



18th Symposium
International Brecht Society
Brecht in the Anthropocene
Victoria, BC Canada
22–26 July 2026
Abstracts Booklet

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Keynote Presentations

Towards a Brechtian Dramaturgy for the Anthropocene

Markus Wessendorf, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

This keynote lecture examines how the theatrical legacy of Bertolt Brecht can be critically reconceptualized in response to the ecological, political, and epistemological challenges of the Anthropocene. At a time when the climate discourse is increasingly overshadowed by economic nationalism, renewed investments in fossil-fuel expansion, and the enormous environmental costs of an expanding AI industry, the question of how theatre can engage with the ecological crisis has taken on new urgency. In this context, Brecht’s work appears both indispensable and problematic. While his theatre provides one of the twentieth century’s most influential models of politically engaged dramaturgy, it also remains grounded in a predominantly Western and anthropocentric worldview shaped by modern scientific rationality, extractive productivity, and the regulation of nature. This keynote therefore asks to what extent Brecht’s dramaturgy can be re-constructed and expanded toward a “more-than-human” perspective.

Drawing on debates surrounding the Anthropocene, this presentation engages with the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty, Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Eva von Redecker, Philippe Descola, Clive Hamilton, and Eva Horn and Hannes Bergthaller. Their theories challenge assumptions of human exceptionalism and limitless progress by foregrounding planetary finitude, interspecies coexistence, and the Earth’s “response-ability” to human intervention. These perspectives complicate Brecht’s emphasis on the human mastery of nature while also pointing to unexpected ecological dimensions in his writings.

Although Brecht’s central theoretical texts define theatre as a distinctly human enterprise, his plays, poems, and prose repeatedly invoke non-human “actants” such as trees, rivers, storms, and animals. Read through contemporary ecological theory, Brecht’s persistent focus on change, finitude, and renewal also acquires new significance. Ultimately, the keynote asks how Brechtian theatre theory might be adapted to the age of Earth System Sciences. The Anthropocene itself may thus be understood as a global *Lehrstück*: an ongoing learning process in which humanity confronts the limits of anthropocentrism and the necessity of “making kin” with other species within a finite and unstable world.

Markus Wessendorf is Chair, Dept. of Theatre and Dance at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He guest-edited the proceedings of the 13th symposium of the International Brecht Society on "Brecht in/and Asia" (which he organized at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in 2010) for "The Brecht Yearbook" 36. He was the main editor of "The Brecht Yearbook" from 2018-2024 and has been the current President of the International Brecht Society since 2024. He also co-organized a conference on "The Legacy of Robert Wilson" with Frank Hentschker (Director, Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, Graduate Center of CUNY) and Viola Kántor (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) at the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center and the Watermill Center in August 2024.

Brecht in the Capitalocene: Performing Resistance from the Global South

Abhilash Pillai, National School of Drama New Delhi

Reframing Brecht through the Capitalocene (Moore, Anthropocene or Capitalocene?, 2016), we foreground the ecological violence of capitalism, not the human species writ large, as the structuring force of our time.

South Asian forms like Koodiyattam (rooted in Brahmanical ritual and caste-bound access) and Theyyam (performed by subaltern castes as divine embodiments) are not free of hierarchy. Their eco-symbolism and sacred immersion do not negate the embeddedness of social control. Koodiyattam's Koothambalam architecture and codified gestures (Venu, Koodiyattam: The Heritage Theatre of India, 2002) create a cosmological frame of order with the ecological costumes and makeup, but one that historically excludes the lower castes and women. In contrast, the Indian Traditional Circus—a secular, hybrid, and itinerant form—reflects labour, risk, and spectacle within urban modernity. Its decline under neoliberal globalisation (Shameerdas T. - Past and present economic conditions of circus workers in Kannur, District: A Glimpse, May 2022, and Aashta Gandhi - From Postcolonial to Neoliberal: Performing the "Other" Body in Indian Circus, Article, January 2018) reveals the precarity of embodied entertainment economies.

The circus—unlike Koodiyattam or Theyyam—shares with Brecht the staging of technique, visibility, and the politicisation of the performing body, though it often lacks the intentional estrangement to provoke critical reflection. Yet, when reframed, it holds radical pedagogical potential (Stoddart, Rings of Desire, 2000). This keynote offers a reciprocal reading: Brecht's interaction with these forms argues ecological and spiritual materialism; the Koodiyattam, Theyyam and Circus receive from Brecht a framework to confront internal hierarchies and capitalist co-option. As Mignolo argues in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011), delinking from colonial epistemologies involves confrontation, not fusion, between aesthetic regimes. The talk resists romanticising tradition or universalising Brecht. Instead, it seeks intersections where subaltern performance, sacred cosmologies, and Marxist estrangement can contest the theatricality of extractive capital, whether in a temple, tent, or theatre.

Abhilash Pillai is a theatre director, pedagogue, and scholar of contemporary Indian theatre. He has directed over 50 productions in multiple languages and written extensively for leading Indian and UK publications. A pioneer of digital theatre in India, he initiated NSD's collaboration with the Grand Circus of Kerala, directing "Clowns & Clouds." His work fuses classical and folk forms with modern technology, exploring theatre as both aesthetic and social science. Through practice-based research and innovative pedagogy, he bridges scholarship and performance to engage critically with society. He currently serves as Director, School of Drama and Fine Arts, University of Calicut, Kerala, India.

Brecht and/on Time

Martin Revermann, University of Toronto

This paper sets out to explore how time matters to Brecht artistically, politically and (auto)biographically. He fully grasped that in order to be understood rather than merely be told and represented, time needs artistic intervention to be processed, shaped, manipulated, experienced and made sense of. This he does in always engaging and often highly original ways, especially in some of his lyric poetry.

Within this genre, which features Brecht's deepest and most nuanced thinking on the topic, I will focus specifically on the fascinating (and still under-explored) intersection between lyric poetry, drama and theatre theory that can be found in select 'theatre poems,' i.e. lyric poetry (from all stages of Brecht's artistic life) which explicitly engages with some aspect(s) of theatre. In particular, it will become apparent how these 'theatre poems' provide uniquely nuanced insights into what I call 'theatre time' and into Brecht's dramatic theory&practice more generally—insights which cannot, or only in much less complex ways, be found in his theoretical prose writings or in the plays themselves.

The paper will conclude by taking a bigger and broader perspective on Brechtian conceptions of time, for which purpose I will develop an ideal typology which distinguishes between teleological time, cyclical time, crisis time and deep time. The last of these is arguably of particular significance to the conference topic, as it is routinely associated with the hope for what we today may call a 'better anthropocene' in which the ever-growing interventionist power of humans contributes to a future where, in Brecht's own words, "humans will be friends to humans."

Martin Revermann is Professor of Classics and Theatre Studies, University of Toronto. He is an expert on classical Greek Theater and on Bertolt Brecht. His most recent monograph is "Brecht and Tragedy: Radicalism, Traditionalism, Eristics" (Cambridge 2022). He edited or co-edited five other books: "Performance, Iconography, Reception. Studies in Honour of Oliver Taplin" (Oxford 2008), "Beyond the Fifth Century: Interactions with Greek Tragedy from the Fourth Century BCE to the Middle Ages" (Berlin/New York 2010), "The Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy" (Cambridge 2014), "A Cultural History of Theatre (Vol. 1: Antiquity)" (London 2017) and "Semiotics in Action" (Brno 2020)

Coming into Relation: The Power of Stories in Cultural Collaborations

Theresa May, University of Oregon

In this paper I reflect on 22 years of collaborative creative work with Indigenous communities in the Pacific Northwest. As a non-Native settler-descendent theatre artist, my work has required a continuing journey of self-decolonization, an examination of my own histories and the values and histories of the institutions in which I work. Critical examination of two projects reveals emergent and required transformations across artistic practice. *Salmon Is Everything*, created in partnership with Karuk, Yurok and Klamath nations, documents the historic fish kill on the Klamath River in 2002 that fueled a grassroots movement that led to the removal of four dams and the freeing of a river. *BlueJay's Canoe*, developed in partnership with tribal Elder Marta Lu Clifford (Chinook, Cree, Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde), centers Indigenous storytelling and lifeways of the Willamette River. Both works also draw on Indigenous ecological knowledge and conservation efforts that center Indigenous partnership, and in this way demonstrate the importance of returning stories to the land. Both show how the practical application of frameworks of Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous futurisms in theatre-making center not only Indigenous knowledge and lifeways but require new ways of working.

Theresa May is a playwright, director and professor of Theatre Arts and allied faculty of Indigenous and Environmental Studies at the University of Oregon. She is co-founder of the EMOS Ecodrama "Playwright's Festival and author of "Earth Matters on Stage: Ecology, Environment and American Theatre," which lays out her theory of "ecodramaturgy." Her play, "Salmon Is Everything: Community-based Theatre in the Klamath Watershed," is an example of her ongoing collaborations with Indigenous tribes. Her current project in partnership with Grand Ronde Elder, Marta Lu Clifford (Chinook/Cree) is "BlueJay's Canoe." Other publications include "Kinship and Community in Climate Change" (Journal of Contemporary Drama 2022); "Tú ers mi otro yo ~ the Ecodramaturgy of José Cruz González" (Routledge Companion to Latinx Theatre, 2024), "Prefiguring the Environmental Justice Movement in Hansberry's Raisin in the Sun" (Black Theatre Review 2024), "Beyond Bambi: Towards a Dangerous Ecocriticism in Theatre Studies" (Theatre Topics, 2014), and others.

Workshops

Climate Disaster Survival Stories: Chelsea Haberlin and Sean Holman (July 19-22)

This is a four-day workshop. It consists of two eight-hour days of intensive training in trauma-informed, co-creative testimony gathering. This process is based on the methodology and process developed for the Climate Disaster Project. In the first part, up to 10 participants will work with Sean Holman and members of the CDP team on their experience of climate disaster, and learn the steps of the testimony gathering process, while co-creating their own survival story. This process consists of a pre-interview during which the participants develop the interview questions together with the facilitator; the interview, which is recorded as audio or video; the creation of a transcript and article based on the interview; the collaborative review of the written text; and the publication. For the second part of the workshop, this final text then serves as the basis for the creation of a staging concept and the performance of the testimony story. Chelsea Haberlin will facilitate the second part (day three) of the four-day workshop on developing a dramaturgical concept for their testimonies and methods to practice specific skills for staging it. On the fourth day, they stage a workshop performance of their creations for the symposium. The training participants acquire in this workshop is vital for a humanities and arts-based response to climate change. This form of theater gives a human face to climate change and empowers local communities to process environmental disasters such as floods, wildfires, and droughts with ownership and agency over their own experiences and stories.

Chelsea Haberlin graduated from UVic's Department of Theatre with an Applied Theatre specialization in 2007, and has focused her career on directing. At the 2013 Jessie Richardson Awards in Vancouver, Chelsea was named Most Promising New Director and given the Ray Michal Award. Chelsea has also completed the National Voice Intensive and in 2013, earned her MFA in Directing from UBC. In 2012 Chelsea received the Sydney J Risk Award for direction and she is currently the dramaturgy intern for the Arts Club Theatre Company. Other directing projects include *Featuring Loretta & Criminal Genius* (Vancouver Fringe Festival), *Faust is Dead* (UBC), *The Ends of the Earth* with Medical students at UBC, *The Scarecrow* for Spectral theatre and an adaptation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* with inmates at the William Head Penitentiary.

Sean Holman joined the faculty in 2021 from Mount Royal University, where he was an associate professor of journalism. Before entering academia, Sean was an investigative journalist and documentary filmmaker in British Columbia. As a journalist, he was best known as the founder and publisher of the pioneering online public affairs news service Public Eye, as well as the host and producer of the syndicated talk show *Public Eye Radio*. His bylines have appeared in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Vancouver Sun*, and the *Times-Colonist*. Sean is a frequent commentator on climate change coverage and government secrecy. His research focuses on how we use and misuse information, particularly against the backdrop of catastrophic climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as democratic decline.

**RASA Box + Brecht Workshop - Ecology and the Human Body:
Abhilash Pillai (July 25)**

This three-hour workshop explores the convergence of Indian and Western performance philosophies, as well as the influence of Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra (NS) and Brecht's Epic Theatre, through the living body. The Nāṭyaśāstra, attributed to Bharata Muni, is an encyclopedic Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts, comprising 36 chapters written between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE. Drawing on Rasa theory from NS and Richard Schechner's "RasaBoxes," participants will explore emotion as both sensory and ecological experience, felt through breath, posture, and visceral impulse. Using Brechtian tools like *Gestus* and *Verfremdungseffekt*, performers will reframe familiar gestures of consumption, care, and neglect to reveal the social and environmental systems shaping them. The session invites participants to embody the ecosystem, treating the body as a microcosm of ecological interdependence. Through improvisation, critical play, and reflection, the workshop seeks to cultivate awareness, empathy, and creative resistance, transforming performance into a dialogue between self, society, and nature.

Abhilash Pillai is a play director, pedagogue and scholar of contemporary Indian Theatre, who has directed more than 30 productions in various Indian languages and English. He currently serves as Dean - Academics, Centres In-Charge and In-Charge of Cultural Exchange Programme of National School of Drama. He is often credited as one of the initiators of digital theatre in Modern Indian Drama with 'Anth Ananth', a 1995 production of NSD Repertory Company. His theatre reinforces the past and also the present through 20th and 21st century Indian Pop visuals, video, recorded sound and other technological interventions. His works draw on a wide array of materials but are presented in a contemporary aesthetic style and envision a dialogue between practice and scholarship that seeks to augment the perspective with critical knowledge about various issues concerned. As a theatre maker, he has been involved in several collaborative projects, international and national, and initiated first-ever collaboration between NSD and a Circus Company, culminating in a production - 'Clowns & Clouds'.

Performances, Lectures, Exhibitions, etc.

Harald and Sharon Krebs

Hanns Eisler's and Bertolt Brecht's *Hollywood Elegies*

In 1942, after their escape from Hitler's Germany, Bertolt Brecht and his friend the composer Hanns Eisler met in Hollywood, which had become the refuge of many European artists. Whereas they abhorred many aspects of this environment, they were able to turn their experiences there into art through collaborative creation. Our lecture-recital focuses on an important product of their collaboration—a cycle of eight songs titled *Hollywood Elegies*. Our lecture-recital describes the historical context of the *Elegies*; demonstrates the complex relationship between Brecht's poetic cycle and Eisler's subsequent musical settings; and, via numerous musical illustrations, draws attention to striking elements of each of the songs as well as to connections among them. The presentation will conclude with a performance of the entire cycle.

Harald Krebs is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus from the University of Victoria, and a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He was President of the Society for Music Theory in 2011-13. His publications on 19th-century music include *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann* (OUP, 1999), which won the Society for Music Theory's Wallace Berry Award. His research on Josephine Lang (1815-80) led to the book *Josephine Lang: Her Life and Songs* (OUP, 2007—co-authored with Sharon Krebs), as well as to several editions of Lang's songs. His current research explores the song autographs of Josephine Lang and Fanny Hensel.

Sharon Krebs holds Bachelor degrees in human physiology and science education, and a Master's degree in Germanic Studies. She has performed with pianist Harald Krebs in Ireland, Germany, Poland, France, England, and Wales, as well as in the US and Canada. She translates Lied texts for various CD projects and for the website [lieder.net]; she has contributed over 11,000 texts and translations to the latter site. She is active as a musicologist and Germanist. She has written the aforementioned book on the life and music of Josephine Lang (co-authored with Harald), as well as articles on Lang, Chamisso and Brecht.

Teresa Kovacs and Kevin Rittberger

Buying Brass in the Curacene / Der Messingkauf im Curazän

Kovacs and Rittberger have been working on their *Messingkauf* / *Buying Brass* project since early 2024. In December 2024 they performed a first version of their script in the Roter Salon at Berlin's Volksbühne. One of the characters explains the situation as follows: "The Messingkauf Dialogues are the heart of Brecht's drama theory. They offer instructions for the creation of scientific theatre and for reflections on the histrionics of fascism. Brecht believed that quantum physics could unhinge bourgeois theatre. Kicking out witches, animals, and ghosts were a matter of course here for him." The project introduces two key thinkers who bridge philosophy and scientific discourses: Karen Barad, a queer-feminist quantum physicist who proposes to remove, along with theatre's fourth wall, the dimension of time altogether from staged performance; and Catherine Malabou, a political philosopher whose concept of "plasticity" opens a space for intra-acting, where the unexpected happens. What can we learn from Brecht in our scientific age

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when confronted with climate catastrophes, in an age demanding the act of healing, that is: caring for each other and curing the planet, including its non-human “components” and acknowledging the rights of animals and things? The lecture / performance, moderated and introduced by Marc Silberman, will include several video excerpts from the February 2026 performance of the revised script (with English subtitles), again at Berlin’s Volksbühne.

Teresa Kovacs is a scholar trained in literature, theater, film, and media studies with an expertise in theater theory, the politics of aesthetics, the comedic, theater and the sciences, transcultural theater, and questions of aesthetics for/of the (post-)Anthropocene. She explores these fields predominantly in the context of German-language theatre in the 20th and 21st century. My monographs reflect my attempts to grasp and name the theatrical imaginary of our present, which goes beyond drama and representational theater and always seems to defy description. In her first book, *Drama als Störung [Drama as Disruption]* (transcript 2016), does this on the example of a specific theatrical genre by Nobel-laureate Elfriede Jelinek, which she terms ‘secondary drama.’ Her second monograph, *Theatre of the Void: Plasticity, Hauntology, and Nuclear Blast* (Cornell UP 2025)/ *Theater der Leere. Heiner Müller, Elfriede Jelinek, Christoph Schlingensief, René Pollesch* (Theater der Zeit 2024), widens this scope and proposes a new approach for understanding the theatrical forms that have dominated German-language theatre since the 1970s. Other publications include: *Schlingensief-Handbuch* (Metzler 2025), an edited volume on Swiss director Milo Rau, *Milo Rau: Aesthetics – Ethics – Politics* (Fink 2025), and *Postdramatic Theater as Transcultural Theater* (Narr 2018).

Kevin Rittberger, born in 1977 in Stuttgart, works as a writer and director among others at the Schauspiel Hannover, at the Residenztheater München, at the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus, at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, at the Schauspielhaus Wien and at Schauspiel Frankfurt – often with his own texts and research projects. In 2011 and 2020 he was nominated for the Mülheim Dramatikerpreis for his plays *Kassandra oder die Welt als Ende der Vorstellung* und *IKI.radikalmensch*.

Andrew Munn

Berlin Verses – An Adaptation of Brecht and Eisler’s *Hollywooder Liederbuch*

This is a “drop-in” multimedia mini-exhibit with song and text that will run throughout the symposium.

Fleeing National Socialist Germany, the composer Hanns Eisler sought sanctuary in California. In Los Angeles, he crafted a musical journal consisting of twenty-eight songs set to the poetry of his collaborator and fellow emigrant, Bertolt Brecht. This collection serves as a poignant record of two revolutionary creators grappling with their opposition to fascism and their estrangement from the burgeoning intersection of industry and art in Hollywood. *Berlin Verses* offers a contemporary political re-envisioning of the *Hollywooder Liederbuch*, translating Brecht’s thematic concerns for a modern audience. Composed in English within the very landscape of its namesake, this project integrates Eisler’s diverse musical language with a critical examination of global emergencies, including climate catastrophe, social disparity, displacement, and international conflict.

Andrew Munn is a bass and interdisciplinary artist. He performs and co-creates opera, chamber music, concert, and multidisciplinary art, often on themes of ecology, history, and ethics. He studied at The Juilliard School, Bard College, and University of Michigan. From 2008 to 2014, Andrew was a leading organizer for environmental justice in the coalfields of Appalachia. This engagement with intertwined processes of ecological, social, and technological change continues to inform his artistic and intellectual work. His works have been presented by the Tanglewood Learning Institute, Shanghai Concert Hall DigiMuse Festival, Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel, Volkskundemuseum

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Wien, Berlin Akademie der Künste, and Barenboim Said Foundation. As a bass soloist he has performed at Carnegie Hall, Berlin Philharmonie, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Elbphilharmonie, and Salzburg Landestheater in repertoire ranging from bass soloist in Verdi's Requiem to world premieres by Chaya Czernowin (Heart Chamber, Deutsche Oper Berlin). Drawn to the intimate intensity of the song repertoire, Andrew is a sought-after interpreter of Schubert's Winterreise (Tanglewood, 2026) and Shostakovich's Suite on Verses by Michelangelo (Hungarian State Opera, 2024), among other works. On themes of ecology, voice, and music, he has been an invited lecturer and clinician at the Goethe Institute, Cornell University, Tianjin Juilliard School, Duke Kunshan University, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, and Virginia Tech among others.

Film evening in collaboration with DEFA Film Library

Made possible by DEFA Film Library (UMass Amherst), screened with permission.

Das Lied der Ströme/The Song of the Rivers

(dir. Joris Ivens, 1954, 95 mins, in Germ. with no sub.)

The Song of the Rivers is a 1954 documentary film production by the DEFA film studio. Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens was the leading director. The sprawling film celebrates international workers movements along six major rivers: the Volga, Mississippi, Ganges, Nile, Amazon, and the Yangtze. Shot in many countries by different film crews, and later edited by Ivens, *Song of the Rivers* begins with a lyrical montage of landscapes and laborers and proceeds to glorify labor and modern industrial machinery. The musical score is by Dmitri Shostakovich, with lyrics written by Brecht, and songs performed by Ernst Busch and famous American actor, singer, and activist Paul Robeson who also narrates.

Der Schneider von Ulm/The Tailor of Ulm

(dir. Lutz Dammbeck, 1979, 14 mins, in Germ. with Eng. sub.)

Another DEFA production, in this animated short film the little town of Ulm is governed and oppressed by its bishop. Nobody speaks up against him except the tailor, who is also an artist. He rebels against the bishop's power and believes the impossible is possible. He believes in his dream—that he can fly! This animation film is based on the eponymous poem "Ulm 1592" (*Svendborger Gedichte*) by Brecht. In the film, Dammbeck also hid a reference to Panamarenko (written on the tailor's hat), the Belgian artist who became known in the mid-1960s and '70s for his mixed-media sculptures of flying objects.

Eine Hinterlassenschaft/A Legacy

(dir. Peter Voigt, 2004, 22 mins, in Germ. with Eng. sub.)

Throughout his career, Voigt always returned to the importance of his teacher, Bertolt Brecht. His films *Eine Hinterlassenschaft*, *Theaterarbeit*, *Der Zögling*, *Episches Theater* and *Jawohl, Brecht* are all contemplations of their relationship. His documentary project, *Bertolt Brecht – Bild und Modell*, also honors his mentor's work and life. Peter Voigt returned to Brecht one more time in *Brechts Regal*. The film focuses on Brecht's personal book collection, particularly on the handwritten notes in his books. Unfortunately, this film was not finished, as Peter Voigt passed away before it was done, on March 12, 2015.

Book Roundtable I

Unsere Hoffnung ist die Krise: Brecht's Interviews as Resource and Call to Action

Noah Willumsen, Nikolaus Müller-Schöll, Markus Wessendorf

With the publication of Brecht's interviews in 2023, 91 largely unknown Brecht texts came to light. Beyond the conversations and quotations they contain, these interviews represent 91 events in Brecht's biography, 91 connections to networks of overlooked actors. The use value and credibility of interviews in literary and historical study remain controversial, however, and these reservations deserved to be discussed, dispelled, concretized and clarified in an open forum. Not only do Brecht's interviews, as a new (or forgotten) form, represent a rupture in his work and its reception; they provided him with a privileged medium in which to react to the ruptures of his own time. Here, at the intersection of activism, media experiment and literary expression, he reached audiences that lay socially and geographically beyond the compass of his theater, becoming for the first time a global phenomenon with a presence in Brazil, France, India and Lebanon. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that he took advantage of the interview to theorize a *Dramatik großer Gegenstände*, a global art capable of confronting the hyperobjects of capitalist modernity: war, race, oil, wheat, money, markets – humanity's *gemeinsamer Kampf mit den von der Natur gegebenen Daseinsbedingungen*. Central to this attempt was a ruthless critique of those very media concerns in which such "viscous", "nonlocal" objects that elude the conceptual grasp of the individual, were constructed and confronted (Morton 2013). Although forced to rely on these *Apparate* in his work, Brecht did not retreat to the tautologies and appeals to authority that mark contemporary discourse ('facts are facts', 'believe scientists'), demanding instead: *Sprechen wir von den Eigentumsverhältnissen!*

Noah Willumsen is the director of the Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv in Berlin. He studied German, art history and philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh and the Humboldt University of Berlin, where he is completing his doctorate on the history of the interview at the research group "Literary and Epistemic History of Small Forms". His edition of Bertolt Brecht's interviews *Unsere Hoffnung heute ist die Krise* (Our Hope Today is the Crisis) was published by Suhrkamp in 2023. Based on extensive archival studies, this volume makes Brecht's internationally scattered and forgotten conversations with journalists accessible for the first time, providing an insight into his contentious approach to the news media of his era. Willumsen's essays on Brecht, Heiner Müller and the media history of the GDR have appeared in *Bertolt Brecht in Context*, *Heiner Müllers KüstenLANDSCHAFTEN*, *E-CIBS* and the *Brecht Yearbook*, of whose editorial board he is a member.

Nikolaus Müller-Schöll is chair of theatre studies at the department of theatre, film and media studies of the Goethe-University in Frankfurt/Main since October 2011, head of this department and at the same time head of the master program in dramaturgy as well as of the international master in Comparative Dramaturgy and Performance Research. Before he has been professor for theatre studies at the Department of German II of the university of Hamburg and as well co-director of the master program in performance studies for two and a half years (2009-2011).

Markus Wessendorf is Chair, Dept. of Theatre and Dance at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He guest-edited the proceedings of the 13th symposium of the International Brecht Society on "Brecht in/and Asia" (which he organized at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in 2010) for *The Brecht Yearbook* 36. He was the main editor of *The Brecht Yearbook* from 2018-2024 and has been the current President of the International Brecht Society since 2024. He also co-organized a conference on "The Legacy of Robert Wilson" with Frank Hentschker (Director, Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, Graduate Center of CUNY) and Viola Kántor (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) at the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center and the Watermill Center in August 2024.

Book Roundtable II

Author Meets Critics: Bertolt Brecht's Adaptations and Anti-Capitalist Aesthetics Today

Joerg Esleben, Anthony Squiers, Noah Willumsen, Jack Davis, Wei Zhang

This book examines Brecht's theory and method of adaptation. It first reconstructs it into a single framework using four key Brechtian concepts: Fabel, gestus, estrangement effects, and historicizing. It then uses that framework to analyse four Brechtian adaptations: *The Tutor*, *Don Juan*, "Socrates Wounded," and *Kriegsfibel*. It argues that adaptation occupies a previously unrealised central place in Brecht's thought, demonstrating that he provides us with a unique way to think about adaptation—as material transformation. It concludes by describing how Brecht is useful for anti-capitalist aesthetics today because through him one can foster a new consciousness which enables better social conditions to be created. This book is practical for both theatre practitioners and artists as well as theorists.

Joerg Esleben teaches German language and culture, intercultural studies, and theatre. His research interests are centred around intercultural relations and engaged arts. His previous research and publications include work on 18th-century travel writing, relations between Germany and India, and the Faust theme in Canada. Currently, Joerg is researching the uses of Bertolt Brecht's work in Canadian theatre and culture (see the online database and exhibition site *Brecht in/au Canada*) and intersections of arts and hope, and also serves as e-cibs co-editor (with Anthony Squiers).

Anthony Squiers is a faculty member at AMDA College of the Performing Arts and co-editor of E- CIBS. He is also author of *An Introduction to the Social and Political Philosophy of Bertolt Brecht*.

Noah Willumsen is the director of the Bertolt Brecht Archive at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin and editor of Brecht's collected interviews („*Unsere Hoffnung heute ist die Krise*“." *Interviews 1926-1956*, Suhrkamp 2023).

Jack Davis is a scholar and translator, with a focus on 20th and 21st century German-language literature, theater and film. His publications on Thomas Bernhard, Christoph Schlingensiefel, Bertolt Brecht and George Tabori have appeared in international scholarly venues in English and German. He is associate professor of German at Truman State University.

Wei Zhang received her PhD in Comparative Theatre from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (2018). She also holds a PhD from Shanghai Theatre Academy (2007). She is the author of *Chinese Adaptations of Brecht: Appropriation and Intertextuality* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) and *Performance Across Chinese Borders* (Routledge, 2024). Her research has been published in *Theatre Research International*, *Asian Theatre Journal*, *Comparative Drama*, *Philosophy and Literature*, *Classical Receptions Journal*, *The Brecht Yearbook* and many other journals. She is Professor at Hangzhou Normal University.

Grischa Meyer

Landscapes of Exile / Brecht's Paper War

Exhibition & Lecture on Brecht's Exile in the USA (1941–1947)

[Grischa Meyer's presentation will take place in German, with discussion following in both German and English.]

"They have nature here; because everything is so artificial, they have an even heightened sense of nature—it is rendered strange. (...) A brilliantly illuminated, ceaseless stream of cars cuts through the landscape; yet one learns that all the greenery has been wrested from the desert solely through irrigation systems. Scratch the surface a little, and the desert breaks through: fail to pay the water bill, and nothing blooms anymore." (Bertolt Brecht, Journal entry from August 9, 1941)

Alongside his *Lehrstücke* (learning plays) and the *Fatzer* fragment, Brecht's journal ranks among his most complex texts—both in terms of content and form. Through a montage of texts—comprising literary, political, and everyday reflections—and clippings of newspaper photos and articles, he created a document of contemporary history that critically questions the official historical narrative of those years while simultaneously gathering material for his "theater of the scientific age." His concise, pointed language is complemented by images from *LIFE*, *The New York Times*, and other newspapers. In addition to describing the varied living conditions of exiles and the progress of the war in Europe, his entries increasingly focus on the domestic political situation in the USA—addressing racism, the exploitation of people and nature, and the rising tide of anti-communism. With this journal, Brecht created a new genre of a high artistic and media-oriented caliber. It oscillates between chronicle, personal diary, and political essay. The result is an open work of art that explores, in a nuanced way, the connections between property and power relations and the root causes of war and fascism. While in his 1934 poem "To Those Born After" Brecht still viewed a conversation about trees as almost a crime—because it implies silence regarding so many atrocities—in the USA he began to understand that the war against landscapes and nature must also be spoken and written about if humanity is to have a future.

In the exhibition "Brecht's Paper War", Grischa Meyer traces this journey of realization.

Grischa Meyer, born in 1950 in Berlin (GDR), is a trained bookseller and a qualified graphic designer. He worked as a freelance designer and photographer for publishing houses and theaters (including the Berliner Ensemble, Deutsches Theater, and Mecklenburgisches Staatstheater Schwerin), created stage designs, and writes essays and books (for *Lettre International*, Propyläen Verlag, and Basisdruck Verlag). From 1992 to 1999, he was a freelance collaborator at the Berliner Ensemble. In 2005, he served as a Copeland Fellow in the German Department at Amherst College (Massachusetts). From 2006 to 2021, he taught book design at the Ostkreuzschule für Fotografie in Berlin. Between 2021 and 2024, he developed the exhibition "Brecht's Paper War" (in collaboration with Holger Teschke).

Panel Presentations

Panel 1: *Revolution and Gender*

Friedemann Weidauer, “‘Mein Körper gehört mir’ – Aber wem gehört die Welt? *Kuhle Wampe* and *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* in comparison”

In both *Kuhle Wampe* and *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* the female body is where nature and society intersect. While Paula desperately wants to have a child with Paul, though as her doctor states ‘reality and ideal never overlap’, for Anni in *Kuhle Wampe* an unwanted pregnancy is a nightmarish vision as it would cost her her job, the only means by which the Bönike family has been keeping afloat during the economic crisis of the 1930s. In both films nature is presented in three ways: In *Kuhle Wampe* we find nature as in reproductive nature “ohne Unterlass fruchtbar” where life is being born again “ohne Vorsicht.” While nature proceeds without care, it is the female protagonist who will have to face the consequences of an unwanted pregnancy. In *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* the wish for a child leads to Paula’s death as she becomes pregnant against the advice of her doctor. The second way in which nature is represented in the two films is as a seemingly idyllic retreat from the burdens of society. In *Kuhle Wampe* it is the “Stempel Lido”, a transitory space that allows for an escape from everyday worries like unemployment. In *Paul und Paula* it is the *Datsche* that Paula’s suitor Saft can offer as an alternative to Paula’s less than perfect apartment in a Berlin *Hinterhaus*. Both Anni and Paula refuse to be lured by the prospect of an illusionary worry-free space. In the middle of the film and amidst the orgy like celebration of her engagement, Anni, in a move by Brecht that echoes the *peripetia*, the turn around point in Aristotelean drama, turns around the hand wagon with her belongings and moves back from *Kuhle Wampe* to the city. Paula decides to continue her adventurous relationship with Paul rather than settle for a boring life with Saft. Finally, both films offer an alternative to what seems to be an irreconcilable conflict between nature as a biological force and as any temporary retreat from society. The games the workers organize outside of the city offer a view of nature that is “socialized.” The workers enjoy their bodies in a way that brings together their beings as biological creatures and social beings while allowing them also to expand their intellectual horizons by studying Hegel. In what seems to be a tactical maneuver in the face of censorship, Brecht/Dudow chose Hegel rather than what they actually meant: Marx. *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* ends with a shot of Paul who is now in charge of three children with three different sets of parents suggesting an alternative to the traditional family of “lebenslangem Eheknast” as Wolf Biermann put it. His new patchwork family suggests an alternative to the traditional one forced upon people living under ‘real existing socialism.’ While the main focus of this paper is the battle ground of the female body where nature and society intersect, it also reads *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* as an homage by Carow/Plenzdorf to Brecht’s and Dudow’s *Kuhle Wampe*.

Friedemann Weidauer was born in Stuttgart, Germany. He received his BA in Classics from Reed College, *Zwischenprüfung* in German, American Studies and Education from the FU Berlin, and MA and PhD in German from the University of Wisconsin/Madison. His research and teaching focus on post-1945 East and West German culture, among his recent publications are articles on Jurek Becker, Wolfgang Borchert and minority literatures. Current research projects include the debate about the Moscow Trials among German authors in exile (1933- 1945)

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and a series of studies of East German *Kulturpolitik* as reflected in DEFA films. He has edited Vols. 33 – 37 of the *Brecht Yearbook* (2007 – 2012, University of Wisconsin Press/International Brecht Society).

Artun Ak, The Nature of Revolution in Slatan Dudow and Bertolt Brecht's *Kuhle Wampe*

In alignment with general modernist tendencies, the reception of Slatan Dudow and Bertolt Brecht's seminal communist film, *Kuhle Wampe oder: Wem gehört die Welt?* (1932), suffers from an urban bias, although what gives the film its title is "Kuhle Wampe," the rural tent colony set on the banks of the Müggelsee, to which the protagonist Anni and her family have to move upon their eviction from their apartment in the city center. Christoph Schaub describes this move to the colony as "a private solution" to Anni's problems and points instead toward the agitprop performance by Das Rote Sprachrohr as staging a collective alternative, whereas Seth Peacock claims more bluntly that the film eventually "reject[s] idyllic parkland environments at Berlin's periphery in favor of the political energy gained through crowded urban spaces." Opposing such marking of nature as "private" or merely "idyllic," I argue that *Kuhle Wampe* depicts such a "return to nature" as a crucial step in the process of proletarian consciousness raising and collective organizing. More than being a site for rest and rejuvenation for exhausted working masses, nature also appears in *Kuhle Wampe* as the source and promise of the revolution; indeed, it is nature itself — trees, weeds, lakes, the wind — that calls for an uprising. In my talk, I will focus especially on the two unusually extensive nature sequences that come early on in the film (17:45-19:30, 26:15-28:25) and also put the film in dialogue with Friedrich Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* (1883/1925) and Sergei Eisenstein's *Nonindifferent Nature* (ca. 1947-8, published posthumously).

Artun Ak is a PhD candidate in the department of German, Russian, and East European Languages at Rutgers University. joined the department in Fall 2021 as an Excellence and Presidential Fellow. His dissertation is on the "returns of nature" in Weimar film culture, as seen in works by Reinert, Murnau, Brecht/Dudow, and others. Recently, he has published an article on Kafka as media history in *Humanities*, and he occasionally reviews books for *Reading in Translation*

Panel 2: Critical Gestures, Humanity, and Calls for Action

Micha Braun: "‘Können uns und euch und niemand helfen!’ *Mahagonny* as a call to action for today?"

Brecht's 1929 opera libretto to 'The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny' encapsulates a story of civilisation from various class- and gender-related perspectives, while it also can be read as a treatise on the power of theatre. It shows how collective imagination and shared use of resources generate social constructs, which, however, may be wiped out in an instance in the face of external threats or by rigid interpretations of individual happiness. The vision of a community offering protection and conviviality is thus continually deconstructed. Pivotal are the libretto's varied interpretations of the hurricane as a threat to order: does the moment of climatic danger compel us to act collectively, or does it reinforce our individualistic pursuits of lust and power? In the opera, the protagonists choose the fatalistic option—to consequently act in their own interest. This escapism mirrors today's response to the impending climate catastrophe—particularly in the Global North, where protection efforts are being massively

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scaled back, and highlights a lack of imagination both in Brecht's time and today. When notions of state-capitalist order and pressing global crises are interdependent, radical ideas of withdrawal flourish, resulting in feelings of powerlessness, particularly on the societal peripheries. With and beyond Brecht, my presentation aims to introduce approaches to a communitarian-imaginative theatre practice that seeks to develop and test new rituals for democratic and inclusive coexistence in peripheral areas of eastern Germany. Participatory theatre creates spaces for dialogue and negotiation, enabling communities to experiment with alternative behaviours and transform grievances into collective agency. My focus will therefore be on Brecht's concept of love in 'Mahagonny'—both the love between people who have built something together, and the short-lived, precarious love between people who depend on each other. Discovering this transient love in theatrical situations and allowing it to take effect is what Brecht's work can offer us today.

Micha Braun, Dr. phil., is a Research Assistant and Lecturer at the Institute for Theatre Studies and Co-Director of the Centre of Competence for Theatre (CCT) at Leipzig University. His main research areas are strategies and practices of repetition and remembrance in the arts, theatre and film of the 20th and 21st century with a key focus on Central and Eastern Europe. Since 2020, he is Vice President of the International Brecht Society and was guest editor for the "Brecht Yearbook" 45/46 & 49 (2020/21, 2024). Micha earned his MA in Theatre Studies and Political Science in Leipzig, before he went for a while into film production. A four-year stipendiary at the DFG Graduate School "Critical Junctions of Globalisation" got him back to Leipzig, where in 2011 he finished his dissertation on history and storytelling in Peter Greenaway's artwork ("In Figuren erzählen," Bielefeld 2012).

Wei Jiang, "Thomas Manns und Bertolt Brechts Vorstellungen von der 'neuen Humanität' mit Fokus auf ihren Auseinandersetzungen mit dem klassischen Erbe"

Following the anti-fascist victory, both the communist and capitalist camps—locked in the East-West conflict—felt an urgent need to culturally legitimize their respective political systems. While the capitalist camp was disparaged and broadly dismissed as having been in league with fascism, the communist camp sought to develop a new, socialist societal culture. The approaches taken and the successes achieved in this regard varied across different countries. In certain Asian nations—where capitalist economies and bourgeois culture were less developed, yet a deeper legacy of democratic revolutions existed—the success in establishing a "Red culture" (a socialist societal culture) was more palpable. Conversely, in the Soviet-influenced regions of Eastern Europe—characterized by deeply rooted religious traditions and a strong bourgeois cultural heritage—efforts to establish a fully developed socialist culture failed. Around 1990, reflecting on the history of the GDR, the German social historian Gerhard A. Ritter even concluded that the GDR was, from start to finish, a "society of ordinary people" rife with "privileges and corruption among the leadership." In the cultural sphere, he observed a curious, paradoxical phenomenon of looking back to the past: the canonization of classical cultural heritage and the appropriation of bourgeois humanism as a historical precursor to socialist humanism. In line with the approach to cultural heritage established during the Lenin era, the aim was to preserve all valuable achievements of human culture, utilizing them as an effective and legitimate historical resource for forging a "new human being" for the new era and the new state leadership. Paradoxically, bourgeois writers such as Thomas Mann—whose literary works (for instance, **Doctor Faustus**) offered a "critically realistic portrayal" of various "stages of development of bourgeois society"—often found favor with GDR cultural officials and aligned with the state's cultural policy. In contrast, communist writers who did not adhere to "heroic narrative patterns"—such as Bertolt Brecht

with his adaptation and staging of the pre-Goethean *Urfaust*—were frequently criticized by GDR cultural officials. They were accused of distorting figures like Faust into "national heroes" and desecrating the humanist legacy associated with Goethe.

Wei Jian is a PhD candidate at the Institute of German Literature at Humboldt University of Berlin (focus and interests: Nietzsche, Brecht, and Thomas Mann), translator of Goethe's *Tag- und Jahreshefte* (in progress) and Jörn Leonhard's *Die Büchse der Pandora: Geschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs* (in progress)

Troy Vettese, "Of Useless Trees, Planetary Management, and *Wuwei*"

Brecht is a rare Marxist who values nature for its uselessness and grasps *wuwei*, which are helpful principles in a time of excessive action and an overreliance on human agency. Instead of geoengineering or DAC facilities, veganism and rewilding represent the path of a Brechtian ecosocialism. This paper will examine the limits of contemporary ecosocialist thinkers, from Andreas Malm to John Bellamy Foster, who still see the Earth-system as a machine to be controlled, to the history of planetary management and Earth-system science.

Troy Vettese is an environmental historian and Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute. His field is the history of ecological economics, energy systems, and animal life in the capitalist system. He has a PhD in History from New York University and has worked at Harvard as a postdoctoral research fellow. He has published (co-authored with Drew Pendergrass) *Half-Earth Socialism: A Plan to Save the Future from Extinction, Climate Change and Pandemics* (Verso, 2022), which presents a model for a just and sustainable future. He also writes for such publications as *Bookforum*, *New Left Review*, *The Guardian*, *Jacobin*, *n+1*, and *Salvage*.

Panel 3 Brecht's "*Die Sintflut*" in an Era of Climate Breakdown

Phoebe von Held and Lizzie Stewart

While rarely the focus in and of themselves, a selection of Brecht's fragments — his unfinished play texts from the second half of the 1920s — abound with rains and biblical floods. In *Fleischhacker* (1924-31), heavy rainfall jeopardises the success of the eponymous protagonist's plan to corner the wheat market, and a conversation between a grandfather and his grandson conjures up the biblical image of the Flood. In *Fatzer* (1926-30), the landscape of world war 1's apocalyptic devastation, viewed by the four deserters when they climb out of their tank, is described as 'like after the Flood!'. However, in a much shorter fragment *Die Sintflut* (1926-27), an intended radio play, the flooding and devastation of cities becomes a central subject itself: here natural disaster threatens humankind. Having co-translated Brecht's *Sintflut* for insertion into a larger performance piece produced in London at Raven Row in 2024 for the *brecht: fragments* exhibition, we were struck by the ways in which this piece from the 1920s foreshadows the concerns of a twentyfirst-century audience and the imminent threat of climate breakdown. Our joint papers will explore in a first paper 'Contextualising *Die Sintflut*' the

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content, constitution, and form of this fragment itself as it was collected by Brecht and his collaborator Elisabeth Hauptmann in the folder BBA 214 held at the Bertolt Brecht Archive, Berlin. The second paper ‘Producing *The Flood*’ will discuss the directorial decisions involved in how it was adapted and integrated into the larger fragments performance and exhibition at Raven Row. In ‘Contextualising *Die Sintflut*’, we will present the main components contained in the *Sintflut* folder, which comprise a number of dramatic monologue and dialogue pieces mostly borrowing from biblical sources of the old testament, but also addressing the destruction of Pompeii and the hurricane disaster of 1926 in Florida. The folder also contains large numbers of contemporary German and American newspaper clippings with articles and photographs documenting hurricane disasters, including flooding. We will explore how Hauptmann drew stories and data from these news media reporting on the loss of human life as well as on the damages in social and economic infrastructures — notes which she then assembled in the format of dense text montages. On the basis of this dramaturgical research, Brecht re-envisioned and estranged their witnessing of the Florida hurricane disaster through the mythical framework of biblical sources, which introduced not only distance and a perspective of epic trans-historical depth but also an element of dialogue and confrontation, mainly channelled through the enigmatic yet provocative protagonist of the prophet Nahaya, a re-invention of the biblical prophets Jonah and Nahum. The second paper ‘Producing *The Flood*’ will discuss how our translation was adapted and inserted into the overall montage of companion fragments in *brecht: fragments* at Raven Row. This will demonstrate how the overriding trope of the Flood in its more abstract metaphorical readings in the context of Brecht’s critique of capitalism and war, could be gradually pushed and calibrated into a more literal reading pinpointing the imminent dangers of climate catastrophe as thematised in *The Flood*. Based on the assumption that Brecht’s fragmentary aesthetics were in part developed in an attempt to approach the large-scale systemic questions of modernity, the aim here was to bring into resonance the problematics of capitalist economic disaster and war with those of climate catastrophe and show that the former two can no longer be addressed without the latter. Our papers will include presentations of the original archival materials of *Die Sintflut* as well as documentation of the *brecht: fragments* exhibition and performance at Raven Row. *Brecht: fragments* was co-curated by Phoebe von Held, in collaboration with Tom Kuhn, Alex Sainsbury and Iliane Thiemann. Phoebe also adapted and directed the performance script of the *brecht: fragments* performances.

Phoebe von Held is a theatre adaptor/director and researcher who lives and works in London. Her theatre projects combine the development of performance texts with directing and design conceptualisation and are often linked to theoretical research. In her adaptations, the focus is on the rewriting of mostly non-dramatic, literary texts that shed new light onto key contemporary social and political issues, opening up the medium of theatre to formal possibilities beyond the dramatic genre. In recent years, her interest has turned to Bertolt Brecht’s unfinished play fragments, written during the 1920s, when, faced with the challenges of global capitalist modernity, Brecht began to radically deconstruct the genre of drama, evoking a highly innovative, liminal, almost unstageable theatre.

Lizzie Stewart is senior lecturer in modern languages at King’s College London. Lizzie Stewart studied German and Russian as an undergraduate at the University of Edinburgh. This was followed by an MSc in European Theatre (awarded 2010), and a PhD (awarded 2015), both of which were AHRC-funded and taken at the University of Edinburgh. Along the way, she also studied in Heidelberg and Moscow, and spent time based in Berlin, as a DAAD-funded researcher. Lizzie taught German language, literature and culture from 2011-2014 at Edinburgh, and in 2014-15 was a Research Fellow in Assessment Practices there. She held positions as Teaching Fellow in German at the University of St Andrews (2015-2016), where she also taught in Comparative Literature at all levels, and as Teaching Associate in Modern German Studies at University of Cambridge (2016-17). She was awarded a Leverhulme Fellowship in 2017, before being appointed as a Lecturer at King’s in 2017.

Panel 4 *Brecht-Tage 2026 Report: „To encourage the Green: Brecht’s Green Revolution revisited“*

Troy Vettese and Marc Silberman

On this panel, Troy Vettese and Marc Silberman will recap and discuss the outcomes from the BB-Tage in 2026. In February 2026 the Brecht Days in Berlin will be titled „‘The Earth, the great nourisher’: Brecht’s Green Revolution” curated by Hans Christian von Herrmann and Alexander Karschnia. Its provocation is to rethink our understanding of the ‘Green Revolution,’ which started only a few years after Brecht’s death in 1961—the same year that the Berlin Wall was built and Heiner Müller’s play ‘The Resettler or Life in the countryside’ was staged for the first time. Jason Moore, one of today’s leading eco-Marxists, has argued that the Green Revolution should be back-dated at least three or four decades. Today, even climate activists have largely forgotten about the Green Revolution despite industrialized agriculture’s outsized impact on climate and extinction. For Troy Vettese and Drew Pendergrass, authors of *Half-Earth Socialism*, Brecht is one of the very few Marxist thinkers who broke with the promethean megalomania widespread on the left. Mr Keuner’s contemplation of the uselessness of trees has inspired Vettese and Pendergrass’ eco-socialism predicated on similarly Daoist ideas of *wuwei*, or the action of inaction. Brecht, in his idiosyncratic way, was both a Daoist and Stalinist who was fascinated by schemes to remake the face of the Earth, evidenced in the long poem ‘The education of Millet’ (1950). Today, such ecological hubris finds its echo in geo-engineering ideas like solar radiation management to cool down the planet. We will explore the Janus-faced nature of Brecht’s environmental thought during Berlin’s Brecht Days in 2026.

Troy Vettese is an environmental historian and Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute. His field is the history of ecological economics, energy systems, and animal life in the capitalist system. He has a PhD in History from New York University and has worked at Harvard as a postdoctoral research fellow. He has published (co-authored with Drew Pendergrass) *Half-Earth Socialism: A Plan to Save the Future from Extinction, Climate Change and Pandemics* (Verso, 2022), which presents a model for a just and sustainable future. He also writes for such publications as *Bookforum*, *New Left Review*, *The Guardian*, *Jacobin*, *n+1*, and *Salvage*.

Marc Silberman received his Ph.D. from Indiana University (1975) and joined the University of Wisconsin faculty in 1988 after spending twelve years at the University of Texas in San Antonio. He taught undergraduate and graduate courses on German literature, cinema, and culture of the twentieth and twenty-first century, including as guest professor at UCLA, Freie Universität Berlin, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, University of Oxford, Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and Universidad de Valencia in Spain. He has published three monographs and edited or co-edited twenty-nine volumes or special issues of journals as well as numerous articles, book chapters, and interviews in his areas of expertise. He is also a translator of, among others, Bertolt Brecht and Heiner Müller.

Panel 5: *Social Relations and the Non-Human*

Luke Franklin, “Anthropocene Seasonality and Environmental Rhythms in *Mother Courage and Her Children*”

Longstanding consensus holds that *Mother Courage* never learns her lesson, that “*Wer mitn Teufel frühstücken will, muß ein langen Löffel haben!*” Life, however, has taught her something else: in John Willett’s translation, “I’ve learned nowt’s got to come when you think it will, not even seasons of the year”. This paper asks what Courage knows when she says there’s no knowing when, how, or in what form seasonal change is to work its future effects. Brecht’s play begins and ends, famously, with tidings of a *Frühjahr* that is neither the beginning of spring nor the end of winter, but a tortuous interspace where “*was noch nicht gestorben ist | Das macht sich auf die Socken nun*”. Extreme weather consists, not only of abrupt natural disasters, but of the effacement of long-abiding seasonal differences and the hectic prolongation of middle ranges between seasons. The Anthropocene, writes Jeremy Davies, “reschedules the year” in a violent de-synchronizing of nonhuman lifeworlds that might call to mind disasters of mistiming that accumulate in Brecht’s play. A question emerges, then, about the relation of this play to environmental damages that might seem to fall outside the scope of its concerns. I argue that Brecht both inherits, and adapts to his own ends, a tradition in which the violence unleashed by the Thirty Years’ War is more than human in scale, saturating earth, water, and sky, with its fury. Brecht exposes false naturalizations of a war-torn social world dislocated by class and religion. A self-sabotaging form of human agency that mistakes business affairs for the air and water of life is to be disabused of its illusions. But the effects of estrangement migrate from the socio-natural catastrophe of the Thirty Years’ War to Brecht’s historical moment and to our own: episodes in *Mother Courage* come to dimly reflect emergency conditions in the Anthropocene epoch.

Luke is a scholar of 20th century English-language poetry and poetics, especially modernism and contemporary writing. He has a BA from Dal/King’s and an MPhil from the University of Cambridge. His MPhil thesis was on points of intersection between James Joyce’s writing and the visual arts. He has been a don of residence at King’s, and served as the interim assistant dean of students in 2020. He is a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge, at work on a book about Charles Olson’s Melville scholarship and what it means to ‘read to write’. He’s received two grants from the University of Connecticut to work on Olson’s papers, and currently holds the 2020-2021 Charles Olson Award from Simon Fraser University.

Carl Martin, “The Liminal Littoral in Brecht’s *Leben Eduard des Zweiten*.”

In this 50th anniversary of *Jaws*, which provoked exaggerated fear of sharks worldwide and reinforced the myth of shark as “killing machine,” with its “black eyes, like a doll’s eyes”, it is useful to consider how artists have (mis)used the figure of the shark to symbolize the non/inhuman. Unlike *Jaws*, which (passively if not absolutely) affirms the human/non-human binary, the work of Bertolt Brecht, scorning sentimentality and uncritical spectatorship, locates the shark within the sphere of “the human” to highlight the antisocial aspects and potentialities of society. As Ronald Speirs (*Brecht’s Early Plays*, 1982) observes, “Macheath is aptly likened to a shark because, like Baal, Shlink, Edward the Second, he embodies the predatory instinct of the lone animal, for whom all other animals are enemies or victims” (150). In *Eduard des Zweiten* the shark appears in a ditty uttered by the cynical Mortimer to rebuff questions about the missing king’s whereabouts:

In der Little Street in heller Mittagssonn
Sah man fünf Haifische in eine Kneip gehn,

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Ale nehmen, dann, leicht angeheitert,
Knien in Westminster Abtei. (212–213)

With this trope, a personification of man as crafty and sanctimonious, Brecht builds from a figuration in his source text, Marlowe's *Edward II*, in which the barons parade the emblem of the flying fish—"Which all the other fishes deadly hate, / And therefore being pursued, it takes the air; / No sooner is it up, but there's a fowl / That seizeth it" (6.23–27)—to stand for Gaveston. As in Brecht, the vast ocean comprehends infinite predation. By insisting on the cruelty and degradation of class structures (feudal or capitalist) that alienate and degrade social relations, Brecht and Marlowe (perhaps like *Jaws* itself?) invite us to challenge assumptions that threats to humanity are rooted beyond the human.

Carl Grey Martin joined the English faculty at Norwich in 2010. He specializes in early English language and literature. Martin, born and raised in New Bedford, Massachusetts, to immigrant parents, has always been interested in the stories — and histories — of earlier times and distant places. He regularly teaches the History of the English Language and a course on J.R.R. Tolkien, as well as film studies, science fiction, and premodern world literature. His scholarship, published in journals such as *The Chaucer Review* and *Studies in Philology*, focuses on class, violence, and ideology in 15th- and 16th-century texts. He tries to explore — and expose — the literary and cultural tools that the European aristocracy used to rationalize its violence and material power, which perpetuated class-based injustices. In 2025, Martin was a Clare Hall Visiting Fellow at Cambridge University, where he developed his current book project on Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*. In 2016, he enjoyed a month's residency as a Mayers Fellow at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, to study Thomas Hoccleve's manuscripts. Martin has received the Norwich University Award for Excellence in Research several times.

Henrique Laurentino, "Brecht's Legacy in the Portuguese Culture"

The communication proposes two ways of framing Brecht's aesthetics within the contemporary ecological crisis. The principle of Historicization is examined as a counter-narrative tool to understand the role of cultural objects and institutions in the construction of dominant narratives. The first part addresses the contribution of Brecht's writings and critical thought to Portuguese popular and folk music of the 20th century. The principle of Historicization makes it possible to trace Brecht's direct and indirect legacy in historical counter-narratives that represented political resistance to the fascist regime (1933–1974) and the construction of the democratic regime (after 1974). Particular attention is given to the work of the composer Fernando Lopes-Graça, whose musical and intellectual engagement with Portuguese folk music was deeply informed by first-hand field collections undertaken by himself and by Michel Giacometti. Lopes-Graça developed a modernist and erudite treatment of folk materials, combining creative composition with critical reflection. His approach went beyond musical experimentation: it resisted the homogenizing categorization of culture promoted by the regime, while simultaneously preserving and disseminating the musical traditions of rural and isolated communities. The second approach examines the role of historical narratives in shaping contemporary thought. The ecological crisis compels a reconsideration of how consensual history responds to emerging challenges. In this context, the principle of Historicization functions as an instrument for re-reading artistic and cultural objects through a critical engagement with historical narratives. Portuguese music and theatre demonstrate how Brecht's aesthetics contributed to critical perspectives on the trajectory of democracy, as well as on colonial conflicts, social struggles, and utopian goals. Songwriters such as José Afonso and José Mário Branco were influential voices during political crises, and their perspectives remain relevant in contemporary society.

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Historicization may thus be articulated with Donna Haraway's concept of the Chthulucene, suggesting that only a fully ecological mode of thought—traversing human history—can rebuild the connections between human societies and the environment.

Henrique Laurentino is a PhD candidate in Theatre and Performance Studies at the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon, and holds a Master's degree in Musical Sciences – Historical Musicology from the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at NOVA University Lisbon. In 2023, he defended his master's dissertation, "A mãe de Bertolt Brecht. Música de Hanns Eisler e José Mário Branco," under the supervision of Manuel Deniz Silva and Rui Pina Coelho. His research focuses on the intersection of musical sciences and theatre studies, adopting a theoretical-analytical approach to the application of Bertolt Brecht's dramaturgical concepts in music for theatre. Professionally, he has developed an artistic career as an opera singer and taught at Colégio Planalto in Lisbon between 2020 and 2025, where he also coordinated the Performing Arts project.

Panel 6 *Gestic Dissonance: Queer Aesthetics and Temporalities After the End of (the) (Hu)Man*

Sam Kolodezh, "Saint Joan of the Stockyards and the Ridiculous Hope of the Counter-Apocalypse: Brecht in the Key of Camp"

Kara Raphaeli, "Be a Mensch: Nonbinary Embodiment and the Brechtian Stage"

Wind Woods, "Gestic Refusal and Non-Performance: What if Brecht's *Chalk Circle* was a Cypher?"

How might queer and Black aesthetics produce temporal dissonance—interrupting linearity, futurity, and closure—and enact new ways of sensing and rehearsing the human otherwise? This panel engages the question of aesthetics and temporality through the theoretical horizon opened by Sylvia Wynter's call to move "beyond Man" as the overrepresented genre of the human. We employ the term Gestic Dissonance to explore how queer, Black, and non-normative performance practices unsettle the dramaturgies and temporalities through which Western modernity defines legibility, progress, and embodiment. Drawing on Wynter's reconceptualization of the human as praxis rather than biology, we consider how the gestic—Brecht's aesthetic of the social gesture—can be reimagined as a site of rupture, where new genres of being and relation take form. Together, we ask: what might the gestic reveal when it vibrates against the colonial temporality of "Man," and toward a re-scripted, an unsettled, relational assemblage to come?

Sam Kolodezh is a lecturer at UCSD, LMU, and NYU as well as a choreographer and director. His research interests include temporality, queer theory, critical theory, Shakespeare, and adaptation, especially of early modern works on contemporary stages. Along these lines, his research spans intermedial theater, postmodern South Asian theater, as well as performance philosophy.

Kara Raphaeli is an assistant professor of Theatre Arts at Simpson College. They received their Ph.D. in Theatre and Drama with a specialization in Critical Gender Studies from the joint program between UC San Diego and UC Irvine. Their research focuses on trans history and contemporary trans performance and they have had articles and book chapters published in *The Routledge Anthology of Women's Theatre Theory and Dramatic Criticism*, *The*

Works of Shonda Rhimes, TheatreForum, Theatre History Studies, Victorian Review. Outside of academia, they are a Sister of Perpetual Indulgence and community organizer in Des Moines, Iowa

Wind Dell Woods is an associate professor of Theatre Arts at the University of Puget Sound. As a playwright, his work explores themes of memory, community, and racial identity. His research centers on experimental dramaturgy, Hip Hop aesthetics, and theories of blackness.

Panel 7 *Opera and the Lehrstück in the Anthropocene*

Stephen Brockmann, “Brecht, *Mahagonny*, and the Anthropocene”

Brecht wrote his opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* at the end of the 1920s. Its premier coincided with the early months of the worldwide economic crisis that began with the Wall Street crash of 1929. At this point Brecht was already familiar with Marxist theory, but the opera has less obvious Marxist content than, for instance, *Die Maßnahme* (1930), *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe* (1929-1931), or *Die Mutter* (1930-1932). *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* represents a transition in Brecht’s thinking about human nature and human society away from the early plays that depict a kind of individualism and vitalism (for instance *Baal* [1918] or *Im Dickicht der Städte* [1921-1924]) and toward an understanding of human beings as profoundly conditioned by the social relations in which they are embedded. Since *Mahagonny* deals with the creation of a society, and not just the history of one individual within society, it addresses central themes in Brecht’s conception of human beings, social relations, and nature, in particular the tension between human egoism and individualism on the one hand and human interdependence and embeddedness in larger structures on the other. The key turning point in *Mahagonny* comes with a natural event: a hurricane. It is the hurricane and its arrival—or, more precisely, failure to arrive—that brings the main characters in the opera to a fundamental revelation about human beings and nature: “Wir brauchen keinen Hurrikan/ Wir brauchen keinen Taifun/ Denn was er an Schrecken tun kann/ Das können wir selber tun.” Here Brecht seems to be formulating a major insight of theories of the “Anthropocene” many decades before the concept of the “Anthropocene” was formulated around the turn of the millennium. The revelation runs like this: whereas previously human beings were part of the natural world and, like the rest of the natural world, subject to nature, they have now become so powerful that they are capable of creating their own “nature”. In this new dispensation, human beings are no longer subject to a fate that lies outside them. Rather, they create their own fate. As Brecht was to put it later, “Das Schicksal des Menschen ist der Mensch.” In this presentation I will explore the ways in which Brecht’s opera prefigures and anticipates the concept of the “Anthropocene.”

Stephen Brockmann has been teaching at Carnegie Mellon University since 1993. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1989 and received his undergraduate degree from Columbia University in 1982. His research focuses on the interconnection between culture and national identity. At Carnegie Mellon, he teaches a range of courses in both German and English, including *Nazi and Resistance Culture*, *History of German Film* and seminars on the GDR and its collapse. He is the author of *A Critical History of German Film*, a textbook developed for his course on German film history that has since been adopted by institutions across the U.S. and

internationally. From 2011 to 2012, he served as president of the German Studies Association, the world's largest academic organization for German Studies. From 2014 to 2023, he also served as president of the International Brecht Society (IBS), where he continues to support and organize IBS symposia in the United Kingdom, Germany and beyond.

Francesco Sani, "Brecht and the Scope of Art in the Anthropocene: Dialectics and the Political Meaning of Creative Expression"

Bertolt Brecht's work is rich in reflections on the relationship between human beings and nature. Adopting a dialectical materialist perspective, Brecht's oeuvre extensively explored the historical developments of his age as a series of qualitative changes that defined anew the very nature of what it means to be human and to navigate the social and natural world. It is therefore not surprising that Brecht's legacy is now inspiring a series of ecocritical approaches and seems to easily find an application in the discussion around the Anthropocene. However, the concept of the Anthropocene is descriptive of a new configuration of the role of human beings within the physical and biological order, not necessarily a political project to address issues connected to this state of affairs. Brecht's Marxism, instead, clearly underpinned his creative production on the nature and social function of the arts. This paper explores how Brecht's legacy offers itself not only as a critical tool but also as a framework to evaluate the social function of artistic work developed in response to the Anthropocene. In the study, I first present a framework of reference to define the scope and function for an artistic thematization of the Anthropocene through Brechtian techniques by drawing from two central texts from Brecht's later production: *Me-Ti: Book of Interventions in the Flow of Things* and *Buying Brass*. Secondly, I apply this framework to evaluate examples from my own work as an applied theatre facilitator, looking in particular at my project *Exceptions and Rules: Lehrstück and Climate Change* (De Montfort University, Leicester, February-April 2022). The framework is thus presented as a way to connect the employment of tools to thematize the Anthropocene creatively with a method that provides political contextualisation of an artwork among contenting ideas on how the climate crisis should be responded to.

Francesco Sani is a PhD student at De Montfort University Leicester. His work focuses on the employment of the Brechtian didactic play - *Lehrstück* - in contemporary political performance and, more broadly, on theatre that addresses the material and ideological structures defining individual and collective identity within the neoliberal social order. This is the distinctive line of engagement of my research and my artistic activity as a playwright and a director.

Anthony Squires, "Crisis, Contradiction & Hope: *Der Jasager / Der Neinsager*"

The paper reconstructs and critiques Brecht's notion that the process of contradiction implies hope for a better future, through an analysis of his writings on the *Dreigroschenprozeß* and other theoretical texts. It then provides an illustrative case study using *Der Jasager / Der Neinsager* to show how this notion was operationalized in his artistic praxis. Finally, it assesses the usefulness of the concept—and Brecht's operationalization of it—as a means of addressing current socio-political challenges, including ecological threats.

Anthony Squiers is a faculty member at AMDA College of the Performing Arts and co-editor of E-CIBS. He is author of *An Introduction to the Social and Political Philosophy of Bertolt Brecht* and *Bertolt Brecht's Adaptations and Anticapitalist Aesthetics Today*.

Panel 8 *Nature and Disaster: Sezuan, Galileo, Caucasian Chalk Circle*

Anshul Malik, “Alienation and Ecology: Brechtian Techniques in Contemporary Indian Theatre”

In recent decades, contemporary Indian playwrights have reconfigured the “theatre of roots” to engage not only with cultural identity but also with the pressing realities of ecological crisis. This paper examines the works of Deepan Sivaraman and Shankar Venkateswaran, two playwrights who stand at the confluence of tradition and experiment. While Sivaraman adapts the *bhāṇa* technique from Sanskrit dramaturgy, Venkateswaran draws on experimental forms such as Act Without Words, yet both converge in their evocation of scepticism through scenographic innovation. This scepticism, informed by Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, emerges as a deliberate strategy of alienation, compelling audiences to confront the unsettling truths of “dark ecology” and environmental degradation. By interweaving adapted theatrical techniques with indigenous languages, folk idioms, and traditional song, these playwrights craft a dramaturgy that is at once local and global, rooted and experimental. The paper interrogates whether such practices represent a continuation of the theatre of roots or the emergence of a distinct ecological theatre for the Anthropocene. Further, it explores the pedagogical value of integrating these performances into contemporary theatre curricula in India, considering how they cultivate critical awareness, ethical responsibility, and imaginative engagement with the climate crisis. Through close readings of selected plays, the study argues that this evolving theatre not only resonates with Brechtian legacies but also generates a uniquely Indian response to the ecological precarity of our times.

Anshul Malik is a PhD Research Scholar in the Department of English at NLU, Punjab, India

Eve Yi Lin, “‘Nature’ in the Court of Humanity”

The striking frequency of judicial scenes in Bertolt Brecht’s work is highlighted in both *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Life of Galileo*. Both plays juxtapose nature with the discussion of ethical principles fundamental to the human life-world, such as justice and truth. Brecht’s dramatic courts represent the problematic status quo of social authorities (either religious or civil sacred), against which conceptions of nature are projected from various angles: the natural law, natural science, natural blood ties, and the highly ambiguous “human nature”. Consequently, the multitudinous roles of nature in human society’s value construction escape the otherwise much pinned-down messages delivered by the two plays. As a latent subversive element in Brecht’s

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works, nature questions the legitimacy of human agency and subjectivity over the entire ecological world, which Brecht seemingly asserts. Moreover, the chameleonic roles of nature in the two plays are expanded by transcultural adaptations in literary history. China is a particularly important hetero-culture that the two plays have engaged with. In its rewriting of the ancient Chinese story, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* disrupts the human-oriented ethical orders of Confucianism in the original story, and veers toward a wilder picture of human-nature relation based on Taoism. *Life of Galileo* is the first foreign play staged in post-Mao China (1979) after the nation's decade-long social disaster of cultural blockade, economic collapse, scientific setbacks and ecological damage. It became a landmark cultural event in China, followed shortly by the staging of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1985). Both plays ring an eerie bell in the aftermath of China's ambitious social programs under radical communism. The perceptions of nature in Brecht's two plays were taken up by later ecological writings in contemporary Chinese literature, most notably Ah Cheng's *The King of Trees* (1985) and Liu Cixin's science fiction *The Three-Body Problem* (2008).

Eve Yi Lin studies English and Chinese literature, sinology (China studies), and cultural sociology of reading. She holds a PhD in English language and literature. She was a visiting scholar at Duke University (2016-2017), and she worked for the ERC-funded project "The Politics of Reading in the People's Republic of China" (Grant Agreement No. 757365/SH5: 2018–2023) as a fellow researcher in Freiburg University, Germany. Currently, she is a PhD candidate in sinology at Heidelberg University, Germany, finalizing her second doctoral dissertation on Chinese reading culture.

Martin Woesler, *Brecht's Caucasian Chalk Circle and the Chinese Yuan Zaju Huilan Ji: Paths of Transcultural Adaptation*

This contribution traces the transcultural migration of the chalk circle motif from its Chinese dramatic origins in Li Xingdao's Yuan dynasty zaju *Huilan ji* (*The Circle of Chalk*, 13th/14th century) through its European reception to Bertolt Brecht's *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* (1944). The analysis reconstructs the transmission chain from Li Xingdao's original through Stanislas Julien's pioneering French translation (1832) to Klabund's free German stage adaptation (1925) and finally to Brecht's radical reinterpretation. By comparing plot structures, conceptions of motherhood and justice, and theatrical conventions across these versions, the paper demonstrates that Brecht did not simply borrow a Chinese source but fundamentally inverted its moral logic. Where Li Xingdao's gong'an drama restores the biological mother to her rightful child within a Confucian framework of cosmic justice, Brecht awards the child to the social mother, subordinating blood ties to a materialist ethics of productive care. The paper situates this transformation within the broader context of Brecht's sustained engagement with Chinese thought and theater, including his encounter with Mei Lanfang's Beijing opera demonstrations in Moscow (1935) and his philosophical dialogue with Mohist and Taoist traditions. Drawing on the Chinese original text, the analysis examines what Brecht retained, transformed, and inverted, arguing that his reversal of the judgment scene reflects not merely a Marxist reinterpretation but a productive misreading shaped by the intermediary translations available to him.

Martin Woesler holds a PhD in Sinology from Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany. Since 2019 Member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, Distinguished Professor of Hunan Normal University "Xiaoxiang Scholars", Director of the Center for International Sinology, since 2020 EU Jean Monnet Chair. Since 2023 Director of the Jean Monnet Center of Excellence. Main research fields are the Red Chamber Dreams, comparative literature,

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translation, intercultural communication, contemporary Chinese literature. 66 books, 33 translations, 33 papers in English and Chinese, 41 successful applications for research grants (EU Horizon 2020, German National Science Council, Hanban China, German Ministry of Science, European Science and Scholarship Foundation, etc.). 2019 nominated as "Best Professor" of Germany, in 2020 he received the "Friendship Award of the Chinese Government", in 2023 the "Friend of Chinese Literature" award of the Chinese Writers' Association, and in 2024 the "Foreign Translators" Award of the Chinese Translation Association. He is the president of the German-Chinese Association, the president of the World Association for Chinese Studies, the vice president of the Harvard Visiting Professors in the Humanities, the president of the European Society for the Study of the Dream of the Red Chamber, the C.E.O. of European University Press, an advisor of the German Ministry of Education and Research, and an advisor of the Humboldt Foundation in Germany. Other part-time jobs: researcher at the University of Witten/Heidecke, Germany, head of the international project "History of Sinology", editor-in-chief of the periodical series "European Journal of Sinology", "European Journal of Chinese Studies", "Bulletin of the German China Association", and "Sinica" Book Series.

Panel 9 *Talking About Rivers and Trees. "Critical Gestures" on Infrastructure, Relationality, and Ecological Sensitivity*

Fanti Baum, "‘lying on one’s back’: Becoming a Diplomat"

Bernhard Siebert, "Beyond Birnam. Performing Arboreality After Brecht"

Julia Schade, "The raging Torrent is called Violent": Liquid Dramaturgies in the Wake of Extractivism"

Leon Gabriel, "Gestures in the Contact Zone: Infrastructural Dramaturgy and the Promise of Indigenous Epistemologies"

Bertolt Brecht’s theatrical and poetic texts articulate a tension that, from a contemporary perspective, appears particularly ambivalent: On the one hand, they represent an instrumental approach to the environment, society, and their malleability; on the other hand, they insist on relationality, processuality, and the embedding of human subjectivity within material, social, and ecological structures. The panel proposes "Talking About Rivers and Trees", taking into account both Brecht’s reflections on a “critical stance” and an “intervening thinking” as well as his famous provocation from the poem “To Those Born Later”. According to the latter, it is almost a crime to talk about trees “in dark times”. We will go with and against Brecht in order to reflect on the interconnections of theatre theory, ecology, and infrastructure within the horizon of the Anthropocene. First, the panel examines the prerequisites and limits of a Brechtian conception of change that understands social and material processes as closely intertwined. The image of river engineering Brecht evokes in his "Organon" refers not only to practices of regulation, provision, and organization but also to the possibility of conceiving social conditions as changeable. At the same time, such a perspective remains problematic insofar as it produces exclusions and raises the question of who is actually included in such an understanding of critical practice. Against this backdrop, the panel is interested in the transformation of Brecht’s conceptual framework under the conditions of ecological crisis, infrastructural dependency, and decolonial and feminist environmental critique. In a second step, the question of ecological sensitivity is taken into account: How can it be articulated through the medium of theatre theory and practice? Brecht’s

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polemical dismissal of talk about trees can serve less as an argument to reject ecological awareness, but rather as a productive starting point for discussing the crisis of sensitivity that arises from perceiving nature merely as a backdrop, a resource, or a recreational space. Building on contemporary ecological and aesthetic discourses, the panel explores forms of speech, perception, and action that do not aestheticize the vulnerability of landscapes, the destruction of habitats, and the question of habitability, but instead take them seriously in both theory and practice. This is linked to the search for an attitude that, in the sense of a different understanding of friendliness, goes beyond mere affective assent and can be read as a condition of shared worldliness. "Talking About Rivers and Trees" is conceived as a dialogical convergence of diverse perspectives from theatre theory and practice, which interpret Brecht's texts not through a historical lens but as a catalyst for contemporary discourse. In this way, the panel creates a transdisciplinary space in which Brecht's ideas can be reexamined and developed further in light of current ecological and political challenges.

Fanti Baum is an artist and theorist based in Dortmund and Frankfurt am Main. In 2018 and 2020, she served as co-artistic director of the Favoriten Festival in Dortmund alongside Olivia Ebert. She worked as an artistic-academic associate at the Institute for Theatre, Film and Media Studies in Frankfurt in 2019, held an artistic residency at the Akademie Schloss Solitude in 2020/2021, and served as an artistic-academic associate at HfG Offenbach from 2022 to 2025. Since November 2024, she has been a PhD fellow in the interdisciplinary research training group "Organizing Architectures."

Bernhard Siebert is a theatre scholar and works as a research officer at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Frankfurt am Main. Previously, he worked as a press officer for theatres in Berlin, Zurich, and Dortmund and supported independent theatre, performance, and dance practitioners with production management and public relations. From 2015 to 2022, he was a research associate for Heiner Goebbels and Xavier Le Roy at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies at JLU Giessen. His research focuses on the artistic use of stage machinery, queer forms of theatre, and performance systems.

Leon Gabriel is a junior professor of theater studies specializing in transnational theatre at Ruhr University Bochum. Since 2023, he has headed the Emmy Noether Research Group „Dramaturgies in the Afterlife of Violence. Transnational Theatre between Global South and North“ (www.dramaturgies-after-life.de). Monographie: *Bühnen der Altermundialität. Vom Bild der Welt zur räumlichen Theaterpraxis* (Neofelis, Berlin 2021, Open Access).

Julia Schade is a performance and media scholar and post-doctoral fellow at Ruhr-University Bochum. In her current project she investigates aesthetic practices of the Oceanic and decolonial ecology. Recent publications include *Unzeit. Widerständige Zeitlichkeiten in Performance, Kunst, Theorie* (Berlin: Neofelis 2024) and "Sexuality, Violence, and (Dis)possession in Brecht's Fatzer-fragment: A Revisitation" (*The Brecht Yearbook* 49, 2024).

Panel 10 *Brecht, Prose, and Environmental Thought*

Wei Zhang, "Anthropocene Resonance between Brecht and Zhuangzi"

Some of the ideas expressed in Brecht's plays and stories, e.g., *Schweyk in the Second World War*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Stories of Mr. Keuner*, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, resonate with the writings of Zhuangzi, the ancient Chinese Daoist philosopher of the Warring States period. This resonance is not only environmental but also ethical, challenging the relationship among humans, nature, and society. Zhuangzi's recognition of the interdependence of

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living beings and his vision of social harmony find an echo in Brecht's story of the shark and the small fish in *Stories of Mr. Keuner*. Yet Brecht extends this critique to the modern bourgeoisie, deepening the meaning of the biological chain. Zhuangzi's notion of "the use of the useless" (无用之用)—illustrated by the "big tree" that, though useless for timber, provides habitat, nourishment, and freedom—advocates a non-utilitarian conformity with nature. Similarly, Brecht's characters embody critiques of capitalist exploitation and war. Schweyk's apparent "idiocy" masks a wisdom of survival, Mother Courage's profiteering exposes how human greed distorts natural and social bonds, while Azdak comes across as a Zhuangzian Chinese knight-errant. Ultimately, Zhuangzi offers a philosophy of transcendence, while Brecht insists on human agency to achieve social change.

Wei Zhang received her PhD in Comparative Theatre from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (2018). She also holds a PhD from Shanghai Theatre Academy (2007). She is the author of *Chinese Adaptations of Brecht: Appropriation and Intertextuality* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) and *Performance Across Chinese Borders* (Routledge, 2024). Her research has been published in *Theatre Research International*, *Asian Theatre Journal*, *Comparative Drama*, *Philosophy and Literature*, *Classical Receptions Journal*, *The Brecht Yearbook* and many other journals. She is Professor at Hangzhou Normal University.

Kristopher Imbrigotta, "Adaptability and Ecological Consciousness in the *Stories of Mr. Keuner*"

Bertolt Brecht's *Stories of Mr. Keuner* articulates a narrative of survival that extends beyond political endurance to encompass ecological adaptability. Written across decades of exile and upheaval, the stories transform resilience from a personal virtue into a systemic principle of coexistence. This paper examines how Mr. Keuner—Brecht's quietly ironic alter ego—embodies adaptability as an ethical and ecological intelligence: the capacity to adjust, transform, and sustain life within unstable environments. Through close readings of key parables, the paper explores Brecht's redefinition of strength as flexibility and of goodness as usefulness. Drawing on ecocritical theory, particularly the work of Timothy Morton, Jane Bennett, and Donna Haraway, it situates Brecht's fragmentary prose within a broader discourse of interdependence and environmental awareness. Ultimately, the *Stories of Mr. Keuner* emerges as an early meditation on ecological adaptability—texts that teach how to live *with* change rather than against it. In an era marked by political volatility and climate crisis, Brecht's adaptable thinker Mr K remains an emblem of sustainable thought and creative endurance.

Kris Imbrigotta is chair of German Studies and is an affiliate faculty member in the Department of Environmental Sciences and Studies at the University of Puget Sound. He also serves as director of the Interdisciplinary Humanities Program on his campus. His research and teaching cover literature and cultural studies from the late nineteenth century to today, focusing primarily on: theatre history, performance, and drama pedagogy; environmental arts and humanities; media and film; and memory discourses. He serves as editor for the well-established monograph series *German Life and Civilization* (Peter Lang). Since 2019, he has been a coordinator of the Interdisciplinary Teaching Network of the German Studies Association and is a founding member of the German Studies Collaboratory, a digital humanities open-resource teaching/research hub. From 2016-2023 he served as co-editor of the performance

journal *Communications of the International Brecht Society*. He is the author of the critical student edition of Bertolt Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Bloomsbury, 2021). He was also a member of the international translation team for the newest edition of *Brecht on Theater* (Bloomsbury, 2014). His work has appeared in various book volumes as well as in *Radical History Review*, *German Quarterly*, *Brecht Yearbook*, *Expressionismus*, *Monatshefte*, *Humanities-Net*, and *Translation and Literature*.

Panel 11 *Human Potential, Aesthetics, and Praxis*

Elisa Mazzocato, "Brecht und Dürrenmatt: Strategien der Verfremdung für das Theater im Anthropozän"

Friedrich Dürrenmatt is frequently positioned as Brecht's successor: both dramatists employ experimental methodologies to catalyze the audience from a posture of passivity to one of active engagement. Just as the interpolation of songs, projected texts, and illustrations onto Brecht's stage disrupts the dramatic flow, Dürrenmatt's grotesque aesthetic functions as a mode of alienation (*Verfremdungseffekt*): rather than inviting simple identification with the characters, it fosters critical distance and reflexive inquiry. This is achieved, however, through divergent means. Brecht's disruptive elements expose the theatrical illusion to foreground the inherent artifice of the performance—the very "theatre-ness" of the play. Conversely, Dürrenmatt's use of the grotesque subverts our expectations by unveiling the paradox of the event itself, rendering the familiar strange and compelling us to recognize the potential reality within the seemingly absurd—the grotesque dimensions of our own lived reality. Rooted in more than mere stylistic preference are fundamentally different conceptions of the theatre's function: for Brecht, the stage should didactically empower spectators to transform society, whereas for Dürrenmatt, its highest aim is to "unsettle" them. In this presentation, I will analyze *Life of Galileo* (1939) and *The Physicists* (1961) to demonstrate how these two playwrights approach a question of central importance to the Anthropocene debate from antithetical perspectives: the problem of human agency in a modern world increasingly defined by science and technology. These dramatists offer two distinct responses: one optimistic ("So much is gained if only one man stands up and says No!") and one pessimistic ("Any attempt by an individual to solve for himself what concerns everyone must fail"). Both works, frequently compared regarding the theme of scientific responsibility, acquire even broader resonance within the context of Anthropocene discourse as experiments in human agency. They address this issue not merely thematically, by confronting protagonists Galileo and Möbius with world-altering decisions, but also through a dramaturgical interrogation that utilizes estrangement to pose this very question to the audience. Thus, Brecht's and Dürrenmatt's divergent models suggest how political theatre remains a vital possibility in the Anthropocene, provoking the spectator toward rigorous critical thought.

Elisa Mazzocato is a doctoral candidate in the school of language and literature at the Ludwigs-Maximilians-Universität Munich.

Paul Brodowsky, “A Manifesto for Theatre Practice in the Anthropocene”

This paper situates the work of the independent theatre collective *recherchepraxis* (www.recherchepraxis.de) within contemporary ecocritical discourse and the effort to reposition Brecht in the conceptual terrain of the Anthropocene. It introduces two components of the collective's practice that engage Brechtian aesthetics—especially *Gestus*—in relation to multispecies performance and landscape-based dramaturgy. The first component presents the Manifesto of the New Grand Landscape Theatre / Neues Großes Landschaftstheater (NGLT), which outlines an alternative framework for ecological theatre-making. Rather than treating nature as content or backdrop, the manifesto proposes working procedures that position the land and its human and other-than-human inhabitants as active partners in research, creation, and performance. Central to this approach are long-term site-specific research, interviews with local experts, and a shift of artistic agency from the individual performer toward the ecologies in which performances are embedded. The NGLT thus intervenes in dominant theatrical modes of depicting environmental crisis by cultivating relational practices that challenge anthropocentric dramaturgies. Within this framework, *recherchepraxis* focuses on post-nature landscape constellations that function as interfaces enabling communication between human and other-than-human entities. The second component examines early artistic outcomes of this approach through “Hier spricht die Landschaft”, a series of nine listening stations scattered around the former strip mine Spreetal/Oberlausitz. A 2010 landslide that killed over sixty sheep and halted renaturalization efforts transformed this site into a refuge for rare species. The resulting monologues—voiced by a sheep, grey hairgrass, a grain of sand, and others—explore ways of articulating more-than-human positionalities without collapsing them into human-centered narratives. The analysis considers how Brecht's *Gestus* may illuminate these text-based strategies. As a founding member of *recherchepraxis*, I reflect on how the theatre practice of the NGLT expands Brechtian methodologies for the present ecological moment, proposing that reinterpreting *Gestus* offers new tools for politically engaged theatre in the Anthropocene.

Born in Kiel in 1980; graduated in 2005 with a degree in Cultural Studies, specializing in "Creative Writing and Cultural Journalism," from the University of Hildesheim. During this time, he published his first book, *Milch Holz Katzen*, with Suhrkamp Verlag. In 2004, his first play, *Stadt, Land, Fisch*, was presented at the *Autorentheatertage* (Playwrights' Festival) at the Münchner Kammerspiele. He was a co-founder and—until 2004—co-editor of the literary magazine *Bella triste*; in 2005, he was part of the artistic direction team for the inaugural Prosanova Festival, a triennial event in Hildesheim showcasing young German-language literature. His numerous plays include *Gleis 11* (co-authored with Christine Umpfenbach), *Regen in Neukölln*, and *Intensivtäter*. Additionally, he has developed interview- and research-based plays in collaboration with director Christine Umpfenbach and the collective "Recherchepraxis". During the 2012/13 season, he served as the resident playwright at Theater Freiburg. Beyond prose and drama, he writes radio plays and essays. He has received numerous awards and honors for his writing, including residencies in New York (Writer in Residence at NYU) and Los Angeles (Villa Aurora), as well as the Frankfurt Authors' Foundation Prize and the Nicolas-Born-Prize's promotional award. Since the 2013/14 winter semester, he has held the professorship for "Dramatic Technique" in the Scenic Writing program at the UdK (Berlin University of the Arts). In addition to workshop and mentoring activities, his teaching focuses on prose as well as interview and research techniques.

Panel 12 *Brecht in Dialogue with Paul Celan and Peter Weiss*

Loren Kruger, “‘When Speaking About Trees is Almost a Crime’: Exile, Death and Renewal in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*”

Brecht’s question “what times are these/when speaking about trees is almost a crime?” opens his exile poem *An die Nachgeborenen*. Written as he and his entourage were preparing to flee from Denmark to Sweden, the lines contrast the rootedness of trees with the rootless state of exiles, those “in need,” or perhaps “in a state of emergency” (Not), lacking the help of friends. Calling conversation about trees “almost a crime,” Brecht both avows his own (German, Romantic, naïve) attachment to forests and disavows, in sober and dis-illusioned manner (the first translation of *verfremdt* in 1936), that attachment in the face of war and the destruction of habitat and humanity. Peter Weiss’s novel *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* may not cite this poem directly, but it follows German leftists, including Brecht, scattered across Europe. While the novel celebrates survivors, whether famous like Brecht, fictional, such as the Narrator, or factual but unknown, such as Charlotte Bischoff, who escapes the gruesome death of her comrades in the German Communist underground by working disguised as a charwoman, Weiss also honors the untimely dead. Despite the enormity of wartime slaughter and environmental degradation in the background of his long novel, Weiss does not pretend to paint a canvas of global proportions nor to compose a narrative on the scale of the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene. Rather he brings to light the individual dead and the exemplary ways they responded to their environments, and, in two striking cases, the chthonic (earthly, composting) action of the environment on the dead. In the novel, the bodies of famous Willi Münzenberg, cosmopolitan communist impresario extraordinaire but also a target of Stalin, and modestly known Karin Boye, Swedish poet and student of psychoanalysis, are found in forests. Even though Weiss marks the difference between them--Boye chooses the time and place of her death in a forest near Stockholm, whereas Münzenberg may have been killed elsewhere than the French wood that partially composted his body—the novel dwells in and on the forests, conjuring them to testify to the crimes of the century and to the power of composing and composting a future. Although the Narrator-survivor uses the conditional tense to propose this future, his invocation of Gaia, the figure that begins and ends the narrative, invites a chthulucenic reading, one that, following Donna Haraway, strives to combine the chthonic power of Gaia to resist capitalocenic violence with *kainos*, the urgent pressure of now.

Loren Kruger’s research includes *The National Stage* (University of Chicago Press), which focuses on theatre in England, France and America but is cited by researchers from India to Ireland, Croatia to China, South Africa to Sweden; *Post-Imperial Brecht* (Cambridge University Press), which won the Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literary Study awarded by the Modern Language Association; *A Century of South African Theatre* (Bloomsbury), and *Imagining the Edgy City* (Oxford University Press). The latter covers film and fiction, public art and architecture as well as performance of poetry and theatre in Johannesburg “the Chicago of South Africa,” and compares Johannesburg with other cities from Chicago to Paris, Berlin to Bogotá, Sydney to São Paulo. Kruger’s most recent publications return to Chicago: she was commissioned to introduce *Six Plays by Mickle Maher* (Agate Publishing 2022) and to write about theatre in Chicago and elsewhere for the 75th anniversary issue of *Theatre Journal* (2023), a journal that she edited in the 1990s. Her edition and translation of *Beyond the Internationale: Revolutionary Writings by Eugène Pottier, Communard* (2024) is published by Charles H. Kerr, the progressive publishing house operating in Chicago since 1886, which printed Pottier’s most famous song, the *Internationale* for the first time in English translation in 1894.

Elena Pnevmonidou, “Songs from Beyond the Anthropocene: Urgency and Futurity in Brecht and Celan”

Elena Pnevmonidou’s research focuses on the intersection between romantic aesthetic theory and romantic conceptualizations of the “other,” be it the other gender or the cultural other. With regards to the issue of gender, she is not only interested in male representations of the feminine, but also in the ways in which female writers of the period situate their own conceptualizations of gender in relation to romantic aesthetic theory. She has recently begun carving out a second research area in early 20th century German literature through a forthcoming publication on representations of the body in the writings of Bertolt Brecht and Franz Kafka.

Panel 13 Colonialism, Exploitation, and Crisis Capitalism

Aldo Milohnić and Jakob Ribič, “Historicization versus Naturalization in Brecht’s and our ‘Dark Times’”

“Das Schicksal des Menschen ist der Mensch geworden” is a Brecht’s statement he repeated many times: in *Der Messingkauf*, in the poem *Rede an dänische Arbeiterschaulpieler über die Kunst der Beobachtung*, in *Me-ti*, etc. In the play *Die Mutter* it functions as an aphoristic response of Pelagea Wlassowa to the claim by Die Hausbesitzerin that man needs God because he is helpless before fate. In other words, fundamental social changes do not depend on higher, mystical powers; they will not automatically happen, subject to the mercy of natural or theological laws – only the people themselves can make a better world. However, as Philosopher explains in *Die Messingkauf*, “daß die Menschen so wenig über sich selber wissen, ist schuld daran, daß ihr Wissen über die Natur ihnen so wenig hilft”. The epistemological and at the same time political problem is that people perceive social processes as natural phenomena, that they therefore naturalize them as universal, non-historical events. As Philosopher says in another fragment from the same unfinished Brecht’s work: “So erfährt die Menge den Brotpreis, die Kriegserklärung, den Mangel an Arbeit wie Naturereignisse, Erdbeben oder Überschwemmungen.” Brecht, of course, did not emphasize this social contradiction for moral reasons but as an eminently political question. This delineation between the moral and political dimensions was important in Brecht’s lifetime, “in finsternen Zeiten”; it is equally important today, in a time defined by wars and the threat of using nuclear weapons of mass destruction, as well as economic, ecological, and other global crises inherent to the capitalist mode of production. As Fredric Jameson says, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. If the ultimate consequence of this logical syllogism is that capitalism and the world will collapse together, this is bad news both for those who are aware of the destructiveness of capitalism and for the planet as a whole. Therefore, in our conference paper we will reflect on the potential of searching for a new political imagination in the current historical moment, following at the same time Brecht’s passionate search for a suitable form for new content. If, as he says, “petroleum resists the five-act form,” then contemporary art must also respond with its own means to the destruction of the planet through the extensive exploitation of energy sources and warfare for domination over them.

Aldo Milohnić is a professor of theatre history at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and the head of the Theatre and Film Studies Centre. He has lectured and conducted seminars at the universities in Aarhus (School of Communication and Culture – Department of *Dramaturgy* and *Musicology*), Belgrade (University of Arts), Bochum (Ruhr-Universität, Institut für Theaterwissenschaft), Milan (La Statale, Dipartimento di Beni Culturali e Ambientali), Rijeka (Academy of Applied Arts), Skopje (Faculty of Dramatic Arts), Zadar, Zagreb (Academy of Dramatic Art), etc. He is author of the monographs *Theories of Contemporary Theatre and Performance* (2009), *Art in Times of the Rule of Law and Capital* (2016), *Theatre of Resistance* (2021), *I Worked for 40 Years: Dramatisations and Adaptations of Cankar's The Bailiff Yerney* (2022) and co-author of several other books (*Culture Ltd.* and *It's Time for Brecht*, among others). He is author of numerous articles in academic journals and editor of anthologies and special issues of performing arts journals (*Theatre of Resistance*; *The Politicality of Performance*; *Pupilcheks Arrived – 40 Years of the Pupilijska Ferkeverk Theatre*; *Artivism*; *Brecht/Gestus*; *How to Do Things with Words in Theatre*; *Women in Theatre*, etc.). His research interests include the history and theory of theatre, contemporary performing practices and the sociology of culture and arts. He is also a dramaturg and a curator of exhibitions, conferences and symposiums in the field of performing arts.

Jakob Ribič is a PhD student and research group member at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television of the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). He is currently working on his doctoral dissertation on Bertolt Brecht.

Nikolaus Müller-Schöll, “‘The War for Oil,’ Authoritarianism, and Brecht’s Scope for Resilience”

The age of “humanity,” which was described to us in classical Hegelian terms as the age of reason, is, when viewed from our present perspective, also the age of colonialism and instrumental reason. From an economic point of view, it is characterized by the emergence of the *Capitalocene*. From a German perspective—and this is the only perspective from which I can write—it ends not with the emancipation of humanity hoped for by Kant, the absolute knowledge promised by Hegel, or the “free association of free individuals” envisaged by Marx, but with the genocide of the Herero and Nama, the singular crime against humanity of the Shoah committed against the European Jews, with historically unprecedented forms of control and disciplinary societies, and with the planetary climate crisis. But what does it mean to consider this *conjuncture* (cf. S. Hall) when discussing the so-called “Anthropocene” while reading Brecht? First of all, we should perhaps not ask so much about Brecht’s own thematic contributions to the topic of the Anthropocene, about his usefulness, or about his supposed utopias. Rather, we should understand him as an actor who is literally entangled in this age. His practices are of particular significance today precisely because, at least in the texts he himself describes as the “highest standard, technically” in his work, he always sees himself as part of the problems on the one hand. On the other hand, he persistently resists the dictates of usefulness and positive counter-designs. Instead of devising programs for the future, he explores those small spaces of resilience that open up the possibility of other worlds, which he forbids himself to imagine. I would like to pursue this initially abstract approach, for which I have proposed the term Brecht’s *Theater of Potentiality*, along the lines of Brecht’s poetic examination of the concept of “human beings,” which, as I will show, he understands as beings inhabited by the inhuman, harboring and concealing many possibilities. In keeping with the theme of the conference, I will focus primarily on those texts in which Brecht deals directly or indirectly – either thematically or formally - with “oil,” “war,” and authoritarianism in one way or another—which gives him new relevance in our current political constellation.

Nikolaus Müller-Schöll is chair of theatre studies at the department of theatre, film and media studies of the Goethe-University in Frankfurt/Main since October 2011, head of this department and at the same time head of the master program in dramaturgy as well as of the international master in Comparative Dramaturgy and Performance Research. Before this, he was professor for theatre studies at the Department of German II of the university of Hamburg and as well co-director of the master program in performance studies for two and a half years (2009-2011). His major research interests are: Theatre studies as critical science, questions concerning theatre, theory, literature and politics. Theater as “Ereignis” (event), the question of alterity, the gesture, the fictioning of the political, theater as work on the evil, potentiality, representation “after Auschwitz”, theatre architecture as built ideology etc. Furthermore he continues to work on the objects of his phd and his habilitation: Benjamin, Brecht, Heiner Müller, Kleist as well as the “Comical as paradigm of the experience of modernity” (1700 until present). He published amongst others: *Das Theater des ‘konstruktiven Defaitismus’*. Lektüren zur Theorie eines Theaters der A-Identität bei Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht und Heiner Müller. Frankfurt/M. und Basel 2002; *Politik der Vorstellung* (ed. with Joachim Gerstmeier), Berlin 2006; *Schauplatz Ruhr*, Berlin 2007 (ed. with Ulrike Haß); *Was ist eine Universität? Schlaglichter auf eine ruinierte Institution*, Bielefeld 2009. (ed. with Ulrike Haß); *Heiner Müller sprechen*, Berlin 2010. (ed. with Heiner Goebbels); *Performing politics*, Berlin 2012. (ed. with André Schallenberg and Mayte Zimmermann); *Unterm Blick des Fremden. Theaterarbeit nach Laurent Chétouane*, Bielefeld 2015. (ed. with Leonie Otto).

Ella Ziel, “Environmental Agency and Industrialist Exploitation in *The Exception and the Rule*”
The Exception and the Rule is one of few plays by Brecht in which industrialization is directly aligned with the perspective and desires of the bourgeois class. In it, exploitation of the land is continually paralleled with the exploitation of wage-laborers. Utilizing theories articulated in prominent sociologist Bruno Latour’s book, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, published in the wake of the United States’ withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and written to provide a new possible global political framework grounded in values of environmental respect and collaboration, this paper aims to examine how the ecological aspects of *The Exception and the Rule* can be foregrounded and better understood in relation to contemporary understandings of the Anthropocene. Latour’s concept of the obscurantist elite is exemplified by the Merchant’s deliberate misinformation and endangerment of the working class, and the play’s landscape does not serve as a passive setting to the plot but instead fights back against its exploiters, transforming the fictional Yahi Desert from static backdrop to a theatrical depiction of the Terrestrial as political actor—a more aggressive actor, in fact, than the abused Coolie. However, the Terrestrial (along with its attacks against the advent of industrialization) ceases to exist following the Coolie’s murder; both victims of capitalist exploitation are silent and invisible in the play’s final courtroom scene. While the events and motivations surrounding the Coolie’s murder are discussed extensively, the natural world is forgotten entirely in favor of purely political didacticism. Although Brecht’s critique of capitalist self-interest ultimately focuses more on social and legal ramifications than ecological ones, his commentary on the material dangers of political complacency resonates deeply when read in our current historical moment of environmental collapse brought about by decades of governmentally unchallenged corporate greed.

Ella Ziel is a theatre artist and performer from Charleston, South Carolina currently pursuing their MFA in Acting at UHM. Ella’s focus is in politically-centric experimental drama, particularly the theoretical and creative works of 20th century German playwright Bertolt Brecht. They are interested in theatre’s intrinsically dialectic process and its capability to form and reframe critical dialogues with classic works through innovative or avante-garde stagings of canonical scripts. As an actor, Ella gravitates toward the lyrical dialogue and heightened performance stylings inherent to the works of Shakespeare and early 20th century English drama.

Panel 14 *Technology, Mediation, Science*

Tom Kuhn, “BB and the Automobile: Snapshots from a Love Story”

The private motor car was a transforming technology of modernity, leaving its oily imprint on the streets of Berlin and other cities in the 1920s. It became one of the favoured cultural objects of the fashionable, exciting a popular obsession, not just with the aesthetics of the machine, the speed, and the private space a car could afford, but also with such matters as street signs, the regulation of traffic and, above all, traffic accidents. We find evidence in every variety of cultural artefact, from magazines to ‘high’ art, to films, novels, plays and poems. Brecht’s fondness for cars is well attested. Famously, he wrote off one car against a tree in 1929, and then collaborated in a publicity stunt for the Steyr motor company, in exchange for new car. As well as Steyr (x3), at various times in his life he owned cars by Daimler, Opel, Ford and Buick. He had himself photographed and even painted in front of cars. There is also an overlooked connection to his more serious theoretical concerns. Brecht uses the combustion engine as one of his very first examples of the experience of *Verfremdung* (c. 1936), and then elaborates a theory of epic theatre in relation to a traffic accident (*Die Strassenszene*, 1938). By way of analyses of texts from all periods, theoretical sketches, play plans and realised dramas, from *Der Autokauf* (1929) to the Studebaker of *Herr Puntila* (1940), poems, portraits and other images, this paper interrogates Brecht’s relationship to an icon of technological modernity, a divisive social marker, and a latter-day symbol of man’s destruction of the planet.

Tom Kuhn's main research interests are in political literature in the 20th century. He has worked particularly on Bertolt Brecht, and was the series editor of the main English-language edition of Brecht's works. In addition, he has written on exile and anti-fascist literature, and on more recent drama. He led the 'Writing Brecht' project on the translation, edition and cultural transmission of Brecht. Outputs included several major publications of Brecht's work in English. He has also worked recently on Brecht's use of visual art and other pictorial material.

Sebastian Kirsch, “I’m not a Performer. I’m a Transformer!” Brecht’s *Street Scene* in the Anthropocene

Modern road traffic and, above all, automobilism are among Bertolt Brecht’s key motifs. At the same time, he links these motifs to central aspects of his theatre practice: relations of movement and interruption, reflections on the “dividuum,” critiques of the bourgeois interior and of older representational forms, all articulated in close proximity to the dynamics of traffic. His *Street Scene as the Basic Model of Epic Theatre* thus sits at the very core of his thinking on theatre. In the horizon of the Anthropocene, however, the question arises of how street, automobile, and critical theatre can be thought together today. Which elements of this theatrical and conceptual world have become historical, and which remain productive for contemporary practice? The paper addresses these questions in dialogue with René Pollesch’s (*Life on Earth can be sweet*) *Donna* (2019). Pollesch’s play reworks Brecht’s *Street Scene*, yet combines it with Donna

Haraway's speculative ecologies and the digital imaginaries of the *Transformers* franchise, where so-called Autobots appear as cyborg-like auto-organisms. At the same time, Pollesch makes Brecht's model text the core of a theatrical media history of the street, reaching back to the early modern period and the *commedia*. Against this deep historical background, the opening question returns with new force: Is Brecht's theatre a model for an environmentally attuned practice, or is it a document of a modernity still blind to the costs of its own speed?

Sebastian Kirsch is a scholar of theatre, literature, and cultural theory whose research explores the environmental history of theatre, choral practices, politics, and the intersections of theatre and literary studies. Since 2024, he has been a Schrödinger Fellow at the ZfL Berlin, following appointments at the University of Vienna, New York University, and Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf. He completed two Habilitationen: in theatre studies, and comparative literature at Ruhr University Bochum. His publications include *Chor-Denken: Sorge, Wahrheit, Technik* and *Das Reale der Perspektive*. Kirsch has also worked as a dramaturg and was a longtime editor and columnist for *Theater der Zeit*.

Thereza de Jesus Santos Junqueira & Carine Costa Santos, “Crossing the Ocean with Bertolt Brecht”

If, for Bertolt Brecht, the popular Brazilian saying "Whoever tells a story adds a point" constituted a methodological premise, it is up to us, as his readers, to pay attention to the "points" we can add. His thinking is in line with the renowned Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1981), who taught the inseparability of reading the word and reading the world. The word can only be read if it is relocated in the context of the reading. With Brecht and Freire, this research analyzes the play *Der Ozeanflug* (1929), establishing connections between the moment of its writing and the place from which we view it. The play tells about the development of technology by human beings as a central theme and addresses the challenges faced by the aviator who made the first aerial crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, highlighting his struggle against the forces of nature and his praise for machines/technology. However, after the crossing and the widespread euphoria surrounding the feat, the text seems reticent in concluding that the successful flight is the result of "our steel ingenuity," which points to "what has not yet been achieved." Exhausted after exposing his fragility in the face of the forces of nature, the pilot understands that, despite having survived difficulties, there is great fragility in humanity, and we highlight his reflective process in the final lines of the play. In our reading, we associate Brecht's text with Ailton Krenak (2019) and Antônio Bispo dos Santos (2023), Brazilian “countercolonial” authors who propose the establishment of a different relationship with Earth/Nature, which is seen as a living entity with its own dynamics and not simply as a resource to be exploited. We therefore question the meaning of “what has not yet been achieved” and its connection to technical progress.

Thereza Junqueira is Postdoctoral Researcher and Lecturer of Literature, Theater and Human Rights at the State University of Feira de Santana (UEFS) and at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA)

Carine Santos graduated in Portuguese and Modern Foreign Language/German. Currently pursuing a degree in Portuguese as a Foreign Language at the Federal University of Bahia. Postgraduate student in Editorial Management and Editorial Editing.

Panel 15 *Ecocritical Storytelling and Brecht in Canada*

Joerg Esleben and Misha Kostrov, “A Brechtian Toolkit for Canadian Ecocritical Theatre” The Anthropocene has brought our planet into what many consider the most serious ecological crisis in human history. While this is a global problem, national cultures still play an important role in reflecting and shaping the mentalities and responses related to it. In Canada, climate change is acutely evident in recurring wildfires, melting Arctic landscapes, and conflicts over resource extraction. Theatre in Canada has long been a space where environmental and social issues intersect, yet the systematic application of Brechtian strategies in ecocritical performance remains understudied. This paper examines how Brecht’s methodologies—*Verfremdung*, *Gestus*, historicization, complex seeing, and the self-teaching principles of the *Lehrstücke*—can serve as performance tools for Canadian ecocritical theatre. We argue that these strategies are effective in revealing contradictions, stimulating collective reflection, and thereby helping to reframe public discourse on the climate crisis. We will develop a Brechtian ecocritical model that combines conceptual analysis with practical dramaturgical strategies, applicable to Canadian contexts of environmental crisis and cultural diversity, including Indigenous performance practices. By situating Brecht’s methods within Canadian ecocritical theatre, we aim to demonstrate how epic theatre can contribute to the development of critical consciousness and help mobilize collective responses to the climate crisis. The result will be a Brechtian toolkit for Canada—both a theoretical framework and a set of performative strategies—that enhances theatre’s potential to shift ecological consciousness in national and global contexts.

Joerg Esleben teaches German language and culture, intercultural studies, and theatre. My research interests are centred around intercultural relations and engaged arts. My previous research and publications include work on 18th-century travel writing, relations between Germany and India, and the Faust theme in Canada. Currently, I am researching the uses of Bertolt Brecht’s work in Canadian theatre and culture (see the online database and exhibition site *Brecht in/au Canada*) and intersections of arts and hope, and also serves as e-cibs co-editor (with Anthony Squires).

Misha Kostrov is a Ukrainian-Canadian playwright, director, dramaturg, and Gestalt therapist with over two decades of experience in theatre, film, and teaching. His creative journey blends the worlds of storytelling, psychology, and performance — making his work deeply personal, innovative, and impactful. Born in Kyiv, Ukraine, Misha began his artistic path in the renowned Black Square Theatre (BST), where he studied acting, directing, and drama. His early stage work included performing and directing notable productions such as *Eric’s Room*. He later moved to Canada, earning a degree in Film from Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University), where several of his student films won Jury Prizes at the Toronto Student Film Festival. Misha’s filmmaking career includes a diverse range of projects, from powerful social commentary in short films to acclaimed feature works. His film “*Infernal Guidon, or Cossack Christmas*” earned him the Ukrainian Film Academy Award, Audience Choice. His directorial work has also been recognized with the Platinum Remi Award and the Cannes Corporate Media & TV Awards Silver Dolphin.

Jure Zrilic, “International Law in the Capitalocene: A Brechtian Intervention”

The paper offers a Brechtian reading of investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS), a mechanism of international law that empowers corporations to sue states over regulatory measures affecting their investments. Many of these disputes arise from conflicts surrounding extractive industries, environmental protection and Indigenous rights, making ISDS an important site for examining the relationship between international law and the Capitalocene. Drawing on Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre, the paper conceptualises ISDS as a juridical theatre in which conflicts between

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transnational capital, environmental protection and Indigenous rights are staged. It argues that the anti-theatrical design of ISDS produces effects comparable to those sought by Brecht's dramaturgy. Through the interconnected concepts of distance, dialectics and disillusionment, the paper offers a framework for understanding the operation, evolution and legitimacy crisis of the system. The paper focuses on disputes brought by Canadian corporations arising from extractive industries. It examines how state measures adopted to protect ecosystems, water resources and Indigenous lands are translated into claims concerning investment protection, exposing recurring contradictions in the operation of international investment law. By situating ISDS within the conceptual terrain of the Capitalocene, the paper argues that Brecht's dramaturgy provides a distinctive way of rethinking the relationship between international law, capitalism and environmental governance

Jure joined The City Law School as Senior Lecturer in August 2022. He was previously Lecturer and Senior Lecturer at the University of Liverpool, and prior to that, Research Fellow in International Arbitration at Queen Mary University of London. He has taught international investment law, international arbitration, public international law, and international dispute settlement. Before entering academia, Jure worked at a The Hague-based NGO in the justice sector and at the Court of Appeal of Slovenia. Jure's research interests lie in public international law, international investment law and international arbitration. More specifically, his recent work examines the interplay between international investment law and other bodies of law, such as the law of armed conflict and global health. Jure received PhD from the University of Cambridge as a recipient of AHRC Doctoral Award. His PhD thesis was the basis for a monograph 'The Protection of Foreign Investment in Times of Armed Conflict' (OUP 2019). His scholarship has been commended as 'perfectly timed and making important contribution to this area' (Dr Lawrence Hill-Cawthorne in *Journal of World Investment & Trade*), and as providing 'a holistic analysis of the wider ramifications of investment treaty disputes in times of armed conflict and during the process of peace building' (Dr Ana Maria Daza-Clark in *ICSID Review – Foreign Investment Law Journal*). Jure regularly receives invitations to speak, write or give advice on this subject. Currently, his research focuses on political economy of foreign investment policy making, as well as on the interplay of the law of treaties and armed conflict.

John Bessai, “Epic Estrangement for the Anthropocene: Brechtian Techniques in NFBC Digital Storytelling”

This paper examines how digital works from the National Film Board of Canada (NFBC) mobilize Brechtian strategies—estrangement, gestus, and montage—to reframe perception and agency in the Anthropocene. I analyze *Bear 71* (Leanne Allison & Jeremy Mendes), *Do Not Track* (Brett Gaylor), and *Biidaaban: First Light* (Lisa Jackson) as public storytelling that builds empathic distance and critical clarity about surveillance, settler-colonial infrastructures, and environmental crisis. In *Bear 71*, a first-person animal narration, surveillance imagery, and a navigable “grid” of Banff combine to shift viewpoint and unsettle anthropocentric habits, which helps audiences register responsibility and care for more-than-human worlds. These stylistic choices—grainy camera traps, diegetic data overlays, and interactive maps—produce an epic mode for ecological witness that encourages reflection and action. *Do Not Track* turns the spectator into subject by exposing live tracking flows and platform logics; its participatory structure doubles as didactic form, echoing Brecht's *Lehrstück* while rendering data capitalism visible. In *Biidaaban: First Light*, Indigenous futurity interrupts the settler city through

speculative presence and spatial re-composition, locating responsibility in everyday infrastructures and relations. Across these works, the NFBC's public mandate and "DNA of experimentation" enable narrative forms that operate as civic infrastructure for learning, debate, and collective imagination. I situate these cases within debates on the public sphere and platform society, proposing "epic estrangement" as a design heuristic for Anthropocene storytelling: stage relations, reveal technique, and invite situated action. The result is a practice of art as a public service that links perception to policy, and empathy to structural change.

John Bessai, PhD, is an interdisciplinary scholar of political theory, visual culture, and public media institutions, with 25+ years as a documentary and interactive producer. He teaches at Okanagan College and University College of the North, focusing on Canadian politics, cultural policy, and media. His dissertation, *Art as a Public Service: The NFBC's Role in Shaping Democratic Dialogues and Societal Transformation*, analyzes NFBC projects as counterpublic storytelling that supports civic learning. Recent work and presentations engage environmental media, Indigenous and feminist perspectives, and platform governance.

Panel 16 *Brecht, Global Capitalism, and Theory*

Hunter Bivens, "'The monster rises, making merchandise of nature itself.' Brecht, Mauler, and Bersiev on Labor and Ecological Metabolism

Adorno famously argued that Brecht failed to show the truth of capitalism, rendering "mere episodes in the sphere of circulation [...] instead of the appropriation of surplus value." The target of Adorno's criticism is *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, the play in which—along with the Fleischhacker fragment—Brecht wrestles most directly with the representational dilemmas of capitalism. Written at the point where he was turning in earnest to Marxism and revolutionary politics, *Saint Joan*, I argue, uses the sphere of circulation less in the strict Marxist sense developed in *Capital*, than as a figure for capitalism itself as a way of organizing nature, or a world ecology, as Jason W. Moore might put it, holding together food, energy, raw material, and human expenditure in a particular way. The "edifice of sweat and money" evoked by Mauler can then be read as a figure for the Capitalocene itself, a "situated multispecies world ecology of capital" (Moore) that renders work into loathing, pigs into meat in cans, and Chicago into hell; it is "the world as slaughterhouse." The paper then looks at Brecht's scattered visions of a collective labor that would, in reciprocity with nature, begin to suture the metabolic rift of capital, focusing on the possibly Lysenkoist "Tschaganak Bersijew, or the Cultivation of Millet," to think about a post-capitalist world ecology.

Hunter Bivens is Associate Professor of Literature and German Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where he is also affiliated with History of Art and Visual Culture and the History of Consciousness Department. His research and teaching focus on twentieth- and twenty-first-century German literature, culture, and film; Marxism and critical theory; socialist realism and proletarian literature; modernism and the left avant-gardes; and theories of the novel. He has written extensively on Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers, East German literature and cinema, and representations of labor and socialist culture. Bivens is the author of *Epic and Exile: Novels of the German Popular Front, 1933–1945* and *The East German Construction Novel of the 1950s: Work, Affect, and Obstinacy*. His scholarship has also appeared in *German Studies Review*, *The Brecht Yearbook*, *sympleke*, and numerous edited volumes. He earned a BA from Bard College before completing his PhD at the University of Chicago.

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David Schwartz, “Dialectical Theater as an Instrument for Environmentally Engaged Performance: Insights from Romania”

The paper examines the relevance of Bertolt Brecht’s aesthetic and philosophical system for an environmentally engaged theater in the twenty-first century, with particular attention to the contradictions shaping the contemporary East European context. It asks whether Brecht’s “Great Method” of dialectics and concept of *Verfremdung* can serve as tools for analyzing and staging the specific tensions of the region, and whether the Brechtian method can provide critical insights into capitalism while opening possibilities for practical intervention in response to the multiple crises—climatic, social, and military—that currently affect Romania and its neighbors. The Romanian situation exemplifies the entanglement of ecological, economic, and geopolitical contradictions. Accelerating desertification in the south signals the severity of global warming. At the same time, the promotion of renewable resources, aligned with the liberalization of the energy sector, has produced speculative price hikes that undermine popular support for ecological transition. The war in Ukraine has intensified calls for energy sovereignty, yet such independence relies on expanded gas exploitation, which exacerbates the climate crisis. The paper analyzes three theater productions staged in Bucharest over the last decade, each aiming to employ Brechtian-inspired techniques to confront these contradictions. *Guilt, -y* (Béznă Theater Company, 2018) used classical anti-illusion strategies to highlight the tension between individual guilt and systemic responsibility for environmental collapse. *The Common Room* (Gastivists collective, 2022) staged a post-fascist dystopia as an allegory of extractivism and war. *Anticlimax* (dir. Bobi Pricop, 2025) questioned the role of artists in the climate crisis, using a play-within-a-play approach. Building on Brecht’s later writings on dialectical theater and his account of the “Great Method” in *Me-ti*, the paper reflects on the potential and limits of environmentally engaged theater to both expose contradictions and generate frameworks for critical inquiry and collective action.

David Schwartz is a theatre director and theoretician, based in Bucharest, Romania. He has a PhD in performing arts from the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj, with a thesis on the development of local politically engaged theater. Schwartz directed over 40 theater performances in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. He is the initiator of the Political Theater Platform, founded in Bucharest in 2013. Since 2019, he is a university lecturer at the Department of Theatre Directing of the National University of Theater and Film in Bucharest. Schwartz has been invited to present shows, films, conferences or workshops at international festivals and events in Austria (Vienna), Croatia (Zagreb), Czech Republic (Jihlava), France (Paris), Georgia (Tbilisi), Germany (Berlin, Frankfurt am Oder, Karlsruhe, Wiesbaden), Hungary (Budapest, Szeged), Italy (Lizzano, Rome), Kosovo (Pristina), Moldova (Kishinev), Poland (Torun, Wroclaw), Switzerland (Zurich). He is the editor of two volumes by Bertolt Brecht, translated into Romanian for the first time: Bertolt Brecht, *Trei piese antifasciste* (Three Anti-Fascist Plays, 2021) and *Dialectică și înstrăinare. Scrieri despre teatru* (Dialectics and estrangement: Brecht on Theater, 2024). Schwartz is currently part of a cross-disciplinary collective which aims to re-translate and promote the work of Bertolt Brecht in the Romanian cultural and theatrical environment.

Panel 17 Mining Regimes and Justice in *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*

Lily Climenhaga, “Documenting Mahagonnys: Intersectional Critique, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, and Resource Extraction in Documentary Theatre”

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Brecht and Weill completed their opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* just before 1930, merely thirty years after the end of the Klondike Gold Rush. Mahagonny is a city – much like Dawson City in the Yukon – that emerges in response to arriving and departing prospectors, men searching for precious minerals. The city – both the fictional Mahagonny and its real-world counterparts – offers the newly wealthy the opportunity to spend extravagantly. The opera taps into a cultural memory of the Gold Rush from Charlie Chaplin’s then recent film *The Gold Rush* (1925) and Karl May’s best-selling American West novels. The 1920s saw the continuation of labour conflict within the coal industry (long notorious for its environmental and human cost) resulting in strikes, stoppages, and violent clashes between employers and unionized miners. While certainly not a docu-opera, *Mahagonny* is a political critique. Brecht and Weill criticize the excesses promised by Capitalism, a system that necessitates the subjugation of one group (human and inhuman) for another. This presentation will provide an overview of how documentary theatre, which in recent decades has been heavily influenced by Brechtian staging techniques, undertakes similar Capitalist critiques of the mining industry. However, where Brecht and Weill base their critique on class consciousness, contemporary productions that engage with the excesses of the mining industry add an intersectional lens to the class critique. “Documenting Mahagonnys” will look at several documentary productions that explore the excesses of resource extraction: Yves Degryse and Bart Baele’s *Tagfish* (2010), Korina Vasileiadou and Charis Pechlivanidis’s *Min(d)ing Ibsen. An Enemy of the People meets the People* (2013), and Silke Huysmans and Hannes Dereer’s *Pleasant Island* (2019). It will explore how contemporary documentary artists connect the postcolonial and ecological to the Brechtian class-based critique of Capitalism. These productions reveal that within a neoliberal and neocolonial world the excesses identified by Brecht and Weill export human and ecological destruction and import resources, but, like the hurricane, the long-ignored consequences will eventually arrive on our shores and at new *cities* of Mahagonny.

Lily Climenhaga (Ph.D., University of Alberta/Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität) wrote a dissertation about Milo Rau and the International Institute of Political Murder and is currently undertaking the postdoctoral project "Institutionalized Resistance: Milo Rau's NTGent Period" with the support of FWO at UGent. Lily is a dramaturg, editor, blogger, critic, translator, and occasional stage manager.

Eyck Marcus Wendt, “Justice Beyond the Pit: Political Provocation and the Opera”

After the premiere of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* at the Neue Theater Leipzig in March of 1930, an article in the conservative magazine *Zeitschrift für Musik* concludes that “this evening was a popular tribunal.” And indeed, Brecht’s and Weill’s opera sparked riots beyond the orchestra pit: guests in “dignified smokings” together with fascists heckled the staging while drowned in the applause of other audience members. Brecht admitted that *Mahagonny* could not relinquish what he calls the “culinary” aspects of the opera, but the evening in Leipzig showed the political and social provocation amidst its pleasures. In this way, *Mahagonny* opens the question of the political potential of the opera genre, which is still relevant today. Since his first opera in 2021, an adaptation of Mozart’s *La Clemenza di Tito*, Swiss director Milo Rau tried to shape the opera genre to the liking of his activist perspective. The Catalan composer Hèctor Parra employed Rau as stage director for his opera *Justice* in 2024. Together with librettist Fiston Mwanza Mujila, they developed an opera about a gruesome chemical accident close to Kinshasa. Borrowing from Brecht’s understanding of the opera in his “Anmerkungen,” I want to look at

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Justice under the culinary aspects of the genre. Do the provocative images of neocolonial exploitation set the audience as a “passive (and suffering) part of the Gesamtkunstwerk” in the same way Brecht criticized the numbing ecstasy of the opera? In my presentation, I would like to revisit the production process of *Mahagonny* from its start as a song play to look closer at the contradictions of the opera as a genre for political messaging and agitation. While Brecht and Weill critique the understanding of justice in a bourgeois society with their inversion of the opera genre. Parra Mujila and Rau demand justice through the transformation of the opera into a political demonstration. Are there deeper connections between the opera form and the question of injustice that *Mahagonny* as well as *Justice* can unveil?

Eyck Marcus Wendt is a researcher and teacher at the Institute for Theatre Studies at the University of Leipzig, supported by the Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation. With a background in political theory and cultural studies, he is interested in the intersections between theatricality, representation, and political agency. In his PhD project on the theatre trials and tribunals of Milo Rau, Eyck Marcus Wendt analyzes how new theatre projects affect our understanding of the border between art and politics. He is editor-in-chief of the Leipzig-based literature magazine *Honich*.

Elia Rediger, “Artistic Reflections on ‘The Irrationality of the Operatic Form’”

Swiss artist Elia Rediger (1985*) is a genre-bending, socially engaged composer, singer, director, and performer. Known for his collaborations with some of Europe’s most significant political artists, such as Milo Rau and Christoph Schlingensief, Rediger has also, throughout his career, worked directly with the music from Brecht’s collaborators Hanns Eisler, Paul Dessau, and Kurt Weill. For the panel, Rediger offers an artist’s perspective on the intersections present between *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* and his past and present musical projects on resource extraction: *Hercules in Lubumbashi* (2019) and *Ecosystem* (2025). In a conversation, Rediger—from the perspective of a composer and political artist—will engage with two central points. First, Rediger will reflect on how in *Mahagonny*, Brecht and Weill subvert the highly ritualized and hierarchized operatic form of the Western European theatre. How Brecht and Weill create an opera that invites the proletariat into the opera house and integrates popular music traditions into an operatic composition (what could be called a Volksoper), while rejecting the classical heroic model. Rediger’s methodology in productions like *Hercules in Lubumbashi* (2019) of transferring information in direct and extreme ways is mirrored in the music and storytelling of *Mahagonny*. The second line of discussion will explore Rediger’s engagement with performance and the opera on topics such as resource extraction. How does Rediger’s longstanding interest in portraying the experiences of mining communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) overlap the critique of unfettered Capitalism in *Magahonny*? And how does his work resonate with the other (musical) productions about (neo)colonial, environmental, and neoliberal exploitation discussed within this panel?

Swiss artist Elia Rediger is a genre-bending, socially engaged composer, singer, director, and performer. Known for his collaborations with some of Europe’s most significant political artists, such as Milo Rau and Christoph Schlingensief, Rediger has also, throughout his career, worked directly with the music from Brecht’s collaborators Hanns Eisler, Paul Dessau, and Kurt Weill.

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