

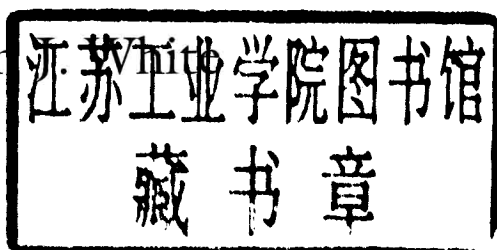
# Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory



John J. White

BERTOLT BRECHT'S  
DRAMATIC THEORY

John



CAMDEN HOUSE

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J. J. W.

August 2004

## Abbreviations of Works Frequently Cited

- BHB* *Brecht Handbuch in fünf Bänden*. Ed. Jan Knopf. Stuttgart-Weimar: Metzler, 2001–3. By volume and page number. Details of the individual volumes are given under Works Consulted.
- BT* *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Ed. and trans. by John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang. London: Methuen, 1964.
- GBA* Bertolt Brecht. *Werke: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*. Ed. by Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei, and Klaus-Detlef Müller. 30 vols + *Registerband*. Berlin-Weimar: Aufbau. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988–2000. Paperback special limited edition with same pagination: 2003.
- GW* Bertolt Brecht: *Gesammelte Werke: Werkausgabe*. Ed. by Suhrkamp Verlag in collaboration with Elisabeth Hauptmann. 20 vols. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1967. Abbreviated in *BHB* and *GBA* as *WA* (*Werkausgabe*). A raised asterisk after page-reference to this edition indicates that the quotation comes from the “Anmerkungen” section of the relevant volume.
- Theaterarbeit* *Theaterarbeit: 6 Aufführungen des Berliner Ensembles*. Ed. by Berliner Ensemble and Helene Weigel. Second, revised edition. Berlin: Henschel, 1961.

### Note

References to titles of individual theoretical works that were not given to them by Brecht follow the *GBA* convention of indicating this by putting them in square brackets.

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## Introduction

THE PRESENT STUDY OFFERS the first detailed commentary in English on Bertolt Brecht's major theoretical writings on the theater. It is not intended as an introduction to the plays or as a basic guide to his main dramaturgical concepts (fortunately a number of general studies of Brecht's work already perform that task admirably). Rather, my aim is to provide in-depth critical analysis of Brecht's thinking on the subject, discussed both with reference to the intellectual context of the time and in the light of subsequent dramatic and aesthetic theory. This will be coupled with an exploration of his methods of argumentation and an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of his evolving theoretical position on the problems he confronts at different stages of his theoretical development.

Throughout his entire creative life, from "Zur Ästhetik des Dramas" (On the Aesthetics of Drama, 1920) to the essays on "Dialektik auf dem Theater" (Dialectics in the Theater, 1956), Brecht theorized prolifically: on theater as an institution, on contemporary drama, and, above all, on Epic Theater, "Verfremdung," and his works' sociopolitical role. Although his theoretical statements on film, radio, poetry, and the novel also exerted considerable influence, the dramaturgical writings far outstrip these in quantity and significance. Indeed, the theoretical works of few modern playwrights can have shaped their plays' reception and our thinking about modern drama to a comparable degree. Yet few bodies of theoretical writing have also remained so contentious, been treated so selectively, or been so blatantly manipulated for ideological purposes. And it was not just his detractors who misunderstood or falsified them. As we shall see, two of his most ardent American admirers, Eric Bentley and Mordecai Gorelik, left Brecht somewhat disappointed with their largely supportive accounts of what they took to be his position. Writing of his experiences with one less sophisticated admirer, Brecht confessed: "Es ist mir dann zumute, wie es einem Mathematiker zumute wäre, wenn er läse: Ich bin mit Ihnen ganz einverstanden, daß zwei mal zwei fünf ist" (*GBA*, 23:171).

One of the last occasions on which Brecht substantially re-thought his theoretical position was in 1953. In January 1953 the GDR's State Commission for Artistic Affairs had announced that a Stanislavsky Conference would be held in the East German capital later that same year. It was an event stage-managed to bring together dramatists, practical theater people, academics, and *Kulturpolitiker* to debate just what East German theater

could — that is, should — learn from the methods of the late Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavsky (1863–1938). This furnished a pretext for the further polarization of the Russian's work (by now officially appropriated as theater of Socialist Realism) and Brecht's own in order to demonize Brecht's Epic Theater as decadent formalism. In the words of a recent commentator, the planned Stanislavsky Conference “came to represent a very real threat to the continued existence of the Berliner Ensemble” (Philpotts 2003, 59). It was imperative for Brecht, Helene Weigel, and the Berliner Ensemble that their position be made clear before, during, and after the event (which took place between 17 and 19 April). The Ensemble was coming under increasing pressure from those whom Brecht referred to as “die Leute [. . .], die das *Kleine Organon* angreifen” (*GBA*, 25:580) to reposition itself *vis-à-vis* the twin artistic orthodoxies of the time: the Stanislavskian system of dramatic production and the content-oriented Soviet aesthetic of Socialist Realism. The establishment in 1947 of an Institute for the Methodical Renewal of German Theater at Weimar under the directorship of the then arch-Stanislavskian Maxim Vallentin had given a clear signal regarding the direction the Soviet Military Administration in Germany expected East German theater to take. The Berliner Ensemble, “das einzige große Theater der Welt, das von einem Schriftsteller geleitet wird” (*GBA*, 23:383), could not be seen to dissent from the Soviet cultural program. Having suffered much during the anti-formalism campaigns of the early 1950s, it was now about to come under a fresh concerted attack.

Brecht was prepared for the gathering storm. During the latter part of 1952 he had collaborated with Erwin Strittmatter (1912–94, best-known for his 1963 novel *Ole Bienkopp*) on a production of the young writer's first play, *Katzgraben*, a social comedy subtitled *Szenen aus dem Bauernleben*. This prudent, though by no means merely expedient,<sup>1</sup> move offered the Ensemble the opportunity to produce an exemplary work of Socialist Realism involving a politically correct picture of village life in the Soviet Zone of Occupation during the turbulent land-reform period (1947–49). As significant as the signals sent to the Establishment by the mere fact of Brecht's work with Strittmatter was an accompanying series of theoretical writings entitled “*Katzgraben*-Notate 1953.” These, together with the work they documented, became part of a robust response to the campaign of vilification in the build-up to a conference that risked becoming theater's

<sup>1</sup> Philpotts (2003) challenges the interpretation of Brecht's behavior in 1953 as merely an opportunistic response to threats to the Berliner Ensemble. Brecht's admiration for Strittmatter is shown to date back to 1951 and to continue long after the anti-formalist furor had subsided. These insights represent a salutary warning against what Philpotts sees as the “tendency in Brecht criticism to over-privilege tactical explanations for his behavior in the GDR” (56).

equivalent of a show trial. A companion piece, “Erwin Strittmatters *Katzgraben*” (*GBA*, 24:437–41), published in *Sinn und Form* earlier in the same year, has also been read as part of a counter-campaign on Brecht’s part, although recent scholarship (Philpotts 2003) has demonstrated that any tactical significance Brecht’s collaboration with Strittmatter may have had needs to be seen in the context of his part in a campaign to launch promising young GDR writers, evidence which puts in question any crude reading of the adoption of Strittmatter’s work as a mere self-serving ploy. Added to which, as has been pointed out (Mumford 1995), the Berliner Ensemble’s production of *Katzgraben* offered Brecht the opportunity to test Stanislavsky’s practice and assumptions against his own approach, as well as to re-visit his last major theoretical work, *Kleines Organon für das Theater* (1948), in the light of ongoing production experiences with Epic and Aristotelian Theater. As all this suggests, one can hardly do justice to the *Katzgraben* notes by considering them independently of the context in which they were written, in this instance a particularly complex situation that has generated diametrically opposite readings. Context is important for an appreciation of the theoretical works written at all stages of Brecht’s life. Theory does not come into being in a vacuum.

The “*Katzgraben*-Notate 1953” represent Brecht’s most important attempt to record his rehearsal procedures and offer detailed insights into Epic Theater, not through his usual analysis of features of the end product or via a photographically documented *Modellbuch*, but by focusing on the process of evolving a production concept through rehearsal discussions focusing in detail on what Epic Theater could learn from the state-sanctioned Stanislavsky System. An editorial note records that this work soon assumed “den Charakter eines exemplarischen ‘Proben-Modells’” (*GBA*, 25:586). Unfortunately, the production of Strittmatter’s play was not a success (*GBA*, 25:585–86), and as a consequence the notes were not published in their entirety until considerably later.<sup>2</sup> To complement the rehearsal notes, other Ensemble members set down independent accounts (material now housed in the Bertolt Brecht Archive). Brecht’s own notes were at the time transcribed by Käthe Rülcke in such a way as to allow space for intercalated information about the various rehearsals (63 days in all), thus giving the documentation the appearance of a rehearsal diary. Yet, in a manner typical of Brecht’s way with quasi-documentation, the dialogues that make up the *Katzgraben* complex, though based on discussions that had actually taken place during rehearsals, were progressively reformulated and reordered, with

<sup>2</sup> *Sinn und Form: Sonderheft Bertolt Brecht*, Potsdam, 1949, 11–41. East and West German *Versuche* versions were only published after the death of Stalin, although a GDR *Versuche* publication had originally been planned for Aufbau’s Heft 10 of 1950 (cf. *GBA*, 23:459). This was in the event canceled for unspecified reasons.

words being put into the participants' mouths to allow them to act as foils to Brecht's own stringently formulated and often non-negotiable views. Such hybrid forms — in this case, part orchestrated dialogue, part production chronicle, but always involving a high degree of retrospective rescripting — were a feature of many of the theoretical writings we shall shortly be considering.

The first *Katzgraben* note touches on a question of central importance to the present study. It begins with a character, identified simply as "P.," asking the playwright: "Wie kommt es, daß man so oft Beschreibungen Ihres Theaters liest — meist in ablehnenden Beurteilungen —, aus denen sich niemand ein Bild machen könnte, wie es wirklich ist?" (*GBA*, 25:401). P. (modeled on Peter Palitzsch, a member of the Berliner Ensemble since 1949) is told by B. (Brecht) that he considers himself at fault for having placed such emphasis on theory. But he also points an accusing finger at his detractors, especially the powerful GDR Stanislavskians and anti-formalists who were currently after his blood: "Mein Fehler. Diese Beschreibungen und viele der Beurteilungen gelten nicht dem Theater, das ich mache, sondern dem Theater, das sich für meine Kritiker aus der Lektüre meiner Traktate ergibt. Ich kann es nicht lassen, die Leser und die Zuschauer in meine Technik und in meine Absichten einzuweißen, das rächt sich" (*ibid.*). Despite the confessional "Ich kann es nicht lassen," Brecht theorized less out of compulsion than from sheer necessity. What he refers to as his "Traktate" had invariably been produced because the situation demanded them. "Die meisten dieser Äußerungen, wenn nicht alle," Brecht had observed two years before the work on *Katzgraben*, "sind als Bemerkungen zu meinen Stücken geschrieben, damit die Stücke richtig aufgeführt würden. Das gibt ihnen einen etwas trockenen, handwerklichen Ton" (*GBA*, 23:171). Radical innovators often feel called upon to explain their experiments; the predicament of exile forces once famous dramatists to introduce themselves in new cultural environments; and those under attack, which in Brecht's case was often from the Lukácses, Erpenbecks, and Kurellas on the Left, need theory to defend their positions. On occasions, Brecht's intended "trockener, handwerklicher Ton" would give way to more aggressive forms of self-justification, but while he was in protracted exile, much of his output did not even enter the public domain. It remained what the composer and Brecht's collaborator Hanns Eisler (1897–1968) once referred to as "Schreiben für die Schublade" (Bunge, 70–71), its function often being to help the writer think through his position on some question in a written form equivalent to what Heinrich von Kleist saw as "die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden." Nevertheless, what lingered for some time in a bottom drawer had a habit of eventually finding its way into print, in expanded form or cannibalized for fragmentary publication. Theory conceived under such circumstances could in any case often be more radical than what Brecht did succeed in getting

into print. For as he once observed, “für die Schublade braucht man keine Konzessionen” (*GBA*, 26:332).

In the “Episches Theater” section of the *Katzgraben* notes, Brecht tries once more, but not for the last time, to combat an unfortunate situation where his theories had an unforeseen effect on the public perception of his work. He reminds his readers that one of his favorite English proverbs is that “the proof of the pudding lies in the eating.” In other words, theories and programs will always be less important than the resultant (or prior) creation. He also tries to counter any assumption that his theorizing is either difficult or offputtingly “Teutonic”: “Meine ganzen Theorien sind überhaupt viel naiver, als man denkt und — als meine Ausdrucksweise vermuten läßt” (*GBA*, 25:401). Yet Brecht never disowns the vast body of writings that had been a part of his self-presentation and self-understanding from the second half of the Weimar Republic onwards. When proposing a postwar edition of his works to the Suhrkamp Verlag in 1953, he is above all interested in having his major dramas back in print, but at the same time he stresses that any such collection should be theoretically underpinned (“mit einem theoretischen Band dazu” [*GBA*, 30:221]). Brecht repeatedly draws attention to theory’s crucial role, while at the same time keeping it in its proper subservient place. Abandon your prejudices and go and see my plays, he advises “die Kritiker”:

Sähen sich die Kritiker mein Theater an, wie es die Zuschauer ja tun, ohne meinen Theorien zunächst dabei Gewicht beizulegen, so würden sie wohl einfach Theater vor sich sehen, Theater, wie ich hoffe, mit Phantasie, Humor und Sinn, und erst bei einer Analyse der Wirkung fiele ihnen einiges Neue auf — das sie dann in meinen theoretischen Ausführungen erklärt finden könnten. Ich glaube, die Kalamität begann dadurch, daß meine Stücke richtig aufgeführt werden mußten, damit sie wirkten, und so mußte ich, für eine nichtaristotelische Dramatik — o Kummer! — ein episches Theater — o Elend! — beschreiben. (“Episches Theater,” *GBA*, 25:401–2)

The reference to the point at which an “Analyse der Wirkung” is attempted as the stage when theory could prove most useful suggests it is the place of feelings in Epic Theater that was expected to give most difficulty. Indeed, from the *Mahagonny* notes of 1930 until his final years, explaining the complicated role of emotions in a theater of critical distance remained one of the greatest challenges Brecht had to face.

In more respects than he concedes, Brecht had himself to blame for much of the hostile reception. His lead concepts were not always well defined or adequately related to one another; and they seldom find full expression in any one single document. A further problem was that Brecht preferred the high-risk strategy of resorting to an innovative terminology,

provocative neologisms even, or idiosyncratically redefined terms rather than the familiar conceptual repertoire of his contemporaries. What is more, the pronounced role played by an arsenal of high-profile concepts in the reception of Epic Theater was not without its dangers. As Walter H. Sokel has warned, to approach Brecht's plays using the yardstick of his own seductive terminology can have an inhibiting effect (Sokel 1973, 548), especially if his conceptual framework is subjected to insufficient scrutiny. Another source of misunderstandings has been a tendency to underestimate the need to make his underlying assumptions (political as well as artistic) explicit: "Ich glaube, gewisse Äußerungen werden mißverstanden, weil ich Wichtiges vorausgesetzt habe, statt es zu formulieren" (GBA, 23:171). This admission will be of especial relevance to the consideration of *Der Messingkauf*.

Although one finds Brecht on occasion referring to his theory as if it were some monolithic entity, the individual writings that made up the amorphous "Schriften zum Theater" were usually the product of continually changing circumstances. From 1919 to 1921 the young Brecht did his theoretical apprenticeship as cub drama-reviewer for the local Augsburg USPD-oriented newspaper *Der Volkswille*, and from 1922 onwards he wrote regular commissioned reviews and literary essays for the prestigious *Die literarische Welt* and the *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, the theater section of which was in the hands of his powerful friend and ally Herbert Ihering. From here on, his disquisitions on drama tend to home in on his own work rather than that of contemporaries or precursors. Even when early reviews served as pegs for pronouncements about the dire state of Weimar theater or the failure of German Naturalism and Expressionism to confront social problems adequately — and could thus be read as justifications of the "Neue Dramatik" of which Brecht's work was the main example — they gave little hint of the powerful propagandizing on his own behalf that was to emerge in the wake of his 1926 conversion to Marxism and the runaway success of *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Many of his canonical theoretical statements from the 1930s and 1940s had to wait years for publication in the German original or in an appropriately influential organ. What are now regarded as Brecht's major dramaturgical writings often suffered from unpropitious beginnings. His most important pre-exile statement on Epic Theater, "Anmerkungen zur Oper *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*" (Notes to the Opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, 1930), had the misfortune of being published less than thirty months before Hitler's coming to power, after which few Germans with any sense would have wanted to be found in possession of *Versuche 2*, in which the notes appeared. The publication of the revised *Mahagonny* notes by the then London-based Malik Verlag within a year of the outbreak of the Second World War was also hardly propitious timing, but rather a matter of Brecht's need to avail himself of one of the few leading exile publishing outlets still relatively safe from German invasion. In fact,

throughout the exile period Brecht was forced to become more opportunistic, seeking possibilities for promoting Epic Theater wherever they might arise, allowing himself to be interviewed, published (above all in English translation) and talked about in the international press.<sup>3</sup>

Brecht's account of "Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst" (Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting, 1936), not published in German until 1957, first appeared in English in the London magazine *Life and Letters To-Day* in the year it was written. The script of a radio talk entitled "Radiovortrag Bertolt Brecht" (1935), although probably never broadcast, became the starting-point for "Das deutsche Drama vor Hitler," written with Margarete Steffin in preparation for visits to London and New York and published as "The German Drama: Pre-Hitler" in the *New York Times* (November 1935) and the following year in the London *Left Review*. "Über experimentelles Theater" (On Experimental Theater, 1939), "Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt" (Short Description of a New Technique of Acting Which Creates an Alienation Effect, 1940), and many other seminal theoretical writings from the exile period did not appear in any language until after Brecht's return to Europe, and in many cases posthumously. His most ambitious theoretical project, the fragmentary *Der Messingkauf* (The Messingkauf Dialogues, 1939–55), had to wait until 1993 for an acceptably authoritative edition (GBA, 22:695–869). Its fortunes in English are even more curious. In 1964, John Willett included a brief account of the material in *Brecht on Theatre* (BT, 169–75) in an attempt to give "a rough indication of the subjects covered by *Der Messingkauf* in the confused and fragmentary state in which Brecht left it" (BT, 175). Yet 1965 saw Willett produce a 95-page translation (*The Messingkauf Dialogues*), presumably because the material had been released for translation after Suhrkamp's publication of it in Elisabeth Hauptmann's 1963 "Lese-Fassung" of the incomplete project. Even though Brecht had, from the early 1930s on, set about systematically disseminating his theoretical writings alongside the literary works in his *Versuche* series, launched in 1930 in the Weimar Republic and revived in both GDR and FRG editions from 1951 until 1977, coverage was highly selective and individual essays often fell victim to the vicissitudes of a volatile exile predicament, the ravages of war, and thereafter the cultural politics of Stalinism and the Cold War. What those of us who came after ("die Nachgeborenen" of the last half century) think of as an agreed canon of theoretical

<sup>3</sup> It would be wrong to associate the campaign for international recognition exclusively with the exile years. As early as 1928, *Die Weltbühne* published "Bertolt Brecht, dargestellt für Engländer" by Lion Feuchtwanger. The improbable choice of a Berlin periodical for a piece with such a title suggests that it must have been written primarily for English-language publication.

writings had often from the outset suffered an incredibly tortuous fate. Even in our own time, only those with access to that increasingly rare commodity, a well-stocked academic library, or who are in a position to be able to buy the expensive *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe* for themselves, are able to come to terms with the substantial number of first publications and new findings made accessible in what has become the standard edition. Yet although the volumes containing the theoretical writings (*GBA*, vols. 21–25) have been in print for over a decade, findings are only gradually percolating via recent scholarship (above all, *BHB*, vol. 4) down to the wider group of those interested in Brecht's work. Virtually all the leading monographs on, or dealing in part with, Brecht's dramatic theory were published before the present edition.<sup>4</sup>

Of the initial impact of National Socialism and exile on his own life and work, Brecht notes: "Sie haben mir nicht nur mein Haus, meinen Fischteich und meinen Wagen abgenommen, sie haben mir meine Bühne und mein Publikum geraubt" (Benjamin 1978, 170). If "*Ein Theater ohne Kontakt mit dem Publikum*" had always for Brecht been "*ein Nonsens*" (*GBA*, 21:121), the exile predicament of seldom having either an audience or access to a theater in which to experiment compounded what he referred to as "*meine Isolierung, was die Produktion betrifft*" (*GBA*, 26:414). "Es ist unmöglich," he complains, "ohne die Bühne ein Stück fertig zu machen" (*GBA*, 26:395). A remark he made of Helene Weigel's predicament — "Durch ihr Bestreben, vor vielen spielen zu dürfen, war sie dazu gelangt, nur noch vor ganz wenigen spielen zu dürfen" (*GBA*, 22:798) — shows the isolation was not his alone. Brecht had also been deprived of most of his publishing outlets and his chosen cultural environment of Berlin. He found himself repeatedly having to establish a fresh foothold in new countries, some at the time hostile to things German, others with a growing suspicion of what could be interpreted as Soviet-inspired culture, and all by and large unsympathetic towards the avant-garde of the by then politically discredited Weimar Republic. This bleak picture is part of the received wisdom communicated over the years by the playwright's biographers, his published correspondence, and his journals. However, as the present study tries to show, there are respects in which one feature of exile, that is to say, having to establish himself afresh in a variety of host countries, had a distinctly beneficial effect on the nature and construction of Brecht's theoretical position. To claim this is neither the token of unquestioning optimism nor the corollary of a view predicated on the ideological assumption that all adversity will have a dialectic

<sup>4</sup> Notably those by Brüggemann, Claas, Fischer, Hecht (1972 and 1986), Hinck, Hultberg, Knopf (1974 and 1980a), Ludwig (1975), Voigts, and Willett (*BT*, 1964), all written before *GBA*'s substantial body of new material and *BHB*, vol. 4 became available.

tically productive result. It is simply to recognize that Brecht's theorizing thrived on adversity. The present study will seek to question the view that the exile period produced little more than a "Bestandsaufnahme und nochmalige Vergewisserung" of earlier theoretical positions (*BHB*, 4:225, 285). However, this does not mean either that I subscribe to Walter Hinck's view that Epic Theater is itself a product of the exile years (Hinck 1966, cf. *BHB*, 4:283). Nevertheless, with the exception of the *Mahagonny* notes and the "Lehrstück" theory, almost all of Brecht's most important theoretical writings stem from the exile period. As Voges has pointed out, "Auf Dauer gesehen waren die Auswirkungen der Exilsituation für den Stückeschreiber ambivalent" (Voges 1985, 214). The remark about not having to make concessions when writing for the bottom drawer was made in connection with *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (The Good Person of Setzuan, 1938–40), a work Brecht hoped would be uncompromising ("ich kann [. . .] dabei die epische Technik entwickeln *und so endlich wieder auf den Standard kommen*" (*GBA*, 26:332, my emphasis). Voges (*ibid.*) argues that Brecht was producing such high caliber avant-garde work in the 1930s and 1940s that it would be wrong to think of his prolific theoretical writings as "die Kompensation für eine fehlende künstlerische Praxis." And since so much of this theory was written for the bottom drawer, it is hardly surprising that the results often show greater vision than some of the compromise plays that were also the product of the exile period.

In one very obvious yet important respect, theory was the exiled Brecht's visiting card. He repeatedly found himself in the predicament of being a relatively unknown quantity, a fish out of water, in situations where he had to explain himself — as was the case in each of his three Scandinavian host countries — while at the same time needing to prepare for an even longer-term campaign of self-presentation in respect of the United States, the country which was gradually crystallizing in his mind as the only logical destination for someone needing to escape the long arm of National Socialism and the continuing Soviet purges. Thus, while Brecht was still in Danish exile, many of his public (rather than bottom-drawer) dramaturgical pronouncements became more than just a way of explaining himself to hoped-for Copenhagen audiences and theater groups with whom he wished to work. As we shall see in chapter 2, he was at the same time paving the way for a move on to fresh and safer pastures. Much of the theorizing surrounding the New York production of *Die Mutter* (The Mother, 1932), as well as the English publication of his essay on alienation effects in Chinese acting, and the approach adopted in "Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt," make more sense when seen against this backcloth. Similarly, "Über experimentelles Theater" represents an attempt to redefine in European terms the historical significance of Epic Theater — first for Brecht's prospective Swedish hosts

and subsequently, as his plans included the need to establish a foothold in Helsinki. *Kleines Organon für das Theater* (Short Organum for the Theater, 1948) and the related *Messingkauf* complex are also closely bound up with the exigencies of the exile situation. To say this is not to seek to relativize their importance as theory, but simply to contextualize them, even if not always in Brecht's sense of "Historisierung." As the war continued, however, it became increasingly clear to Brecht, now from his Californian perspective, that what he had thought of as a kind of limbo ("die *Inzwischenzeit*" [GBA, 26:414]) would soon come to an end. From then on, the completion of a theoretical *magnum opus*, be it *Der Messingkauf* or *Kleines Organon für das Theater*, was no longer seen as part of the preparations for moving on to another makeshift place of sojourn, but for a definitive return to East Germany: to the Soviet Zone of Occupation, soon to become the German Democratic Republic. Given the dangerous quicksands of cultural politics in such a Stalinist environment, it was crucial for Brecht to establish his theoretical position. There was an urgent need to produce a succinct, clearly formulated statement of his aesthetic ideas (a statement that was now *aesthetic*, rather than merely dramaturgical) and to place it in the only GDR publication defiantly liberal enough to serve as a vehicle: Peter Huchel's *Sinn und Form*. That way, he hoped that he would be able to influence the choice of ground on which the polemics about his work would be conducted. The subsequent anti-formalist debates of the GDR "Aufbau" years were by and large reprises of the hostile reception of Brecht's theoretical work in exile, above all of the "Expressionismusdebatte" of the late 1930s. But this time, instead of introducing himself by establishing what he was for and against, Brecht had to position his ideas in a constructive relationship to the dominant Marxist aesthetic. This he had always done, though often in ways too subtle for his opponents' grasp.

The presentational methods adopted to put his ideas across were often related to the ones Brecht used in his plays. As he was well aware, analytical theory inevitably de-familiarizes praxis. In the seventeenth appendix note to "Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt," he observes: "Der Verfremdungseffekt selber ist durch die vorliegende Darstellung in gewissem Sinn verfremdet worden, wir haben eine tausendfache, gewöhnliche, überall vorliegende Operation, indem wir sie als eine besondere beleuchteten, zum Verständnis zu bringen versucht" (GBA, 22:657). However, Brecht's theoretical writings defamiliarize his dramatic practice more than "in gewissem Sinn"; he is, as we shall see, extremely ingenious in the ways he applies what might be thought of as specifically "Brechtian" strategies of defamiliarization to the theoretical points he wishes to get across. Of special relevance in this respect is the rich diversity of paradigms and text-types chosen to communicate dramaturgical ideas. One commentator called Brecht's notes to *Die Dreigro-*