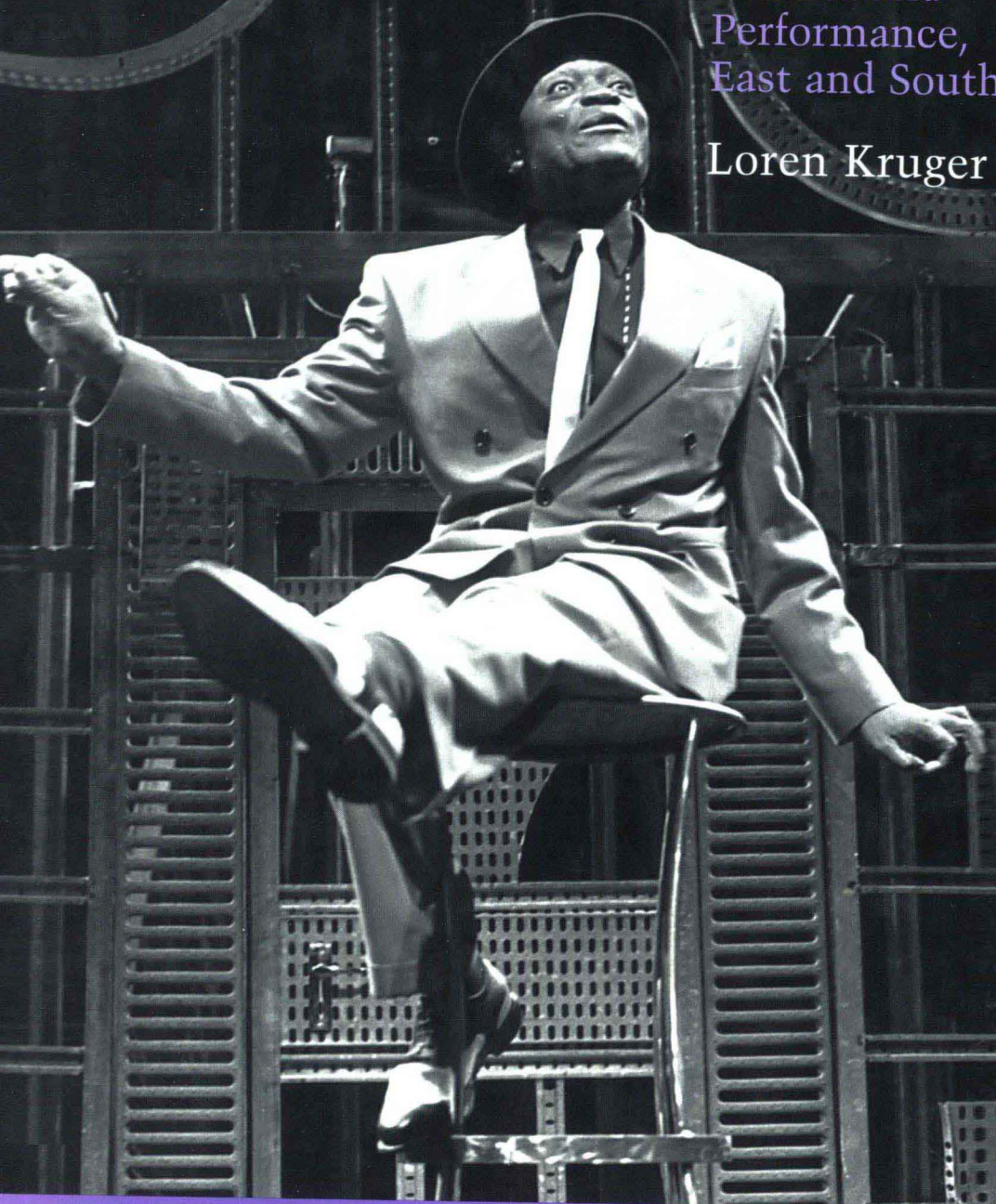


Post-Imperial Brecht

Politics and
Performance,
East and South

Loren Kruger



CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN MODERN THEATRE

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University of Chicago



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Post-Imperial Brecht

Post-Imperial Brecht challenges prevailing views of Brecht's theatre and politics. Most political theatre critics place Brecht between West and East in the Cold War, and a few have recently explored Brecht's impact as a Northern writer on the global South. Loren Kruger is the first to argue that Brecht's impact as a political dramatist, director and theoretical writer makes full sense only when seen in a post-imperial framework that links the East/West axis between US capitalism and Soviet communism with the North/South axis of post-colonial resistance to imperialism. This framework highlights Brecht's arguments with theorists like Benjamin, Bloch, and Lukács. It also shows surprising connections between socialist East Germany, where Brecht's 1950s projects impressed the emerging Heiner Müller, and apartheid-era South Africa, where Brecht's work appeared on the apartheid as well as anti-apartheid stage. Brecht also shaped the work of South Africa's Athol Fugard, whose work reappeared in state and dissident theatres in East Germany. The book concludes with a reflection on Brechtian aspects of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and introduces new more precise translations of key Brechtian terms.

LOREN KRUGER is a graduate of the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and Cornell University, and teaches the history and theory of drama and other cultural forms at the University of Chicago. She is the author of *The National Stage* (1992) and *The Drama of South Africa* (1999), and the editor of *Lights and Shadows: The Autobiography of Leontine Sagan* (1996), and of South African special issues of *Theatre Journal* and *Theatre Research International*.

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Acknowledgments

This book has its origins in a hunch that personal experience of cultural and political life in Germany and South Africa could be grounded in historical connections that are compelling as well as surprising. Its evolution has followed a characteristically comparative literary path between languages, discourses, and cultures, but owes its substance to the study of theatre, a subject still often marginalized in the fields of comparative and other literatures.

On this route between cultures and, specifically, between Berlin and various points in South Africa, I have been supported by many people and institutions. In South Africa, my debts to the people named in the preface to my last book, *The Drama of South Africa*, are renewed with this one, especially to Ann Torlesse at the National English Literary Museum. In addition, Heidi Grunebaum, Yazir Henry, and their comrades at the Direct Action Centre for Peace and Democracy in Cape Town offered unparalleled insight into the personal and political ramifications of truth, reconciliation, and their antagonists in post-apartheid society. Also in Cape Town, Mark Fleischman provided me with an opportunity to revise my thoughts in formal and informal presentation on current South African theatre; Tony Parr and Gay Morris added to the conversation. In Johannesburg Malcolm Purkey reminded me of the eclectic history of Brecht in South Africa; Carole Archibald of the Witwatersrand University Historical Papers Library helped me document the Garment Workers' Union's political theatre before Brecht; and Patricia Watson Shariff raised questions about the limits of theatre in a cultural field shaped increasingly by new media.

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Abbreviations

AdK	Akademie der Künste, Berlin, including Theaterdokumentation (GDR Theatre Documentation; TD), Athol Fugard, and Heiner Müller collections
ANC	African National Congress, South Africa (1912–); underground 1964–90
BE	Berliner Ensemble
BBA	Bertolt Brecht Archive, Berlin
Brecht, <i>Werke</i>	Bertolt Brecht, <i>Werke: Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe</i> in 30 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988–)
<i>BoT</i>	<i>Brecht on Theatre</i> , ed. and trans. John Willett (1964; New York: Hill and Wang, 1992)
BOSS	Bureau of State Security, South Africa (1964–77); succeeded by the State Security Council (until 1990s)
BPT	Bantu Peoples' Theatre (1937–9); later the African National Theatre (1940–1)
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa (1919–50)
CWLP	Culture and Working Life Project, South Africa (1980s)
<i>DSM</i>	<i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders</i> , 4th edn (Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 1994)
DWCL	Durban Workers Culture Local, South Africa (1980s)
FDJ	Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth): SED-affiliated German youth organization

Abbreviations

FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (West), 1949 (Ger.: Bundesrepublik Deutschland or BRD)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East), 1949–90 (Ger.: Deutsche Demokratische Republik or DDR)
GWU	Garment Workers' Union, South Africa
HfÖ	Hochschule für Ökonomie (GDR): College of Economics
HRV	Human Rights Violations Committee of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa
HUAC	House UnAmerican Activities Committee, USA (1938–75)
IU/LL	Indiana University Lilly Library; includes Athol Fugard collection
JATC	Junction Avenue Theatre Company, <i>At the Junction: Four Plays by the Junction Avenue Theatre Company</i> , ed. Martin Orkin (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995)
JPL/STC	Johannesburg Public Library: Strange Theatre Collection
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands or German Communist Party (1919–33; 1945–6)
MK	UmKhonto we Sizwe or Spear of the Nation (1964–94): guerrilla arm of the ANC
NELM	National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown, South Africa
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei or Nazi Party (1924–45)
PACT	Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal, South Africa (1963–98)
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SABTU	South African Black Theatre Union (1969–73)
SACP	South African Communist Party (underground 1950–90; legal from 1990)

Abbreviations

SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands or Socialist Unity Party, ruling party of GDR
SPD	Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands or Socialist Party; absorbed in the GDR by the SED in 1946
Stasi	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit or Ministry for State Security (GDR, 1951–90)
STC/JPL	Strange Theatre Collection, Johannesburg Public Library
Steinweg	Brecht, <i>Die Massnahme</i> , ed. Reiner Steinweg
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa (1996–2000)
UCT	University of Cape Town
UW/WC	University of the Witwatersrand William Cullen Library: includes Garment Workers' Union (GWU), South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) collections, Lewis Sowdon's "Red Rand", and other materials

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Introduction

At the height of the Cold War, in August 1961, as the Berlin Wall realized in concrete the ideological, political and economic barriers that already separated Eastern from Western Europe, the “communist” from the “free” or “imperialist-capitalist” world (depending on point of view), Bertolt Brecht figured alternately as hero and villain of the political melodrama unfolding in its shadow. In articles published in the West German magazine *Der Monat*, which was funded, like its English equivalent *Encounter*, by the CIA-sponsored Committee for Cultural Freedom, Brecht was cast as equal to the “immediate threat of the Red Army.” Anti-communist ideologues charged him with delusional attachment to Communism; even the critical theorist T. W. Adorno accused him of “glorifying the Party,” or, more subtly, of “oversimplifying” artistic form in favor of political content.¹ In the other camp in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) or East Germany, the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) was stirred

¹ The equation of Brecht and the Red Army is Friedrich Tolberg's: “Soll man Brecht im Westen spielen?,” *Der Monat* 14, no. 159 (1962), 56–62; reiterated by respondents in “Soll man Brecht spielen? Antworten an Friedrich Tolberg,” *Der Monat* 14, no. 161 (1962), 57–64. The case for Brecht's delusional attachment to Communism was made by Herbert Lüthy in “Vom armen BB,” *Der Monat* 4, no. 44 (May 1952), 115–44, reprinted in *Encounter*. The claim was reiterated, with an effort to separate Brecht's artistry from his politics, by Martin Esslin in *Bertolt Brecht: A Choice of Evils* (London: Methuen, 1962). For the more subtle critique of Brecht's assault on the autonomy of art, see T[hedor] W[iesengrund] Adorno, “Engagement” (1962) in *Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980), trans. as “Commitment” in *Aesthetics and Politics: Debates between Brecht, Lukacs, Brecht,*

by campaigns in the West to boycott Brecht to abandon its Stalinist denunciation of his experiments as “alien to the people” to attempt after Brecht’s death in 1956 to claim him and even his most experimental form, the *Lehrstück* or learning play for worker-players, as its own. Even though it had criticized Brecht while he lived, the SED used Brecht posthumously as the guarantor of the party’s legitimacy as the true inheritor of the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist tradition of the German left.² On the basis of this claim, the SED continued until the late 1980s to cast Brecht as a “fighter against capitalist exploitation” whose work contributed to “mobilizing reason in the struggle against irrationalism, imperialism, and SDI [the United States’s Strategic Defense Initiative].”³

In claiming Brecht as the representative of the anti-fascist legacy of the 1920s, the SED sought to shore up its own inheritance

Benjamin, Adorno (London: Verso, 1977). Although he rejects Esslin’s psychodrama of the deluded artist (“Engagement,” 419; “Commitment,” 185), Adorno accuses Brecht of “unmediated glorification of the Party” (“Engagement” 415; “Commitment” 182) and reiterates the Cold War dichotomy between artistic autonomy and political instrumentalization, as the title of the original radio broadcast, “Engagement oder Autonomie von Kunst” (Radio Bremen, March 1962) attests. For analysis of the “crusade against Brecht,” see André Müller, *Kreuzzug gegen Brecht. Die Kampagne in der Bundesrepublik 1961/62* (Darmstadt: Progressverlag, 1963); for comment in English, see John Willett, “The Changing Role of Politics,” *Brecht in Context*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1998), 193–238.

² For the attack on Brecht’s alleged formalism, see Walter Ulbricht (general secretary of the SED), “Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in der Kunst und Literatur. Für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur” (1951), in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, ed. Elimar Schubbe (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), 178–86, here 182; for the recovery of the anti-fascist *Lehrstück* for the GDR, see Ulbricht, “Der Weg zur Sicherung des Friedens und zur Erhöhung der materiellen und kulturellen Bedingungen des Volkes” (1959), in *Dokumente*, 540–6.

³ Hans Joachim Hoffmann (GDR Culture Minister), Address on Brecht’s ninetieth birthday, 10 February 1988, in the GDR Theatre Union journal *Theater der Zeit* (April 1988), 6–9. The initials SDI were in the original.