in the past.

We invite historically oriented submissions that seek to grapple with questions of foreignness in Brecht's biographical experience—in periods of migration and in the GDR as well as in other phases of Brecht's life. We particularly welcome model investigations of the theatrical work of Brecht's successors, in their relationships with Brecht and among each other. We seek contributions that look at theater work by and after Brecht with »open eyes«—as a theater that has become strange(r)—as well as contributions that address the structures and functions of a theater that welcomes estrangement.

II. Theater among Strangers: Brecht's Concept of a Transcultural Theater and Its Continuation in the Theater of Migration Societies

Brecht's writing as well as his practical theater work are fundamentally influenced by the experience of foreignness, migration, and cultural instability. Brecht's work has therefore been referred to, accurately enough, as »migrant writing.« This is the fundamental impulse behind techniques such as the distancing effect (*V-Effekt*) and the »separation of elements,« from Brecht's theory of affect and his concept of »gestus« to practices of historicization and transmedial and transcultural positioning. All these techniques point to the idea of a »transcultural theater.« To live »without support and embarked on a great voyage,« as Brecht's Galileo remarks—as a stranger among strangers—is the fundamental challenge of migration societies and forms the basis of Brecht's entire artistic project.

The goal of this—theoretically focused—section is the reconstruction, elaboration, and continued development of an idea of a »transcultural theater« in Brecht's »migrant writing« under the changed conditions and in the diverse contexts of the contemporary world. We therefore welcome re-readings and re-revisions of supposedly well-known Brechtian theories and practices. We are happy to explore questions about the relevance of contemporary aesthetic-political theories of theater as well as experimental techniques between science and art in diverse settings within a globalized world. Among other aspects, we are hoping for examinations of strategies for exemplary theatrical formations—positioned between globalization on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other and explicitly outside of conventional discourse histories—as well as investigations into writing practices of a political-aesthetic theory of theater in a post-Brechtian world.

III. Foreign Affairs in a Global World: Artistic Practices after Brecht in Regional and Social Combustion Points Worldwide

For a long time, Brecht appeared—above all on the political left—to be universally applicable to any kind of social conflict. By now, in the critical junctures of globalization, all social classes and levels are threatened with the experience of being forced to the margins, forgotten, and left behind socially, economically, technologically, culturally, artistically, and in the media. This experience of marginalization makes it impossible to assume Brecht's significance as a »universal factor of applicability« available everywhere and in all cultures in the same way. Rather, it demands that we cast a careful look at specific appropriations in concrete situations and in real places. Only in this way can we hope for a critical discourse that questions both euphoric concepts of globalization and all-too-optimistic hopes for supposedly »Brechtian« counter-projects. Thinking about the marginal and the marginalized—always already anticipated by Brecht—demands that we (re)discover Brecht from the margins.

What, then, does marginalization mean in Brechtian terms? Which practices, projects, and appropriations exist on the margins of urban centers and of government- or corporate-supported structures, in zones between art and the social, beyond established reading practices and conventional dramaturgies? How might it be possible to imagine alternatives—precisely from a marginalized perspective? Our section focuses on specific spaces and practices within the framework of globalization. We particularly welcome investigations of (theater) projects that, in an attempt to explore these and other questions, dare to overstep the boundaries between artistic research, scientific practice, and social intervention.

IV. Strangers Acting/Acting Strange: Theater Work with Nonprofessional Actors »after Brecht«

Brecht always emphasized the relevance of theater work with amateurs and »lay acting groups.« As late as 1956, he believed that the future of theater was to be found among »small, versatile troupes and tiny groups« who could become productive via the artistic and practical appropriation of »everyday questions.« Brecht's most radical work in this area came with the theory and practice of the *Lehrstück* (learning play), which »teaches by being performed and not by being seen.« The rapprochement between acting and observing in an active process involving self-observation shifts the accent from teaching to learning. As an act of learning for all participants, the process of acting is intended to enable both an »acting through« and an »acting different(ly)« that makes attitudes and patterns of behavior recognizable as such, thus changing and even invalidating them. The artistic and social space of virtuality thus opened up provides a productive confrontation with foreignness and an estrangement of the seemingly familiar.

The *Lehrstücke* and other theater experiments in Brecht's theory and practice offer multiple points of contact for contemporary (theater) aesthetics and methods that are focused, via a process of »self-understanding« and self-empowerment, on work with nonprofessional actors of all age groups and cultures within the context of migration and a changed coexistence among various generations. In this section, we welcome diverse questions regarding theatrical practices »after« Brecht that overstep notions of a fixed cultural »identity.« Experimental theatrical forms are just as central to this investigation as political aspects of the *Lehrstück* as a learning play, as well as approaches of pedagogic, collective and process-based practice and theoretical reflections on the relation between theatre and cultural and social diversity.

General information about the symposium

Performances, keynotes, workshops, and roundtables. In addition to the four thematic sections, the symposium will address the contemporary significance and relevance of theater work with and after Brecht via a variety of keynote addresses by leading figures, as well as in multiple workshops and roundtables featuring theater practitioners and other experts. In addition, a large number of theatrical performances, scenic presentations, and lecture performances by artists from Leipzig and around the world will form an integral part of the symposium. We will make continual updates about the symposium program on our website www.brechtunterfremden.org.

Symposium fee and additional costs. There will be a symposium fee of 140 euros per participant. Students will pay a reduced fee of 65 euros. Non-student participants who register and pay their fees by January 31, 2019 will receive a discount of 40 euros off the regular rate and thus pay 100 euros.

Travel and room and board costs must be covered by participants themselves. The symposium organizers will try to negotiate reduced-rate hotel prices as well as an affordable ticket system for reduced-price lunches and dinners for participants. Information about such costs will be available in advance of the symposium via email and at the website www.brechtunterfremden.org.

In the event of an invitation to participate in the symposium, the organizers would be happy to support participants who wish to apply to their home universities or other funding agencies for support in covering travel and other participation costs.

Publication. Following the conclusion of the symposium, the organizers plan to publish selected contributions in the *Brecht Yearbook* or in the IBS journal *e-cibs* (=electronic communications of the international brecht society). Joining the IBS is not a requirement for participation in the symposium BRECHT UNTER FREMDEN / BRECHT AMONG STRANGERS. However, only members of the IBS will receive a free copy of the *Brecht Yearbook*, which will include the proceedings of the Leipzig symposium. Further details about the work of the International Brecht Society and its publications, about membership benefits as well as about previous IBS symposia, can be found at the website www.brechtsociety.org.