

CALL FOR PAPERS

Brecht in / and Asia

13th Symposium of the International Brecht Society

19-23 May 2010

University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Honolulu

To reassess the complex interconnections between Brecht's work and various Asian cultures at the beginning of the 21st century, the International Brecht Society invites scholars and artists in theater, performance, and other cultural fields as well as doctoral students to an interdisciplinary symposium in Spring 2010 on the topic *Brecht in / and Asia*.

Brecht was not the only Western modernist to turn to Asian theater and thought for inspiration, but he was an especially astute observer of the cultural encounter with this "other," which had such a significant impact on his work. Conversely, Brecht's own theater and thought returned to inspire new forms of political and aesthetic experiments in many parts of Asia. With the dynamic, ongoing echoes of this mutual relationship as point of departure, the symposium will provide a forum to explore its multiple dimensions. This call for papers broadly understands "Asia" to refer to the geo-political spaces of a "pluralized Asia" as well as to the reach of Asian traditions into the cultures of Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The organizational committee, consisting of Eiichiro Hirata (Keio University, Tokyo), Hans-Thies Lehmann (Goethe University, Frankfurt), Marc Silberman (University of Wisconsin, Madison), Markus Wessendorf (University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Honolulu), and Erdmut Wizisla (Bertolt Brecht Archive, Berlin), seeks proposals for papers, posters, panels, and workshops in the following four areas:

I. Asia's Brecht: Theater artists and ensembles throughout Asia refer to Brecht as a major influence on their dramaturgies, aesthetics, and theater pedagogies. Building on the experience of the IBS's 7th Symposium in Hong Kong (1986, "Brecht in Asia and Africa"), we look back at major advocates of Brecht in Asia, e.g., Korea Senda and Tatsuji Iwabuchi in Japan, Huang Zuolin in China, and Rudraprasad Sengupta in India, who were instrumental in popularizing Brecht in their respective countries. How did they adapt Brecht to local circumstances and performance traditions? Do Brecht's ideas shape the work of contemporary directors and companies, for example the intercultural theater of Ong Keng Sen (Singapore), the political theater of Crescent Moon Theater (Thailand), the multicultural theater of the Golden Bough Performance Society (Taiwan), the community theater of PETA (Philippines), and the postmodern productions of Makoto Nakashima's Bird Theater Company (Japan)? Which concepts, texts, and practices have they adapted and how did local performers, audiences, and critics respond? What is the current status of reception, translation, and research concerning Brecht (and not just with regard to his theater texts and theories)?

II. Brecht's Asia: Brecht's engagement with different Asian cultures challenges us to identify and consider their traces throughout his work, and – as in the case with "Asia's Brecht" – to reconsider the impact on current intercultural debates: reworkings of Japanese Nô plays, reactions to China's politics in the 1950s, reflections on Chinese acting, ideas on stage design and theater aesthetics, observations on Chinese painting, adaptations of stylistic and poetological aspects of Asian poetry, and borrowings from Asian philosophies. It may be worthwhile to reinvestigate the contributions of Brecht's collaborators to his adaptations from East Asian sources (for example, Hauptmann's work on Zenchiku's *Taniko* for *He Who Says Yes*). Some refer to Brecht's "Chinese attitude" and note that the *gestus* of his "Chinese poems" is closer to the original texts than to the English translations on which they are based. What were Brecht's contacts with or reactions to the large community of Asian immigrants during his exile years in California? There is textual material still to discover, for example the recently reconstructed *The Judith of Shimoda*, adapted from Yuzo Yamamoto's play, which will have its American premiere during the Symposium. Furthermore, recent postcolonial and post-orientalist approaches suggest critical reflection on Brecht's

appropriations from Asian cultures. How does knowledge of the marginalized and oppressed inscribed in his work move transculturally, e.g., in German director Fritz Bennewitz's stagings of Brecht in India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka? How do Brechtian aesthetics cross boundaries into Asian-American plays by the likes of Philip Kan Gotanda, Jessica Hagedorn, David Henry Hwang, Naomi Iizuka and Young Jean Lee?

III. Asia beyond Brecht: Brecht's Epic Theater and his writings on culture and politics spoke to the crises and ruptures of the 20th century. In the new millennium conflicts in Islamic Asia seem to lend themselves to Brechtian dramaturgies when playwrights address regional political tensions in a global context. Examples include: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (various productions by the Palestinian theater companies al-Balalin and al-Hakawati), autocratic regimes in the region propped up by Western neocolonialism (*The Al-Hamlet Summit* by Kuwaiti playwright/director Sulayman Al-Bassam), and the rise of religiously motivated terrorism (*Scorched* by Lebanese-Canadian playwright Wajdi Mouawad). How do Brecht's war plays compare to Western plays about the American-led "War on Terror" in Islamic Asia, e.g., David Greig's *The American Pilot*, Mark Ravenhill's *Shoot/Get Treasure/Repeat: An Epic Cycle of Short Plays*, or Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End*? Can contemporary politics – with its complexities and intricacies – appropriate and refunction Brecht's dialectical practice for its own purposes?

IV. Brecht beyond Asia: The Asian references in Brecht's writings present a rich source for comparative study, but there are also more abstract and mediated modes of intercultural exchange that encompass dramaturgical, structural, and linguistic strategies such as the use of masks, reduction, fragmentation, and stylization. Brecht's thinking was synthetic and his production practices were collaborative, with the result that new ways of visualizing contemporary reality and reconceptualizing the modern subject shaped texts and stagings that continue to speak to readers and audiences all over the world. Can his peculiar notion of the "dividual" be related to different concepts of human individuality and agency in Asian cultures? How do we imagine a dialogue between different modes of thinking as envisioned in the "Dialogue on Language with a Japanese Friend" by Martin Heidegger? How does Brecht's well-documented love of the simple, concrete object on stage and his appreciation more generally of the significance of objects translate across cultural divides?

Since the primary conference language will be English, English-language proposals will be preferred. However, presentations in German are also welcome.

Please submit proposals for 20-minute presentations (250-350 words), abstracts for the poster sessions (100-150 words), workshop descriptions (100-150 words), or suggestions for panels (with three participants) by July 1, 2009 to:

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Submissions by email are preferred, but hard copy and fax will also be accepted. Presenters will be notified in **late October 2009** about the committee's selection of proposals, posters, and panels. The organizational committee reserves the right to constitute the panels and alter proposed themes or groups. Symposium participants are expected to be, or become, members of the International Brecht Society. The regular registration fee for the symposium is \$120 (\$90 for students and retirees), if registered by February 2010, thereafter the conference fee increases to \$150 / \$120. All participants are required to register. A selection of symposium proceedings will be published in *The Brecht Yearbook* (volume 36 / 2011).

The IBS plans to organize a cultural program during the conference, including the first American production of Brecht's *The Judith of Shimoda* (at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa) and a guest performance of director Makoto Nakashima's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (by the Bird Theater Company from Japan). More information on the cultural program as well as other details of the symposium can be found on the conference website: <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/brecht2010>. The IBS hopes to attract financing and sponsors to partially subsidize participants' travel. Please note, however, that participants will have to arrange their own flight reservations and hotel accommodations.