

# **Teatro do Mundo**

Teatro e Violência  
Theater and Violence

**Titulo**

Teatro do Mundo  
Teatro e Violência

**Edição**

Centro de Estudos Tetrais da Universidade do Porto  
Centro de Literaturas e Culturas Lusófonas e Europeias

**Capa**

Cristina Marinho

**Impressão e Acabamento**

Tipografia Fonseca, Lda. - Porto

**Tiragem**

20 exemplares

**Depósito Legal**

439138/18

**ISBN**

978-989-95312-9-1

Os artigos publicados são da inteira  
Responsabilidade dos respetivos autores

# Confronting Nazism Then and Now: Dialectical Theatre and the Problem of Political Violence

David Barnett

York University

## Introduction

The resurgence of the far-right in Germany in recent years, as evidenced by attacks on migrant centres and demonstrations by the anti-Islam Pegida movement, has brought back the spectre of Nazism to German society. A more concrete example of Neo-Nazism came to light in November 2011 when two bank robbers botched a raid. Police tracked the assailants back to a campervan that had been burnt; the two men were found dead inside the vehicle, apparently having shot themselves. This incident of criminality opened the lid on a far greater range of offences. The two men, Uwe Böhnhardt (1977-2011) and Uwe Mundlos (1973-2011) had been members of a terrorist cell, the Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (National Socialist Underground – NSU), together with Beate Zschäpe (1975 - ). On

hearing of their demise, Zschäpe set fire to their flat, went on the run, and distributed a video publicizing the NSU before handing herself in to the police. At the time of writing, she is standing trial for her part in the terrorist cell. The flat, which contained an archive of sorts, was not completely destroyed and the police found numerous items of evidence that revealed a series of violent acts. The NSU had carried out nine racially motivated murders (of eight Turks and one Greek, 2000-6); one murder of a German policewoman (2007); three documented attempted murders (1999-2004) one of which was a nail-bomb attack in which, remarkably, no-one was killed; and fifteen documented bank robberies (1998-2011).<sup>99</sup> As if these crimes were not shocking enough, subsequent revelations about secret-service infiltration, potential collusion, mass shredding of files and information, police failings to connect the murder victims and to identify the racist motive, and the media's uncritical acceptance of the police's narratives further pointed to systemic issues that

---

<sup>99</sup> All information concerning the NSU here and below is taken from Stefan Aust and Dirk Laabs, *Heimatschutz. Der Staat und die Mordserie des NSU* (Munich: Pantheon, 2014). This weighty volume draws on thousands of pages of official documents, inquiries and transcripts as well as a series of interviews.

cast a shadow over wider German society and its public institutions.

German theatre, however, has not shied away from this issue; on the contrary, there have been a number of plays and projects that have directly engaged with the NSU and its contexts. This essay will investigate an older treatment of Nazism before approaching two contrasting examples of the many works that have responded to the scandal with a view to understanding how they engage with two different categories of violence. The first is the obvious one, the use of physical force with the intention of hurting, damaging or killing. Theatre has had problems with representing this kind of violence since its origins in ancient Greece. Attic tragedy famously let most of its murders, suicides and woundings take place offstage while nonetheless occasionally showing their results on the mechanical *eccyclema*. Rush Rehm notes that while suffering was representable on the classical stage, as in the case of Ajax's suicide in Sophocles's play of the same name, the dominance of reported violence emphasises a 'reliance on the audience's imagination to visualize

and re-animate that violence in their mind's eye'.<sup>100</sup> Jonathan Hart agrees, with respect to the speeches that describe the terrible events, that 'narrative is indispensable and not a poor excuse for dramatic representation'.<sup>101</sup> Commentators seem to avoid the question of why this may happen, but the very act of representing violence may be significant: can performed violence have the same effect as the images that are conjured by the various reports proffered by ancient messengers? Additionally, one might ask whether onstage violence actually diminishes the power of violence. Here theatre acknowledges its inability to reproduce reality, something brought into sharp relief in the past century when compared with cinema or television. Yet this phenomenological difference, in which the one-to-one mapping of representation to reality breaks down, might prove a boon in that theatre, in that its complex systems for depicting the world can do more than simply reproduce surfaces. Its suggestiveness allows the horrors of violence and their aftermath to have effects that potentially exceed the shock of the deeds themselves.

---

<sup>100</sup> Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 62.

<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Hart, *Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), p. 122.

The second category of violence is more subtle. Roland Barthes notes of himself:

he could not get away from that grim notion that true violence is that of the *self-evident*: [...] a tyrant who promulgated preposterous laws would all in all be less violent than the masses that were content to utter *what is self-evident, what follows of itself*: the 'natural' is, in short, *the ultimate outrage*.<sup>102</sup>

This notion suggests an internalized set of relations that convert the strange into the familiar. The process implicitly does damage to the subject because something malign is in play that passes itself off as something natural, inevitable or acceptable. In each case, the potential to resist a potentially disadvantageous process is reduced, and so is the likelihood of bringing about change.

The same analysis can be found in Bertolt Brecht's politicized theatre. His dialectical theatre focused on a critique of naturalized (and universalized) ideology and its effects on the subject. In one note he explicitly addresses the issue:

---

<sup>102</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, tr. by Richard Howard (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977), p. 85.

The *self-evident* – i.e. the particular shape that our consciousness has given to experience – dissolves when it is negated by the *V-effect* and transformed into a new form of the *evident*. A process of schematization is thus destroyed.<sup>103</sup>

Brecht acknowledges that the execution of *Verfremdung* – making the familiar strange – is also an act of violence in that a certain way of thinking is actively ‘destroyed’. Yet a process in which violence is combatted by violence is not untypical of dialectical thought. Dialectics, the basis of Brecht’s theatre, is predicated on contradiction and conceptual untidiness of the results of its neutralization. As Fredric Jameson states: a ‘dialectic proceeds by standing outside a specific thought [...] in order to show that the alleged conclusions in fact harbor [sic] the workings of unstable categorical opposition’.<sup>104</sup> The dialectic’s mechanism

---

<sup>103</sup> Bertolt Brecht, ‘Second Appendix to *Buying Brass Theory*’, in Brecht, *Brecht on Performance: Messingkauf and Modelbooks*, ed. by Tom Kuhn, Steve Giles and Marc Silberman (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 122.

<sup>104</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 26.



thus makes it an eminently useful way of approaching apparently self-evident concepts in order to open them up and present the messy conclusions to an audience. It is this kind of analytical drive that can be found in Brecht's own treatment of Nazism in everyday German life.

### Nazism and the 'Gestentafel'

Brecht chose to investigate the political ideas and actions that forced him into exile in 1933 not through a study of Nazi Party leaders (that came later in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* - 1941), but a series of twenty-nine scenes, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* (1938), focused mostly on the everyday lives of German citizens under Nazi rule. In showing a montage of different figures and situations, he was able to bring out not only the contradictions between Nazi ideology and lived experience in the Third Reich, but also a set of values that allowed such a society to function. He was investigating Barthesian violence in order to understand the physical violence that arose from it.

In one, a family suspect that their young son is betraying their stray words to the Hitler Youth, although the question of his culpability is left open for the audience. There is no sense that the child is in some way 'evil' or even malicious; the scene documents an atmosphere of terror that pervades the home and is prevalent beyond it. The failure of the scene to reveal the child's guilt further undermines any sense that the child is wholly responsible if indeed he *has* informed on his parents. Brecht's dialectical theatre is not concerned with essences, but processes that lead to particular behaviours. The scene therefore points to the malign influence of social norms on individual subjects that make the prospect of a child informing on his parents possible. Yet something that is 'normal' in Nazi Germany hopefully strikes the spectator as profoundly strange, hence activating curiosity and reflection. In another scene, SA members bring in the zinc coffin of a worker they have tortured to death. A fellow worker insists that they open to coffin to confirm the dead man's violent end, but his wife insists that they keep the lip shut, for fear that her brother might be next if the deed is discovered and the worker acts on his findings. Yet the refusal to confirm the truth is not understood as cowardice on

the wife's part, but a material fear of the consequences, especially as the worker will only discover what is already known. The scene concludes with the wife's lines: 'We don't need to see him. He won't be forgotten'.<sup>105</sup> Out of defeat comes resolution. The scene approaches two concepts of violence: the murder of the husband and the apparent complicity of the wife in not uncovering the truth. However, the wife helps expose the processes by which the Nazis cover up their murderous regime, the violence of the self-evident, and shows how resistance can be engendered.

All the scenes are written in what one might call an unstylized realism and reveal no poetic artifice as such in the dialogue. The action of each scene, however, signals a tightly wrought series of contradictions that are there to be brought out in performance. Brecht understood the play as a whole as a 'Gestentafel',<sup>106</sup> a 'table of gestures', and this term requires further explication. The scenes of *Fear and Misery* are unconnected: figures do not

---

<sup>105</sup> Brecht, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, in Brecht, *Collected Plays*, vol. 4, ed. and introduced by Tom Kuhn and John Willett (London: Methuen, 2003), p. 183.

<sup>106</sup> Journal entry for 15 August 1938, BFA 26, 318. All translations are mine unless otherwise acknowledged..

reappear and there is no plotting that extends beyond any single scene. Yet what links them all is the pervading ideology and practice of Nazism. The gestures exhibited in every scene provide a continuity deliberately refused by the montage form Brecht adopted. The gestures also become the visual articulation of the scenes' contradictions. As a result, the realistic behaviours and opinions on stage were all contextualized by an oppressive system that was developed socially and politically offstage. Yet as John J. and Ann White note: 'what is rather surprising [...] is the sparse role allocated to stage directions in bringing out the *Gestus* in any particular incident'.<sup>107</sup> It is thus the task of the actors and the creative team to bring forth the 'showing': the texts are not prescriptive and thus encourage the company to emphasize the motifs of the play's title in order to create a network of elements that construct the scenes' contradictions. These include the defiance found in the second scene discussed above, as a way of viewing Nazism as a system that both informs the action and against which the figures can struggle.

---

<sup>107</sup> John J. and Ann White, *Bertolt Brecht's 'Fear and Misery of the Third Reich. A German Exile Drama In the Struggle Against Fascism* (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2010), p. 83.

This example of a play that is thoroughly focused on situations and actions points to the possibilities of dialectical drama: it can peel off the veneer of reality and excavate the processes that inform it. The play's focus on dialectical contradiction, that fear and misery are products of oppression rather than the working people's 'natural' disposition in any society, suggests that reality is always unstable and negotiable. Indeed, Brecht's motto to *The Threepenny Lawsuit* was 'Die Widersprüche sind die Hoffnungen!' ('Contradictions are our hope!').<sup>108</sup> This unashamedly optimistic sentiment is located in the category of a contradiction itself. That is, contradictions can be ignored or down-played, yet they persist until change has taken place. Contradictions are thus the motor of change, and a Brechtian theatre's main task is to identify them, lest they are passed over or naturalized. The fragility of reality is the source of hope, and any given situation is at least susceptible to alteration, perhaps for the better.

Yet while Brecht's play offers a model for how Nazism could be represented in the 1930s, society has changed since then, and

---

<sup>108</sup> Brecht, 'The Threepenny Lawsuit', in Brecht, *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio*, ed. by Marc Silberman (London: Methuen, 2001), p. 148.

new forms of Nazism have risen from the ashes. One manifestation that shocked Germany in recent years, the exposure of the NSU, meant that Brecht's approach to Nazism as system needed to be rethought and thus represented quite differently on the contemporary stage. The contradictions evident in contemporary German society point to the issues confronting theatre-makers in a different social and historical context. The clearest is that Germany is now a liberal democracy and no longer a totalitarian state. The presence of the spectre of Nazism thus opens a number of avenues for exploration, primarily focused on how an historical catastrophe can find a footing in an enlightened and progressive nation.

I understand the dialectical analysis, taken above, as an appropriate method for approaching complex realities for the following reasons. A dialectical view of social phenomena is anti-essentialist in that it does not impute fixed qualities to anything. Instead, the 'thing-in-itself' is banished and replaced with fluid entities that are contradictory. Dialectical dramaturgy also seeks to tease out the processes that lead to the phenomena encountered on stage, and so a single instance, such as a Neo-Nazi, may be accounted for in a variety of ways including social

position, dominant and subversive ideologies, social proscriptions and sanctions, etc. In short, a theatre that engages with a dialectical understanding of reality, either consciously, as in Brecht's case, or unconsciously can reveal much about the complexes that can bring about the crimes carried out by the NSU. In the following sections, I will consider two examples of theatre productions that confront the issue of Neo-Nazi violence from divergent thematic and dramaturgical perspectives. In doing this, I intend to indicate the ways in which a dialectical theatre might open up the question of violence and interrogate the processes that bring it about.

### Imagining Neo-Nazis Imagining Nazism

Among the many projects brought to life by the NSU affair, it is something of a rarity to find a playwright inventing action and figures without recourse to documentary sources. Lothar Kittstein's *Der weiße Wolf* (The White Wolf) appears to owe something to a Neo-Nazi fanzine of the same name, yet he contends that his decision was poetic and that he only found out

about the fanzine after he had written the play.<sup>109</sup> This detail reflects the construction of the play as a whole: the characters and action remind the audience of the real NSU, yet are not based in their real lives at all. In his play, the White Wolf is the name of a nightclub at which one of the characters works.

The three characters, Tosch, Gräck and Janine are versions of the NSU's two Uwes and Beate Zschäpe.<sup>110</sup> The central location is a rundown house. Tosch arrives in his campervan at the end of the first scene. The vehicle links the fictional life of this trio to the real events in recent German history: it was used by the two Uwes to traverse Germany and commit their crimes. Already, there is a familiarity with and a conscious difference from the real people and events that inspired the play. Over seventeen scenes, the three-way relationships unfold, combining predominantly new dramatic material with a sense that the three had been involved in violent affairs preceding the start of the play.

---

<sup>109</sup> See Lothar Kittstein, in Stephen Wetzel, 'Eine Geisterbeschwörung. Gespräch mit Lothar Kittstein', in *Programme to 'Der weiße Wolf'*, pp. 12-15 (12).

<sup>110</sup> I am grateful to the erstwhile dramaturgical assistant Henrieke Beuthner at the Schauspiel Frankfurt for sending me the unpublished manuscript of *Der weiße Wolf*. All references to and page numbers from the play are taken from this source.



The scenes' texture is disconcerting, as it mixes what appear to be real events unfolding before the audience with a strange, dreamlike quality. Janine, for example, is pregnant, yet Gräck starts to doubt her condition as she seems to be getting thinner over time. Dreams themselves also feature: in the opening scene, Janine recounts a recurring dream in which she has to recite a poem correctly to win a prize in a quiz show. The poem is 'Der alte Barbarossa' ('Old Barbarossa') by Friedrich Rückert. It tells of the sleeping Kaiser Friedrich who is kept underground in his enchanted castle. Written in 1817, the poem looks forward to the day when he will awaken from his slumbers in the post-Napoleonic era so that the as yet divided Germany will take its rightful place among the nations. The meaning for the characters is more closely linked to Nazi dreams of reawakening German greatness, something suppressed by democracy, immigration and capitalism. Literature also figures elsewhere in the play. All three refer to the pulp-fiction *Landser*<sup>111</sup> booklets that tell stories of military glory on the battlefield and the home front. They were

---

<sup>111</sup> A 'Landser' is a private in the army. Neo-Nazis like to see themselves as soldiers fighting for Germany. Landser is also the name of a Neo-Nazi rock band that was banned in the early twenty-first century.

published from 1957 and present nostalgic and positive portrayals of the German *Wehrmacht*. That literary sources inform the characters' ideologies already offers the audience an insight into the constructed nature of identity in the play. Myths of a sleeping Kaiser and rose-tinted stories of war fuel the ideas on stage and create a narrative for the ideas discussed and enacted on stage.

Other factors also inform the characters' thoughts and behaviour: post-industrial decline is linked to the influx of foreigners; motherhood is the goal of all German women; the value of 'Ordnung' ('order', p. 45) is placed above the laissez-faire tenets of democracy. Indeed, language itself is recognized as a means of nationalist self-expression. Gräck and Tosch correct each other's speech in different scenes in a bid to retain a German purity of expression. In short, the characters gain their values through a series of clichés, and the stage world that arises from such a linguistic texture becomes unreal in the sense that the characters may be spouting texts written elsewhere. The use of platitude and formulaic language makes the characters parodies of themselves for the vast majority of the play.

It is only by the final scenes that that the play's fictional underpinnings and unreal texture shed light on the architecture of the play as a whole. The men play a game of Russian roulette. They escape death when they press the trigger yet two shots are heard outside the house. The men leave to search for the source of the gunshots and they are not seen again. Janine delivers the final scene's lines, and in the production in Frankfurt, that premiered on 7 February 2014, she was made to look like Beate Zschäpe in this scene. The implication was that the two shots represented the real Uwes' deaths in the campervan and that the whole piece was a product of Zschäpe's imagination. This is what guarantees the uncanny texture of the play, and so the final revelation acts as a veiled explanation of the previous scenes.

Violence underpins almost all the scenes. The characters hit and manhandle each other, and there is an amount of stage blood in evidence. Nazi concepts, such as 'Blut und Ehre' ('blood and honour', p. 11), a one-time engraving on the knives of the Hitler Youth and now a motto used by Neo-Nazis, appear in the text. There is talk of a murder, casual mentions of beating people up, and the relationships between the three characters are marked by an interplay between easy friendship and equally easy

violence in the form of slaps and hits. However, the violence that precedes the play itself is only ever alluded to. Is there, then, a dialectic at work in the play that helps to approach the question of violence?

On the one hand, identity is presented as at least partially manufactured. The quotation of literary sources and the wholesale reproduction of racist and nationalist cliché suggest that the characters on stage need not be considered 'natural' and thus unchangeable. That said, there is little to suggest a link between far-right ideology and the characters' susceptibility to it. There is also no response to the onstage violence and it is treated as a normal part of the characters' lives. That is, the opportunity to show a dynamic relationship between idea and action has not been grasped, and so there is little to show how change may be possible. In addition, the playwright's conscious decision not to represent the real NSU, but fictionalized characters may also encourage the audience to compare the dramatic with the real, although this is a moot argument. An audience will not be familiar with the real relationships between the members of the NSU, and thus one set of clichés could well be replaced by another.

On the other hand, the action on stage may include social elements, such as the shabby state of society for those in a less privileged position, but the scenes themselves tend to remain at the level of the psychological. Regardless of how their ideology has been forged, there is little to suggest any dynamism in the characters: they remain fixed throughout the play and do not change when their circumstances change. Janine, for example, is at times praised and at others humiliated, yet her personality stays constant throughout. Dialectical characterization insists on a dynamic relationship between situation and behaviour, and this is not simply something found in Brecht's plays. Brecht was able to call Shakespeare 'a great realist' who 'always shovelled a lot of raw material on to the stage, unvarnished representations of things he had seen'.<sup>112</sup> The sense here is that realist playwriting is not in some way concerned with the reproduction of surface reality, but with the treatment of dramatic material. In *Der weiße Wolf*, Kittstein is perhaps a little too interested in the clichés concerning Neo-Nazis to probe the conditions under which they arise and so the dialogue between individual and society does

---

<sup>112</sup> Brecht, *Buying Brass*, in Brecht, *Brecht on Performance*, pp. 11-125 (92).

not take place on stage. The Barthesian violence, that is, the question of why the characters accept the relationships and behaviours performed, is never addressed thematically or dramaturgically, and so the play functions more as a flattened representation of violent characters rather than an investigation of them.

Another reason for the more static, undialectical presentation is to be found in the revelation of the final scene: the previous action seems to emanate from Janine's mind, that is, the play is essentially solipsistic. Such a dramaturgical conceit has a negative impact on the overall reception of the play in that the monolithic presentation of all the action only permits criticism of the mind from which the play has sprung. And as this mind is implicitly linked to Beate Zschäpe, the insights are few, if any. Indeed, the play's premiere met with a decidedly lukewarm response. The direction was roundly criticized for offering production that was performed 'without nuance'.<sup>113</sup> While this associates performative failure with the director, one could similarly contend that the play itself offered little to resist

---

<sup>113</sup> Alexander Jürgs, "'Schön braun! Kleine Nazikuchen'", *Die Welt*, 9 February 2014.

anything but a two-dimensional portrayal. Another reviewer noted that the text doesn't suggest 'why these three people drifted off into a Neo-Nazi body of thought. [...] It can only denounce them as stupid individuals'.<sup>114</sup> A further reviewer captured the undialectical failings of the writing clearly in observing that the play supports the 'lone-wolf hypothesis. There is no mention of the NSU's victims, nothing of the social climate in which the cell could flourish, nothing of the media'.<sup>115</sup> These two comments point to a fundamental weakness: the characterization was primarily psychological, a category in theatre that anchors characters in a set of behaviours that are fixed and static. There was little to invite speculation on the causes of the actions and beliefs. Indeed, the use of clichéd representations meant that the audience could sit back and have their own prejudices regarding the Neo-Nazis confirmed from the comfort of their seats. Politically, this is a significant problem because it sets up the perpetrators as inevitable by-products rather than as dynamic creations of a society. The dramaturgy of

---

<sup>114</sup> Bettina Kneller, 'NSU im harten Schlagschatten', *Main-Echo*, 12 February 2014.

<sup>115</sup> Cornelia Fiedler, 'Bei Nazis unterm Sofa', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10 February 2014.

the play shut down the link between social cause and effect, and the audience could only gaze upon three misfits on stage that had little connection with the auditorium.

### The Semi-Documentary Challenge

Dramatic treatment of the NSU has more often been based on documentary research than relatively free invention. *Die Lücke. Ein Stück Keupstraße* (The Gap or The Divide. A Piece of Keupstraße) was a project initiated by director Nuran David Calis, a theatre-maker with Turkish, Armenian and Jewish roots, and it premiered on 7 June 2014 at the Schauspiel Köln. Calis responded to the nail-bomb attack in Cologne that took place in Keupstraße, a main thoroughfare with a predominately Turkish population, almost ten years to the day before the opening night. Keupstraße is very close to the theatre space, the Schauspiel Köln's Depot, and thus had a great deal of local resonance. Indeed, before the show started, audience members were invited to take a tour of the locale in order to understand the reality of the situation. Calis had attempted to engage with the incident in



2008, three years before the exposure of the NSU and, more crucially, when the police still believed the bomb was the work of a shady and never-proven Turkish mafia.<sup>116</sup> As a result, he met with resistance and rejection from potential participants because the street's residents were still considered a part and not the victims of a terrorist attack.

By 2014, of course, the situation had very much changed, and Calis was able to engage with local people and develop a project that explored the effects of the attack and relations between Germans and Turks. The role of the real was signalled from the outset in the tour of Keupstraße itself and was reinforced by the three genuine residents who performed against three German actors. Thomas Laue, the dramaturge for the production, told me that the speeches changed every performance.<sup>117</sup> That is, while there was a structure and a sequence of situations that were fixed, the interactions themselves followed a pattern, but were not strictly scripted. This allowed relationships to develop over the course of the run (the production is still in the repertoire at

---

<sup>116</sup> See Calis, in Hartmut Wilmes, 'Keupstraße spielt eine Hauptrolle', *Kölnische Rundschau*, 29 May 2014.

<sup>117</sup> Email from Thomas Laue to me, 11 August 2014.

the time of writing, winter 2016) and for themes to be confronted in different ways. The following analysis considers the piece in terms of its dramaturgical, performative and scenographic features in order to understand its treatment of the two kinds of violence discussed in the introduction.

The use of non-professional performers in professional productions is nothing new in German theatre. The group Rimini Protokoll is perhaps the most well-known exemplar of using what it calls 'Experten des Alltags' ('experts of the everyday'),<sup>118</sup> although the term has been subject to an amount of criticism. When, for example, Bettina Brandl-Risi contends that the amateur performers are 'experts of their own biographies',<sup>119</sup> one might counter that no-one is an expert on their own lives because we simply do not have that kind of distance to ourselves. Instead, one may prefer to view the non-professional performers as

---

<sup>118</sup> The term has become so firmly established with the group that it served as the title to the first collection of scholarly essays on Rimini Protokoll: see Miriam Dreysse and Florian Malzacher (eds.), *Experten des Alltags. Das Theater von Rimini Protokoll* (Berlin: Alexander, 2007).

<sup>119</sup> Bettina Brandl-Risi, 'Moving and Speaking through the Event. Participation and Reenactment [sic] in Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* and Rimini Protokoll's *Deutschland 2*, *Theater* 40: 3 (2010), pp. 55—65 (59).

offering access to a specialist range of experiences that they continue to negotiate, not as 'experts', but learners. As such, the performances can transform over time. The performers' documentary authenticity is irreplaceable because only they can respond to new material, night by night, and so there is a freshness to each performance that even the most naturalistic actor cannot present, not having lived through the complex experiences of, here, the Keupstraße residents.

The three professional white German actors, on the other hand, are able to contrast themselves with their on-stage counterparts by performing a series of stock positions on the nail-bomb attack itself and on their relationships to the immigrants of the past decades. Their artificiality, their conscious performance of their roles as roles, signals to an audience the relationship between a standard set of views and their effects. For example, one of the actors does not pronounce the name of one of the amateur performers correctly at the start of the show. It is obvious that this is rehearsed and it serves to establish an opening problem in communication. The audience is able to appreciate that certain ideas are being explored, not in a spontaneous way, but in one crafted by a creative team and developed in rehearsal and

performance. This is not to argue, however, that *Die Lücke* represents a clash between the constructed and the naïve: the three Turkish performers are as socialized and as rehearsed as the German actors, and the more they participate in the show, the better versed they will become so that their own responses may lose their initial roughness or spontaneity with every successive iteration. Rather, the amateurs offer a glimpse of the Other to the predominantly German audience, and their lack of professional training and execution marks their performance as different and worthy of curiosity. They embody lived experience and make use of it in a theatrical setting that nonetheless does not pretend that they are acting 'naturally'. Their Otherness also affects the professional actors, whose more staged behaviour appears strange and thus also generates curiosity. As a result, everything that is performed may strike the audience as odd and stimulate the spectators into asking questions of *all* the action on stage. Already, then, the dialectic of Self and Other was clearly articulated.

Another feature of the project's approach, which diverges greatly from *Der weiße Wolf*, is that the NSU does not appear: this is a project that focuses on the victims *and* on a mindset that

enabled them to be blamed for so many years until the truth finally emerged. That is, while documentary footage that showed the build-up and aftermath of the attack was played between the scenes, the production was more focused on Barthes' approach to violence, the naturalization of the astonishing, than on the real physical violence itself, which always underlay the work, but did not need to be represented or re-enacted. The project used a variety of innovative theatrical means to interrogate the apparently self-evident and to expose its constructedness.

At the heart of the production was its scenography. The set consisted of two clinically white platforms that could be moved between scenes; they represented the gap or divide of the project's title. There was a bench on which the actors and performed could sit built into each platform behind which was a white wall onto which images could be projected. The divide between the two communities existed from the start, and the show itself sought to show how it may be bridged while indicating the many barriers to this aim.

The use of the screens exposed some important features about the dialectical relationships on stage. In one configuration, the

Turkish performers were projected as sitting on the German actors' bench. That is, the actors discussing their on-stage compatriots were projecting their own image of them. This visual metaphor was easily readable. The dialectical twist came when the actors were projected onto the screen on the Turkish performers' platform. The close-ups of the actors' faces, expressing puzzlement or accusation, were not the Turkish performers' projection, but the pervasiveness of the German Self in the lives of the Turkish Other. The use of the same technique to achieve different ends addresses the essential asymmetry at the heart of the relationships in question: simply inverting a particular strategy does not lead to an inversion of power relations. This dialectical point that 'the same thing twice is not the same thing' opens up the complexity of the tensions that run through the production. That is, in dialectical thought, what appears to be 'the same thing' is revealed to have its own dynamics and trajectory because the same phenomenon will have a different set of relationships underpinning it, as in the case here.

The performances by both groups was also inflected by a gestural clarity, something associated with Brechtian theatre.

The body becomes a visual index for a particular attitude, in Brechtian parlance, for a *Haltung*. The point of a *Haltung* is that it is a physicalized attitude that is primarily social in origin. The gestures of accusation or incredulity on the part of the German actors, for example, are no longer limited to a personal position, but extend to something larger, the social. This gestic approach to performance allowed *Die Lücke* to explore issues at the level of society rather than at that of the individual. As such, the arguments that were set out transcended their speakers. Here it is worth noting that the German actors did not represent the excesses of xenophobia. On the contrary, they offered themselves as liberals seeking to understand their fellow citizens. Yet as one reviewer noted, ‘an initial encounter takes place and quickly reveals the prejudices under the superficial tolerance as well as a proselytizer’s zeal that is so closely connected to western concepts of freedom’.<sup>120</sup> So, the attempt at engagement on the German side continually hit obstacles, as the Germans’

---

<sup>120</sup> Sascha Westphal, ‘Brücke über den Abgrund’, undated, [http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=9643:die-luecke-nuran-david-calis-schickt-das-publikum-auf-die-koelner-keupstrasse-und-bringt-ein-stueck-von-ihr-auf-die-buehne&catid=84:schauspiel-koeln](http://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9643:die-luecke-nuran-david-calis-schickt-das-publikum-auf-die-koelner-keupstrasse-und-bringt-ein-stueck-von-ihr-auf-die-buehne&catid=84:schauspiel-koeln) [accessed 27 October 2016].

sometimes clichéd attempts at sympathy exposed fears, anxieties and uncertainties that then generated antagonism. Again, dialectical contradictions could be identified within single speaking subjects.

As the show progressed, the piece moved on to the attack itself and the inadequate response from the police and secret agencies. There was thus a telescoping of the project's reach, from the interactions on stage to the institutions that supposedly guarded each citizen's freedoms, but were inflected by attitudes already encountered on stage. Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn is that discursive practices and tensions that were given prominence in the production actually help to embed and propagate violence in both its physical and its Barthesian manifestations.

Other features of the set design also served to support the project's themes. A street lamp stood in-between the two platforms, but did not shine light on the situation. A bicycle also stood near the lamp. Here the bicycle represented the means by which the NSU transported the nail-bomb to Keupstraße, yet nobody responded to the object. The bicycle thus stood as an open question: this everyday item asked the audience whether



they would notice it and whether they would act upon the now-provocative object.

This inclusion of the audience was a central element of the project, from the tour of Keupstraße to its role in the show itself. The challenge of the piece was set firmly in the divided stage and the unsuccessful attempts at bridging it. The spectators were offered a situation that was not resolved and were asked to find a solution in their own behaviours and attitudes. One reviewer noted how the project shamed the audience in the face of the collective failures that were presented.<sup>121</sup> However, audience responses cannot be assumed in advance, and another reviewer noted with disappointment how someone sitting next to her nodded his agreement when one of the German actors stated that openness and tolerance were all very well, but that elements of a foreign culture will always remain foreign and thus unapproachable.<sup>122</sup> The differences in response, which is to be expected in any theatrical situation, reflected just how timely and pertinent *Die Lücke* was.

---

<sup>121</sup> See Eleonor Benítez, 'Anspielen gegen die Beschämung', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8 June 2014.

<sup>122</sup> See Bettina Weber, 'Zusammenstehen', *Die deutsche Bühne*, 10 June 2014.

## Conclusions

The two productions discussed above confront the same phenomenon with remarkably divergent means, and the strengths and weaknesses of both reveal important points about reflections on real violence in the theatre.

First, representing real violence on stage has a limited reach. The violent interactions of the Neo-Nazis in *Der weiße Wolf* did little to challenge the stereotypical image of these people or to contextualize their behaviour. As a result, the spectators were not challenged to find elements of the extremists in their own attitudes and simply to deliver judgements on what can only be described as abhorrent behaviour. The absence of an open dialectic meant that a range of issues were not addressed, primarily concerning the interaction between individual and society. Instead, the characters were located in the underclass where a link between poverty and criminality can go unquestioned. A dynamic between society, ideology, language

and behaviour was notably missing, and so the issue of Barthesian violence failed to emerge at all.

Second, the investigation of Barthesian violence can only begin as a dialectical interrogation because its very nature is rooted in subtle processes of concealment. *Die Lücke* is predicated on contradiction, the engine of the dialectic, and the contradictions are clearly organized for the audience. The title of the project and its scenographic realization, the tension between liberal tolerance and prejudice, and the asymmetrical relationships on stage all point to fissures that help develop the Barthesian violence that underpins the physical violence of the nail-bomb attack. However, a dialectical treatment of human attitudes and behaviour is not concerned with explanation, but articulation. The project thus offered no answers, but sought to ask the right questions.

Third, asking questions and refusing easy solutions transfers the onus of the theatrical event from the stage to the auditorium. However, the dialectical set-up of *Die Lücke* means that the audience is challenged never to settle into a single position. The changing focus and the openness of the issues confronts an audience with different perspectives. As the report from the

audience, quoted above, reveals, there is most definitely an interpretive freedom when such issues are presented, and the stage cannot, and indeed should not, act as arbiter.

The treatment of real violent events does not necessarily require re-enactment or direct stage representation. Indeed, there are potentially ethical implications of such reproductions, and in all the theatrical treatments I have encountered that deal with the NSU and its crimes, none have attempted to re-present the NSU's murders themselves. This may be out of respect to the victims in that re-presentation may have the effect of trivializing or misrepresenting real crime by offering an audience something that is obviously fake. Instead, both projects discussed above have attempted to engage with the consequences of real violence. The question, however, is how they have sought to do this and to what ends. My analysis has indicated that a dialectical approach can organize different tensions that go beyond the individuals who committed the crimes in a bid to grasp the complexity of a Neo-Nazi terrorist cell. The social conditions, not only in terms on one's social position and background, but also the discourses circulating around society, all contribute to the individual's decision to perform atrocities. What is self-evident

to a terrorist is opened to question and exposed in *Die Lücke*, and one translation of its title as 'the gap' is symptomatic of the problems of it seeks to approach: there are gaps that can only be filled by a careful articulation of the multifaceted problems. Only then can Barthesian violence be discussed and, only perhaps, confronted.

