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The International
Amfiteater Symposium

SPEECH ON THE (DARK) TIMES: BRECHT'S THOUGHT THEN AND NOW

6–9 October 2026

Ljubljana, Slovenian Theatre Institute

In a brief yet extraordinarily lucid fragment from *Buying Brass*, entitled "Speech on Our Times" (Rede über die Zeit), Bertolt Brecht offers a precise analysis of the social conditions shaping his historical moment, not merely in Germany but globally. In the fragment, a character bearing the generic name Philosopher observes that "the monstrous oppression and exploitation of human beings by other human beings, the wartime slaughters and peacetime degradations of every sort taking place across the planet have almost come to seem natural to us". Despite the historical distance, this observation still resonates as an uncannily accurate commentary on the conditions of our contemporary moment, marked by capitalist exploitation, violence against human and non-human life, war and the climate crisis. We live in a time in which numerous regressive, increasingly popular and even institutionalised forms of authoritarian (micro-)politics are gaining ground, recalling the dark forces of past eras. These politics are rooted in racism, chauvinism, nationalism, xenophobia, transphobia, homophobia, sexism, class discrimination, ruthless exploitation, (neo-)colonialism, religious fundamentalism, environmental degradation, militarism and more.

"If our present-day world no longer fits drama," Brecht told his collaborator Elisabeth Hauptmann one hundred years ago, "then drama no longer fits the world." Thus, from its very beginning, Brecht's project of the epic (dialectical) theatre appears to have been conceived as an attempt to enable theatre to respond to – and even intervene in – its historical moment. The symposium will provide an opportunity to reflect on what an effective theatrical and/or Brechtian response to our time might look like today – a time marked by neoliberalism and the rise of authoritarian politics. At the symposium, we will thus explore the relationships between art (theatre, playwriting, literature, etc.) and the contemporary social and political context and seek potential theatrical and other tactics capable of following Brecht's maxim in *The Measures Taken* (and *Buying Brass*): "Change the world, it needs it!" The symposium aims to reflect, through Brecht and the questions raised by "Speech on Our Times", on the "dark times" of his era as well as our own.

PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 6 October

18:00

Opening of the Exhibition *Theatre Work: Brecht on Slovenian Stages* (Slovenian Theatre Institute, Mestni trg 17, Ljubljana)

Production: Slovenian Theatre Institute (SLOGI) in collaboration with the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana (UL AGRFT)

Authors: Aldo Milohnić, Jakob Ribič (both UL AGRFT), Ana Perne (SLOGI)

Opening Speeches: Vesna Jurca Tadel (Acting Director-General of the Creativity Directorate, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia), Gašper Troha (Director of SLOGI), Žanina Mirčevska (Dean of UL AGRFT), Lena Prents (Director of Goethe-Institut Ljubljana), authors of the exhibition

Short Opening Performances: Sofija Zavratnik Kain sings two songs by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill; Anthony Squiers reads excerpts from his new translation of the poem *Die drei Soldaten* (The Three Soldiers) by Bertolt Brecht

Followed by a welcome reception

Wednesday, 7 October

8:30–9:00

Registration

9:00–9:40

FIRST KEYNOTE LECTURE

Markus Wessendorf (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, USA): *A Contemporary Reassessment of "Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth"*

9:40–10:00

Discussion

10:00–10:10

Short Break

10:10–10:55

FIRST PANEL

Contemporary Conversations about *Refugee Conversations* (and beyond)

Moderator: Jakob Ribič

Aleksandra Jovićević (University of Rome "La Sapienza", Italy): *Exiles and Émigrés, Then and Now*

Lara Tarbuk (Dresden University of Technology, Germany): *From the Margins of Language: Exile and Conversation in Bertolt Brecht and Senthuran Varatharajah*

Miša Glišič (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia): *The Refugee as the Architect of the Third Space: Rethinking Brecht's Dialectics through Bhabha and Welsch*

10:55–11:20

Discussion

11:20–11:40

Coffee Break

11:40–12:25

SECOND PANEL

War and Pacifism in "Dark Times": Then and Now

Moderator: Aldo Milohnić

Kristopher Imbrigotta (University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, USA): *Taking Positions in Dark Times: Resistance, Authoritarianism and the Politics of Seeing in Brecht's* War Primer

Milena Mileva Blažić (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) and **Hans Zollner** (Institute of Anthropology, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, Italy): Antimärchen: *Brecht's* Children's Crusade 1939 *and the Hameln Legend*

Milena Massalongo (University of Mantua, Italy): *"What you don't understand is the* technique*": Where We Stand Now, Measured against Brecht* [CANCELLED]

12:25–12:50

Discussion

12:50–14:20

Lunch Break

14:20–15:05

THIRD PANEL

Puntila, Matti and Saint Joan in the Jungle of Capitalism

Moderator: Tomaž Toporišič

Jure Gantar (Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada): *Brecht and the Master-Servant Dialectic*

Eva Kraševec (Slovenian National Theatre, Ljubljana, Slovenia): *Puntila and Matti in Turbocapitalism*

Agata Tomšič (ErosAntEros, Ravenna, Italy): *Why Stage Brecht in the Age of* Capitalist Realism*? Two Practical Examples that Seek to "Change the World" through Theatre and the Power of Imagination*

15:05–15:30

Discussion

15:30–15:50

Coffee Break

15:50–16:35

FOURTH PANEL

(Post)Brechtian Dramaturgies in Politically Committed Contemporary Theatre

Moderator: Maja Murnik

Tomaž Toporišič (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia): *In the Footsteps of Brecht's Fundamental Reforms of Dramaturgy in Contemporary Performing Arts*

Matko Botić (University of Split, Croatia): *Doubt as Destiny: Oliver Frljić's* The Brothers Karamazov *as an Echo of Brechtian Epic Theatre*

Milorad Mićić (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia): *From Estrangement to Confrontation: The Post-Brechtian Theatre of Oliver Frljić*

16:35–17:00

Discussion

18:00

Opening of the Exhibition *Brecht's Attempts and Experiments (*Versuche*) – Slovenian Translations, First German Editions and Documents from the Bertolt Brecht Archive of the Academy of Arts, Berlin* (National and University Library, Turjaška ulica 1, Ljubljana)

Production: National and University Library (NUK) in collaboration with the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana (UL AGRFT)

Authors: Aldo Milohnić, Jakob Ribič (both UL AGRFT), Barbara Jesenovec (NUK)

Archival Material Consultants: Iliane Thiemann, Noah Willumsen (both Bertolt Brecht Archive of the Academy of Arts, Berlin – BBA/AdK)

Opening Speeches: Jana Kolar (Director of NUK), Iliane Thiemann and Noah Willumsen (BBA/AdK), Sylvia Groneick (German Ambassador to Slovenia), authors of the exhibition

Short Opening Performances: Sofija Zavratnik Kain sings two songs by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill; Nataša Barbara Gračner "re-enacts" excerpts from Brecht's *Galileo*, staged 30 years ago in NUK

Thursday, 8 October

9:00–9:40

SECOND KEYNOTE LECTURE

Tom Kuhn (University of Oxford, UK): *"Brothers, if I were with you now...": Brecht, War and Empathy*

9:40–10:00

Discussion

10:00–10:10

Short Break

10:10–10:55

FIFTH PANEL

Learning and the Learning-Play in the Dystopian Times

Moderator: Aleksandra Jovićević

Aldo Milohnić (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia): *Brecht's "Theatre for the Scientific Age" in the Dystopian Times*

Sergio Lo Gatto (Link Campus University, Rome, Italy): *The Legacy of the* Lehrstück *in Contemporary Italian Playwriting: The Case of Davide Carnevali's* Classroom Plays

Francesco Puccio (eCampus University, Rome, Italy): *Reassessing the Ruins: Sophocles'* Antigone *as a Brechtian* Lehrstück *in Archaeological Spaces*

10:55–11:20

Discussion

11:20–11:40

Coffee Break

11:40–12:25

SIXTH PANEL

Learning-Play as a Metaphor: Politics, Censorship and Brechtian Strategies

Moderator: Lada Čale Feldman

Elena Knopová (Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia): *Unsettling the Familiar Again: Brechtian Strategies in Contemporary Slovak Theatre*

Sebastijan Horvat (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia): *Jože Možina's Interview with Tone Kerin on RTV Slovenia as an Example of a Learning-Play*

Rita Agatina Di Leo (University of Bari "Aldo Moro" and University of Rome "La Sapienza", Italy): *Archipelago of Exceptions: When Visibility Becomes Censorable – Notes from Contemporary Italy*

12:25–12:50

Discussion

12:50–14:20

Lunch Break

14:20–15:05

SEVENTH PANEL

New Readings of the "Classic" Brecht-Aristotle Antagonism

Moderator: Goran Sergej Pristaš

Anthony Squiers (AMDA College and Conservatory of the Performing Arts, Los Angeles, USA): *Beyond Aesthetics: Brecht's Ontological Break with Aristotle*

Krištof Jacek Kozak (University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia): *On How a Certain Bertolt B. Let Himself Be Ensnared by His Own Shadow*

Vid Milaković (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia): *Aristotle and Brecht in Contemporary Theatre – Clash of the Titans* [CANCELLED]

15:05–15:30
Discussion

15:30–15:50
Coffee Break

15:50–17:00
ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS OF BRECHT'S WRITINGS

Brecht's Legacy 70 Years On

Moderator: Jakob Ribič (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; editor of the recent Slovenian translations of Brecht's writings)

Speakers:

Tom Kuhn (University of Oxford, UK) [ADDED]

Aldo Milohnić (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; editor of the recent Slovenian translations of Brecht's writings)

Darko Suvin (Emeritus Professor, McGill University, Montréal, Canada)

Noah Willumsen (Director of Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Germany) [CANCELLED]

Erdmut Wizisla (Director of Walter Benjamin Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Germany)

18:00
Guided Tour of the Exhibition *Cosmos Kosovel* – an exhibition marking the 100th anniversary of the death of the Slovenian avant-garde poet, writer and artist Srečko Kosovel (Cankarjev dom, Prešernova cesta 10, Ljubljana)

Guides: Marijan Rupert (NUK, exhibition curator) and Kristina Pranjić (ZRC SAZU and University of Nova Gorica, member of the exhibition Programme Committee)

Friday, 9 October

9:00–9:40
THIRD KEYNOTE LECTURE

Bojana Kunst (Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen, Germany): *When We Can No Longer Even Speak of Trees: Brecht and the Risk of Speaking the Truth*

9:40–10:00
Discussion

10:00–10:10
Short Break

10:10–10:55
EIGHTH PANEL

Estrangement and the Politics of Gaze, Perception and Spectatorship

Moderator: Gašper Troha

Goran Sergej Pristaš (University of Zagreb, Croatia): *Composite Gaze and Vulnerable Assemblies*

Jakob Ribič (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia): *"The Eyes of the Stranger": What Might Be the Contemporary Form of* Verfremdung*?*

Yujia Zheng (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia): *Estranging the Hyper-Spectator: Brecht after Rancière*

10:55–11:20
Discussion

11:20–11:40
Coffee Break

11:40–12:25
NINTH PANEL

Oppositions in Institutional and Alternative Approaches to (Post)Brechtian Theatre

Moderator: Kristopher Imbrigotta

Agata Juniku (University of Zagreb, Croatia): *From Margins to Freedom, Centre to Avoid: Two Cases*

Ana Kocjančič (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia): *Brechtian Spatial Principles and Scenographic Minimalism in the Early Work of Niko Matul*

Ana Perne (Slovenian Theatre Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia): *Brecht's Theory as a Factor in the Transformation of Acting Practices in Slovenia*

12:25–12:50
Discussion

12:50–14:20
Lunch Break

14:20–15:05
TENTH PANEL

Brecht and (Un)expected Relations through Writings, Music and Voice

Moderator: Jure Gantar

Lada Čale Feldman (University of Zagreb, Croatia): *Krleža through Brechtian Estrangement: On the Shared Artistic, Cognitive and Political Value of Two Modernist Classics*

Gregor Pompe (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia): *Brecht's Idea of Epic Theatre in the Operatic Context of His Time*

Jasmina Godec (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia): *Estrangement on Radio: Brecht, Listening and the Representation of Madness*

15:05–15:30
Discussion

15:30–15:40
Short Break

15:40–16:00
CLOSING CHORD: A MUSIC/PERFORMATIVE PRESENTATION

Jani Kovačič (Singer and musician, Ljubljana, Slovenia): *Did Brecht Teach Us Anything? On Some of Brecht's "Stücke und Lieder"*

18:30
Bus Transfer to Novo Mesto

20:00
Performance: *The Life and Times of Bertolt Brecht* (Anton Podbevšek Teater, Prešernov trg 3, Novo Mesto)

22:00
Farewell Reception

23:00
Bus Transfer to Ljubljana

ABSTRACTS AND BIOS

KEYNOTE LECTURES

Tom Kuhn

"Brothers, if I were with you now ...": Brecht, War and Empathy

My starting point is Brecht's poem of 1942 about the German invasion of Soviet Russia, *To the German Soldiers in the East*, which apparently makes a clear rhetorical gesture of empathy ("Brothers, if I were with you now ... if I were one of you ... I would say, as you say ..."). We are accustomed to thinking of Brechtian *Verfremdung* as opposed to any kind of empathy, but this is perhaps a misunderstanding, deriving in part from the involved history of *Einfühlung* and its translations. My purpose is to re-complicate that understanding, also in relation to more recent notions of empathy. I track some other instances where Brecht seems to communicate intense emotion, and I analyse the play of passionate immediacy and critical distance, feeling and rationality. Under the pressure of war and forced migration (the world is so far out of joint), Brecht's aesthetic takes a turn which we might re-create today.

Tom Kuhn is an Emeritus Fellow of St Hugh's College, Oxford, where he was for many years professor of 20th-century German literature. He has worked especially on Bertolt Brecht, and is the principal editor (and one of the translators) of the English-language edition of Brecht's works. Major publications include *Brecht on Theatre* and *Brecht on Performance* (both 2014), *The Collected Poems of Bertolt Brecht* (2018), and *Brecht and the Writer's Workshop:* Fatzer *and Other Dramatic Projects* (2019). He has also collaborated extensively with musicians, visual artists and theatre makers, and has commissioned and produced new work.

Bojana Kunst

When We Can No Longer Even Speak of Trees: Brecht and the Risk of Speaking the Truth

"What kind of times are these, when a conversation about trees is almost a crime?" writes Bertolt Brecht in his famous poem *To Those Born Later.* Talking about trees can be a crime because it implies silence about the atrocities of his time. This lecture proposes a reversal of Brecht's thought: what kind of times are these, when we can no longer even speak of trees?

Drawing on the play *A Roof and Four Walls* (2025) by Lina Majdalanie and Rabih Mroué, I argue that the contemporary problem is no longer primarily how to speak about violence but rather what happens when political conflict colonises the very space of speech itself. In such circumstances, even the most everyday experiences, images, memories, objects and life stories lose their self-evidence. They become contentious, suspect and laden with political meanings. The question is no longer whether art should address violence but under what conditions speech is even possible.

While Brecht wondered how to speak about the crimes of his time, Majdalanie and Mroué face a different problem: what happens when the very legitimacy of artists' speech becomes the subject of political controversy? From their position as migrant artists in the German cultural sphere, they return to Brecht's work and life to demonstrate that questions of truth cannot be separated from questions of belonging, legitimacy and visibility. Who is allowed to speak? Whose testimony is recognised as legitimate? Which lives become publicly visible, and which remain unheard?

Bojana Kunst is a performance and dance theorist, dramaturg and professor at Justus Liebig University Giessen, where she teaches at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies and directs the international MA programme in Choreography and Performance. Since 2026, she has served as the president of the Hessian Theatre Academy. Born in Maribor, Slovenia, she studied philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, where she completed her PhD in philosophy and aesthetics. Her research focuses on contemporary performance and dance, particularly the relationship between artistic labour, politics and collaborative artistic processes. Kunst's theoretical work is closely intertwined with artistic practice, and she has long collaborated with performance artists as a dramaturg and researcher. She has written several influential books, including *Artist at Work: Proximity of Art and Capitalism* (2015) and *Življenje umetnosti: prečne črte skrbi* (*The Life of Art: Transversal Lines of Care*, 2021). Her writings on performance, dance and contemporary artistic production have been widely translated and published internationally.

Markus Wessendorf

A Contemporary Reassessment of "Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth"

This keynote lecture offers a contemporary reevaluation of Bertolt Brecht's 1934/35 pamphlet "Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth" as a framework for understanding how to articulate and spread the truth under the conditions of resurgent authoritarianism in 2026. By juxtaposing Brecht's dual understanding of truth – both as a concrete, empirical fact and as a dialectically constructed insight that requires estrangement – with Hannah Arendt's distinction between rational and factual truth, the lecture argues that the shared recognition of truth, once grounded in collective testimony, is today destabilised by algorithmic fragmentation and AI-driven systems of knowledge production. Each of Brecht's five difficulties in writing the truth – courage, cleverness, rhetorical skill, audience selection and cunning – reappears in a transformed contemporary guise: the concentration of media ownership among tech oligarchs allied with Trumpism; Steve Bannon's "flooding the zone" strategy, which exploits the dynamics of digital platforms; Rainer Mühlhoff's analysis of the procedural, interest-driven production of truth through sub-symbolic AI; Eva von Redecker's concept of "phantom ownership" as a mechanism that shifts real material grievances onto a fantasmatic loss; and the political right's far greater effectiveness in strategically circulating its "truths" compared to the fragmented communicative practices of the left. The lecture contends that while the five difficulties have intensified under digital capitalism, Brecht's dialectical method – precision, material analysis and the unwavering articulation of contemporary realities – remains an indispensable resource for writing the truth today.

Markus Wessendorf holds a PhD in applied theatre studies from the University of Giessen, Germany. He is a professor at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. His areas of specialisation are in experimental and avant-garde theatre, performance studies and theatre theory and dramaturgy and devised theatre. In his writings, he has covered a wide range of topics, from tourism to terrorism, masochism to Mohism, diaspora to deconstruction. His publications include a monograph on Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater (Berlin 1998) and a co-edited volume on interdisciplinary relationships between theatre and the other arts (Tübingen 1998). He was the editor of *The Brecht Yearbook/Das Brecht-Jahrbuch* from volume 43 to 50 (2018–2025). As a director, he has staged Heiner Müller's *Germania Death in Berlin* (New York 1989), Norman Price's *Barking Dogs* (Brisbane 1998), Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (Honolulu 2010) and his own adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya and Zombies* (Honolulu 2012). He also facilitated the devised-theatre project *Smile, You're Under Surveillance!* (Honolulu 2017) and was the dramaturg for Pei-Ling Kao's dance-theatre productions *Integral Bodies* (Honolulu 2010) and *Are We There Yet, Baby?* (Honolulu 2023). He has been the president of the International Brecht Society since 2024.

ROUNDTABLE *BRECHT'S LEGACY 70 YEARS ON*

Darko Suvin (Lucca, Italy) is a university teacher, literary and theatre critic, poet and writer. He is professor emeritus at McGill University, Montréal, Canada. Since 1986, he has been a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences) and, since 1973, a life member of Clare Hall College (Cambridge, UK). He is a research associate in the Department of English at the University of Pisa, Italy, a member of the doctoral programme in Italian in the Department of Contemporary and Comparative Literature at the University of Roma 2 – Tor Vergata and a member of the Advisory Board, UBIQ [Zagreb]. He has published or edited 46 books and many articles. His full CV is available at https://darkosuvin.com/vitae/vita/.

Noah Willumsen is the director of the Bertolt Brecht Archive at the Academy of Arts, Berlin, and the editor of Brecht's collected interviews *Unsere Hoffnung heute ist die Krise* (*Our Hope Today is Crisis*). *Interviews 1926-1956* (Suhrkamp 2023). He studied philosophy, art history and German literature at the University of Pittsburgh and served as a research assistant for the "Literary and Epistemic History of Small Forms" at the Humboldt University of Berlin. His essays on media and theatre history have appeared in English, German and Italian in literary journals such as *Sinn und Form* and academic publications such as *Das Heiner-Müller-Jahrbuch* and *The Brecht Yearbook*, of whose editorial board he is a member.

Erdmut Wizisla, born in Leipzig in 1958, is a literary scholar. After studying German literature at Humboldt University, he received his doctorate in 1994 with a dissertation entitled "Benjamin und Brecht. Geschichte einer Freundschaft" (Suhrkamp 2004, English: Libris 2009). From 1993 to 2024, he directed the Bertolt Brecht Archive at the Academy of Arts, Berlin. Since 2004, he has also directed the Walter Benjamin Archive (also at the Academy of Arts). He has curated exhibitions and published extensively, particularly on Benjamin, Brecht, Hannah Arendt and Uwe Johnson.

OPENING OF THE EXHIBITION *BRECHT'S ATTEMPTS AND EXPERIMENTS*

Iliane Thiemann studied German literature and library science at the Humboldt University, Berlin. Since 2002 she has worked in the archives of the Academy of Arts, Berlin, initially as an archivist in the Performing Arts section and, since 2011, as a research associate at the Bertolt Brecht Archive. In addition to publications such as "Peace is the be-all and end-all: Brecht, Picasso and the Dove on the Curtain of the Berliner Ensemble", she has curated and co-curated numerous literary exhibitions, including *Benjamin and Brecht. Thinking in Extremes* (Academy of Arts, Berlin) and *Dear Ise: Isot Kilian at 100* (Brecht Weigel House, Buckow).

PANELS

Milena Mileva Blažić and Hans Zollner
Antimärchen: Brecht's *Children's Crusade 1939* and the Hameln Legend

Two texts separated by more than a century take the same narrative shape: a column of children leaves a town and does not come back. In the Brothers Grimm's legend *Die Kinder zu Hameln* (*The Children of Hameln*, 1816), 130 children follow a piper into a mountain in 1284. In Bertolt Brecht's ballad *Kinderkreuzzug 1939* (*Children's Crusade 1939*), drafted after the invasion of Poland and completed in 1941, 55 orphaned children cross a devastated Poland behind a leader who does not know the road. This paper reads the two comparatively, as literary artefacts rather than historical evidence, and argues that the ballad enacts what Max Lüthi calls the *Antimärchen*: a narrative with a fairy-tale structure but an unhappy ending. Where the *Märchen* renders the marvellous self-evident, estrangement (*Verfremdung*) removes the self-evident, and the ballad performs that removal on an inherited shape.

The consequence is a reversal in the status accorded to the children. In the legend they are the term of an exchange: taken in place of an unpaid fee, they neither speak nor testify, and the surviving community holds the whole narrative function. The testimonial function is divided so that neither testimony can be complete: the blind child tells the story but cannot show the place, while the mute child points it out but has heard nothing.

In the ballad, classified in the reference literature as children's poetry, they act, deliberate, bury their dead, hold a court and finally write. Their testimony is complete, but it comes too late. Mythistory forms around an event that has never been explained; the ballad is built to prevent its formation around an event that has been explained.

Milena Mileva Blažić is a full professor at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana. She works on comparative children's literature and fairy-tale studies, on the deconstruction of the Sage and the fairy tale and on the transformation of fairy-tale structures into anti-fairy tales.

Hans Zollner, SJ, is a full professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University and founder and Director of its Institute of Anthropology (IADC). A theologian, psychologist and licensed psychotherapist, he works on safeguarding, human dignity and abuse prevention.

Matko Botić
Doubt as Destiny: Oliver Frljić's *The Brothers Karamazov* as an Echo of Brechtian Epic Theatre

In his preface to the Yugoslav edition of *Schriften zum Theater*, Darko Suvin unequivocally argues that the fundamental reason for Bertolt Brecht's enduring relevance lies in the meticulously developed system of his poetics. "Why do we engage with Brecht?" he asks, only to immediately answer by foregrounding the *comprehensiveness* of Brecht's dramaturgical theory and practice as the key guarantee of its timelessness. According to Suvin, this theory and practice are comprehensive because "they encompass all aspects of theatre – from the dramatic text to the apparatus of production".

In contemporary theatre, when a theatrical act can be virtually anything, few theatrical systems are so encompassing, or bodies of work so coherent, that they are read and evaluated primarily as complex, *comprehensive* artistic mechanisms. The oeuvre of director Oliver Frljić offers a compelling example of such a coherent system. His two productions based on *The Brothers Karamazov*, staged in 2022 at the Zagreb Youth Theatre, faithfully embody the core values of this theatrical mechanism.

This paper examines the connections between Brecht's legacy and Frljić's directorial poetics through the lenses of these productions, with particular emphasis on the

relationship between ethics and aesthetics in the construction of the stage image. To what extent are these two systems fundamentally aligned, and to what extent does a century's distance separate them? From the perspective of these productions, can Brecht be read as our contemporary, or as part of a historical canon? Answering these questions may also contribute to broader reflections on Brecht's position in contemporary theatre.

Matko Botić is an assistant professor in the Theatre Arts Department of the Arts Academy in Split, where he currently serves as vice dean for Arts and Sciences. He graduated in Croatian language and literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka. He received his PhD from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb in 2012 with the dissertation *Hrvatska proza u novijem hrvatskom kazalištu: teorijsko-dramaturški aspekti* (*Croatian Prose in Recent Croatian Theatre*), later published as *Igranje proze, pisanje kazališta* (*Playing Prose, Writing Theatre*). He has published more than two hundred theatre reviews and essays and regularly presents at theatre studies conferences. As a dramaturg, he has collaborated with numerous Croatian theatre companies and directors and participated in radio and television projects.

Lada Čale Feldman

Krleža through Brechtian Estrangement: On the Shared Artistic, Cognitive and Political Value of Two Modernist Classics

The most prolific and venerated Croatian poet, playwright, novelist, essayist, lexicographer and leftist Miroslav Krleža not only wrote extensively but was also under the declared and undeclared influence of many important German modernist literary and philosophical figures, including Nietzsche, Kraus, Rilke, Musil and Benn. Curiously, however, despite some striking common artistic and political interests and the targets of his razor-sharp critique, Krleža never directly addressed Brecht in his writings. In that absence, Brecht becomes one of the "irritating names" Krleža conspicuously disregarded, failing to affiliate with or distance himself from them (Lauer 1984).

Despite this striking silence, several critics have identified numerous sporadic analogies between the topics, genres, poetic strategies and even individual works of the two writers. Moreover, Krleža's plays and novels have benefited immensely from the application of the Brechtian "method" (Jameson 1998) by contemporary Croatian playwrights and adapters, and, even more so, by Croatian and Slovenian directors, all of whom have utilised Brechtian techniques to emphasise the contemporary critical relevance of Krleža's art and thought. This paper intends to discuss the vital yet under-acknowledged connection between these two modernist classics, reconfirming the shared artistic, cognitive and political value of their contributions to understanding and resisting the "micro- and macro-fascisms" currently plaguing the world – not to mention Krleža's imaginary "Blithuania", the telling codename for his lifelong political obsession with the (South) Eastern European national question.

Lada Čale Feldman is a full professor and chair of theatre studies in the Department for Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb in Croatia. Her research focuses on theatre and performance studies and feminist criticism. Besides her two co-authored and eight authored books in Croatian – including *Molière ponovljen* (*Molière Repeated*), published in 2025 – she also co-edited several special issues of journals and numerous collections, among which in English (with I. Prica and R. Senjković), *Fear, Death and Resistance: Croatia 1991–92*, 1993 and (with M. Blažević) *MISperformance: essays in shifting perspectives*, 2014. She has received six awards (five national and one international).

Rita Agatina Di Leo

Archipelago of Exceptions: When Visibility Becomes Censorable – Notes from Contemporary Italy

In "Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth" (1935), Bertolt Brecht links truth-telling to the capacity to intervene in reality and show it as transformable. To tell the truth means recognising the relations of force shaping the present while identifying, within their contradictions, the possibility of change. What, then, does it mean to speak the truth when the conditions of speech themselves are continuously redefined? Starting from this question, the paper investigates contemporary censorship in Italian performing arts as a field where power, artistic production and the conditions of speech are renegotiated.

Rather than treating censorship as a stable object, the research approaches it through its discontinuities: practices, discourses, expectations and institutional decisions that shape what can be thought, shown and heard. Brecht's claim that truth-telling requires responsibility on the part of the one who writes opens, within cultural production, onto a question of institutional responsibility: who sustains an artwork, who programmes it, and who determines the conditions under which it can appear? The paper examines three moments in contemporary Italian performance: the public reactions to Romeo Castellucci's *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God* (2010), the institutional controversy surrounding Marta Cuscunà's *Sorry, Boys* (2016), and the curatorial practices of the Santarcangelo Festival (2015, 2018, 2025). Considered together, these cases reveal shifts and continuities in the relationship between artistic freedom, institutional power and censorship.

Following Brecht, knowledge is a shared process between those who write and those who read. The research therefore emerges through encounters with artists and their experiences, making this relation part of its method and responsibility. What conditions make truth-telling possible today? Who is responsible for them? And how can research make censorship visible without reproducing the silencing it seeks to expose?

Rita Agatina Di Leo is a PhD candidate in the National Doctorate in Gender Studies at the University of Bari "Aldo Moro" and the University of Rome "La Sapienza" and a visiting researcher at the ICON Institute, Utrecht University. Her research explores the limits of freedom of expression in the performing arts through gender and performance studies, focusing on marginalised bodies and censorship in the 20th and 21st centuries. Her publications include work for FrancoAngeli, Routledge, Biennale of Venice, *Hystrio*, *Sinestesie* and *Engramma*.

Jure Gantar

Brecht and the Master-Servant Dialectic

It is well known that Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was one of Bertolt Brecht's favourite philosophers. Yet Brecht explicitly addressed Hegel's ideas in only one text, *Refugee Conversations* (*Flüchtlingsgespräche*), written between 1940 and 1941 during his exile in Finland. In one of its dialogues, he comments on Hegel's *Science of Logic* (*Wissenschaft der Logik*), describing it, in a striking hyperbole, as "one of the great humoristic works of world literature".

This paper focuses on another of Brecht's works from the same period, *Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti* (*Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*), a play whose title suggests that it, too, may have been informed by Hegel's thought. While several scholars and critics – from George Steiner to Hans Mayer and Nina Birkner – have noted parallels between the relationship between the landowner Puntila and his chauffeur Matti and that of the master and servant in Hegel's dialectic (*Herr-Knecht-Dialektik*), few have explored these connections in any depth. As a result, it remains unclear to what extent Brecht's dramatic practice reflects or departs from Hegelian theory.

To rectify this oversight, I analyse key scenes in Brecht's play and compare them with the stages of self-consciousness (*Selbstbewusstsein*) as described in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*). Although such an approach cannot conclusively demonstrate that Brecht modelled *Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti* after Hegel's master-servant dialectic, it does help to assess the viability of such a reading and, just as importantly, offers a new perspective on Hegel's famous allegory.

Jure Gantar holds a BA and an MA from the University of Ljubljana, as well as a PhD in drama from the University of Toronto. He is a professor of theatre at the Fountain School of Performing Arts at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada. The author of four books – *Dramaturgija in smeh* (*Dramaturgy and Laughter*, 1993), *The Pleasure of Fools* (2005), *The Evolution of Wilde's Wit* (2015) and *Eseji o komediji* (*Essays on Comedy*, 2022) – he has published more than one hundred articles and other scholarly work on dramatic theory, comedy, laughter, wit and contemporary theatre.

Miša Glišič

The Refugee as the Architect of the Third Space: Rethinking Brecht's Dialectics through Bhabha and Welsch

In his *Refugee Conversations*, Bertolt Brecht identifies the refugee as the ultimate dialectician – a figure forced by exile to continuously perceive the contradictions of the social order. Today, amidst the resurgence of "regressive, authoritarian (micro)politics" predicated on

exclusion and purity, Brecht's observation demands a theoretical update. This paper proposes reading Brecht's concept of "dark times" through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory and Wolfgang Welsch's concept of transculturality.

The central thesis is that the "darkness" of our time stems from a violent adherence to the outdated concept of singular, homogeneous national cultures (what Welsch terms "Herderian spheres"). Against this, the paper positions Brecht's refugee not merely as a victim of expulsion but as an inhabitant of Bhabha's "Third Space" – a zone of hybridity where cultural purity is impossible and identity is a matter of constant negotiation.

By applying Welsch's critique of multiculturalism (which separates) and advocating for transculturality (which entangles), we can reinterpret Brecht's estrangement effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*). Today, estrangement is not merely a theatrical technique but an ontological condition of the transcultural subject. Writing the "truth" today (referencing Brecht's "Five Difficulties …") therefore means exposing the lie of cultural purity. The paper argues that Bhabha's hybridity is the modern realisation of Brecht's dialectics: it disrupts the symbolic order of authoritarianism by demonstrating that, in a globalised world, we are all structural "refugees" from the illusion of a fixed identity.

Miša Glišič is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana, focusing on literary theory and cultural studies. Her research examines the intersections of postcolonial theory and contemporary literature, with a specific emphasis on hybridity and transculturality. Drawing on the works of Homi K. Bhabha and Wolfgang Welsch, she explores how the dissolution of traditional cultural boundaries redefines the notion of the subject in crisis. Her work aims to bridge the gap between classical modernist dialectics and postmodern theories of identity, analysing mechanisms of exclusion and belonging in the context of globalised socio-political shifts.

Jasmina Godec

Estrangement on Radio: Brecht, Listening and the Representation of Madness

The paper draws on Brecht's concept of estrangement and his reflections on radio as an apparatus of communication, placing them in dialogue with Mladen Dolar's thinking on voice and Neil Verma's work on radio dramaturgy and listening. It asks how Brecht's thought might be reconsidered beyond its established theatrical formulations and extended into radio drama and contemporary sound art. Amid information overload, the algorithmic mediation of reality, the banalisation of violence and the growing desensitisation to social suffering, listening as a critical practice becomes especially urgent.

Using a participatory radio play being developed for a live performance at the Museum of Madness, located in a former social care institution in Trate, the paper examines how sound dramaturgy and participatory structures can produce estrangement effects. Estrangement is understood not merely as an interruption of identification but as a procedure that distances listeners from what appears self-evident and places them in an active, reflective relation to what they hear. Voice, silence, fragmentation, montage and layered listening perspectives function not merely as aesthetic devices but as procedures that destabilise notions of madness, institutionalisation and social normality.

The central argument is that radio drama can serve as a contemporary site of Brechtian estrangement: not as a medium relying solely on identification and psychological immersion, but as one that positions the listener as an active co-creator of meaning. The paper thus extends Brecht's thought into radio art and considers listening as a form of "speech on our times."

Jasmina Godec is a journalist, radio producer and author, internationally certified integrative psychotherapist and doctoral student in the arts at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana. Her research and artistic work focus on radio drama, sound dramaturgy, voice and listening as aesthetic, ethical and political practices. In her doctoral research, she examines radio drama as an artistic medium for reflecting on and deconstructing madness, with the Museum of Madness in Trate as a case study. She works in cultural journalism, radio production and interdisciplinary projects connecting art, media, memory and mental health.

Sebastijan Horvat

Jože Možina's Interview with Tone Kerin on RTV Slovenia as an Example of a Learning-Play

On 20 July 2025, RTV Slovenia's programme "Intervju" aired a conversation with Tone Kerin, a missionary in Madagascar, conducted by journalist Jože Možina. We will subject the interview to a Brechtian analysis and attempt to identify a media event that, despite the journalist's intentions, becomes an example of a learning play. Ideas and values reach a breaking point in the interview, so roles reverse and inadvertently end up defending the opposing ideological pole. We treat this interview as a theatrical scene intended to be a clear, one-dimensional promotion of ideas – so to speak, the next installment in a right-wing "prolet-cult" series, but with each new scene (a question addressed to the interviewee), we encounter ever-new contradictions and "hidden" internal conflicts that gradually alter the expected and anticipated ideological narrative. This strange dance unfolds almost without the interviewee's will or intention, let alone the journalist's. The teacher and sage, who is also a shrewd rogue, finds himself, in a Brechtian manner, on our side of the perspective, opening a hidden window onto the material practices of a series of alienation effects, dialectical contradictions, role-playing and bodily postures.
Rest assured, if we're dealing with the alt-right's appropriation of rebellion against the elites, we'll end up in a class struggle sooner or later!

Sebastijan Horvat finished his studies in theatre direction at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana (UL AGRFT). He co-founded the independent theatre institute E.P.I. Centre. Since 2005, he has worked at UL AGRFT, where he teaches theatre directing and acting. He has directed in most Slovenian theatres and occasionally abroad. In 2005, he received the Young Director Award at the Salzburg Festival "Salzburger Festspiele 2005" – "Montblanc Young Directors Project Award", for the production *Alamut*. In 2008, he received the national Slovenian Prešeren Fund Award for theatre directing in the last two years. He has received numerous awards at the Maribor Theatre Festival and the Week of Slovenian Drama. At two consecutive international festivals – the 53rd and 54th BITEF – he received the Grand Prix.

Kristopher Imbrigotta

Taking Positions in Dark Times: Resistance, Authoritarianism and the Politics of Seeing in Brecht's *War Primer*

Bertolt Brecht's *War Primer* (*Kriegsfibel*), published in East Berlin in 1955, is a compact handbook for reading images against the grain of authoritarian spectacle. Pairing press photographs from the Second World War with terse four-line epigrams, Brecht interrupts the propaganda functions of mass imagery and trains readers to "take a position" rather than drift into the ready-made alignments offered by headline, caption and state narrative. Revising the book's montage method through the lens of today's US political and cultural situation – marked by renewed authoritarian rhetoric, attacks on institutions and an image-saturated media ecology – this paper argues that *War Primer* models a practice of resistant spectatorship that remains urgently usable. Brecht's photo-epigrams expose how war photographs distribute blame and innocence, how they aestheticise violence and how they conceal class interests and systems of command. By refunctioning images through estranging captions, Brecht produces a pedagogy of attention that speaks directly to contemporary conditions in which "truth" is not simply contested but algorithmically fragmented and affectively weaponised. The paper concludes by proposing *War Primer* as a transferable technique for counter-reading today's political imagery – rallies, mugshots, viral clips, memes and platform circulation – without collapsing historical specificity into easy analogy.

Kristopher Imbrigotta is associate professor of German Studies at the University of Puget Sound (Tacoma, USA). He serves as editor for the well-established monograph series *German Life and Civilization* (Peter Lang), and also served as co-editor of *E-CIBS* (2016–2023). He is the author/editor of the Bloomsbury/Methuen edition of Bertolt Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (2021). He also served on the international translation team for the newest edition of *Brecht on Theater* (Bloomsbury, 2014). This past summer, he co-organised the 18th IBS Symposium on "Brecht in the Anthropocene" in Canada. Forthcoming projects include: an anthology, *Brecht and Ecocriticism* (Camden House) and an article on socialism, infrastructure and the ecology of labour in two DEFA films (*German Screen Studies*).

Aleksandra Jovićević

Exiles and Émigrés, Then and Now

Since Brecht's exile (1933–1949), the migratory landscape has transformed, but the classification remains within the semantic sphere of *migrant* and retains its stigma. As emigration exponentially increases, especially after the Ceuta crisis (late July 2026), the image of the exiled person is crumbling, giving rise to many different names: outcasts, fugitives, displaced persons, refugees, exiles, asylum seekers, stateless persons, emigrants, nomads, illegal immigrants, foreigners, etc. The list of terms, more or less discriminatory, varies in different languages and expands each time new aspects emerge in the multifaceted world of migration. According to Bernhard Waldenfels (2011), the concept of stranger (*Fremd*) is used daily in all cultures and languages. It carries different cultural meanings and appears even in the arts, such as in Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*. Modernity has stripped the stranger of his aura; he is no longer someone who is welcomed with generosity and sympathy. Thus, the "guilt" of the migrants-emigrants is originary in an ontological sense. Since emigrating, their nonexistence becomes twofold: they do not exist in the place of arrival because they are distrusted, and they do not exist in the place of departure from which they are erased.

In my paper, I will try to explore the transformative condition of exiled artists, especially how they managed to create alternative models of citizenship and artistic creation. One of the main threads of my research deals with highlighting how the assumption of an *exiled* point of view – combined with the other axes that determine the construction of identity, such as race, class, gender and sexual orientation – enables the opening of new ontological, epistemological, political and ethical perspectives on contemporary issues of power, resistance, identity, citizenship, freedom of thought and movement, especially in the works of contemporary artists like Arkadi Zaides, Kepler-452, etc.

Aleksandra Jovićević is Professor of performance studies at the Department of History, Anthropology, Religion, Arts Performance (SARAS) at La Sapienza University in Rome and a visiting professor at the University of Arts in Belgrade, where she gained her BA degree. She earned her MA and PhD at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University (NYU) and was a Fulbright Visiting Fellow at Yale University. She founded and serves on the scientific board of the academic journal *The Anthology of Essays by the Faculty of Dramatic Arts* (Belgrade) and on the editorial board of *Biblioteca teatrale,* an academic journal of performing arts (Rome), for which she curated several issues. Her most recent publication (with Ana Vujanović) is *Architettura cognitiva e critica dei performance studies* (*Cognitive and Critical Architecture of Performance Studies*, 2026).

Agata Juniku

From Margins to Freedom, Centre to Avoid: Two Cases

At some public ceremony in the late 1980s, asked by a journalist about being considered always *on the margins*, Jean-Luc Godard answered: "Yes, but the margins hold a book together."

The figure of a political (real or internal) refugee who is thus a stranger (even to its own native surroundings) has long been present in society – of course, followed always by the theoretical discourse of their time – but it seems that in the current global context it can be attributed to the majority of the population. Political and economic processes have become so estranged and non-negotiable that practices of escaping, inhabiting the margins, withdrawing – while *drawing* and maintaining different *transversal lines of care* (Kunst) – might be understood as a Brechtian response to our time. In my paper, I would like to reflect upon two recent, seemingly different projects (2025) which both, in their way and specific context, reclaim, to paraphrase Bauman, freedom *from* genesis amnesia and freedom *to* solidarity: the extreme musical theatre performance, *Rotulus Homo Pendulum*, inspired by and dedicated to Slovenian avant-garde artist and *enlightener* Marko Brecelj, and an almost-guerrilla event *NE-Bitef,* which happened after the cancellation of the official theatre festival edition.

Agata Juniku is an associate professor at the Academy of Dramatic Art, University of Zagreb. She holds a DEA (Diplôme d'études approfondies) in philosophy from Université Paris 8 and a PhD from the University of Zagreb. She has followed theatre and dance professionally since 1988 – as a journalist and editor on Radio 101, Croatian Radio Third Programme (*Kazališ̌tarije, Odeon*) and in the journals *Zarez* and *Frakcija.* Her academic research mostly focuses on contemporary theories of performance, the construction and presentation of identity in theatre and procedures of political action in the context of performing practices, including radio art. She is the author of *Indoš i Živadinov, teatro-bio-grafije: sveto i ludičko kao modusi političkoga u teatru* (*Indoš and Živadinov, theatre-bio-graphies: The Sacred and the Ludic as Modes of the Political in Theatre*, 2019).

Elena Knopová

Unsettling the Familiar Again: Brechtian Strategies in Contemporary Slovak Theatre

The paper examines Brecht's reflections on theatre and society, as well as post-Brechtian staging strategies, through the production *Ota* (2025), written by playwright Michal Ditte and directed by Júlia Rázusová. The production is inspired by the biography of radio journalist Ota Plávková, who publicly opposed the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia and was subsequently subjected to prolonged political persecution. A parallel with the present is provided by the story of the journalist Laura, who faces attacks from a politically protected oligarchy (with references to the Gorilla Affair and the murder of journalist Ján Kuciak).

Although the production draws on authentic materials, it is not primarily documentary theatre. The artists seek to expose power relations as historically constructed and therefore subject to change. To this end, they employ a range of strategies of epic theatre and *Lehrstück*. The production thus becomes a model parable, while theatre itself becomes a site of critical learning through a dialectical process of *Einverständnis*. Yet in Slovakia, the didactic and openly ideological dimension of theatre was long rejected, not least because of the aesthetic doctrine imposed during the Normalisation period. This raises the question of why these strategies remain relevant today, and whether their contemporary reactivation can renew theatre's critical and socially transformative potential.

Elena Knopová, associate professor, is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Theatre and Film Research, Art Research Centre of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Her research focuses on contemporary European theatre and drama, with particular emphasis on thematic dramaturgies and transformations in the discourse of theatrical value, as well as on political and socially engaged forms of theatre, including community theatre. Her work also explores Bertolt Brecht's legacy in Slovak theatre, on which she has published several studies and articles. She regularly organises international conferences and leads workshops in theatre criticism. She also serves on the dramaturgical boards of the Slovak theatre festivals *Dotyky a spojenia* (Touchings and Connections) and *Nová dráma/New Drama*.

Ana Kocjančič

Brechtian Spatial Principles and Scenographic Minimalism in the Early Work of Niko Matul

In the presentation, we will discuss the early scenographic practices of Niko Matul (1928–1988) as a specific spatial articulation of the principles of Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre. The discussion focuses on the productions *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1957, SNT Drama Ljubljana) and *Schweik in the Second World War* (1958, SNT Drama Ljubljana), in which Matul establishes a distinctive scenographic model: a unified stage space based on a circular ground plan and conditioned by mechanical elements, incorporating numerous props that symbolically denote locations.

Matul's scenography constructs a coherent, abstract stage environment that is dynamically transformed through lighting changes, curtain arrangements and prop reduction. Such an approach reflects key principles of Brechtian scenographic thought, including non-illusionism, the exposure of the theatrical apparatus, functional minimalism and the montage-based organisation of scenes. This scenographic concept enables the transformation of settings through minimal means, which raises the broader question of the shift in Slovenian scenography from plastic scenography toward a more minimalist approach.

We shall also consider whether Matul adopts Brechtian principles merely at a formal level, in alignment with contemporary stage aesthetics, or whether he translates them into a specific spatial language grounded in Brecht's writings – one based on circular iconography, an open and transformable stage structure and scenography conceived as an active medium of interpretation that fosters audience participation and critical reflection.

The study thus situates Matul's work within the broader context of modernist scenographic practices. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the reception of Brechtian aesthetics in Slovenian theatre in the second half of the twentieth century.

Ana Kocjančič is a theatre historian, art historian, curator and gallerist. She completed her postgraduate studies at the Department of Art History at the University of Ljubljana with a thesis on *Scenography in Slovenian Drama Theatres between the Two World Wars (1918–1941)*. She helped prepare the theatre terminology dictionary and co-authored a related publication

(SAZU, 2007). Her research focuses on the history of Slovenian scenography, its relationship with the visual arts and the influence of European theatre and artistic movements. She wrote the monograph *Prostor v prostoru: scenografija na Slovenskem od 17. stoletja do leta 1991* (*Space Within Space: Scenography in Slovenia from the 17th Century to 1991*) and curated the accompanying exhibition. She is employed at the Slovenian Theatre Institute in Ljubljana and is currently pursuing a PhD at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana.

Jani Kovačič

Did Brecht Teach Us Anything? On Some of Brecht's "Stücke und Lieder"

Brecht is the most prominent representative of an artistic tradition rooted in the rich legacy of German cabaret. This tradition also encompasses figures such as Kurt Tucholsky, Ernst Busch, Erich Kästner and many others. Brecht was an excellent compiler and skillfully wove literary history into his vision and songs. Although he enjoyed performing his songs accompanied by guitar, they gained wider popularity only through the musical settings of Kurt Schwaen, Hanns Eisler, Paul Dessau and, most notably, Kurt Weill. Accompanied by live performance, we shall explore several of Brecht's songs and compare his own melodies with the settings of these composers. Brecht teaches us a form of tough-minded optimism.

Jani Kovačič is a Slovenian musician, singer-songwriter, writer, philosopher and teacher. He has been active on the Slovenian music scene since 1976. He writes poems, satires and popular songs as well as more complex sound pictures. Aphoristic style, ironic syllogisms and childish naivety enrich his lyrics. He has released many music albums and performed at numerous concerts, including music-cabaret programmes, and has also performed several Brecht songs. For most of his career (until his retirement in 2023), he worked as a philosophy professor at Gimnazija Bežigrad in Ljubljana.

Krištof Jacek Kozak

On How a Certain Bertolt B. Let Himself Be Ensnared by His Own Shadow

Perhaps even more than for his plays, Brecht is widely recognised as the founder and theorist of the first nonAristotelian conception of drama, which he termed *epic theatre*. As he writes in the *Short Organon*, epic theatre diverges from traditional theatre in virtually every respect and positions itself in systematic opposition to it. For this reason, the notion that Brecht also authored a play that can be situated within the most traditional understanding of dramatic form appears almost absurd. Yet it is accurate. Indeed, the play can be placed alongside the very small number of dramas – so few they can be counted on one hand – that adopt the dramatic structure found only in the "absolute", fully realised examples of ancient Greek tragedy as defined by Aristotle. Central here is the architecture of the plot, for which Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* remains the unsurpassed model, particularly in its depiction of a hero becoming ensnared in the web of his own actions until the moment of recognition.

Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* follows this structure with striking precision. The protagonist's fate unfolds through her relentless pursuit of the army in order to secure her family's survival, while the war takes from her, one by one, all three of her children. The tragedy of *Mother Courage* may even exceed that of *Oedipus Rex*, for at the end of Brecht's play the protagonist does not grasp the full extent of her loss; instead, she continues in her unreflective and desperate forward motion.

Krištof Jacek Kozak studied philosophy and comparative literature at the University of Ljubljana and received his PhD in comparative literature from the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada, in 2003. He is employed in the Department of Slovene Studies at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Primorska. He has published two monographs (the second one appeared in Serbian, Slovak and English translations) and several scholarly and professional articles. He has also worked as a theatre critic, translator and dramaturg. He has been a guest lecturer at various foreign universities.

Eva Kraševec

Puntila and Matti in Turbocapitalism

Master Puntila and His Man Matti is a comedy by Brecht that adds a new dimension to the classical philosophical dialectic of master-servant in the context of capitalism in the first half of the 20th century. Brecht's Marxist-inflected social critique crystallises in the character of an internally divided modern capitalist. Does his humanity, which comes to the fore in a state of drunkenness, speak of human nature, which unconsciously evades brutal capitalism, or is it merely performative, as is often the case in today's neoliberal corporate environment, in which companies promote equality, care for employees and a sustainable approach, but in doing so only mask the pursuit of constantly increasing profits, dismissal and precarisation?

The focal point of Puntila's duality is represented by his chauffeur Matti – read today as an exploited precarious worker – who adapts according to the master's schizophrenic alternation between a "humane" master or a tyrant and occupies a structural position of critical distance. The symposium paper will examine how the dialectic of master and servant operates in the era of contemporary capitalist realism, a system in which capitalism seems inevitable, and criticism is absorbed rather than leading to change. How can Brecht's theatrical work illuminate the state of capitalist realism today, demonstrate the intolerability of ethical performativity that takes the place of structural change, and point to possible alternatives? The paper argues that Brecht's play can expose the gap between ethical appearance and economic reality, encouraging a critical confrontation with the contradictions of contemporary capitalism.

Eva Kraševec studied dramaturgy at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana and at the Freie Universität in Berlin. Under the mentorship of professor Mladen Dolar, she completed her PhD on critical and subversive comedy at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana. She is employed by the Slovenian National Theatre Drama Ljubljana. She also works in other theatres, in non-institutional projects and writes performance texts. Furthermore, she publishes scientific and professional articles and is one of the editors of the *Theatre Bulletin of the SNT Drama Ljubljana*.

Sergio Lo Gatto

The Legacy of the Lehrstück in Contemporary Italian Playwriting: The Case of Davide Carnevali's *Classroom Plays*

The paper explores the contemporary legacy of Brecht's *Lehrstück* within Italian playwriting. While Brecht's original model aimed to instil doctrine through the radical sublimation of the individual into the mass, 21st-century adaptations reshape these political and pedagogical intentions for new institutional environments. The study investigates how the dialectical perspective – where theatre functions as a transformative tool for both performer and spectator – persists in modern dramaturgy.

As a primary case study, the paper analyses the work of Davide Carnevali (a prominent playwright and associate artist at the Piccolo Teatro di Milano – Teatro d'Europa) and his project *Classroom Plays*, tracing the shift from Brecht's industrial settings to the modern classroom. This contemporary model maintains the Brechtian character typification, while introducing a hybrid register that merges high philosophical discourse with pop culture.

The analysis focuses on two main structural elements: the role of the "actor-divulgator", who navigates the blurred boundary between character and performer, and metatheatrical stage directions that deconstruct theatrical conventions and support flexible, minimalist staging. Following the legacy of Brecht's *Lehrstücke,* theatre remains a vital framework for political engagement: by bridging text, performance and didactics, the presentation demonstrates how these modern learning plays fulfil a threefold political function: addressing pedagogical gaps in schools, questioning theatre's social efficacy and fostering a critical, conscious audience.

Sergio Lo Gatto is an assistant professor in performing arts at Link Campus University, Rome. He holds a PhD from Sapienza University, where he taught from 2019 to 2023. He currently teaches at the Italian National Academy of Dramatic Arts. His research focuses on theatre criticism, contemporary playwriting, acting techniques in educational contexts and the intersection between performativity and virtual environments. As a dramaturg and curator, he has consulted for the National Theatre Emilia Romagna Teatro (ERT), the Union des Théâtres de l'Europe and the National Theatre in Rome.

A former editor-in-chief of the webzine *Teatro e Critica*, he contributes to the national Rai Radio3 broadcast and various academic publications. He has published extensively on contemporary theatre and dance.

Milena Massalongo

"What you don't understand is the *technique*." Where We Stand Now, Measured against Brecht

Perhaps Brecht does not need updating. What if it is we who need to update ourselves through him? What if our time has not ceased to be Brecht's time but has simply lost its critical tools? Between the lines of his "Speech on Our Times" creeps the suspicion that conspicuous emergencies obscure long-term systemic urgencies. Climate change, restrictions on human rights and wars risk becoming the new normal. Yet, it is easier to resist the normalisation of these crises than that of endemic problems such as exploitation, the erosion of workers' rights and a paralysed political system, which have already become unquestioned normality. We are ready to play Antigone against fascisms; yet we laugh at Brecht's 1935 reframing: while condemning fascist violence, we should also ask what purpose it serves, who benefits, what is being protected. "Gentlemen, let us also speak about property relations." Today that strikes us as unaddressable. But then: "If the issue strikes you as utopian, you must ask yourself: why does it strike us as utopian?" Why do we no longer dare to address issues at their root, to think in down-to-earth terms? How much does a widespread sense of powerlessness have to do with this? To what extent has this powerlessness become indistinguishable from comfort? And to what extent does it depend on our humanising relationship with technique in every field, AI being its latest manifestation?

Milena Massalongo teaches German culture and literature, translation and linguistics at the University of Mantua. She holds a PhD in German studies (dissertation on Brecht and Heiner Müller) and a degree in aesthetics (supervised by G. Agamben). She was formerly a research fellow at the University of Verona, Roma Tre and the Italian Institute of German Studies, and has taught as a visiting professor at the academies of arts in Düsseldorf and Dresden. Among her publications are *Brecht gebrauchen* (co-ed., 2017), a special issue of *Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik* "Theaterbegriffe" (co-ed., 2022), *La rovina dell'egoista Johann Fatzer* by B. Brecht (2007), *Teatro (e prosa)* by H. Müller (ed., 2023), *Tragedia e teatro drammatico* by H. T. Lehmann (ed., 2022). Among her dramaturgical collaborations are *Fatzer geht über die Alpen* (Berliner Volksbühne and Teatro Stabile Torino, 2011–2012); *Disgraced/Dis-crimini* (Residenztheater Munich and Teatro Stabile Torino, dir. Martin Kušej, 2017–2018). Since 2021 she has been involved in an ongoing collaboration with CUE Press (Italian theatre/cinema publisher), currently planning a new Italian edition of Brecht's works.

Milorad Mićić

From Estrangement to Confrontation: The Post-Brechtian Theatre of Oliver Frljić

This paper takes as its point of departure the question of what constitutes Brecht's "Speech on Our Times" under contemporary conditions of neoliberalism, the rise of authoritarian politics, hastened militarisation, the normalisation of violence, post-truth and microfascisms, and how it might be actualised within contemporary post-Brechtian theatrical practices. Drawing on Bertolt Brecht's theoretical framework, particularly his concept of the estrangement effect, the paper examines its potential in contemporary theatre, focusing on the work of director Oliver Frljić.

The central thesis is that Frljić's theatre can be understood as a distinctly post-Brechtian practice. Rather than rejecting Brechtian techniques, Frljić relocates them within a different historical context and radicalises them. While Brecht conceived the estrangement effect as a tool for establishing critical distance, Frljić develops strategies of confrontation that shift the spectator from the position of a critical yet distanced observer to one of ethical and political co-responsibility.

Frljić's theatre does not produce truth as a stable value but rather as an event of conflict on stage and, consequently, as a conflictual confrontation with the audience. The production of conflict, discomfort and affective intensification has the potential to reconfigure the relationships between audience, theatre and social reality. In this context, the paper asks whether confrontation can be understood as a transformed or radicalised form of estrangement, or whether post-Brechtian theatre no longer operates primarily through distancing but rather through direct involvement, thereby establishing new modes of articulating a "speech on our times".

Milorad (Mišo) Mićić graduated in translation studies from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana in 2016. In 2021, he completed his Master's degree in speech forms at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana (UL AGRFT). For his MA thesis, *What is Hidden in Silence?*, he received the Academy Prešeren Award in 2022. He is currently a fourth-year doctoral student in theatre and performing arts at UL AGRFT, where he is working on his dissertation entitled *Power Relations in the Theatre of Oliver Frljić*. For more than twenty years, he has worked in independent theatre as an actor, dramaturg, director and producer. In recent years, he has increasingly focused on theoretical research alongside his artistic practice.

Vid Milaković

Aristotle and Brecht in Contemporary Theatre – The Clash of the Titans

Over the past two centuries, widespread Aristotelianism has gradually taken over European theatre and has put the spectator's empathic regard for dramatic characters at the forefront. This empathic regard, crucially, enables the spectator to experience emotional purification known as catharsis. At the beginning of the 20th century, Bertolt Brecht challenged Aristotle's ideas of imitation (*mimesis*) and empathic identification. His epic theatre, based on the estrangement effect, aims to establish a critical stance (*Haltung*) in the spectator towards the social issues illuminated by the performance. This paper evaluates their opposing understandings of theatre in light of the current social climate, contemporary audience expectations and the limited subversiveness of current artistic production. Which goal, catharsis or the formation of a critical stance that leads to social engagement, is more easily achieved in today's society, and why? Is there a difference between goals that are more easily achieved and those that are more urgent? The paper concludes that due to the increasing individualisation of society, the spectator is more "inclined" to perceive the theatre performance in a self-referential way and is thus more open to experiencing individual change (catharsis) than to forming a critical attitude towards current societal structures. At the same time, the contemporary audience is highly educated, privileged and stable. It prioritises empathetic engagement as the most important criterion for "spoken" theatre, which is more in line with Aristotle's conception of the theatre, which uses the strategy of empathic regard as a tool for achieving catharsis. I conclude that the subversive (societal) role of theatre, similar to that of the other art forms, is severely limited, since the space of art in capitalist-parliamentarianism has become a place of reconciliation rather than a place of social resistance. In conclusion, I propose possible solutions to the "impotence" of contemporary theatre in promoting (necessary) social change.

Vid Milaković is a screenwriter, director and producer. He studied at New York University in Abu Dhabi, where he graduated in psychology and film. For his film *T(h)rust* (2022), he received a scholarship from the Film and New Media department and won the main student award at the SICA Film Festival in Los Angeles. At NYU Tisch in New York (2021/22), he independently produced the short film *Ocean Without a Floor*, which was screened as part of the out-of-competition programme at the Sarajevo Film Festival 2023. As a young filmmaker, Vid participated in the Campus Talents programme at the Motovun Film Festival in 2022 and visited the Zagreb Film Festival a year later. His graduation film, *But I Love You* (2023), screened at the Catania Film Festival in Italy and the Prvi Kadar IFF in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He is currently finishing a master's in film directing at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana.

Aldo Milohnić

Brecht's "Theatre for the Scientific Age" in the Dystopian Times

As we can read in Brecht's *Journals*, the main thesis of the *Short Organon for the Theatre* is that "a certain form of learning is the most important pleasure of our age, so that it has to occupy an important place in our theatre". This pleasure, which is both learning and entertainment, is for him the enjoyment that a "theatre for the scientific age" must generate in its audience. The dialectical relationship between learning and entertainment is certainly an important premise not only of the *Organon* but of Brecht's entire theory of theatre. He placed this relationship on solid materialist foundations, for it contains a contradiction that cannot be resolved under the conditions of the capitalist mode of production, "when knowledge is acquired in order to be sold on for the highest possible price, and when even a high price still involves further exploitation by those who pay it". As long as the purpose of learning is

to acquire qualifications to increase the price of labour on the labour market, learning cannot be pleasure but a necessity of life; likewise, workers cannot get rid of forced labour as long as labour is "free" as wage labour, that is, as long as they "freely" sell their labour force on the labour market. If wage labour is caught in the paradox that it is forced precisely because it is free, then "it is not a matter of freeing labour but of abolishing it", as Marx and Engels realised already in *The German Ideology*. However, in today's "dark" times of late, neoliberal capitalism, the production of knowledge still goes hand in hand with the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, and it is still "easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism". What Fredric Jameson adds to this dystopian aporia is particularly important for our consideration: we should ask ourselves "how to jumpstart the sense of history so that it begins again to transmit feeble signals of time, of otherness, of change, of Utopia". Thus, is there still any space for utopian thinking in these dystopian times? Is there still any hope for a "theatre for the scientific age"?

Aldo Milohnić is a professor of the history of theatre at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana and the head of the Theatre and Film Studies Centre. He is the author of, among others, *Umetnost v* času *vladavine prava in kapitala* (*Art in Times of the Rule of Law and Capital*) and *Gledališče upora* (*Theatre of Resistance*), co-author of several other books (including Čas *je za Brechta!* [*It's Time for Brecht!*]) and edited volumes (including *Brecht/Gestus*). A member of the editorial boards of the performing arts journals *Amfiteater* and *European Journal of Theatre and Performance*, he is also a dramaturg and curator of exhibitions, conferences and symposiums of the performing arts. His research interests include the history and theory of theatre, contemporary performing practices and the sociology of culture and arts.

Ana Perne

Brecht's Theory as a Factor in the Transformation of Acting Practices in Slovenia

The contribution examines the influence of Bertolt Brecht's theatre theory on the development of acting practices in Slovenia, with particular emphasis on the transition from psychological realism to more distanced, reflective modes of acting. Brecht's concept of epic theatre – especially through the estrangement effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) as a strategy for the deconstruction of mimetic identification and the destabilisation of the illusionistic paradigm – significantly reshaped the understanding of the actor's relationship to the character, the text and the audience.

In the Slovenian context, this influence emerged gradually and with a certain degree of restraint; more pronounced shifts were rare and became more visible only with the rise of postmodernist tendencies. The analysis focuses on key performative moments that contributed to the transformation of acting expression, the coexistence of psychologically motivated and more distanced, reflective approaches and the shift in the understanding of the actor's expressive apparatus (body and voice) as a carrier of citationality and narrativisation. Within the history of Brecht's works on Slovenian stages, one significant aspect is the incorporation of Brechtian procedures into postdramatic theatre practices.

Particular attention is devoted to the question of how Slovenian actresses and actors moved from becoming acquainted with Brecht's theory to practically implementing it – often selectively and fragmentarily – the role played by specific historical and sociopolitical circumstances, and to the extent to which aesthetic form also develops into a political gesture. In this way, the contribution opens a broader discussion of the past and present relevance of Brecht's theory, its impact on the understanding of acting as a critical and socially engaged artistic practice, and its reinterpretation in contemporary theatre.

Ana Perne graduated in dramaturgy from the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, and in French language and literature and the sociology of culture at the Faculty of Arts, both part of the University of Ljubljana. For several years, she worked as a performing arts critic and collaborated with various theatres and festivals in different roles, including editor, discussion moderator and translator. Since December 2014, she has been employed at the Slovenian Theatre Institute. Among other projects, she co-authored the exhibition *Borštnik Bound!* marking the 50th anniversary of the Maribor Theatre Festival in 2015. In 2018, a year dedicated to Ivan Cankar, she co-led the symposium *A Century of the Bondsmen*. In 2023, she authored and curated *The Landmarks of Theatre Acting*, an exhibition tracing the development of acting in Slovenia.

Gregor Pompe

Brecht's Idea of Epic Theatre in the Operatic Context of His Time

In theatre history, Brecht's "Notes on the Opera 'The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny'" have undoubtedly been regarded as a turning point. In them, Brecht clearly articulates the concept of epic theatre, which he places in a dialectical relationship with dramatic theatre. What seems unusual, however, is that this new concept of theatre was conceived as a response to the "operatic situation", or rather to its specific form, which Brecht understood as "culinary opera". This raises the question of which operas Brecht actually knew and considered "culinary". To what extent was his view of opera in fact markedly conservative, and is it possible that in his brief survey he deliberately overlooked certain more contemporary works? Indeed, in operatic works created in the 1920s – immediately preceding *Mahagonny* – one can identify numerous elements that Brecht later integrated into his concept of epic theatre. This paper therefore aims to place Brecht's ideas about theatre within the operatic context of his time, identify possible influences and reactions and reveal the necessary dialectical dependence of Brecht's concepts on traditional operatic form and on Wagner's conception of music drama.

Gregor Pompe studied comparative literature, German language and musicology at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana, where he obtained his PhD in musicology. He is a full professor in the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Arts, and his research interests primarily focus on contemporary music, music theatre and the semantics of music. He has published numerous scholarly articles in international journals as well as several monographs. For his work, he received the Mantuani Prize of the Slovenian Musicological Society. He is a member of various professional bodies and is also active as a music critic, composer, opera dramaturg and organiser of musical life.

Goran Sergej Pristaš

Composite Gaze and Vulnerable Assemblies

This paper reconsiders Brecht's concepts of *Verfremdungseffekt* and *Lehrstück* in the context of contemporary "dark times" marked by climate crisis, war and the erosion of perceptual and political horizons. Extending Brecht's claim that new material conditions demand new theatrical forms, it argues that climate change resists not only dramatic structure but also postdramatic modes of representation, as it destabilises scale, temporality and the possibility of a coherent viewpoint.

In this situation, estrangement can no longer rely on critical distance alone. Instead, it shifts toward a displacement within perception itself. The paper introduces the concept of the composite gaze as a transformation of estrangement: a mode of viewing that emerges from the material, sensory and relational conditions of performance. Rather than positioning the spectator outside the event, it destabilises perception from within, producing situated and fragmented modes of attention.

At the same time, Brecht's *Lehrstück* is rethought through practices that foreground vulnerability, interdependence and asymmetry between performers and spectators. Drawing on the project *To = To*, created by Peti ansambl HNK Ivan pl. Zajc Rijeka, the group CO2...a couple of artists and collaborators, the paper examines how such "vulnerable assemblies" create performative environments where perception is continuously reconfigured and knowledge is not transmitted but negotiated. Rather than representing crisis, these practices construct conditions in which perception itself becomes a site of political and aesthetic transformation, opening space for new forms of relation and collective imagination.

Goran Sergej Pristaš is a dramaturg and member of the group CO2...a couple of artists together with Nikolina Pristaš; co-founder and member of BADco. performing arts collective. He is a professor of dramaturgy at the Academy of Dramatic Arts of the University of Zagreb and the head of the Working Group for Cultural Strategy and Cultural Development of the City of Zagreb. As a researcher and curator at the Centre for Drama Art (CDU), he was one of the initiators of the project Zagreb – Cultural Kapital of Europe 3000. With his projects and collaborations (BADco., *Frakcija*), he has participated in the Venice Biennale 2011 and 2016, documenta 12, ARCO and numerous festivals and conferences. He mentors and teaches courses in performance dramaturgy, writing for performance, analytical writing, dramaturgy and choreography, as well as collaborative practices at Uniarts (Stockholm), JLU (Giessen), Statens Scenekunstskole (Copenhagen), P.A.R.T.S. (Brussels), KHiO Oslo, etc. He was the first editor-in-chief (1996–2007) of *Frakcija* magazine for the performing arts. His latest book is *Exploded Gaze* (2018).

Francesco Puccio

Reassessing the Ruins: Sophocles' Antigone as a Brechtian *Lehrstück* in Archaeological Spaces

In response to the Symposium's call to re-examine Bertolt Brecht's political and pedagogical theatre against contemporary realities, this paper offers a reinterpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone* through the framework of the Brechtian *Lehrstück*. Moving beyond traditional views of classical tragedy as a fixed canonical monument, it investigates how the drama functions as an open performative model for collective learning, probing the unresolved tensions between civic responsibility, dissent and state violence. This inquiry centres on analysing performances staged within archaeological contexts. Far from serving as neutral historical backdrops or objects of tourist contemplation, ancient heritage sites operate as active dramaturgical agents. The material presence of ruins, stratified histories and structural constraints directly generates the estrangement effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*), dismantling theatrical illusion and preventing passive audience identification. Drawing on spatial dramaturgy, most notably The Living Theatre's radical engagement with Brecht's *Antigonemodell 1948*, the paper argues that heritage spaces activate a uniquely Brechtian dialectic. The archaeological site simultaneously exposes the historical distance of the ancient text and lays bare the persistence of contemporary mechanisms of control. Bridging Brecht's "theatre of the scientific age" with modern site-specific practices, this contribution aims to demonstrate how staging *Antigone* in archaeological environments reactivates the public and political function of performance. By transforming ancient stone from a comforting artefact into a critical *medium*, theatre equips audiences to confront the fractures of the present and rethink the relationship between memory, space and collective responsibility.

Francesco Puccio is a researcher in the history of theatre and performing arts at eCampus University. As a theatre director, playwright and scholar, his work bridges academic inquiry and practice-led research, focusing on the performativity of classical myth, spatial dramaturgy and the practical activation of cultural heritage on the modern and contemporary stage. His research explores how ancient performance contexts and dialectical methodologies offer critical tools for engaging with contemporary political realities. His recent monographs include *Le parole e i gesti della divinazione: Tiresia in scena* (2025) and *In sacrificio: Il personaggio di Ifigenia tra teatro e cinema* (2025).

Jakob Ribič

"The Eyes of the Stranger": What Might Be the Contemporary Form of *Verfremdung*?

In his essay "What Is Epic Theatre?", Walter Benjamin illustrates the concept of *Verfremdung* with a famous example: a family row on the verge of violence is abruptly suspended by the appearance of a stranger at the door. In "The Author as Producer", Benjamin further suggests that the stranger's viewpoint is actually that of the epic dramatist.

This paper takes Benjamin's example as its starting point. It focuses on the figure of the stranger as a structural position from which violence can be perceived and brought into view. Yet who, precisely, is the stranger from Benjamin's illustration? Sara Ahmed argues lucidly that the stranger is not someone simply not recognised but *someone recognised precisely as a stranger*, and thus shaped by histories and power relations. In her more recent works, however, she proposes a reappropriation of this figure. She describes the "feminist killjoy" as a subject "out of place", not fully at home within the sedimented categories and habitual assumptions of everyday life, and thus alienated from dominant social orientations. Yet it is precisely this estrangement that brings such orientations into her view – and may, consequently, allow the feminist killjoy to know more about them.

In this sense, the paper asks whether Ahmed's concept of the "feminist killjoy" might today be understood as the "stranger" from Walter Benjamin's illustration; as a figure whose gaze is that of the epic dramatist who perceives social violence and brings it into view. The paper thus considers whether such a reconfiguration of the stranger might open a pathway toward rethinking a contemporary form of *Verfremdung*, one of the foundational concepts of Bertolt Brecht's theatre.

Jakob Ribič is a member of the research group at the UL AGRFT, where, as part of his doctoral studies, he researched Bertolt Brecht's life and work. He publishes scholarly and academic articles in various publications,

including the leading international journal in Brecht studies (*The Brecht Yearbook*). Together with Aldo Milohnić, he co-edited the Slovenian edition of *Buying Brass* and *A Short Organon for the Theatre*, while a second volume of Brecht's writings is currently also in preparation. He has received two Academy Prešeren Awards and serves on various theatre committees and juries.

Anthony Squiers

Beyond Aesthetics: Brecht's Ontological Break with Aristotle

Brecht's break from Aristotle is a well-worn path in Brechtian scholarship, extensively discussed since the beginning of scholarly work on him. In 1939, for example, Walter Benjamin writes: "Brecht introduces the dramaturgy of his theatre as a 'non-Aristotelian' one, just as Riemann introduced a non-Euclidean geometry [...] Riemann refused the axiom of parallels; what Brecht refuses is Aristotelian catharsis" (*Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock. London: Verso, 1998, 18). Since Benjamin, scholars have largely understood this paradigm shift as an aesthetic one. By taking his identification of catharsis as the defining point of rupture, Brecht's break with Aristotle has been interpreted in terms of theatrical form and spectator effect – estrangement, anti-illusionism and the disruption of empathy.
However, this paper demonstrates that *such an interpretation fundamentally misreads the nature of the break*. Brecht's rupture is not primarily aesthetic but ontological: it concerns the underlying assumptions about the structure of reality upon which Aristotle's account of drama is built. What scholars have identified as the rupture point is only a derivative effect of a more fundamental schism.

Brecht's enduring relevance for our "dark times" underscores the importance of this line of inquiry. His project hinges on a willingness to interrogate the most fundamental assumptions about reality itself, a move that remains insufficiently explored. At a moment when domination, crisis and violence present themselves as natural and inevitable, attending to Brecht's ontological rupture offers a way to expose their contingency and reopen the horizon of transformation.

Anthony Squiers holds a PhD in political science from Western Michigan University and a post-doctoral certificate (Habilitation) in American studies from the Universität Passau. He is a faculty member at AMDA College and Conservatory of the Performing Arts in Los Angeles and a Fellow at the Berlin Institute of Critical Theory. He has written extensively on Brecht and has won several grants and awards. His publications include the books: *An Introduction to the Social and Political Philosophy of Bertolt Brecht*; *Philosophizing Brecht*; and *Bertolt Brecht's Adaptations and Anti-capitalist Aesthetics Today*. He is also a founding member of the editorial board of the Brecht Studies Book Series published by Camden House. He is co-editor of *E-CIBS*, the performance journal of the International Brecht Society.

Lara Tarbuk

From the Margins of Language: Exile and Conversation in Bertolt Brecht and Senthuran Varatharajah

At a table in a railway station cafe, the two refugees Ziffel and Kalle in Brecht's *Refugee Conversations* (1940/41) subject the society they have fled to critical scrutiny. Their ideological analysis rests on both their position of exile and the medium of their conversation, which ultimately leads them to reflect on language and its limits. The experience of flight and the event of conversation – as the title itself announces – become the twin pillars of the reflection that unfolds.

Senthuran Varatharajah's novel *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* (*Before the Signs Increased*), published in 2016 in the midst of the so-called refugee crisis, takes up the literary-historical tradition of Brecht's *Refugee Conversations* and updates it: instead of meeting at the transitory space of a railway station cafe, the conversation between two formerly displaced people now takes place via Facebook chat – and thus in writing. Although fixed in signs, their languages prove to be fugitive, just as they themselves once were. Here too, the two interlocutors Valmira and Senthil are led back to the foundations of their exchange: the experience of flight and the preconditions of their language.

The paper examines the lines of flight between these two texts – Brecht's *Refugee Conversations* and Varatharajah's *Vor der Zunahme der Zeichen* – and reads them as engagements with the conditions and possibilities of speaking in and about exile. As such, they become seismographs of the exiles of their respective presents.

Lara Tarbuk is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for German Studies and Media Cultures at TU

Dresden. She studied German and Slavic Studies in Belgrade, Freiburg and Berlin. From 2020 to the beginning of 2025, she researched and taught at FU Berlin, where she completed her doctoral dissertation on Bertolt Brecht's and Ödön von Horváth's early plays. Her research interests include Weimar-era literature, drama and theatre and postmigrant contemporary literature. She recently published *Aufführungen der Republik: Dramatische Entwürfe theatraler Ereignisse in Stücken von Bertolt Brecht und Ödön von Horváth* (2026).

Agata Tomšič

Why Stage Brecht in the Age of *Capitalist Realism*? Two Practical Examples that Seek to "Change the World" through Theatre and the Power of Imagination

In 2009, Mark Fisher published a *pamphlet* centred on the claim that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism". By 2022, *Der Spiegel* reported that billionaires were rereading Marx to save capitalism from itself. In this context, the theatre company ErosAntEros drew on two of Brecht's 1930s texts to challenge the global political-economic status quo, pursuing the utopia that rereading Brecht can help us to transcend capitalism. The company transposes Walter Benjamin's concepts of *quotation* and *dialectical image* onto their practice, approaching one of Brecht's most radical essays, "Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth", and the play through which he sought to spread Marxist thought to the masses, *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*. Written after the 1929 stock market crash and Hitler's rise to power, the two texts focus on the manipulation of information, finance, capital and worker exploitation, anticipating the years of economic crisis, industrial failures, land abandonment and poverty that led to World War II. ErosAntEros has staged both texts in multidisciplinary forms, where the spoken word engages in a powerful dialogue with music and video; in the latter case, within an international and multilingual production centred on one of the most radical and provocative music bands of the last forty years, Laibach.

My paper will examine these topics from the dual perspective of an artist and scholar involved in these creative processes, proposing Brecht as a model for acting upon the present through the power of imagination – a vital faculty our contemporary societies are increasingly neglecting.

Agata Tomšič obtained her Master's degree in Performing Arts at the University of Bologna in 2013. Since then, she has published essays, edited books, curated programmes, participated in international conferences. Alongside her studies, she trained with Socìetas, Schaubühne, Odin Teatret, Motus, Living Theatre, Teatro Valdoca, Fanny & Alexander, Anagoor and other leading figures from the contemporary performance scene. In 2010, she co-founded the theatre group ErosAntEros, producing multidisciplinary politically engaged performances with major European theatres and festivals. From 2018 to 2026, she co-directed POLIS Teatro Festival in Ravenna, further affirming her role as curator and manager within international projects and networks. In 2023, she obtained a Second Level Master Course in 20th Century and contemporary singing – vocal music and musical theatre from the State Conservatory of Ravenna. In 2026, she became the artistic director of Mittelfest in Cividale del Friuli for 2027–2029.

Tomaž Toporišič

In the Footsteps of Brecht's Fundamental Reforms of Dramaturgy in Contemporary Performing Arts

The paper proceeds from the premise that, alongside Artaud, Brecht enacted one of the most radical ruptures with the Eurocentric dramatic tradition, profoundly shaping postwar theatre practices. As Alain Badiou observes, Brecht "proposes and tests fundamental reforms of dramaturgy" across writing, acting and directing, thereby establishing theatre as a form of "collective historical clarification".

Marking the seventieth anniversary of Brecht's death, the paper situates (post-)Brechtian paradigms within contemporary performance. It connects Brecht's concepts of epic and dialectical theatre with post-Brechtian trajectories in the works of Heiner Müller and Elfriede Jelinek, Oliver Frljić and Anja Hilling, and Sebastijan Horvat and Milena Marković.

Brecht's reconfiguration of theatre entails the rejection of psychology, the hermeneutics of meaning, linguistic play and the parousia of the body in favour of an "apparatus for the construction of truths" (Badiou). In this

sense, Brecht emerges – following Roland Barthes – as an exemplary figure of twentieth-century theatrical transformation. As a Marxist thinker of the sign, he shifts theatre from expression to signification. Consequently, the playwright ceases to function as a covert persuader and instead openly negotiates the conditions of spectatorship (Wright), inaugurating new inquiries into the politics of performance.

The paper further examines how the marginal, "overgrown path" Benjamin identifies in Brecht's work persists in contemporary performing arts, and how it has been transformed. Particular attention is given to the capacity of contemporary practices, in line with the Brechtian Gestus, to expose the unstable boundary between social violence and violence against society, as well as the tension between artistic engagement and the limits of its subversive efficacy.

Tomaž Toporišič is a dramaturg and theatre theorist, a full professor of dramaturgy and performing arts studies at the Academy of Theatre and Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana, and an associate member of the Slovene Academy of Science and Arts (SAZU). He has written seven books on contemporary performing arts. His latest research articles include "Slovene Historical Avant-garde and Europe in Crisis" in *Theatralia* (2022) and "Theatre Displeasure Touching Society's Raw Nerves: Castellucci and Frljić" in *Nordic Theatre Studies* (2025). He served as artistic director and dramaturg of Mladinsko Theatre and, in 1995, co-founded Exodos Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts. He curated several exhibitions for the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space (PQ). His work seeks to foster dialogue between theatre theory and practice.

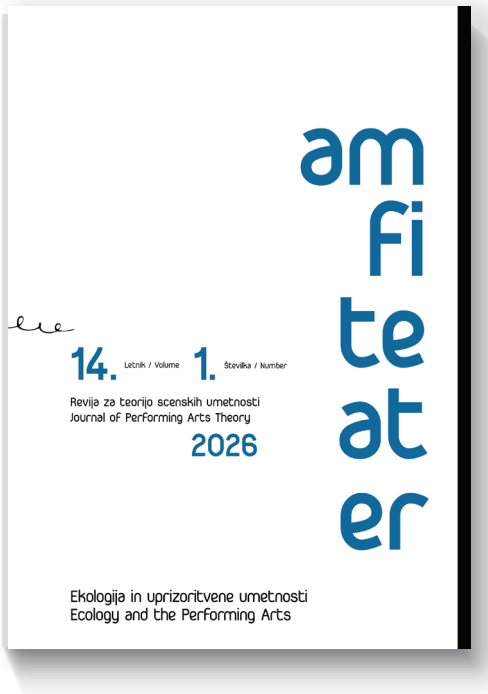
Yujia Zheng

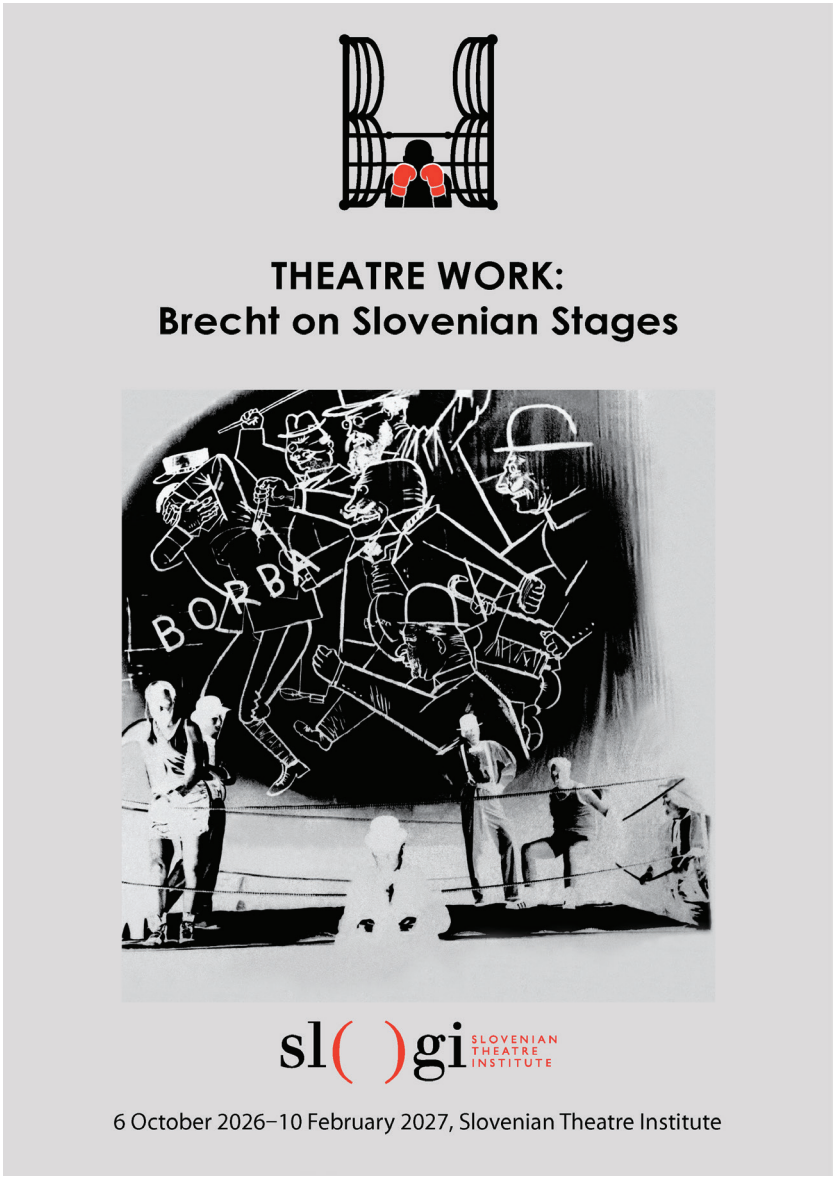
Estranging the Hyper-Spectator: Brecht after Rancière

Starting from Rancière's critique of the presuppositions underlying Brecht's theatre theory, I reconsider the object of *Verfremdungseffekt* (V-effect). In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière argues that "viewing is also an action" (13). Performance, meanwhile, "subsists, as a spectacle, an autonomous thing, between the idea of the artist and the sensation or comprehension of the spectator" (14). As a "third thing", it excludes "any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect" (14–15). If spectators are already active, I ask: when spectating is continually directed toward the "third thing", can spectating itself still become an object of observation? Inspired by Rancière's "hyper-theatre", I use "hyper-spectator" to describe a spectator whose activity is repeatedly affirmed. Drawing on Liz Tomlin and empirical audience research, I argue that when this activity is affirmed while spectating remains directed toward the "third thing", such spectating may become habitual. As a result, the spectator's social position and the ideological conditions shaping their spectating may increasingly be taken as natural, obscuring the historical specificity and mutability of spectating itself.

In this sense, the hyper-spectator makes a return to Brecht's V-effect necessary. The point is not to redefine the (hyper-)spectator as passive but to bring the spectator's activity to bear on spectating itself. Using Maaike Bleeker's spectatorship analysis, I examine how Milo Rau's *Compassion* and Dries Verhoeven's *No Man's Land* position spectators in relation to what is presented, asking whether this positioning might bring spectating itself into view and open it to questioning and critique.

Yujia Zheng is a doctoral student at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana. His research focuses on spectatorship in contemporary theatre, particularly on how spectators engage with exposed materials.





The exhibition *Theatre Work: Brecht on Slovenian Stages* offers a concise overview of the profound impact Bertolt Brecht – the great German playwright, poet, prose writer, essayist as well as theoretician, director, and reformer of the theatre – has had on Slovenian theatre. The title of the exhibition is inspired by the celebrated book *Theaterarbeit*, which documented productions by Brecht's Berliner Ensemble. Similarly, this exhibition explores Brecht and theatre work, but within the context of the history of Slovenian theatre.

The first encounter between Brecht and Slovenian theatre took place in 1937, when Bojan Stupica staged *The Threepenny Opera* at SNT Drama Ljubljana, under the title *The Beggar's Opera*. Brecht returned to Slovenian stages only some time later, but from the mid-1950s on, he became a regular part of Slovenian theatre repertoires. An average of at least one of his works has been staged per year ever since. In professional theatres, Brecht has been staged most often at SNT Drama Ljubljana and SNT Maribor - Drama, while his works have also regularly featured in the curriculum of the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television.

The opening of the exhibition on October 6 at 6 p.m. at the Slovenian Theatre Institute – Theatre Museum will simultaneously launch the international symposium *Speech on the (Dark) Times: Brecht's Thought Then and Now*, which will take place until 9 October in the same venue hosting the exhibition.

The visual design is based on a photograph of the production *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (music by Kurt Weill, libretto by Bertolt Brecht), directed by Hinko Leskovšek, SNT Opera and Ballet Ljubljana, premiere 15 July 1969. Photo source: SLOGI Iconotheque – Theatre Museum.

The International *Amfiteater* Symposium
Speech on the (Dark) Times: Brecht's Thought Then and Now
6–9 October 2026
Ljubljana, Slovenian Theatre Institute

Heads of the symposium: Aldo Milohnić and Jakob Ribič

Organising committee: Aldo Milohnić, Maja Murnik, Jakob Ribič, Tomaž Toporišič, Gašper Troha, Markus Wessendorf and Noah Willumsen

The symposium is organised by:
The Slovenian Theatre Institute
The Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana
Amfiteater, Journal of Performing Arts Theory

In collaboration with:
Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv (Akademie der Künste, Berlin)
International Brecht Society
Goethe-Institut Ljubljana
National and University Library
Založba /*cf. Press
Anton Podbevšek Teater
Cankarjev dom

Programme booklet edited by: Aldo Milohnić and Jakob Ribič
Language editing: Jana Renée Wilcoxen
Designed by: Nina Šturm
Published by: Slovenian Theatre Institute, represented by Gašper Troha
Ljubljana, October 2026

amfiteater

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AGRFT UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television

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NARODNA IN UNIVERZITETNA KNJIŽNICA

ZALOŽBA */cf.

APT Anton Podbevšek Teater

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The symposium is organised within the framework of the research programme UL AGRFT Theatre and Interart Studies (P6-0376), co-financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) from the state budget.

ARIS Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency