A Month in Berlin: Theatre for All Ages

Last fall I spent mid-October till mid-November in Berlin, a city that has been reconfiguring itself ever since the Berlin Wall fell so spectacularly on November 9, 1989. Born and raised in post-war West Germany, I grew up with a perspective that placed divided Berlin at the dead center of the Cold War with a border that was demarcated by the "death strip" where those who tried to escape from the east were gunned down by their own countrymen. These were the defining dramatic images. My first actual visit to both parts of Berlin was in 1960 when I noted the contrast between the glamorous, busy, brightly lit *Ku-Damm* versus the gray, desolate streets of East Berlin. In 1978, I did dramaturgical research at various theatres in Germany including the Schaubühne, at that time at Hallesche Ufer, where I saw *Krapp's Last Tape* with an unforgettable Rick Cluchey, and, at the Berliner Ensemble in East Berlin, *Galileo Galilei* with Ekkehard Schall, Bertolt Brecht's son-in-law. My third visit in 1990, shortly after the unification, was to meet East German playwright Christoph Hein [no relation]. I had translated his play *The Knights of the Round Table*, a thinly veiled drama about the last days of the Honecker regime; his chronicle about the fall of the Berlin Wall was published in the New York *Times* in November/December 1989. Under the direction of Moshe Yassur, The Third Step Theatre Company produced the American premiere in New York in 1991. Since then I have visited Berlin several times and marveled how the formerly separated parts of East and West are being architecturally blended; how the death strip has become a green stripe with parks and playgrounds; how the cosmopolitan chic and the young have invaded all parts of Berlin; how immigrants from all corners of the world have found a niche. The Berlin of 2017 is an entirely new cultural entity that is more defined by the dynamics of global developments than by being a national capital.

The wall that divided East and West Berlin consisted of concrete, electric fences, vehicle barriers, and a "death strip" patrolled by the border guards. Pictured is what remains of the death strip today.

Maybe it is a bit self-indulgent to write about my Berlin experiences over a period of fifty-plus years, but I simply wanted to share my personal amazement at the evolution of this city to its present stage. The theatre scene plays a vital part in the cultural climate, as is attested by audiences of all ages filling the houses and being visibly engaged in lively discourse before and after a performance. In the course of a month, I saw six productions at the Schaubühne, one at the Berliner Ensemble, one at the Gorki Theater, one at the Volksbühne. I could have seen more and am sorry I missed Labiche's *The Affair Rue de Lourcine* in Elfriede Jelinek's German translation at the Deutsches Theater, but, frankly, I had reached sensory (and maybe even intellectual) capacity—each production was inventive and challenging in content and form. However, from the work I saw in these very different theatres, I was able to extrapolate some aesthetic and stylistic common denominators which were active in the individual productions.

Unlike in other European countries, Germany is not dominated by a national theatre; however, certain aesthetic characteristics pervade dramaturgical, directorial, and design elements for a certain period of time in many of the major theatres throughout the country. This may have to do as much with the political and cultural geography of Germany as with the fact that German theatre has historically been a director's theatre where the directorial concept drives all aspects of a production. The distinct German directors of the twentieth century, such as Max Reinhardt, Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, Fritz Kortner, Peter Stein, Peter Zadek, Thomas Langhoff, Jürgen Flimm, Claus Peymann, Dieter Dorn, Rudolf Noelte, Thomas Ostermeier, Frank Castorf—the list of notable directors goes on—not only left their mark on individual epochal productions but also shaped the repertory theatres which, in many cases, they led for decades. They also developed long-term artistic relationships with dramaturgs and designers with whom they crafted intensely idiosyncratic productions. (After 1968, a few West German theatres tried to replace traditional hierarchical structures with more democratic artistic and administrative procedures.) Moreover, the acting ensembles and staff of German repertory theatres are fully employed, and actors have been able to maintain a position for many years. Thus a cohesive aesthetic of design and acting style can evolve through a long-term relationship with the artistic team. Prominent theatres with prominent artistic teams also influence the dramaturgical approach to plays and some stylistic commonalities emerge over time. One aspect of a dramaturgical approach that I observed during this month common to very diverse productions in very different theatres was the pervasive use of video that fractured or doubled textual information and thus created a constant shift of perspective on the text resulting in the ironic distancing of any emotional affect. One common stylistic element that emerged from this use of video was the doubled and often simultaneous presence of the actor as oversized image at times dominating the actor’s live presence. This doubling of the actor as mediated image and as live presence promoted an acting technique that emphasized the performative self of the actor. This performative aspect was further exploited by the actor commenting directly (as actor) to the audience, often interpolating improvisational phrases into existing text.

Of the theatres in Berlin, I have been most fond of the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, which offers a diverse serious repertory in its complex of several stages. Between October 18 and November 10, I was able to see six productions on three different stages: *Trust* and *Fear* by Falk Richter; *Empire* by Milo Rau; *Schatten (Eurydike sagt*) by Elfriede Jelinek; *Richard III* by Shakespeare; and *Die Mutter* by Bertolt Brecht/Hanns Eisler, a studio co-production with graduates from the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts, one of the major theatre academies in Germany.

Trust (2009) by Falk Richter and dancer/choreographer Anouk von Dijk. Photo: Christophe Rayaud de

Lage.

Trust and *Fear* are two works with text and movement in rhythmic patterns that express major contemporary social themes in terms of their psychological effects. In *Trust* (2009), Falk Richter and dancer/choreographer Anouk von Dijk explore the question of Trust (writ large) as it permeates the quality of our lives from the most intimate to the most public political spheres—the program note states, “relationships emerge and disintegrate in ever shorter time spans…[by an] an ever sharper competition…[we are] bonding, separating, buying, selling.” The performance by an ensemble of Schaubühne actors and dancers from the dance company anoukvandijk dc depict in seamless precision “the shaky foundations and mechanisms of human bonds against the background of current crises,” marital, economic, social—all driven by monetized exchange. A recurring text motif: “money prefers to live without us.” The expansive set of ramps and mirrors by Katrin Hoffman with subtle lighting by Carsten Sander allowed for the shifting relational dynamics among the performers.

Ehe und Familie vor!
GENDER?
Armuts-zuwanderung STOPP
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Ehe und Familie vor!

Fear (2015) by Falk Richter.

For *Fear* (2015), Katrin Hoffman devised an elevated glass cube covered with white netting in which, at the beginning, seven actors crowd together with some recording machinery; we hear their chatting in bits and pieces while another actor does movement warm-ups on one of the ramps. Video by Björn Melhus and music by Malte Beckenbach underscore text and movement. The choreography for this piece was developed collaboratively by Falk Richter and members of the ensemble. As the title implies, the performance piece explores all aspects of Fear, primarily the fear of loss of specific identity—individual, national, economic, social—a pervasive sense of unease that has lately been gripping the European psyche with a particular political edge in Germany because of its Nazi history. The *angst* felt in some quarters as the fear of disappearing, of being exchanged for another, of zombification, was performed with incredible physical dexterity and haunting beauty. The final image of transformation was the collective making of a garden in which peace and a home could be found—Candide's final "let us take care of our garden."

Empire (2016), with concept, text, and direction by Milo Rau, at the Schaubühne.

Empire (concept, text and direction by Milo Rau) premiered at the Schaubühne in September 2016; it is the final part of his "Europe Trilogy." With supertitles in English, the four actors, Ramo Ali, Akillas Karazissis, Rami Khalaf, and Maia Morgenstern performed in Arabic, Greek, Kurdish, and Romanian, their own respective languages, (auto)biographical texts around experiences and questions that once again roil European reality. What does fleeing and losing one's home mean? What is home? How can you narrate the pain, the loss, and new beginnings onstage? The set by Anton Lukas represents a cross section of some ahistorical two-level abandoned partially destroyed building where a small kitchen is the central meeting ground for the four actors, all of whom narrate their particular tales of flight, tragedy, alienation, and new beginnings with remarkable sensibility and restraint. Two of the actors are of the older generation, the Greek actor Karazissis and the Romanian/Jewish actor Maia Morgenstern, both of whom survived dictatorships in their home countries and are now established artists there. The other two performers are Syrian actor Rami Khalaf, who fled to France, and Ramo Ali, a Syrian/Kurdish survivor of Assad's prison and torture who came to Germany where he began to share/perform the story of his flight. The dramaturgical structure of conversational shared narration with powerful but intimate performances drew me into the epic portrayal of a continent in turmoil through the lives of individuals. (Dramaturgy and research were conducted by Stefan Bläske and Mirjam Knapp). Historical events can ultimately only be grasped through individual stories, and the theatre is the most powerful forum for such an encounter because it gives the collective audience the intellectual and emotional experience by which to engage and empathize—and, in some cases, maybe even to motivate action. Archival videos, designed by Marc Stepan, music by Eleni Karaindrou, and sound design by Jens Baudisch effectively underscored the narration.

Schatten (Eurydike sagt) by Elfriede Jelinek, directed by Katie Mitchell and Lily McLeish for the Schaubühne. Premiere: September 2016.

Another September 2016 premiere at the Schaubühne was Elfriede Jelinek's *Schatten (Eurydike sagt*) (Shadow (Eurydice Says)), a poetic text that gives Eurydice's perspective on Orpheus's loss as a loss of self. Orpheus, the singer, cannot abide the loss of Eurydice's body while she finds in her shadow existence the space to be herself, not having to be the reflecting object of Orpheus's narcissism. Just in case the female point of view has escaped the spectator in this visually busy rendering of a somewhat laconic text, the program booklet provides context. It contains excerpts of Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" and Helene Cixous's essay, "The Laughter of Medusa" as well as three modern poetic takes on the Orpheus and Eurydice myth: "Dunkles zu Sagen" by Ingeborg Bachmann, "Orpheus (1)" by Margaret Atwood, and "Eurydice" by Carol Ann Duffy. The mise-en-scène by Katie Mitchell (with co-director Lily McLeish) is augmented by Alex Eales's complex stage design and video installation by Ingi Bekk and Ellie Thompson. The constantly shifting stage space and mediated imagery affects the perception of the happenings. In addition, a sound score updates the character of Orpheus as celebrity rock singer and emphasizes the surreal shadowy underworld. Performers with cameras and boom on long cables constantly pursue the actors who impersonate Eurydice, Orpheus, and Charon in the labyrinthine basement of a corporate-style office world of shifting walls, elevators, sound studio, dressing-room, and garage, complete with a Volkswagen—in short, we witness the action as though in a TV studio where we can see live actors and their video image simultaneously, where an "anchor" (actress Stephanie Eidt) speaks Jelinek's text in a sound booth like commentary. Jule Böwe portrays mute Eurydice who moves into and through the Underworld, a labyrinthine corporate basement. Renato Schuch as rock star Orpheus and Maik Solbach with strangely dead eyes as Charon accompany and torment her. Marcel Kieslich, Nadja Krüger, and Christin Wilke are the camera team "persecuting" the Orpheus/Eurydice drama as live action with Simon Peter operating the boom. It is an interesting theatrical "reality TV" show of celebrity disembodiment.

Richard III, in a new translation/adaptation by Marius von Mayenburg and directed by Thomas Ostermeier. Premiere: February 2015.

Richard III, in a new translation/adaptation by Marius von Mayenburg and directed by Thomas Ostermeier, premiered in February 2015. The stage, designed by Jan Pappelbaum, is an amalgam of a Shakepearean hemispheric globe with a vertical upstage construction of three levels with steel scaffolding and narrow walkways reminiscent of Piscator's stage architecture as socio-political statement. The audience, in a shallow half-round of steeply raked rows, with two ramps for actor entrances, is very close to the action on the stage. Basic cold white stage lighting, designed by Erich Schneider, spills partially into the audience, thus unifying the space between spectators and actors, making them into co-conspirators in the proceedings, as they would have been in Shakespeare's theatre. This gives a certain internal rationale to the actors' periodic verbal (seemingly spontaneous/improvisational) comments to an audience member. The primary playing area, a slightly raked semi-circular space covered with earthlike material that became progressively bloodier, reminded me also of the ancient Greek *theatron* where a ruler's demise by his own hubris was enacted as a political rite. Shakespeare's history plays also functioned as a political ritual for the benefit of the ruling elite as well as the common public. Ostermeier's chilling and energetic mise-en-scène in this towering set with alternately brightly lit and shadowed areas demanded from the young ensemble of actors an acrobatic physicality that made Richard's ascent, abetted by his youthful gang of followers, into the brutal combat that Shakespeare's language demanded. Lars Eidinger played a very athletic and rather naked Richard who is by turns funny, disgusting, sexual, brilliant, and pathetic—he is a mercurial virtuoso actor whose tone and body can change from seduction to terror in a second. An on-stage percussionist, Thomas Witte, punctuated the fast-paced performance with hard-edged sound (music by Nils Ostendorf). Abstract video patterns (designed by Sebastien Dupouey) projected against the back wall added to the sense of speed with which Richard's world and England fell into chaos; a recurring symbolic video image was a flock of falling blackbirds. The last image is Richard III hanging lifeless upside down, his foot caught in a noose-like stirrup, as though his horse had been shot out from under him ("A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse…"). Ostermeier productions show the human capacity for brutality and vulgarity as the basic consequence of unbridled ambition; it is the corrosive element in all human relations, whether dramatized in an Ibsen domestic drama or in Shakespeare's royal gambits. He is a master of choreographing these dances of death, and he has the actors who can commit to this Artaudian theatre of cruelty.

Bertolt Brecht and the composer Hanns Eisler, with the collaboration of Slatan Dudow and Günther Weisenborn, wrote *Die Mutter* first in 1930–31; it premiered in Berlin in 1932. The play is an adaptation of Gorki's novel *The Mother* (1906) about an event in the botched 1905 revolution. The central character, Pelagea Vlassova, is a poor illiterate mother who, in the course of Brecht's *Lehrstück* [teaching play], goes from complaining about the cost of food and being afraid of authority to taking on the revolutionary cause of the workers and her son by distributing illegal leaflets that call for action against the bosses. The fourteen scenes show the way stations of her personal sacrifices and losses, foremost the death of her son, in the interest of social progress. The role of Pelagea was originated and frequently performed by Helene Weigel, Brecht's wife. In the present Schaubühne studio production, the veteran actress Ursula Werner headed a young ensemble of seven graduating acting students from the Ernst Busch academy, named after a famous actor who also originated the role of Pelagea's son Vlassov in 1932. Werner is an actress with sensibility and craft who endowed Pelagea with many colors—sly humor, fierce courage, and deep sorrow.

I imagine she really became like a mother to this young cast of well-trained acting graduates. Under Peter Kleinert's tight direction on Peter Schubert's simple unencumbered set, the ensemble gave differentiated and persuasive performances that moved the play into our times; the message of unfettered destructive capitalism clearly spoke to the young audience in attendance. [See also Schafer report in this issue.]

The six very different plays I saw at the Schaubühne all dealt with prominent contemporary social and political concerns affecting society: the loss of Trust in a hyper-individualistic society and its corollary, the Fear of loss of all aspects of identity; the psychic effect of borders, control, and power in a pan-violent world, i.e. what do nation and empire mean in a globalized economy and who controls the explanation of legitimacy?

The Maxim Gorki Theater, located near the Humboldt University in the former eastern sector of Berlin, is committed to producing theatre that spans cultures, and that engages political concerns that extend beyond Germany's borders but affect German society as economic immigrants, political exiles, and refugees from conflict regions are coming into the country. On the occasion of the ninety-ninth anniversary of the Russian October Revolution, the Gorki Theater invited the Argentine director Lola Arias to devise a documentary theatre piece about life "in the cross-hairs of the socialist ideal"—the interface of the personal and the political under communist and post-communist Germany. The resulting production with an ensemble of eight women between the ages of eight and eighty-four opened in mid-October 2016 under the title *ATLAS OF COMMUNISM* as part of the festival *Uniting Backgrounds—Theatre towards Democracy.* The idea for the production originated in a ten-hour interview-performance, *AUDITION FOR A DEMONSTRATION*, on November 9, 2014 in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in which actors organized audience members to relate their personal experiences in the November 4, 1989 mass demonstrations at the Alexanderplatz.

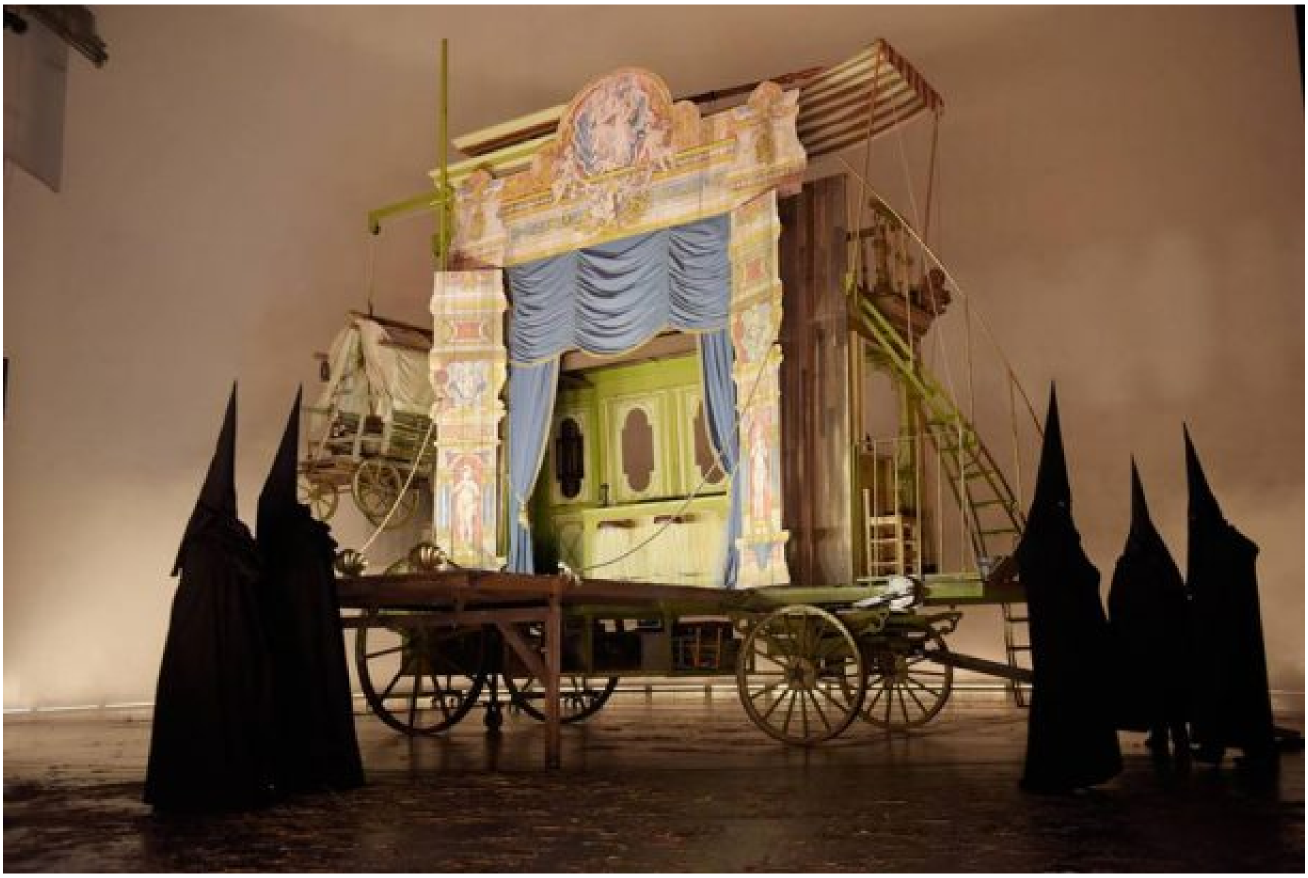
Lola Arias's project *AUDITION FOR A DEMONSTRATION* (2014), a ten-hour interview performance that provided the seed for *ATLAS OF COMMUNISM* (2016).

Lola Arias and Jo Schramm, the stage designer, totally reconfigured the audience/performance space of the main stage. Above the center of the main horizontal stage space hung a video screen that was serviced from a computer table by a couple of performers with the assistance of two live camera technicians. Some of the audience was seated on the stage on benches in a kind of pit on either side below a built-up center runway; other spectators were sitting in the regular audience section. Thus performers and witnesses/spectators were facing each other across the transverse T-shaped performance space. The dramaturg Aljoscha Begrich, born in East Berlin in 1977 and raised in the former GDR, describes in his very personal program notes the laborious evolution of this project even before the rehearsals with Lola Arias began in June 2016, such as finding, interviewing, and selecting the performers (most of whom were not professional actors) and their stories. One remarkable participating performer is the eighty-four-year-old Salomea Genin, whose story includes her escape as a Jew from Nazi Germany in 1935 and her return after the war to the GDR as a staunch Socialist and who served, for a time, as a Stasi informer. A charming eight-year-old child tells how she heard from her parents vaguely about the existence of the communist state but has no real understanding of it. A Vietnamese laborer tells of the racism she encountered. An actress talks about her destroyed career after the *Wende* [post-1990]. And the litany goes on, augmented by live performances alternating with live videos of the performers as they face one or the other side of the audience. The "atlas" of narratives gives us an insight into the psychosocial map of life under communism and the reverberations of its demise. The production succeeded in drawing together the larger history with personal experience through the lens of present political sensibilities—it allows for public discussion and questioning. The theatre becomes the *agora*, the public forum in the classical sense. And it all ends with a loud party!

The Good Person of Szechuan by Bertolt Brecht, directed by Leander Haußmann. Photo: Lucie Jansch.

The Berliner Ensemble's present production of Bertolt Brecht's sociopolitical allegory *The Good Person of Szechuan* degenerated, in my estimation, into a kind of post-modern highly ironic diversion that lacked both the pathos as well as the sly humor of Brecht. I was not entirely sure what the director Leander Haußmann wanted to convey with his colorful but at times silly production. His gods were three housewives that slapped on ill-fitting long fake beards whenever they had to be gods—true, Brecht gave these gods a ridiculous flavor, but their ridiculousness lies in the inadequacy or irrelevancy of their moral demands in the face of social human reality. They realize this at the end and retreat to their protected sphere while Shen Te, "the good person," is left alone with her conundrum, how to be good and to live in a world that cheats, steals, betrays, and kills, i.e. the capitalistic world where only the Shui Tas (Shen Te's evil "cousin") can make it on the backs of the water carriers and the whores. Brecht gives us one glimpse of good, but it is like a sorry fairytale: Shen Te's love enables the out-of-work pilot to fly off only to forget his good angel, Shen Te. Via Lewandowsky divided the huge stage of the Schiffbauerdamm Theater into various stations that brought some of the action closer to the audience, but the actors were swallowed up as they moved upstage; certainly the text became sometimes inaudible. Super-tall streetlamps moved like surreal characters and bent to spy on a scene, such as the romantic moment between Shen Te and the pilot Sun. Brecht wrote the "fable" with Ruth Berlau and Margarete Steffin's collaboration and music by Paul Dessau in 1939/40 while all were en route as refugees from Berlin to Denmark, Sweden to Finland; in his notes he comments, among other things, that writing a play without access to a stage is very difficult. On a deeper level, the play shows despair without relief about the darkening world and leaves us with no solution. At the end, as in a Shakespearean epilogue, a player steps in front of the audience and asks for forgiveness that the play ends so bitterly. He implores the audience: “You must look yourself for the conclusion—it has to be a good one, it must, it must, it must!” Director Haußmann comments: “When the curtain comes down at the end and all questions remain open, we will have had nonetheless a good dose of entertainment. Brecht’s poetic tricks let the audience forget—even just for a short moment—that Brecht deals in *The Good Person of Szechuan* with the really big question of how to be a human being. Brecht won’t do anything less than that and we won’t either.” The excellent program book contains informative background material and the play text showing significant cuts made for the production; however, the final image in the book is a common Chinese dime store good luck figure. And so I am left wondering: was the production a surreptitiously deprecating commentary on Brecht’s fable?

Last but not least, I “experienced” at the Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz one of the final Frank Castorf productions, *Die Kabale der Scheinheiligen* [The Cabal of Hypocrites], a five hour confection of theatrical exuberance that had premiered in May 2016. The origin of the Volksbühne was in 1914; it flourished in the 1920s under Piscator’s direction. Reconstructed from ruins after WWII, it became part of the GDR’s theatrical triumvirate together with the Berliner Ensemble and the Deutsches Theater. It is a huge 1920s-style theatre complex with generous lobby spaces, an unpretentious theatre-cantine where the public can eat and mingle with theatre folk—a common institution also at the Berliner Ensemble and the Gorki—and an egalitarian auditorium with excellent sightlines. When I entered the auditorium I was surprised to see glistening black plastic wall drapings and a large neon classic Coca-Cola sign looming above the balcony. (I was told this was left over from *The Brothers Karamazov* production.) In contrast to all other German theatres that I had attended over the years, there was no elaborate program booklet for purchase, only a flyer with the essential information. The full title of the production in large Gothic letters, *Die Kabale der Scheinheiligen Das Leben des Herrn de Moliere nach Michail Bulgakow,* covered one side of the flyer; on the other was the cast list, the artistic team, and the technical support. Castorf and his dramaturg, Sebastian Kaiser, had created a text from two plays by Bulgakov that were adapted and interspersed with texts by Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine, Molière, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Castorf has made a career of amalgamated texts for expansive (and expensive) productions that mix up time periods and space.



Die Kabale der Scheinheiligen, directed by Frank Castorf, written by Castorf and dramaturg, Sebastian Kaiser with text from Mikhail Bulgakov, Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine, Molière, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

Stage designer Aleksandar Deni? designed an elaborate set with three large mobile units: one was a two-story seventeenth-century theatre cart; one carried King Louis XIV's bed-*salon* with the *ruelle* for royal visitors; one contained a messy Rainer Werner Fassbinder type of living/filming space where camera people meander through the entire performance space offstage and onstage so that live actors compete with their filmed image for audience attention. The technical complexity of moving the large set units smoothly was obviously a challenge—the performance I saw needed an extra intermission for untangling two such units—but the acting ensemble moved through the five hours of mingled texts, dramatic moments, and theatrical styles with tireless alacrity; notably Alexander Scheer as a maniacal Molière and his nimble side-kick (often literally) servant and candle-extinguisher Jean-Jacques Bouton, played by Patrick Güldenberg who "pirouettes and leaps" to attention, are spell-binding. Jeanne Balibar as Madeleine Bejart also performs the roles of the *tragedienne*—unforgettable are Racine's Phedre passages in which she suffers from her passion for Hippolyte; Hanna Hilsdorf as Armande Bejart de Molière and Balibar have some powerful scenes in which their complicated, ambiguous relationship to Molière is played out—were Madeleine and Armande mother and daughter but also Moliere's first companion/wife and daughter/second wife? There is much humor in this production. I remember especially the scenes with the Marquis de Charron, Archbishop of Paris, played by Lars Rudolph with all the oiliness of the hypocritical ecclesiastic politician—at times his mouth draws itself into the shape of a Greek satyr's mask when he wants to please his king while castigating Molière for blasphemy. Castorf explores in this production all kinds of relationships: intimate, political, social, theatrical—all in a kind of freewheeling sequence that exposes these relationships as tainted by institutional power structures in which individuals have to assert themselves through a brutal competition and where “leaders” are *a priori* corrupt and subjects by necessity hypocrites. The relationship of author to authority affected Racine, Corneille, and Molière as subjects of King Louis XIV; Bulgakov (played by Sophie Rois) had to navigate around Stalin. The figure of Fassbinder as volatile authoritarian film and theatre director parallels King Louis XIV. By implication Castorf, as executive director of the Volksbühne and director of this production, includes himself in this game of power. The medieval allegorical image of the Wheel of Fortune still pertains—the powerful will go down to be crushed while others ascend to sit for a while in the sun until the wheel turns again. The theatre is not exempt from this. After all, the ancient Greek word *hypocrites* refers to the Actor. Castorf leaves the Volksbühne at the end of the 2016/2017 season, after twenty-five years, to give his position to a new director with a different power base.

A month in Berlin was rich in theatrical offerings that expose contemporary challenges to old assumptions about home, identity, power relationships, and definitions of the Other; all the productions enacted what it means to be a human being in this world where mediated reality dominates actual life. In 2016 Bob Dylan received the Literature Nobel Prize for his poetry—“for the times they are a-changing” (as they always are)—and he sent as proxy recipient Patti Smith who performed his song in front of the assembled audience of dignitaries, including the King of Sweden. We can watch this performance now on Youtube, as we can many other theatre performances. Is it the same as theatre live? Is the mediated world replacing real place? Is live-streaming the same as liveness? I prefer making the effort to see/hear/feel live actors among live spectators in a live city for the one life I have in this real place for as long as possible, whatever the complications and discomfort.

Beate Hein Bennett, Ph.D. Comp. Lit., has worked as a teacher, translator, and freelance dramaturg. Born and raised in Germany and trained in all aspects of theatre arts, she has a high respect for the art in all its complexity from front to backstage, from spoken language to the language of the body. Her latest involvement has been as dramaturg for the New Yiddish Rep/Castillo Theatre premiere production in Yiddish of *Waiting for Godot* in New York. A theatrical highlight was as translator and dramaturg for The Living Theatre production of Else Lasker-Schüler’s IANDI on Avenue C. She is currently translating Judith Malina’s book *The Piscator Notebook* (Routledge, 2012) into German.

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