

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

Developing a Theater of the Collective: Brecht's Lehrstuecke and the Nazi Thingspiele

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9xg4k4ws>

Journal

Colloquia Germanica, 42 (2009)(4)

ISSN

0010-1338

Author

Pan, DTC

Publication Date

2013-01-23

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Developing a Theater of the Collective: Brecht's *Lehrstücke* and the Nazi *Thingspiele*¹

DAVID PAN

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE

The Weimar Republic was a unique period of German history because of the situation in which competing notions of the basis of political order were in play at the same time, leading both to extreme instability but also to a situation in which issues of aesthetic representation had crucial consequences for political developments. This merging of aesthetic and political questions resulted in the development of competing forms of political representation on both the left and the right. Both Johannes Reichl and Helmuth Kiesel have shown that this competition led to similarities between the *Lehrstück* and the *Thingspiel* as theatrical forms developed by communists and Nazis (Reichl 110–20, Kiesel 87–90). But while Kiesel argues that the correspondences stem from their common participation in totalitarian political forms, it may be that these movements were not so much examples of a totalitarian aesthetic as products of a crisis situation in which foundations of authority were in conflict with each other. The only effective way to resolve this conflict was through different representational attempts to establish the parameters of political identity.

Both genres form part of a modern German tradition of aesthetic approaches to political representation ranging from Kleist's *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* to Heiner Müller's *Mauser*. One of the crucial characteristics of the texts in this tradition is that they conceive themselves as political tools by reason of their aesthetic character. Or put differently, in recognizing that the process of aesthetic representation is essential to the success of political movements that seek to establish a new order, from German nationalism to international communism to East German socialism, the authors of such texts have designed them partly as direct interventions in a process of political representation and partly as artistic meditations on the very aesthetic processes that mediate between political power and individual consciousness in political acts such as incitement to war, political agitation, and terrorism.

¹ An earlier version of this essay was originally presented at the 2011 MLA Convention as part of the session, «The Epic and Ethics in the Brechtian Mode.» I would like to thank the organizers of this session, particularly Dorothee Ostmeier and Marc Silberman, as well as Theodore Fiedler for their encouragement of my efforts.

The key difference between a totalitarian aesthetic and a political representational aesthetic would be the extent to which the art forms engage in or stifle public debate. As I hope to show, both the *Lehrstücke* and the *Thingspiele* used similar techniques that depended upon their embeddedness in a situation of uncertainty and their participation in active debates about political identity. They were not totalitarian forms of art in themselves, even if they may have served to support governments that became totalitarian.

Because of the ruthless consequentiality of its sacrificial dynamic, Brecht's *Maßnahme* is perhaps the paradigmatic example of such a politically representational text in the Weimar period. While Reiner Steinweg has argued for the way in which Brecht's *Lehrstücke* attempted to promote critical thinking rather than empathetic spectatorship (Steinweg 87–93), the documented accounts of audience responses demonstrate that *Die Maßnahme* did not in fact create a critical distance between the action and the participants. On the contrary, the actor-participants often reacted viscerally, identifying and empathizing with the heroes in order to then either embrace or reject the premises of their sacrifice (Tatlow 198). This effect of the play is clearly evident in the way the critical reception has tended to be shaped by an empathy with the young comrade who is executed. The first Marxist reviewers, though praising Brecht's and Hanns Eisler's creation of a new musical form for workers' choruses (Brecht, *Die Maßnahme* 338, 349, 352), felt that the musical play misrepresented the role of the communist party and remained trapped within a bourgeois, idealistic perspective (Brecht, *Die Maßnahme* 337, 354, 359). Their sympathy for the young comrade led them to criticize the brutality of the sacrifice for being an example of a «Jesuitenmoral» and even a «nationalsozialistische Moral» (Brecht, *Die Maßnahme*, 359, 401), and postwar literary critics took a similar stance in denouncing the communist-inspired brutality of the piece (Knopf 95). The post-war reappraisals of the play also used an aesthetics of empathy in order to explain its functioning. Though Martin Esslin calls *Die Maßnahme* Brecht's «first real masterpiece» (162), he does so by sympathizing with the young comrade and reading the play as a «horrifying anticipation of the great confession trials of the Stalinist era» (164).

Reinhold Grimm completes this move toward an aesthetics of empathy by reading the play as a tragedy, with the young comrade as the hero inescapably caught between two conflicting moral imperatives (402–03). But if *Die Maßnahme*'s aesthetic effects display features of tragedy, whose conflicts are based on empathy with the sacrificed hero, these effects contradict Steinweg's theories about how the *Lehrstücke* should function as exercises in critical thinking. Yet, neither Grimm, who sees the play as part of an «ideologischen

Irrweg» (423), nor other critics have been able to develop an alternative theory that explains how the *Lehrstücke* function as political drama. Klaus-Dieter Krabiel's reading, though providing an accurate depiction of the innovative formal and structural aspects of the piece as a musical play for workers' choruses (Krabiel 180–81), has nevertheless been unable to account for the way in which the real reception has developed in a direction contrary to Brecht's goal of creating a new kind of critical reception, to the point where he and his executors felt obliged to refuse permission to perform the play until the 1990s (*Brecht Handbuch* 1:264; Willett 153). The result has been that critics have been forced to discard the crucial sacrifice in the play in order to save the theory. Krabiel, for instance, treats the sacrifice as a provocation that is in the end an unacceptable element of an otherwise enlightened political ethic (*Brecht Handbuch* 1:262). Similarly, David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen dismiss the sacrificial aspect as a flaw in the play that pushes it toward the kind of pity and sympathy found in an Aristotelian vision of tragedy and thereby undermines its functioning as a critical exercise (Bathrick and Huyssen 111–112; Komins 109). While Oliver Simons recognizes how the play's adherence to the genre constraints of the tragedy determines the way in which it relates to a political dimension (336–38), it is not clear from his analysis how the tragic action itself functions as a political intervention.

The key point here is that *Die Maßnahme* has functioned not so much as a lesson in critical thinking as a component in a process of political representation. At the center of a theory of theater as a political representation lies the event of individual sacrifice, an act that most clearly embodies the aesthetic component of politics at its most basic level of mobilization of individual consciousness for a political cause. Yet, as opposed to the idea that the *Lehrstücke* embody individual tragedies, the point of the sacrifice is not just to evoke sympathy and compassion or to create a provocation, but to understand the way collective goals link to individual consciousness in a mutually constitutive process. In pursuing a new kind of theater, *Die Massnahme* neither effaces nor exalts the individual, but provides insight into how the representational aspect of political power is linked to the aesthetic experience of the individual. Though the argument here follows Antony Tatlow in privileging the actual reception over the «projected» reception (198), the point is not to condemn the retrograde tendencies of the *Lehrstück*, but to show that these plays engage in processes of political representation that, though eventually also playing into totalitarian tendencies, nevertheless continue to shape politics in a world that has failed to be transformed in the way that Brecht intended.

Die Maßnahme was written as a version of *Der Jasager* in which the action takes place in a concrete situation, and the creation and revision of these two plays took place in the same period from 1929 to 1931 (Steinweg 66; Knopf 92–93). The final versions of both plays were published in 1931 in the same issue of *Versuche*, which contained the revised *Maßnahme* as well as the revised versions of *Der Jasager* (second version) and *Der Neinsager*. The simultaneity of their production and revision already indicates that these plays are engaging similar issues of sacrifice, and the first reviews of *Die Maßnahme* immediately recognized it as «eine neue Fassung des ‹Jasagers›» (Brecht, *Die Maßnahme* 326, 328, 401). *Die Maßnahme* is like *Der Jasager* in that both involve a decision to sacrifice an individual for the collective. But because its retelling of *Der Jasager* links it to contemporary events, *Die Maßnahme* cannot maintain the unity of the collective that is the premise of *Der Jasager* (Pan, «Sacrifice» 233–35). Instead, the sacrifice in *Die Maßnahme* involves the affirmation of a particular value against other competing values that would define the character of the community.

The play concentrates on the issue of political representation both through its innovative form as a musical piece designed for performance by workers' choruses and the specific structure of the play within the play through which the young comrade is depicted. As Knopf underlines (99–100), the four agitators form a group of players who must stage the story of the young comrade in order to obtain a judgment from the control chorus about the correctness of their actions. The young comrade is never literally on the stage. Rather, this figure exists only as a role that is played by one of the four agitators, each of whom takes a turn at playing the role of the young comrade in their staging of their story. Consequently, the young comrade exists, not as an individual character, but as a representation, in this case a cross between a legal and a political representation because both the control chorus and the workers' choruses form the audience that must judge both the justness of the agitators' actions and the validity of their political goals.

The merging of the legal and political judgments is crucial. If one of the key shifts in the transformation of *Der Jasager* from its first to its second version involves a focus on the specific goals and ideals that are to be affirmed in the sacrifice, there is a similar linking of *Einverständnis* with particular ideological goals in *Die Maßnahme*. The basic premise in the latter play is precisely that there is agreement about the ideological goals that are to be placed above all other considerations and that this agreement overrides any other moral considerations in determining the justice and injustice of particular actions: «Der für den Kommunismus kämpft, der muß kämpfen können und nicht kämpfen; die Wahrheit sagen und die Wahrheit nicht sagen; Dienste erweisen

und Dienste verweigern; Versprechen halten und Versprechen nicht halten. Sich in Gefahr begeben und die Gefahr fliehen; kenntlich sein und unkenntlich sein. Wer für den Kommunismus kämpft, hat von allen Tugenden nur eine: daß er für den Kommunismus kämpft» (Brecht, *Die Maßnahme* 11–12, 72). In a speech that in the original version is repeated first by the control chorus and then by the four agitators, the play affirms through a series of examples that all other moral considerations are to be subordinated to the goals of communism. All justice must then be understood from this ideological standpoint. As in Carl Schmitt's conception of a fundamental decision about the enemy that then becomes defining for the entire political entity if it is to maintain itself (Schmitt, *Concept of the Political* 26–30), the establishment of communist ideology is here the sovereign decision that then determines the basis from which all other ethical decisions gain meaning. This fundamental ideological decision is the presupposition of the play that, like any decision on ultimate values, cannot be rationally justified. Consequently, it must remain as the central premise that establishes the framework around which all other considerations must be organized. The establishment of communist ideology seeks to become the sovereign decision in the state of exception that then should determine the basis from which all other ethical decisions gain meaning in the future. Because it is being performed during the late Weimar Republic state of exception in which ideological unity about the fundamental parameters of the public sphere is lacking, this ideological decision cannot work in this context as the presupposition of the play but only as its goal. Consequently, the play's plot consists of the young comrade's constant questioning of the primacy of this ideology based on his compassion and pity for others. The action moves the young comrade to the self-sacrificial affirmation of this ideology, in spite of the previous objections.

But in a consequent move that was heavily criticized as a form of «idealism» by Marxist reviewers, particularly Alfred Kurella (Brecht, *Die Maßnahme* 384), the play's focus on spreading ideology suggests that communism must be established as an ideological construct rather than a natural outgrowth of reality. The struggle for communism in the play is not in the first place an objective struggle against material conditions or necessities, but rather a political struggle to propagate communist ideology. When the agitators first encounter the young comrade, this comrade expects their help in supplying material needs such as locomotives, tractors, seeds, weapons, or, failing this, clear orders from the central committee or even their own labor. But the agitators respond: «So ist es: wir bringen nichts für euch. Aber über die Grenze nach Urga bringen wir die Schriften der Klassiker und der Propagandisten, das ABC des Kommunismus, den Unwissenden Belehrung über ihre Lage, den

Unterdrückten das Klassenbewußtsein und die Erfahrung der Revolution» (Brecht, *Die Maßnahme* 9). The primary struggle does not concern material conditions but rather competing ideologies, and the key task is to bring the «Schriften der Klassiker.» In this sense, *Die Maßnahme* is structurally much more like the first version of *Der Jasager* than any of the later versions because the primary imperative is not the direct improvement of materials conditions or the saving of individuals but the bringing of learned texts.

This focus on ideological texts (*Lehre*) is contradictory, however, to the extent that Brecht wants to demonstrate on the one hand the objectivity of this ideology but on the other hand must establish communism through a political representation that functions on an aesthetic level, thereby treating communism as just another ideology amongst others that must be established aesthetically and not just as the result of critical thinking. The basic project of communism for the play is to spread and enforce this ideology in a process by which the ideology must «take hold of the masses»: «Die Partei kann nicht vernichtet werden/Denn sie beruht auf der Lehre der Klassiker/Welche geschöpft ist aus der Kenntnis der Wirklichkeit/Und bestimmt ist, sie zu verändern, indem sie, die Lehre/Die Massen ergreift» (Brecht, *Die Maßnahme* 28). As Kurella points out in his critique of this passage, communism is for Brecht, Dudow, and Eisler an idea that the party embodies and that must take hold of the masses just like any other ideology (Brecht, *Die Maßnahme* 384–85). Against this idealistic conception, Kurella sees the party as the manifestation of the proletariat, whose material reality guarantees the objectivity of the communist idea. Rather than embodying a mere idea like other competing ideologies, for Kurella the party's grounding in the reality of the proletariat means that it changes the world, not by enforcing an ideology, but by participating in the «Selbstentwicklung der Wahrheit» out of the dialectical interaction between insight and change (Brecht, *Die Maßnahme* 385). When Knopf insists, against Kurella, that this change does not come automatically with insight but only when «Theorie zu den Massen gebracht wird» (Knopf 102), he defends Brecht's conception of communism as primarily an ideology that must be spread in order to gain power rather than a reality that will manifest itself automatically.

This need for communist ideology to be brought to the masses in a convincing way means that political representation becomes the key element in this struggle for communism. But in an insight that derives from *Die Maßnahme*'s borrowing of its structure from *Der Jasager*, the success of this representation can only be measured by the capacity of communists for self-sacrifice. By linking political ideology to individual sacrifice, *Die Maßnahme* draws out the aesthetic consequences of Schmitt's insistence on the will-

ingness to sacrifice and to kill in war as the primary measure of political identity (Schmitt, *Concept of the Political* 71). Consequently, the play's understanding of justice in terms of a dynamic of sacrifice creates the aesthetic structure for a communist political theology.

But for Knopf as well, the power of the ideology does not lie in its status as a pure idea but as an idea grounded in reality as opposed to other ideas that are simply elements of tradition or an ideology that is not grounded in reality. Consequently, he focuses on the control chorus's reaction to the *Einverständnis* of the young comrade with his execution (Knopf 102). Instead of noting, «Er hat dem Brauch gemäß geantwortet» as in the first version of *Der Jasager* (Brecht, *Der Jasager* 26), the control chorus states, «Er hat der Wirklichkeit gemäß geantwortet» (Brecht, *Die Maßnahme* 32), thereby emphasizing the objectivity of the situation in a similar way as in the second version of *Der Jasager* where the teacher states that the boy «der Notwendigkeit gemäß geantwortet» (Brecht, *Der Jasager* 36). The move from custom to «necessity» and «reality» is, however, not necessarily an affirmation of the objectivity and reality of communist ideology. If communist ideology involves the establishment of a morality that affirms the rule of workers, this ideology is not based on objectivity and necessity but on a particular set of values that cannot be rationally grounded but must participate in the same processes of aesthetic representation as other ideologies based for instance on monarchism, nationalism, or racism.

The young comrade's inability to subordinate his compassion for suffering individuals to the strategic necessities of communist agitation becomes the reason that he must be killed by his fellow agitators at the end of the story. Though the play depicts this failure to conform to communist methods as a failure to understand strategic necessities, these necessities are not really objective. The killing of the young comrade only becomes a necessity if the values of communist ideology are affirmed as the highest ones, which must be pursued at all costs. Within a different value system, in which communist goals were to be subordinated to nationalist or liberal ones, for instance, the necessity of the execution would fall away. The definition of a situation of necessity always involves a concomitant affirmation of a particular set of values.

Consequently, the play's appeal to the authority of necessity rather than custom is in fact a denial of the decision on values that has to be taken in order for the necessity of the execution to make sense. Strategic necessities are not a result of an existential violence. Nor do they prove the excessive irrationality of communist strictures, as Ronald Speirs argues (178–79). Rather necessity can become a justification for the execution only when there is a specific set of

values that can be agreed upon and that would make sacrifice into a necessity to defend those values *against other competing values*. But because Brecht also wants to affirm communist values as objective ones, he tries to stage the violence of the sacrifice, not as part of the affirmation of a specific set of values, but as the necessary reaction to the violence of the world. The agitators affirm their dispassionate use of violence by pointing to the real conditions of the world: «*Furchtbar ist es, zu töten. / Aber nicht andere nur, auch uns töten wir, wenn es nottut / Da doch nur mit Gewalt diese tötende / Welt zu ändern ist, wie / Jeder Lebende weiß*» (94). By arguing that violence is necessary in order to change the world into one that no longer kills, the agitators affirm a particular communist ideology that understands itself as the path toward a peaceful world.

But as William Rasch has argued, one of the characteristics of communist ideology in particular that manifests itself at this point in *Die Massnahme* is that it sees itself, not as one ideology among others, but as a manifestation of «reality» itself. As a consequence, critical distance is no longer the proper stance for the agitators and the control chorus. Instead, the play stages an example of political representation that involves the establishment of values in a moment of sympathy and not of criticism (Rasch 74). In this context, the sympathy that the agitators and control chorus show for the young comrade, echoing the same sympathy that the students show toward the young boy in *Der Jasager* before they throw him into the valley (Brecht, *Jasager* 26–27, 39–40; Knopf 92), is not simply a remnant of an aesthetics of tragedy or a «residue of their own bourgeois individualities» (Komins 109), but an essential part of the subjective aspect of political representation. The sacrifice does not distract from the conceptual exercise but is its central point because the young comrade is not a particular individual but a role which the different actors take turns in playing. The staging of the sacrifice is consequently not as an individual tragedy but as a cultural-political necessity with emblematic significance.

Kiesel points out that both *Die Maßnahme* and the *Thingspiele* function to justify the power of higher authorities to observe and judge the actions of a struggling avant-garde (Kiesel 88). He consequently argues that both forms of theater function as totalitarian rituals whose purpose is to establish «political religions» (89). The difficulty here is that it is by no means clear that there can ever be an objective basis from which to establish a completely secular politics. Even liberal democracies require their populations to have faith in institutions such as the parliament, the judiciary, and the electoral system in order to function properly. While both *Lehrstück* and *Thingspiel* attempt to establish their ritual performances as something new, the use of ritual is itself not new

but rather may be the foundation of any and every political order because each one must institute through political representation the rules of its own public sphere (Pan, «Afterword» 86–97). The emphatic character of the rituals that these new genres attempt to establish does not set them apart as totalitarian but is perhaps a consequence of the crisis situation in which a previous set of rituals that made up the nineteenth-century *Kaiserreich* had broken down and there was a situation of competition for establishing new ones. The key to understanding the aesthetics underlying these plays, however, is the insight into the way in which notions of value and self-sacrifice cannot be imposed by a higher authority but need to have an aesthetic depiction that matches with an audience's self-conceptions about the foundations of its own collective identity.

If the *Lehrstücke* are exercises in political representation rather than in critical thinking, it does not make sense to distinguish them structurally from right-wing theatrical forms, most prominently the *Thingspiele*, which pursued similar political representational goals with similar methods. During the early years of Nazi rule from 1933 to 1936, the Nazi relationship to the cultural tradition as well as to new artistic movements such as Expressionism or the *Thingspiel* was in flux. In the end, Nazi theater policy settled on a return to the classics of bourgeois theater, and theaters by the end of the 1930s were no longer producing contemporary drama, but rather canonical works by Schiller, Goethe, Kleist, Hebbel, and Shakespeare (Hostetter 191–98, Pan, «Structure» 89). But before this stabilization, the Nazis supported the *Thingspiel* dramas because they shared their political goal of creating a new national unity within a right-wing framework. Though the Nazis used the term *Thing* to give them an archaic context by referring back to Germanic tribunal gatherings described by Tacitus, these dramas drew on experimental theater movements of the Weimar Republic for their structures. They were thus the right-wing pendant to the *Lehrstücke*, not only in their formal aspects but also in the way they were meant to function within a specific political context. The main difference was in the specific ideology being defended. As opposed to the communist *Lehrstücke*, the *Thingspiele* were based on a right-wing nationalist tendency with the explicit political function of creating a new national unity within its own public sphere.

Beginning already during the latter years of the Weimar Republic, these plays promised to establish a new relationship between artist and spectator. As such, these plays continued a transformation of theater practices toward community participation initiated by open-air theater, amateur theater, and workers' chorus and sports movements in the 1920s (Eichberg 71–94,

Fischer-Lichte 126–27). In fact, the early *Thingspiele* were not explicitly connected with the Nazis but rather were a right-wing nationalist version of a kind of open-air theater that used large choruses and amateur actors in order to integrate the audience more actively into the action of the drama. The movement began as early as 1932, with the founding of the *Reichsbund zur Förderung der Freilichtspiele*, not by the Nazis, but by the pro-Catholic Wilhelm Karl Gerst and Egon Schmid, a supporter of open-air theater (Strobl 58, Fischer-Lichte 127, Eichberg 203). Even in February 1933, the *Reichsbund* was trying to work with left-wing writers such as Ödön von Horváth, Ernst Toller, and Carl Zuckmayer (Strobl 256, Stommer 24). In taking over these movements, the Nazis initially accepted their techniques. So when Wilhelm von Schramm publishes his programmatic *Neubau des deutschen Theaters* in 1934 with a preface by Otto Laubinger, director of the theater section of Goebbels' *Reichspropagandaministerium* and president of the *Reichstheaterkammer*, he draws explicitly on these techniques and earlier movements in order to describe the new *Thingspiele* (Schramm 28–45).

The early *Thingspiele* were not even labeled as such, as this term was first coined by the Germanist Carl Niessen in July 1933 in order to designate the nationalist versions of open-air, workers' theater that attempted to merge spectators with the stage action (Niven 55). By that time, some of the most prominent examples of this genre, including Richard Euringer's *Deutsche Passion 1933* and Kurt Heynicke's *Neurode* had already been written during the closing days of the Weimar Republic. They were ready for production just as the Nazis came to power and this shift in the political situation allowed for their success, first because the Nazis perceived these plays as important for solidifying their popularity and second because the plays gained in contemporary significance during the period in which Hitler was still struggling to consolidate his power. The agitprop call to audiences in these plays to make a decision had clear political overtones in a situation in early 1933 when audience perspectives during the first few months of Hitler's chancellorship may have had an effect on historical developments.

Consequently, the early *Thingspiele* participated in a process of public debate and were at first not designed to suppress such debate. Even the early Nazi theoretical texts about the *Thingspiel* provided a forum for competing conceptions (Eichberg 30–35, Reichl 17–30). The main positions included a Goebbels faction represented by Otto Laubinger and Wilhelm Schramm that favored links to Expressionism, Max Reinhardt, and Weimar-era theatrical techniques (Schramm 38), a Rosenberg faction that attempted to emphasize the link to old Germanic traditions as well as a focus on the dramatic text rather than on technique (Braumüller 35), and a Catholic faction that Braumüller

sees fits to criticize as a betrayal of the National Socialist idea (Braumüller 24–27). In spite of these disagreements, however, there was an overarching consensus that the primary purpose of the *Thingspiel* that separated it from a bourgeois theater focused on the individual was the creation of a collective. Schramm writes: «Das neue Deutschland verlangte nach einem politisch-repräsentativen Theater. Es brauchte eine Darstellung der Volksgemeinschaft und öffentliche Repräsentation der Macht und Einheit des neuen Staates» (Schramm 39). This call for a political representational theater that depicts the unity of a new national community leads for Schramm to the development of new theatrical techniques that allow for a new kind of political audience and a new basis for the public sphere. «Für diese Darstellung war aber die Guckkastenbühne nicht tauglich, denn jetzt brauchte man ja kein «Publikum» mehr, das sich zu einigen Hundert in einem geschlossenen Raum versammelte, sondern die wahre Öffentlichkeit der Zehn-, Zwanzig- und Fünftausende, wie schon Dr. Goebbels angekündigt hatte» (Schramm 39). While the basis of unity was the Nordic race, Schramm's conception allows for an «active participation» of the people in the building and development of this new public sphere. «Der Deutsche sollte sich einmal nicht mehr als Privatmensch und isoliertes Individuum, sondern als Teil der Öffentlichkeit und Volksgemeinschaft erleben und in aktiver Teilnahme dabei in Erscheinung treten. Die künstliche Trennung der Stände und Klassen sollte verschwinden. Im männlichen Spiel sollte gemeinsames Volksschicksal dargestellt werden, und zwar in einer Theaterform, deren Wesen die helle nordische Rasse und ihre Artung bestimmte» (Schramm 39). The unity of the people in the first place excludes all those who are deemed to be outside of the proper racial parameters, but within this unity, the *Thingspiel* is supposed to allow for an active collective participation that would not be possible in traditional theater or film.

Similarly, Wolf Braumüller, writing within the Rosenberg faction, also focuses attention on both the collective nature of the *Thingspiel* experience against the individual focus of traditional theater. The goal is again the creation of a unified political will. «Tausende von Volksgenossen konnten mit dem Erlebnis eines künstlerischen Aktes zu einer Einheit des Willens wie des Wollens zusammengeschweißt werden. Der individualistischen Selbstherrlichkeit trat ein neuer kulturschaffender Faktor gegenüber: die Forderung von Tausenden von Herzen als Bekenntnis des Volkes» (Braumüller 28). This creation of a community also becomes the basis of a new kind of public forum that presupposes such a community. «Hier war die Möglichkeit, in der äußerlichen Sprengung alles Herkömmlichen aus der Kunst einer Gesellschaft eine Kunst der Gemeinschaft zu gestalten. Hier bot sich auch

die Möglichkeit, die Geistigkeit des Einzelnen in die geistige Disziplin von Tausenden zu verwandeln, wo der Einzelne nichts und Alle für Einen gelten. Hier war das Forum des geistigen Führertums und der geistigen Gefolgschaft» (Braumüller 28). Though in emphasizing «Gefolgschaft» rather than «aktive Teilnahme,» Braumüller disagrees here with Schramm about the degree of community initiative involved in the *Thingspiel*, both are in agreement about the *Thingspiel*'s political representational role in forging this community. Because both Schramm and Braumüller emphasize the importance of the *Thingspiel* in establishing the unity of the national community, there is an implicit admission that race itself is not in fact a sufficient unifying factor and that representational strategies are necessary for establishing the homogeneity required for a stable public sphere. As with Brecht, there is a contradiction here between the claim of an objective, scientific unity – here grounded in race theories – and the practice in which political representation is necessary to establish this unity through aesthetic means.

The primary similarities between the *Lehrstück* and the *Thingspiel* are then, first, that they both attempted to establish a new form of theater that encouraged a dissolution of the boundary between actors and audience through the use of open-air theaters, large choruses, and a degree of audience participation and, second, that they were designed as forms of political representation that would help mobilize people through rituals oriented around a particular understanding of collective identity. If we grant that neither the communist use of class nor the National Socialist invocation of blood as the definer of the community contained any objective truth, then the analysis of these two genres must focus on their political representational value, that is, the way they moved audiences toward specific political decisions in a situation of political flux. In looking at these two genres from this perspective, we see that they correspond to each other in two key aspects, first, in the way that they both seek to establish ideological conformity above all other values and, second, in the way that they do not assume this conformity but set it as their aesthetic goal. This final point is crucial for grasping both the initial popularity and subsequent waning of the *Thingspiel* genre. As Reichl points out, «Nur wo ein Gegensatz ausgetragen wird etwa von Weimarer ›Systemzeit‹ und Drittem Reich (Euringer), ›schaffender Arbeit‹ und ›raffendem Kapital‹ (Heynicke) oder ›gerechtem Volk‹ gegen ›ungerechte Obrigkeit‹ (Möller), dessen Lösung dann aber jeweils der NS – Staat als Ideal oder ganz praktisch bringt, kann man von ›Thingspiel‹ sprechen» (Reichl 12). If the *Thingspiel* can be distinguished from other genres by the extent to which it sets up the decision to embrace National Socialism as a real choice, then it

functioned as a genuine political theater within a process of political debate to the same extent as the Brechtian *Lehrstück*.

This explanation for the aesthetic and political context of the *Thingspiel* also illuminates some of the reasons why it proved to be as compelling a political representational experience as the *Lehrstück* for German audiences. Richard Euringer's *Deutsche Passion 1933* was created within the situation of political flux at the end of the Weimar Republic and exhibits an ideological structure that is similar to theatrical experiments on the left. Though this play was written in December 1932, it was first performed, like Brecht's early *Lehrstück* attempt, *Der Flug der Lindberghs*, as a radio play, in April 1933 (Niven 60–61). The published version sold 30,000 copies by the end of 1934, and it was subsequently performed at the *Reichsfestspiele* in Heidelberg in July 1934 (Fischer-Lichte 122). Though it was first performed in this period of political excitement and decision shortly after the Nazis came to power, its themes were defined by the Weimar Republic. The play begins with two ghosts. The first is the ghost of the nameless World War I soldier who is shocked at seeing the decadence of the Weimar Republic. The second is the evil spirit who embodies all the evils of Weimar. The play is structured as a struggle between these two ghosts for supremacy in determining the spiritual focus of the German people. While the evil spirit revels in the greed of the capitalists, the sexual promiscuity of the women, and the decadence of the theaters, the nameless soldier exhorts the people to avoid «Gier und Rachsucht» and instead to understand their unity and accept sacrifices for others (Euringer 34). The nameless soldier calls on the nobles to see themselves as part of the «Bauernstand,» the proletariat to understand itself as «Volk vom Volke,» and on all to embrace the value of work and workers: «Arbeit Arbeit rettet das Land./Wer ist er? Wer zählt nicht zum Arbeitsstand?» (35). The nameless soldier then ends this exhortation with a call for decision: «Volk ans Werk! Du hast die Wahl. Entscheide ein für allemal!» (Euringer 36).

Though Euringer had begun working with the Nazi *Völkischer Beobachter* by 1931 and the play ends with the surprised and frustrated words of the evil spirit: «Das auch noch! Da zerplatz doch gleich! Das also gibt's: ein drittes Reich!!!» (47), the dead soldier's pleas are not clearly National Socialist but conform to a more generally nationalist perspective. Rather than emphasizing race or anti-Semitism, the dead soldier focuses on the problems of the Weimar Republic – the plight of World War I soldiers, inflation, unemployment, political factionalism, and the perceived decadence of culture – in order to then affirm the importance of work, sacrifice, and German unity. Strobl argues that while «the left sought to induce reflection [...] the Nazis, however, appealed to

the spectators' emotions» (Strobl 42), there is in fact little difference in the structure of aesthetic effect between Euringer's *Thingspiel* and left-wing agitprop drama.

A comparison of *Deutsche Passion 1933* with Ernst Toller's *Masse Mensch* shows for instance strong similarities in terms of dramatic technique as well as the structure of the conflict. As in Euringer's play in which none of the figures have names but instead are designated by their role such as «proletarian,» «war cripple,» or «mother,» Toller's play eschews names in order to designate people by roles such as «Arbeiter,» «Bankier,» or «Wache» and then sets up the main conflict as one between «der Namenlose» and «die Frau.» Moreover, this conflict is, as with Euringer, not one in which different political positions such as socialism and fascism are set against each other, but in which the entire conflict is played out within the socialist camp. The dispute is one that is in the end similar to the conflict in Euringer's play. Like Euringer's «namenloser Soldat,» «Der Namenlose» in Toller's play argues for the priority of sacrifice over the desires of individuals and insists on the importance of both sacrifice and decision: «Der Lehre willen muß ich sie opfern./Du aber verrätst die Masse, du verrätst die Sache./Denn heute gilts sich zu entscheiden./Wer schwanket, sich nicht entscheiden kann,/Stützt die Herren, die uns unterdrücken,/Stützt die Herren, die uns hungern lassen,/Ist Feind» (109). As opposed to this call for sacrifice and decision, Toller's "Frau" defends «Der Mensch über alles!» (109). But this intervention for the individual is simply the more positive version of the evil spirit's similar defense of individual desires in his sardonic defense of Weimar morals: «Hier oben lebt sich es frisch und jung. Nie gab es auf der Welt so viel Tanz und Plasier, sie schwimmen in Geld (und wär's Papier). Ob ihr platzt vor Neide, die Stallmagd geht in Seide. Man küsst sich und herzt sich und paart sich zum Paar und trennt sich ohne Traualtar» (12). Though the evil spirit's position is obviously being ridiculed even as it is presented, reducing the conflict in the play, the poles of the conflict are the same as in *Masse Mensch*, even to the point that Toller's "Frau" seems to arrive at her position partly out of her illicit love for the bourgeois man, demonstrating a susceptibility to the kind of loose morality described by Euringer's «böser Geist.»

Because it leaves the final decision regarding the sacrificial and the individualist positions up to the audience, *Masse Mensch* includes more of a true conflict in the play and grants more decision-making power to the spectator than *Deutsche Passion*. But, especially as compared to some of the subsequent *Thingspiele*, *Deutsche Passion* does leave the audience in control to the extent that, in setting up the conflict between sacrifice and individualism in the same way as *Masse Mensch*, it also is calling for the audience to make a

decision for one or the other and defines this decision in the context of its performance as a decision between the Weimar Republic and the Nazi Reich. To the extent that the audience was still living in a context at the end of 1932 and in 1933 in which their decisions still had meaning, the play therefore had a political representational value that guaranteed its resonance with the audience.

Additionally, *Deutsche Passion*'s clear affirmation both of sacrifice and of the need for this sacrifice to establish a new unity and harmony of the German people played to the same enthusiasm for German national identity as that which brought the Nazis to power. The play points to the long-term reasons for this enthusiasm in its final sanctification of the *namenloser Soldat*. Responding to the evil spirit's insistence that he return to the grave, the nameless soldier becomes the «Guter Geist» and links his spiritual awakening with the awakening of the people:

Die Mutter:	<i>Aus seinen Wunden bricht ein Glanz. Sein Geist strahlt aus der Dornenkron. Unsterblich stirbt der Muttersohn.</i>
Der gute Geist (der namenlose Soldat):	Ein Volk am Werk. Es ist vollstreckt. Es wacht mein Geist, der euch erweckt. (46)

This simultaneous salvation of the nameless soldier and the people establishes a structure of sacrifice that allows the people to return to the dead soldiers of World War I and redeem them by casting their deaths as a preparation for German spiritual renewal. To the extent that the German nationalism of World War I is being reinvoked here along with a spirit of sacrifice, *Deutsche Passion 1933* establishes a political representation with a religious structure that borrows from both Christian passion plays and a Goethean triumphalism, the subsequent lines describing the evil spirit's frustration at seeing the spirit of the nameless soldier rise to heaven:

Böser Geist:	Gut! Guter Geist! Reiss dich entzwei, Und fahr zur Hölle mit Geschrei! Den Leib hinunter in die Nacht!
Viele Frauenstimmen:	
Die Mutter:	Da schwebt er auf!
Guter Geist (aus der Höhe):	Es ist vollbracht.
Böser Geist:	Verdammt! Jetzt fährt das Aas empor!

Viele Frauenstimmen:
 Kinderstimmen: Hört! Hört! Aus Chören hört ... den Chor!
 Chöre der seligen Krieger:
 (aus Himmelshöhen
 Stimmen der Jung-
 deutschland Regimenter) Mutter, klag nicht, daß wir geendet!
 Es war nicht umsonst, wir sind vollendet!

Die Mutter:
 (erschüttert aber stark) Selig die Vollendeten, schwere befreit.
 Selig die Lebendigen, denn ihrer ist die Zeit.

Böser Geist:
 Das auch noch! Da zerplatz doch gleich!
 Das also gibt's: ein drittes Reich!?!?! (46–47)

Echoing the cadences of the final scene of Goethe's *Faust II*, this final action not only links the present unity of Germany to a redemption of the dead soldiers, but also sets up the spirit of the nameless soldier as the ultimate spiritual authority, whose Christ-like sacrifice grants him the authority to call out «Es ist vollbracht!» in place of God. This final scene then creates a multiple denouement in which the Christian passion play, Goethe's *Faust*, and the tragedy of World War I all find their redemption and fulfillment in the establishment of the Third Reich.

Whether we blame here the insidious structure of this play or the fateful circumstances of the progression of German history, the final point to face here is the success of this play's vision of sacrifice in comparison with alternative ones proposed by competing political parties. Like *Die Massnahme* and *Masse Mensch*, *Deutsche Passion* has a clear ideological direction, but does not presuppose it, instead calling for the audience to make a decision for the Nazi Reich. To the extent that the audience was still living in a context at the end of 1932 and in 1933 in which their decisions still had meaning, the play therefore had a political representational value in a contemporary conflict that guaranteed its resonance with the audience. As political representation, Euringer's play clearly sees its project as the establishment of a new structure of sacrifice that would build on existing nationalist sentiment and channel it toward particular political decisions and a general legitimation of the Nazi cause. This project defines a basic congruence with the structure of left-wing theater of the period. To the extent that left-wing aesthetic representations participated in the same ideological struggle as the right-wing ones, they needed to establish a competing vision of sacrifice and political unity around their own ideals. In addressing this problem, *Die Massnahme* and *Masse Mensch* do not solve it through a rationalizing approach as against a Nazi emotional approach. Communist

success would have been built on the same spiritual mobilization based on the representational establishment of its ideals as the Nazi rise to power.

Both the left- and right-wing genres were consequently extremely context-specific forms in that they only make aesthetic sense in a period in which the ideology that each advocates is both on the table for political debate but has not yet reached a hegemonic status for political culture. This was precisely the situation in the period from 1931 to 1934 when these works were created and first produced, a period in which it was unclear whether a communist, a republican, or a nationalist political consensus would establish itself as the foundation for political life. In this situation, both *Die Massnahme* and *Deutsche Passion 1933* competed with each other to establish these foundations in their representations. At the same time, both works turned out to be very context-bound in the sense that after the early 1930s, they had lost their aesthetic legitimacy and were banned by the very political actors who had called them into being. Brecht famously forbade any performances of *Die Massnahme* during his lifetime after the initial productions in the early 1930s. Similarly, the Nazis turned against the *Thingspiel* movement by 1935, and virtually none were allowed to be performed after 1936.

These moves to suppress these genres may stem from the inability to accept the independence of the kind of public sphere that these genres potentially establish. It is important here to distinguish between the specific public spheres that different manifestations of the *Lehrstück* and the *Thingspiel* establish to the extent that they are built on an allegiance to differing texts—for Catholics, the Bible or, for nationalists, a German literary and cultural tradition or, for communists, the texts of Marx and Engels or, for Nazis, a set of biological race theories. If the textual basis of unity can establish a set of ground rules for debate within a public sphere, it can allow for heterogeneity, conflict, and an interpretive relationship to founding texts within this sphere. The techniques of the *Lehrstück* and *Thingspiel* may indeed offer ways to support this active public sphere, and, as Evelyn Annuss has demonstrated, the choruses, for example, did not in the end function as representations of ideological conformity but rather as spaces for a growing cacophony of voices (Annuss 173–77). Even if this kind of context of debate, disagreement, and development might also be suppressed, there will continue to exist the possibility of a dynamic relationship to the textual tradition that balances the homogeneity needed for establishing the parameters for discussion against the heterogeneity of voices and interests that participate in the tradition. Because both the communist materialist and the Nazi racist understandings of unity operate on a level that claims to be prior to texts, however, there is an inherent difficulty in building a public sphere that allows for debate and active

community participation. To the extent that Communists view their ideology as grounded in material conditions that transcend ideology and Nazis see their own ideas as based upon a different kind of materiality grounded in biological race, they both consider their stances as independent and prior to any textual foundation. This view allowed both communism and Nazism to justify the gradual suppression of political debate that could only distract from the assumed foundation in a material reality. The Nazis turned away from the *Thingspiel* once they no longer wanted large events that offered the possibility of community participation. Brecht's refusal to allow performances of *Die Maßnahme* probably helped to curtail the debate about Stalinism. Curiously, the end of both *Lehrstück* and *Thingspiel* may have been the consequence, not of their repressive nature, but, to the contrary, of their potential for building a context of public debate and community participation in politics.

Works Cited

- Anuss, Evelyn. «Chor und Geschlecht im nationalsozialistischen Theater.» *Staat in (Un-) Ordnung. Geschlechterperspektiven auf die Zwischenkriegszeit*. Ed. Stefan Krammer et al. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011. 167–80.
- Bathrick, David, and Andreas Huyssen. «Producing Revolution: Heiner Müller's *Mauser* as Learning Play.» *New German Critique* 8 (1976): 110–21.
- Braumüller, Wolf. *Freilicht- und Thingspiel: Rückschau und Forderungen*. Berlin: Volkschaft-Verlag für Buch, Bühne und Film, 1935.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Der Jasager und der Neinsager: Vorlagen, Fassungen, Materialien*. Ed. Peter Szondi. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Die Maßnahme: Kritische Ausgabe mit einer Spielanleitung von Reiner Steinweg*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972.
- Brecht Handbuch in fünf Bänden*. Ed. Jan Knopf. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001.
- Eichberg, Henning, Michael Dultz, Glen Gadberry, Günther Rühle. *Massenspiele: NS-Thingspiel, Arbeiterweihespiel und olympisches Zeremoniell*. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1977.
- Esslin, Martin. *Brecht: The Man and his Work*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971.
- Euringer, Richard. *Deutsche Passion: 1933. Hörwerk in Sechs Sätzen*. Oldenburg i. O., Berlin: G. Stalling, 1933.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Grimm, Reinhold. «Ideologische Tragödie und Tragödie der Ideologie: Versuch über ein Lehrstück von Brecht.» *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 78.4 (1959): 394–424.
- Hostetter, Elizabeth Schulz. *The Berlin State Theater under the Nazi Regime: A Study of the Administration, Key Productions, and Critical Responses from 1933–1944*. Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004.

- Kiesel, Helmuth. «Die Massnahme im Licht der Totalitarismustheorie.» *Massnahmen: Bertolt Brechts/Hanns Eislers Lehrstück Die Massnahme: Kontroverse Perspektive Praxis*. Ed. Inge Gellert, Gerd Koch, and Florian Vaßen. *Recherchen 1*. Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 1998. 83–100.
- Knopf, Jan. *Brecht-Handbuch: Theater. Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1980.
- Komins, Benton Jay. «Rewriting, Violence, and Theater: Bertolt Brecht's *The Measures Taken* and Heiner Müller's *Mauser*.» *The Comparatist* 26 (2002): 99–119.
- Krabiell, Klaus-Dieter. *Brechts Lehrstücke: Entstehung und Entwicklung eines Spieltyps*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1993.
- Niven, William. «The Birth of Nazi Drama?: *Thing Plays*.» *Theater under the Nazis*. Ed. John London. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000. 54–95.
- Pan, David. «Afterword: Historical Event and Mythic Meaning in Carl Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba*.» *Hamlet or Hecuba: The Intrusion of the Time into the Play*. By Carl Schmitt. Trans. David Pan and Jennifer R. Rust. New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2009.
- Pan, David. «Sacrifice as Political Representation in Bertolt Brecht's *Lehrstücke*.» *Germanic Review* 84.3 (Summer 2009): 222–49.
- Pan, David. «The Structure of Aesthetic Pleasure in the Nazi Reception of Goethe's *Faust*.» *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany*. Ed. Pamela E. Swett, Corey Ross, and Fabrice d'Almeida. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Rasch, William. *Sovereignty and Its Discontents: On the Primacy of Conflict and the Structure of the Political*. London: Birkbeck Law Press, 2004.
- Reichl, Johannes M. *Das Thingspiel: Über den Versuch eines nationalsozialistischen Lehrstück-Theaters (Euringer – Heynicke – Möller)*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Dr. Mißlbeck, 1988.
- Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. Trans. George Schwab. Chicago: U Chicago P, 2007.
- Schramm, Wilhelm von. *Neubau des deutschen Theaters: Ergebnisse und Forderungen*. Berlin: Schlieffen, 1934.
- Simons, Oliver. «Theater of Revolution and the Law of Genre – Bertolt Brecht's *The Measures Taken (Die Maßnahme)*.» *Germanic Review* 84.4 (Fall 2009): 327–52.
- Speirs, Ronald. *Brecht's Early Plays*. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Steinweg, Reiner. *Das Lehrstück: Brechts Theorie einer politisch-ästhetischen Erziehung*. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlerische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1972.
- Stommer, Rainer. *Die inszenierte Volksgemeinschaft: die «Thing-Bewegung» im Dritten Reich*. Marburg: Jonas, 1985.
- Strobl, Gerwin. *The Swastika and the Stage: German Theatre and Society, 1933–1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.
- Tatlow, Antony. *The Mask of Evil: Brecht's Response to the Poetry, Theatre and Thought of China and Japan. A Comparative and Critical Evaluation*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1977.
- Toller, Ernst. *Masse Mensch. Gesammelte Werke*. Bd. 2. Munich: Carl Hanser, 1978.

Willett, John. «Production as Learning Experience: *Taniko – He Who Says Yes – The Measures Taken*.» *Brecht and Asian Theatre: The Proceedings of a Conference on Brecht in East Asian Theatre*. Ed. Antony Tatlow and Tak-wai Wong. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 1982.