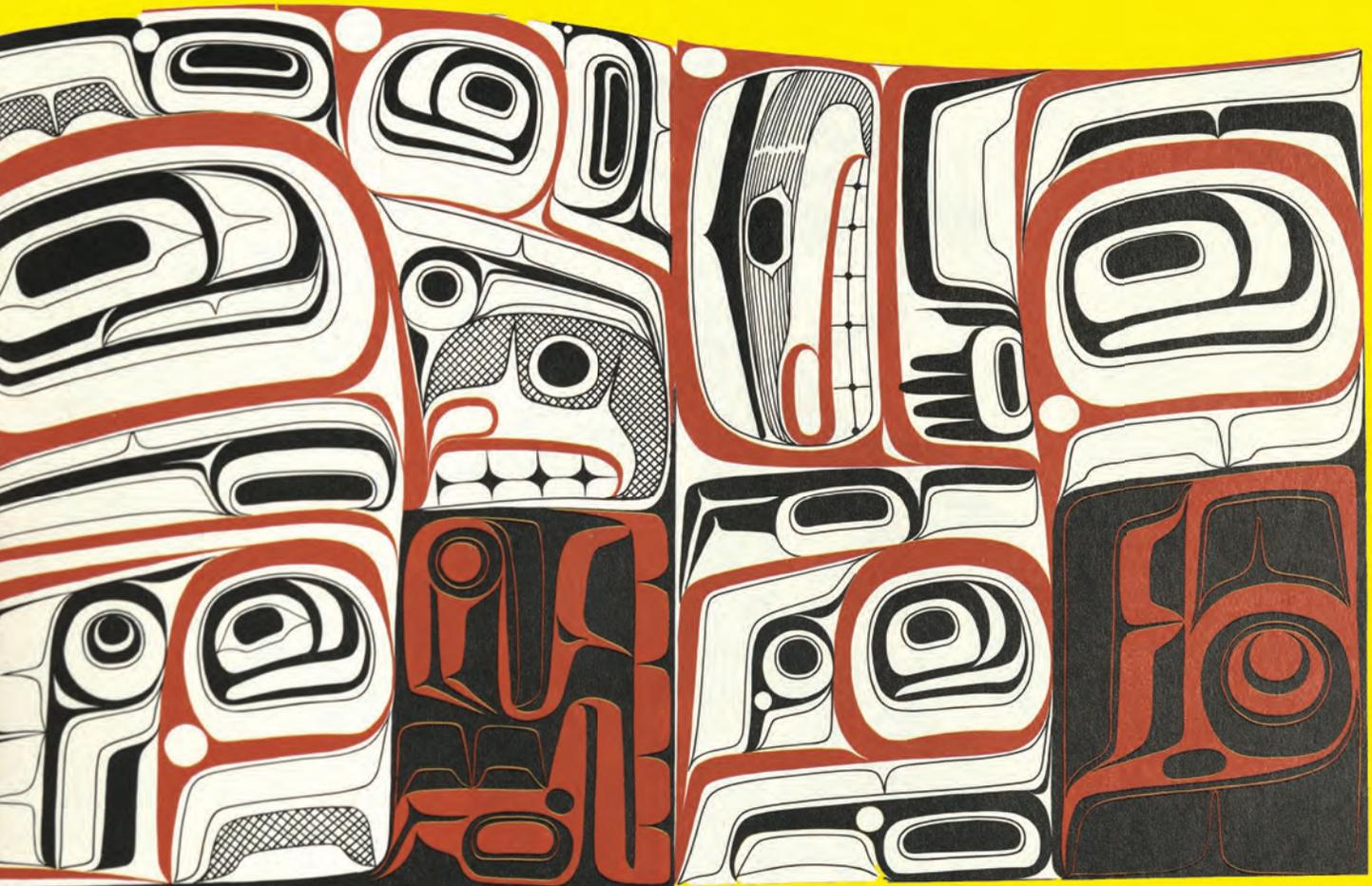


**res 73/74 spring/autumn 2020**

*Anthropology and aesthetics*



*La parade*

# Res 73/74 Spring/Autumn 2020

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## *Anthropology and aesthetics*

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# The animation of sameness

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## *Brecht's Elephant Calf and the parade ground of epic theater*

FLORIAN FUCHS

### The returned gaze

It is well known that Bertolt Brecht's *Lehrstücke* or "learning plays" were meant to instruct the actors before the eyes of the audience. To achieve this, the actors need to master a particular tension of gazes: they not only need to absorb those gazes directed at them from the audience but also control those that they themselves may return to the audience, all the more if the absorbed gazes are underlaid with affect. This tense thicket of charged glances is Brecht's provocation of all theatrical conventions. Diderot had defined conventional theater staging as centered on the "actor's paradox," which dictates that the actor must induce the audience's emotions and reactions while suppressing any gazes or displays of affect during the play.<sup>1</sup> Brecht's returned gaze takes down this "inner fourth wall" of the actor and makes use of an inversion of Diderot's premise. The social sciences know this inversion as the "observer's paradox," according to which the mere presence of the observer's gaze may influence the observed in their actions.<sup>2</sup> It was Brecht's innovation to implement the observer's paradox as a motivating structure at the ground of his *Lehrstücke*. While this figuration of returned gazes was absent from theater before Brecht, there is, however, one notable older form of the performing arts in which the fourth wall had to be constitutively absent: performances by acrobats, clowns, and other makeshift acts that directly engage with the viewer in streets, building entrances, and other provisional spaces. The returned gaze often initiates such performances, and it is this very constitution of the returned gaze that creates the particular tension and attraction between audience and stage in the Brechtian learning play. Brecht insisted that the instructional character of the actors' performances must not be interrupted, even if this means that the gaze of the onlookers shall be left unanswered as they are instructed. The fourth wall of the theatrical stage, therefore, does not completely disappear but is made

permeable, transparent, and, effectively, rendered a medium.

Brecht's learning plays were written between 1927 and 1930 and in his oeuvre demarcate the origins of what he began to call "epic theater" shortly thereafter: a form of stage play that is antidramatic, as well as antiempathetic, and which could be called prosaic. Walter Benjamin, closely acquainted with Brecht in those years, was among the first to point out the situational tension and attraction implied in the term "epic." In his 1931 essay "What Is Epic Theatre?" he states that the proposition "of epic theatre is that 'the one who shows'—that is, the actor—'shall be shown.'"<sup>3</sup> This point positivizes the effects of the observer's paradox as it exhibits the permeability and fluidity of the fourth wall. Before Brecht's deconstruction of theater, this fluidity could only be experienced during plays or performances in public or semiopen spaces, which by definition lacked the layout or machinations to construct a fourth wall. What Brecht achieved was to transpose this very play of attraction and tension from the makeshift setups of side stages on the streets, from the alley jugglers and skits of wayfaring amateur groups, to the main stages of theaters. This transposition in itself, however, requires a close reconstruction of the tensions and attractions of the returned gaze. Brecht deconstructed the observer's paradox in order to regain, as it were, a pure, empty form of attraction that is able to recreate the energetic scene of the *parade* on the stage. Epic theater, I will argue here, rests on incorporating the para-theater of the *parade*.

### *Man Equals Man* as catalyst of epic theater

The emergence of epic theater can be dated to the same years, 1927–31, which culminated in the theory that Benjamin was able to formulate in his essay about Brecht's dramaturgic innovations. Strikingly, the beginning and end of this phase are marked by another linked phenomenon—namely, by two paradigmatic

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1. D. Diderot, *Paradox sur le comédien* (Paris, 1992).

2. N. Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt, 2002), 16.

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3. W. Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? (First Version)," trans. Anna Bostok, in *Understanding Brecht* (New York, 1998), 11.

productions of one and the same play, Brecht's *Mann ist Mann* (*Man Equals Man*) in 1926 and 1931. This play is usually counted outside the canon of "epic theater," which is not surprising as it was not among Brecht's significant successes and did not contribute to his renown or to his own theory of theater. Brecht worked on *Man Equals Man* in various stages and with few interruptions from 1919 until its 1926 premiere, after which he began developing his true breakthrough success, the libretto of Kurt Weill's opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (1930). After his subsequent rise to becoming perhaps the most recognized dramaturg of the late Weimar Republic, with "epic theater" having found a certain continuous form, Brecht then returned to *Man Equals Man* once more. Having made some slight adaptations to the 1926 version, he went on to direct the piece himself; the production had its opening night in February 1931 at the Staatliches Schauspielhaus Berlin.<sup>4</sup> This second premiere of *Man Equals Man* hence ended the sequence of the *Lehrstücke* and, arguably, the sequence of the core plays of epic theater as such, as it took place just weeks after the premiere of Brecht's most archetypal and most successful *Lehrstück*, *Die Maßnahme*. *Man Equals Man* thus bookended the phase in which Brecht fulfilled his vision of epic theater, a phase that was soon after terminated when Brechtian theater caused more and more political uproars from the Right, including interruptions of performances by SA Brownshirts. Brecht eventually left Germany in February 1933.

Benjamin saw *Man Equals Man* at the Schauspielhaus Berlin on its opening night on February 6, 1931, which was only his second attendance of a play by his friend Brecht. Although he was commissioned by the *Frankfurter Zeitung* to write merely a review,<sup>5</sup> seeing *Man Equals Man* caused Benjamin to convert his earlier notes on Brecht from 1930 into the full-fledged essay he completed later that summer, which bore emphatic traces of Peter Lorre and Helene Weigel in the main roles at the Schauspielhaus. Benjamin was not alone in recognizing the significance of the play's position at the threshold between epic theater and earlier avant-garde notions of theater, especially its refinement of influences from expressionism and Dada. That Brecht himself directed the play at the Schauspielhaus further emphasized the special status of *Man Equals Man*; it seemed as if he was aiming to complete a full circle of

work by reconnecting the now perfected epic theater to its inception piece of 1926. While for Benjamin this reperformance of the work meant seeing the self-realization of Brechtian theater in its archetype, it also led to heightened attention and antagonistic scrutiny from theater critics. According to one reviewer, Brecht "wanted to use the old play *Man Equals Man* to run an experiment of direction *and* of acting," an impossible double bind that unavoidably had to fail, since it was based on "faulty reasoning" (Denkfehler).<sup>6</sup>

The controversial reviews capture the catalytic position of the 1931 production, whose intensity can be best explained via two circumstances pointed out by the aforementioned review.<sup>7</sup> First, the original 1926 version of *Man Equals Man* was the first play in which Brecht experimented with the elements that would later become constitutive of epic theater, such as the half-lowered curtain that allowed the audience to see a truncated slice of the stage during scene changes, or the *Zwischenspruch*—that is, an interjection by an actor stepping in front of the curtain between scenes to provide a theoretical, antidramatic reflection on the play delivered not only out of character but also explicitly on behalf of Brecht. Second, Brecht had published a first version of his theater theory in his "Anmerkungen zur Oper 'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny'" just a few months before *Man Equals Man* opened in 1931. These notes on the Mahagonny opera concluded with a schema opposing conventional dramatic theater with the "epic form of theater" (epische Form des Theaters)—an opposition that provoked audiences and critics to go see the next Brecht staging as a test-drive of his theory, especially since Brecht was directing the piece himself.<sup>8</sup> Erdmut Wizisla has called this unique conjunction of theory and practice—the staging of an outdated piece for current programmatic purposes—the most evident "model case" of epic theater, one which manifested, in other words, a dramatology of Brechtian theater.<sup>9</sup> Brecht's 1931 *Man Equals Man* successfully explained epic theater's inherent demand for models, which the core plays since 1927 had to fulfill internally, by showing its indebtedness to the structure of his 1926 *Man Equals*

4. See the detailed account of the history of the play in C. Wege, ed., *Brecht's "Mann ist Mann"* (Frankfurt, 1982).

5. Benjamin in a letter to Brecht, February 1931, in W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe* (Frankfurt, 1998), 4:16.

6. H. Ihering, *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, February 7, 1931, quoted in Wege, *Brecht's "Mann ist Mann"*, 314–16. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

7. Reviews of the play are collected in Wege, *Brecht's "Mann ist Mann"*, 297–322.

8. B. Brecht, "Anmerkungen zur Oper 'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny,'" in *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt, 1967), 17:1009.

9. E. Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht* (New Haven, CT, 2009), 112.

*Man*. This revisiting of epic theater's own prehistory in his earlier plays, however, necessarily invoked a genealogy of stage models external to the conventions of theater, specifically in the case of *Galgei*, the original fragment of *Man Equals Man* based on a *parade*-esque setting. Because the 1931 production lays open the para-theatrical origins of Brecht's notion of theater by means of the *parade* model, *Man Equals Man* can be seen as an implicit metaplay of epic theater. Yet, despite the fact that "faulty reasoning" must thus be ascribed not to Brecht but to the reviewer, the 1931 attempt to align theory and practice failed, causing confusion on the part of the audience. Faced, in addition, with the increasingly politically risky situation around progressive and socialist theater, the play was cancelled after only five evenings, in stark contrast to the overwhelmingly positive attention it had received during the premiere of the first version in Berlin only four years prior.

In spite, or rather because of this staging of a piece that had suddenly become untimely for the audience, it cannot be overstated how much *Man Equals Man*'s structure, content, and origin resulted from Brecht's earliest phase of work. Given that Brecht himself, while staging the play in 1931, must have realized how much it prefigures his later style, it can in retrospect only be considered consistent and almost foreseeable that the 1931 *Man Equals Man* brought to a conclusive point what it had established in 1926. These two productions mark the necessary conditions for epic theater and, at the same time, outline the rules for its transgression, implying that the catalytic essence of *Man Equals Man* operates along the edges of epic theater itself. Projected onto the play's content, the liminal and transgressive elements that make it a model case for Brecht's theater tout court—particularly its *Zwischenspruch*, songs, and *Zwischenspiel*—become visible as proof of Brecht's persistent attempts to introduce and install anti-avant-gardist, and even antimodernist traits of folk theater onto the established stages of theater.<sup>10</sup>

The most overlooked, and at the same time most stunning of *Man Equals Man*'s features is the introduction of the returned gaze and not the seemingly timely problem of a loss of individuality in a mass society, which had been taken up already by so many other works of the avant-garde. It is this structural innovation that was in fact meant to bear the doubling

of theory and practice that Brecht stressed in 1931. Benjamin's insight that Brecht is showing the actor acting is no less than a direct result of the inclusion of the audience, the most important example of which is the play-within-a-play that Brecht embedded into *Man Equals Man*, a single scene called *The Elephant's Calf, or: The Provability of Any and Every Contention* (*Das Elefantenkalf, oder: Die Beweisbarkeit jeglicher Behauptung*). It was to be performed between scenes, or even as an "interlude for the foyer" of the theater ("ein Zwischenspiel für das Foyer"), as Brecht later subtitled it. *The Elephant Calf* is an interlude in the literal sense: a play interrupting, or rather, disturbing the play at its most vulnerable theatrical moment, during its own intermission, in the concourse and entrance hall, when everyone thought theatricality had been suspended for a few instants. The going offstage that *The Elephant Calf* demands is unique among all of Brecht's pieces and so radically unconventional that it appears to never have actually been staged during his lifetime, as far as the records show.<sup>11</sup> Even if Benjamin did not see *The Elephant Calf* in 1931, the fact that *Man Equals Man* was generated around this play-within-a-play structure is crucial, as it implanted the ability to absorb such satellite acts into the heart of epic theater right from its birth. *The Elephant Calf* is like a foreign body within *Man Equals Man* and within Brecht's oeuvre overall: it does not stem from the high phase of epic theater but is a consequence of the original ground of Brecht's conception of theater. This makes the emergence of epic theater traceable to a wholly different cultural phenomenon of offstage theatricality—namely, to circus performances, street sideshows, folk plays, and funfair attractions—in short, to the *parade* as Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, Honoré Daumier, and Georges Seurat had captured it. Like epic theater in general and like *The Elephant Calf* in particular, all these performances center around the returned gaze. In fact, such strictly *parade*-esque elements were a direct inspiration for the writing of *Man Equals Man*'s earliest drafts back in 1918, when it was called *Galgei*.

### ***Galgei*, the gallows' fool**

"A simple person is driven by a dubious group of jesters to play the role of another person" (Ein einfacher Mensch wird von einer zweifelhaften Sorte von Spaßvögeln getrieben, die Rolle eines andern zu

10. For a basic overview of its clown-esque context, see J. Schechter, "Brecht's Clowns: *Man Is Man* and After," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. P. Thomson and G. Sacks (Cambridge, 2006), 90–100.

11. A. Kugli, "Mann ist Mann," in *Brecht Handbuch*, ed. J. Knopf (Stuttgart, 2001), 1:152–66.

spielen): this is Brecht's minimal plot summary of *Galgei*, and it would remain the summary of *Man Equals Man*.<sup>12</sup> The surviving manuscripts of *Galgei* date back to 1920 and contain three fragmentary scenes for the piece, which is named for its main protagonist, Joseph Galgei. It is this same "simple person" who would later be slightly renamed as "Galy Gay" to become the main protagonist in *Man Equals Man*. In *Galgei*, Joseph Galgei is a heavy, unsophisticated man enjoying the attractions and rides of the Augsburg Plärrer, the large, traditional fair held twice a year in the city, where Brecht and his friends spent time during their adolescence.<sup>13</sup> Already in a letter from 1918 Brecht had written of the play to his friend Hans Otto Münsterer: "The Plärrer fair happened here. I half messed myself up riding swing boats. . . . Occasionally, I am also doing a new piece for the theater of the future: *The Fat Man on the Swing Boat*."<sup>14</sup> Sideshows, clowns, and swing boats are the generative setting of *Galgei*—a world of excessive immediacy, in which representation is always already a captivating presence and performance, one that can mess up a person. Hence Brecht's characterization of Joseph Galgei: "He who rides the swing boat cannot be a bourgeois."<sup>15</sup> At the fair, bourgeoisie and spectacle exclude one another. Münsterer remarks that Brecht understood the swing boat as "one of the symbols of life,"<sup>16</sup> swinging up until you are way up in the canopy of the sky and then inevitably falling back past the shimmering lights of the stars all the way down to the ground. More than a symbol, the amusement ride in *Galgei* becomes the machinery in which the individual is bereft of his or her agency in life and made equal with all the others attracted by the promises of excessive amusement. This is where the hunt for the prosaic metamorphoses of the fair originates. At the turning point of the scene, Galgei takes the businessman Ligarch, who is disabled and walks with crutches, onto the swing boat with him and begins to rock it until they fly back and forth, equalizing their particular limitations of both class and body. This suspension of reality motivates Galgei's subsequent contact with Matti,

Ligarch's assistant. He will be responsible for bringing Galgei into the group of *Spaßvögel*, the rough jesters and knockabouts who eventually convince him to pretend to be Pick, a man they have just carelessly tricked into swimming down by the riverbank, resulting in his death by drowning. The amusement ride and its machination are hence Galgei's side entry onto the main stage, the place where his self is suspended only to make him appear as that which he is: no individual, but a simple, faceless man amid a collective.

Simple jesters, jokesters, and banterers make up the society in this fragment, not the mannered and trained ballet dancers or circus acrobats of the avant-garde. Contrary to the latter's perfectionism and professional performance, the amusement of the city fair has already taken over the reality of life for Galgei; no main stage remains, only sideshows in which the person stays the same, even if Galgei is lured by the *Spaßvögel* to become Pick: "Whether Pick or Galgei," writes Brecht in a note, "you are the creature that God made. You can be called any name you want, you will never be different."<sup>17</sup> Transformation and metamorphosis have become meaningless; there is no essence to be had on either side, no conclusions to be drawn from becoming someone else. Implied in this eternal persistence of the same, however, is that the sideshow aesthetics of the city fair have the function of a litmus test. Precisely because the transformations that they induce are technically half theater, half life, they would indeed have brought out the singularity of an individual, had such a thing still existed. But for Brecht such tests only return negative results.

This circumstance makes *parade* theatricality a liminal tool to test whether a current reality is in a condition to be changed. Its potential to transform a moment in someone's life into one of utter magic is emphatically worthless when it is confronted with the reality of the simple man. "He is not tender, not sensationally good, he is only mediocre," is how Brecht describes Joseph Galgei: "through misfortune he becomes better, but not active; that's the hitch: he is not *particularly* good, he is moody, he has evil traits, he is stingy, he likes to cheat, he is not honest with himself . . . Times are cruel: guys like him used to be left unscathed."<sup>18</sup> What Benjamin

12. B. Brecht, "'Galgei': Entwurf und Vorarbeiten," in Wege, Brechts *"Mann ist Mann"*, 50.

13. H. O. Münsterer, "Bert Brecht: Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1917–1922," in Wege, Brechts *"Mann ist Mann"*, 263–64.

14. "Hier war Plärrer. Ich habe mich halb kaputt geschiffschauelt. . . . Mache auch gelegentlich ein neues Stück fürs Theater der Zukunft: *Der dicke Mann auf der Schiffschaukel*." Münsterer, "Bert Brecht," 263.

15. "Wer schiffschauelt, kann kein Spießler sein." Münsterer, "Bert Brecht," 264.

16. Münsterer, "Bert Brecht," 264.

17. "Ob Pick oder Galgei, du bist das Wesen, das Gott gemacht hat. Du kannst heißen, wie du willst, du wirst nie anders." Brecht, "'Galgei,'" 51.

18. "Er ist nicht zart, nicht sensationell gut, er ist nur mittelgut, im Unglück wird er besser, aber nicht aktiv; das ist der Haken: er ist nicht *besonders* gut, er gehört zu den Launen, er hat böse Züge, er ist geizig, er betrügt gern, er ist nicht ehrlich gegen sich . . . Die Zeit ist

had defined as the theoretical core of epic theater—the actor being the one that shall be shown—is in *Galgei* still in the archaic condition of what could be called a “gallows play.” The title evokes such a spectacle around the gallows, or *Galgen*, with the suffix “-ei” denoting that the gallows itself can turn into a *nomen actionis* like a stage for the unsuccessful transformation of existence. The *Spaßvögel*, the jester, the gallows’ fool, with his willingness to lure anybody into doing anything, is shown as the primal actor in everyone, no matter their attempts at self-improvement.

### Antimodernist parade

Brecht’s take on clowns, jesters, and acrobats also differs radically from the avant-garde notion of sideshows, such as the one Jean Cocteau staged with Pablo Picasso and Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in 1917, a ballet-theater piece called *Parade*.<sup>19</sup> In fact, with Cocteau and Picasso we meet a notion of *parade* that is diametrically opposed to what Brecht makes of the *parade* atmosphere of the fair in *Galgei*. In a description of the piece written for the 1917 production, Cocteau outlined his *Parade* as a “simple” and “innocent” theatrical adventure that renders the *parade* as a product of dances alone:

The plot of “Parade” is supposed to take place on a street in Paris, on a Sunday. Certain music-hall artists show themselves in the street, outside of a music-hall, in order to draw a crowd. This is always called a “parade,” among traveling circuses in France. The headliners are a Chinese magician, a little American girl, and two acrobats. The managers, in their atrocious language, try awkwardly to attract the crowd, but are unable to convince the people sufficiently to draw them into the theatre. The Chinaman, the American girl and the two acrobats come out onto the street from the empty theatre, and seeing the failure of the managers, they try the power of their charms; but all their efforts are to no avail. In short, the story of “Parade” is the tragedy of an unsuccessful theatrical venture. Simple—innocent enough.<sup>20</sup>

The failure of the old venture of the *parade*, which Brecht draws on, is countered by the dances of the Ballets Russes. Cocteau goes on to describe how the manager “danced beautifully to the music,” how

“everyone applauded the marvellous technical skill of the great comic dancer” who played the Chinese magician, and how the American girl made “a union of grace and agility,” all trying to make the capitalist venture of the manager successful through the pure joy of dance, combining “the accidental art of the circus with the happy remembrances of childhood.”<sup>21</sup> Where Cocteau and Picasso, according to Apollinaire’s program note, aim at a “sur-réalisme” that “will express the magic of . . . everyday life,”<sup>22</sup> Brecht rather uses the sideshow as a genre for a redux of realism. In Cocteau’s version, the barkers of the *parade*, who usually call out to passersby on the street to win customers for a sideshow, become business managers, transforming the barkers’ loud, theatrical appeal into the capitalist ingeniousness of a marketing specialist, whose goal is to successfully turn his acts into commodities. The acts in Cocteau’s *Parade* thus appear like symbols of progressive self-transformation through capitalism, like “paean to the unconventional life as defined by the avant-garde of 1917,” as Deborah Menaker Rothschild describes them. They have “a life that is lived with an appreciation of mystery, a love of adventure, and a willingness to take risks in the name of personal freedom.”<sup>23</sup> This *parade* seems to be the epitome of modernism, all but prophetic of individualist New Age lifestyles, liberating makeovers, and simplifying life changes, whose ability to transform the street into a celebration of vitalist energy would eventually succeed and discharge itself by creating new, supposedly progressive ways of life.<sup>24</sup> This is the exact opposite of the effects that the reality of *parade* causes in *Galgei*. Joseph Galgei and his later *Man Equals Man* incarnation, Galy Gay, are nineteenth-century persons, for whom the *parade* energy causes a reduction of the self to its lowest denominator, resulting in an almost nihilist aesthetics. Galgei is quick to adopt this life and become an opportunist who can adapt himself to be anything, because there is no essence to be lost in the transformation. Even though it was conceived just one year after Cocteau’s *Parade*, the structure of Brecht’s *Galgei/Man Equals Man* uses the transformative appeal of the *parade* setup to undo the exact liberalism of expression that Cocteau had fleshed out in his take on the *parade* as “sur-réalisme” (in fact, the origin of the

21. Cocteau, “Parade Réaliste,” 33.

22. G. Apollinaire, “Description of *Parade*,” in Rothschild, *Picasso’s “Parade*,” 267–68.

23. Rothschild, *Picasso’s “Parade*,” 75.

24. Some observations on this aspect of *Parade* can be found in D. Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago, 1999), 185–215.

unbarmherzig, früher ließ sie solche Burschen ungeschoren.” Brecht, “Galgei,” 52.

19. For full documentation, see D. M. Rothschild, *Picasso’s “Parade”: From Street to Stage* (New York, 1991).

20. J. Cocteau, “Parade Réaliste: In Which Four Modernist Artists Have a Hand,” quoted in Rothschild, *Picasso’s “Parade*,” 33.

concept of surrealism).<sup>25</sup> Not only is there an uncanny parallelism of the plays with the appearance of animals onstage—namely, the horse in *Parade* and the elephant in *Man Equals Man*—each of which is played by two different actors. For Cocteau and Brecht alike, Charlie Chaplin was also a surprising touchstone, although he taught them opposing lessons. Where Cocteau aims for the overcoming of modernist realism as displayed by the tramp, Brecht returns to the folksy, antiquated, and bare realism that is closer to his earlier influence, the Augsburg comedian Karl Valentin, whose skits promised no overcoming of anything at all but were a trickster-style utilization of realism in the tradition of the early modern Ulenspiegel figure.<sup>26</sup>

### Soldier's parade

Brecht's reversal of the liberation of amusement into an equalization machine happens not only on the level of action but also—and more radically—on the level of form. Although *Man Equals Man* exchanges the sideshow setting at the Augsburg Plärrer fair for that of colonial India (inspired by Brecht's reading of Kipling's *Soldiers Three*), it still absorbs the constellation of a fair full of jokesters and jesters into its own setup. The main play shows the transformation of the Galgei character, now a simple Irish packer named Galy Gay, into a soldier through various deceits by three British soldiers, who have left their fourth comrade, Jeraiah Jip, behind in a pagoda temple during a robbery attempt and now need a replacement. Similar to *Galgei*, the play ends when the now transformed "simple" and apathetic protagonist Jip, formerly Galy Gay, is empowered by his new role and is suddenly willing to commit murder and war crimes. The most important original additions to *Man Equals Man*, however, are structural and stem from implementing the *parade* and fair dramaturgy of the Plärrer setting of *Galgei* by transporting them from the level of content, such as the swing boat ride, to the formal level of plot machinations. As mentioned above, Brecht includes his first-ever *Zwischenspruch* and his first—and only—*Zwischenspiel* into *Man Equals Man*, both of which put a *parade*-esque realism at the turning points of the play. In Brecht's *Zwischenspruch*, the framing of the stage and the whole play is effectively

suspended when Leokadja Begbick famously remarks, in the voice and manner of a *parade* barker, "Herr Bertolt Brecht maintains man equals man / —A view that has been around since time began. / But then Herr Brecht points out how far one can / Manoeuvre and manipulate that man." She then ends with a direct appeal to the audience: "Herr Bertolt Brecht hopes you'll feel the ground on which you stand / Slither between your toes like shifting sand."<sup>27</sup> This interjection in the form of an advertisement sets up the ballyhoo of the *parade* as the backdrop of the whole piece. In the 1931 version, Brecht even put this *Zwischenspruch* before the play. In the photo-film of the Schauspielhaus production, Helene Weigel can be seen addressing the audience members in front of the provisional curtain, disrupting their belief in the main stage, as it were. In her *Zwischenspruch* she channels the director Brecht and reveals that what is to follow is a makeshift performance on a side stage, eliminating in that very moment the fourth wall and the prohibition of returned gazes between actors and audience.<sup>28</sup>

The *parade* element reaches its full extent in the *Elephant Calf* interlude. Its original subtitle, *Die Beweisbarkeit jeglicher Behauptung* (literally: "The provability of any contention") spells out what, in light of the fleetingness of *parade* aesthetics, can only be called a critique of representation tout court. Everything that might be contended can be proven, which means, in turn, that the categorical distinction between false and true results of proofs is worthless. The only condition that contentions, and we could add propositions or performances, require to become effective is that they must be acted out and followed through to the end. Their only proof is a coming into existence, their entering into a reality that is already there and real, as it were. For this reason, the beginning of *The Elephant Calf* continues the barker's call of the *Zwischenspruch*, this time shouted by one of the soldiers from the main play:

Polly (before the curtain): In order that the act of the drama may have its full effect on you, you are invited to smoke like chimneys. Our artistes are the best in the world, our drinks over proof, our seats comfortable, bets on the story's

25. R. Konersmann, "Surrealismus," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. J. Ritter and K. Gründer (Basel, 1998), 10:682–87.

26. On Brecht and Karl Valentin, see O. Double and M. Wilson, "Brecht and Cabaret," in Thomson and Sacks, *Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, 40–61.

27. B. Brecht, *Man Equals Man*, trans. J. Willett, in *Collected Plays* (London, 1970), 2, pt. 1:38. "Herr Bertolt Brecht behauptet: Mann ist Mann. / Und das ist etwas, was jeder behaupten kann. / Aber Herr Bertolt Brecht beweist auch dann / Daß man mit einem Menschen beliebig viel machen kann. / . . . / Herr Bertolt Brecht hofft, Sie werden den Boden, auf dem Sie stehen / Wie Schnee unter Ihren Füßen vergehen sehen." B. Brecht, *Mann ist Mann* (Frankfurt, 1968), 44–45.

28. The still-image film of the 1931 production is preserved at the Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv, Berlin.

outcome can be placed at the bars, acts will end and the curtain fall according to how the betting goes. Kindly do not take shots at the pianist, he is doing his best. Anyone who doesn't get the plot first go off needn't bother, it's incomprehensible. If you insist on seeing something full of meaning you should go to the gents. Ticket money will be refunded under no circumstances. Here is our comrade Jip, whose privilege it is to play the Elephant Calf, Jackie Pall. If that should strike you as impossibly difficult then all I can say is that stage artistes have got to be able to do absolutely anything.<sup>29</sup>

### The tautology of individuality

*The Elephant Calf* is a formalist glance into theater's construction. The play is to be set up in such a way that those gathered in the foyer see a makeshift *Bretterbühne*, a scaffold stage or trestle stage, allowing them to also see behind the curtain. As the opening remark states, Jip from the main play—that is, Galy Gay—plays the elephant calf, who is to be convicted of murdering his mother, even though she is still present onstage and is played by another soldier, Jesse. Through three “proofs,” the elephant calf (that is, Jip/Galy Gay) is revealed as (1) male and not female, hence (2) capable of murdering someone, and (3) in no possible way the offspring of the present mother. Once these three proofs are made, each of which takes the form of a miniature scene, Polly returns to his declamatory mode to call out: “Without proof men aren't men but orangutans, as proved by Darwin, and what about Progress . . . I'll absolutely prove . . . that this here Elephant Calf is no Elephant Calf whatsoever, but none other than Jeraiah Jip from Tipperary.”<sup>30</sup> What *The Elephant Calf* proves by negation is the ineffectiveness of theater's illusion. When the play-within-a-play blurs its secondary level of reflection and bleeds into the main play, both first- and second-degree theatricality are rendered indistinguishable from one another and effectively also from the backdrop of reality itself. In the mode of logic analysis this confirms what the makeshift side stage had already failed to provide in practice: no illusion had been delivered in the first place. Jip always equaled Jip. Projected back onto *Man Equals Man*, however, this means that Galy Gay was always Galy Gay and that it thus does not matter who theater makes us think he is, an elephant calf or Jeraiah Jip or Galy Gay. The effect of producing such “proof” is thus, as the subtitle states, that transformation in life will

not cause any actual change whatsoever. The “provability of any and every contention” is the summary of life as a tautological process. Whereas Cocteau's *Parade* was all about maintaining life's metamorphoses, Brecht, as if working against the misrepresentation of this easy and superficial absorption of *parade*, reveals the tautology of existence in modernity at the origin of epic theater. There is no “new you”—always just your old self. In consequence, Brecht leaves the attraction of *parade* aesthetics as an erratic residue of individuality, unresolvable by any equation or proof. In demonstrating such faulty computations of individuality, *Man Equals Man* works through the realism of *parade* aesthetics to get at the deeper erratic energy of life at play in its attraction. Accounting for it as a negligible by-product of self-transformation, as Cocteau did, merely exhibits the *raison d'être* of *parade* while also pushing it further away. Instead, Brecht's *parade* theatricality isolates this erratic energy and attempts to give it a nonrepresentational space to dwell.

If we ultimately believe the deliberately failed demonstrations of *The Elephant Calf*, this does not mean that everyone is made the same as everyone else by some higher normative concept of standardization. Rather, the sameness of lived experience is the equalizing power, as it forces the same effects on everyone. Strictly speaking, *Man Equals Man* leaves individuality intact, but the differences between individuals are reduced to such low degrees that they no longer significantly influence personality, character, or selfhood: you are you, but so is everyone else. This is the tautology of individuality that *The Elephant Calf* reverse engineers to reveal whether something nevertheless remains.

The original 1926 book design of *Man Equals Man* locates this tautology of life in modernity while hinting that Brecht's inquiry draws on more than the mere explanation of a loss of individuality. Two photographs appear on the front and back interiors of the book boards, the first showing a view over a mass of hundreds of heads of men all looking in the same direction, and the second showing a similar view over hundreds of automobiles neatly aligned in a massive lot. The dialectic of this pairing suggests that the men could have manufactured the cars in a Fordist factory, but that they could just as well be the potential customers for the cars. Assuming that both of these man-car relations are true, as suggested by the juxtaposition of the images enwrapping the whole play, then what is evoked here is the commodity fetishism described by Marx in Part I of *Capital*. By ascribing a “fetish character” to mass-produced

29. B. Brecht, *The Elephant Calf*, trans. J. Willett, in *Collected Plays*, 2, pt. 1:79.

30. Brecht, *Elephant Calf*, 88.

goods, Marx explained the surplus value of production, because such products no longer bear the trace of their human maker and can thus be desired and bought even by him or her, at an exponentially higher price than what they earned for the production.<sup>31</sup> *Man Equals Man* projects this commodity fetishism back onto the people in mass society and thereby strengthens the thesis laid out here—namely, that while individuality fades in collectivized society, an attraction remains that cannot be accounted for merely by declaring illusions of individuality to be illusions. As perfect and complete as the transformations of individuals might appear to be, the *parade* element in society remains active. When everything is reduced to calculable, industrial, and rational interaction, an unaccounted-for animation lingers among people and lures them toward each other.

Ultimately, then, it is a consequential violation of the integrity of the audience's world that *The Elephant Calf* takes place on the audience's side of the actual theater stage, in the foyer, where no fourth wall may be erected. This side-stage structure of the *parade* does not even require an actual main stage, because these performances merely display a potentiality of a main stage. Like parasites of theater, side-stage acts are in constant search of a host illusion, which catapults them, as it were, into the intact realm of the unexpecting audience. It is exactly the representative hegemony of a main stage and the main attractions that the dramaturgy of these side stages tries to undermine. Both the premodernist *parade* and *The Elephant Calf* rupture the representative regimes of their respective institutions, whether it is the circus or the main stage from which they have ostensibly originated. By gestures, not by action, they show that their para-theater comes only with a mock-dramaturgy, an unfinished setting that has already abandoned any need for a physical stage, props, or even an audience and is made tangible by its immersion in the crowd. Despite the transparency of the destruction of illusion, despite the acting out of theory, so to speak, the *parade* ground of epic theater is made active by turning those in the foyer into unexpecting audiences. In this moment, epic theater does its work: the practice of illusion is unwound, and what is left underneath is half performance, half life, neither just one nor just the other.

### The animation of sameness

In their structural dependency, the play and the play within it thus formulate a larger thesis about the emptiness of transformation. This seems to allow for an easy critical reading against the forces of capitalist and industrialist modernity and the fact that they take individuality out of the individual, especially in collectives like the army, or in groups of petty criminals like that in *Galgei*. Such a thesis is a commonplace in the 1920s and had already been developed by Marxism, Nietzsche, and psychoanalysis and posed by realist writers such as Arthur Schnitzler and Gerhart Hauptmann, and visual artists like the painter Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and the director Robert Wiene (Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* [1920] even has a similar city fair setting). The psychosocial problem that *Man Equals Man* and *The Elephant Calf* pose is that of a certain impulse in society that is implied in the transposition of characters from the main stage to the side stage. This casting is not motivated by any one theme of the main play but manifests itself between the characters, as in *Galgei*, in the form of an energy that attracts the protagonists to this empty form of transformation that could be called a kind of unmotivated self-casting, an empty animation of the self.

*Man Equals Man* relies heavily on the allure of capitalism, as exemplified by Galy Gay's eagerness to sell an elephant even though it is not his property and he knows he will be convicted for it. The notion of attraction, of being attracted to a meaningless deal, to a false object, is central to the main play. This empty attraction continues in the crude air of heroism that pulls the soldiers into war, which has its precedent in the banal vice that guides the jesters in *Galgei* in their careless behavior toward others. *Man Equals Man* manifests that these are the types of attractions that remain in a society in which individuality is no longer a sufficient motivation for acting out one's life. When attractions do occur, they are motivated not by schema or conceit, nor by will or fear; instead, like the side stage of the *parade*, with its barkers and one-trick acrobats, the call to the attraction itself becomes a motivation. Exactly this is the answer to the bleak perspective on life that *The Elephant Calf* formulates. It is not just that the emptiness of theater is revealed to show everyone as being always already entangled in theatricality and self-fashioning. The point of *The Elephant Calf* is to reveal these remainders of attraction behind the thicket of meaningless motivations and the gestures that, as Brecht later developed further in his concept of *Gestus*, are no

31. K. Marx, *Capital*, trans. S. Moore and E. Aveling (Moscow, 1954), 1:76–87.

longer supported by actions.<sup>32</sup> Despite the tautology of individuality, the self finds and follows an attraction that is not eliminated even if the shape-shifting is debunked. Because in the main play Galy Gay becomes Jip without hesitation, he can transform once more in the play-within-a-play. He has learned nothing, and neither have we. Still, he does not turn back into Galy Gay nor does he remain Jip, as the tautology of individuality would have it; instead he becomes an elephant calf, a second-degree casting by the main play's elephant. This elephant calf is both female and male, as the play suggests, both evil and peaceful, both slapstick and serious. The circular calculation that results from the addition of play and play-within-a-play does not in the end invalidate itself. When man equals man, an irreducible factor remains that attracts the two plays to each other, that makes one man desire to become another, and that can turn a human back into an animal. This is what the double structure brings out: while individuality is tautological, its drive to attempt change cannot be explained without acknowledging the animation of sameness.

### A baroque persistence

In view of Brecht's interest in adapting historical subjects, it has been noted that *The Elephant Calf* has strong similarities to the play-within-a-play in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595/96), in which a group of "rude mechanicals" fails to keep up the theatrical illusion while staging a play for a wedding party.<sup>33</sup> As Paul Kussmaul has argued, it does not make any sense for Brecht to add this Shakespearean reference merely for a heightened degree of parody, since Shakespeare's piece already has this fully fleshed out.<sup>34</sup> Brecht's allusion to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, whose first important German adaptation was Andreas Gryphius's *Absurda Comica* (1655), is therefore aimed at the element of crude, amateurish theater that Shakespeare (and Gryphius) elevated to an everyman's knowledge of theatricality. From the group of amateur actors Shakespeare derives a potentiality that is necessary to keep all of theater in check—namely, the possibility of breaking the illusion—and for the same

reason Brecht retains the attraction of going with the *parade*, of giving in to its temptations and leaving behind any stable realm, whether a realm of reality or of theater.

Already the early modern *parade* has absorbed the lure of the trickster, an unruly energy that the modernist society of capitalist production still struggles to suppress. In consequence, this energy makes the trickster completely incompatible with the concept of the self-confident, sovereign individual that Cocteau mistakenly designates as its ultimate figuration. What Brecht realizes and updates for the amateurish play-within-a-play genre, in order to assure its survival against the modernist cult of illusion, is the fact that the *parade* has its origins in the baroque's willingness to transgress forms of life. Two decades before Brecht's *Galgei*, Aby Warburg had already noted this in his 1895 essay "The Theatrical Costumes for the Intermedi of 1589," in which he called attention to the former existence of "now extinct transitional forms between real life and dramatic art" (heute ausgestorbenen Zwischenformen zwischen dem wirklichen Leben und dramatischer Kunst).<sup>35</sup> What applies to the intermedi of the early baroque has its afterlife in Brecht's inception of epic theater. But, as Benjamin noted with regard to *Man Equals Man*, understanding these transgressive forms requires a mode of reception that the medium itself needs to create: "For the difficulties encountered by epic theatre in achieving recognition are, after all, nothing other than an expression of its closeness to real life" (nichts anderes als der Ausdruck seiner Lebensnähe).<sup>36</sup> Transitional forms that negotiate, closely and mimetically, between life and dramatic art are hence necessarily anachronistic. Such forms are not exclusive to life or to dramatic art: they have absorbed an understanding of both. They are stock containers or, rather, resurfacing vessels that allow the return of "revered figures" from other times.<sup>37</sup>

32. For the specific role of gestures in *Man Equals Man*, see B. Doherty, "Test and Gestus in Brecht and Benjamin," *MLN* 115, no. 3 (2000): 442–81.

33. W. Shakespeare, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* (Cambridge, 2009), 35 (act 3, scene 2, line 9).

34. See, e.g., P. Kussmaul, *Bertolt Brecht und das englische Drama der Renaissance* (Bern, 1974), 115–18.

35. A. Warburg, "The Theatrical Costumes for the Intermedi of 1589," trans. David Britt, in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity* (Los Angeles, 1999), 369, and "Theaterkostüme zu den Intermedien von 1589," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig, 1932), 1:432.

36. Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre?," 3, and "Was ist das epische Theater?," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt, 1977), 2:520. On the complicated technical and media theoretical landscape of this problem that Benjamin evokes here, see D. Fore, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 2012).

37. Warburg, "Theatrical Costumes for the Intermedi," 369.