

explores the *lumpenproletariat* in an even less representative way via Fatzer's narration. Last but not least, *The Measures Taken* can be read as a re-staging and re-enactment of the process of class formation via political struggle that also reassociates already politically instituted subjects and collectives with vulnerabilities and affects which at least imply the possibility of another possible form of institution. From this perspective, Brecht's reworking of the scene after the premiere can also be understood as an act of politically instituting the text itself. In *The Threepenny Opera* and *Fatzer*, as well as between the different versions of *The Measures Taken*, one can actually see the struggle of class formation and institution at work – not only as a topic but also in the artistic practice.

Michael Wehren works as a scientific assistant at the Institute for Theatre Studies of the University of Leipzig and is also a member of the free theatre- and performance group *friendly fire*. His doctoral thesis focuses on Brecht's learning plays, the *Fatzer* fragment and their contemporary productivity. His other areas of research include critical perspectives on class and classism in the context of theatre, body politics in modern dance, global theatres of justice and re-stagings of crimes, the transmedial afterlife of the Shoah and the Holocaust in theatre and film as well as theories of the third in the context of contemporary performance art. Contact: wehren@uni-leipzig.de.

#### Abstract

This article focuses on the re-entry and re-framing of the questions of class and classism in the context of contemporary discussions about intersectionality and the works of Bertolt Brecht. Starting with the observation that since the 1990s traditional Marxist categories like class have been less prominent in art and academic discourse than more contemporary concepts like “the political,” I argue that a renewed understanding of class and classism is productive also in the context of Brecht studies. After discussing selected approaches to the concepts of class and classism, the article focuses on the processes of the political as well as aesthetic institution of class in Brecht's learning play *The Measures Taken*. In an analysis of a paradigmatic choir scene, I demonstrate that the exposed repetition of the process of class formation or *the institution of class* can be seen as a critical intervention and a re-association with that which has been rejected in and by it in the name of the collective.

Key words: Bertolt Brecht, The Measures Taken, Fatzer, Threepenny Opera, Class, Classism, Institution, Politics of affect, Politics of vulnerability, Intersectionality, Learning plays

Veronika Darian

“Positions  
of Trust”.

Drafting  
Gender/Class

The mainly textual material this contribution is interested in refers to true events. At the same time it mirrors processes of (narrative or artistic) estrangement (*Verfremdung*) in reaction to experiences of alienation (*Entfremdung*) due to the socio-economic conditions the texts deal with. However, this contribution will less focus on a detailed comparison of different narratives and storylines. Rather, individual aspects and arguments which are significant in relation to gender and class are to be picked out because they specifically reflect social, economic, and political circumstances. In this way, selected passages and additional textual references are brought into the constellation. They will comment on each other, following Brecht's suggestion of historicizing understood as a process of estranging formerly familiar "facts."

*Verfremdung* estranges an incident or character simply by taking from the incident or character what is self-evident, familiar, obvious in order to produce wonder and curiosity. [...] *Verfremdung* is, then, a process of historicizing, of portraying incidents and persons as historical, that is, as ephemeral.<sup>1</sup>

For opening up such kind of constellation, in which processes of socio-economic alienation trigger different processes of estrangement, the following passage offers a first possible starting point:

A few years ago, an industrial accident occurred in M. in a secondary department of the Ottkar factory due to a burst pipe. The six deaths it cost would probably have remained in the hearts of their relatives and in the accident statistics of the workforce and nowhere else, had it not been for a discovery linked to this accident that shocked the whole town.<sup>2</sup>

A second beginning of the same story sounds like this:

In the decades after the Great War unemployment and the oppression of the lower orders went from bad to worse. An incident which took place in Mainz shows better than any peace treaty, history book or statistical table the barbaric condition to which the great European countries had been reduced by their inability to keep their economies going except by force and exploitation.<sup>3</sup>

- 1 Bertolt Brecht. On Experimental Theatre. Translated by Marc Silberman and John Willett. In: *Brecht on Theatre*. Edited by Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Tom Kuhn. Third Edition. London: Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 143.
- 2 Anna Seghers. Der sogenannte Rendel [1940]. In: *Argonautenschiff. Jahrbuch der Anna-Seghers-Gesellschaft Berlin und Mainz e.V.* 3. Berlin – Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1994, p. 92. If not stated otherwise, translated by Veronika Darian.
- 3 Bertolt Brecht. The Job or By the Sweat of Thy Brow Shalt Thou Fail to Earn Thy Bread. Translated by Hugh Rorrison. In: Bertolt Brecht. *Short Stories 1921–1946. The Berlin Stories (1924–1933)*. Edited by John Willett and Ralph Manheim. London – New York: Methuen, 1983, p. 112. For original see: Bertolt Brecht. Der Arbeitsplatz oder Im Schweiß Deines Angesichts sollst Du kein Brot essen. In: Bertolt Brecht. *Werke. Vol. 19*. Edited by Werner Hecht – Jan Knopf – Werner Mittenzwei – Klaus-Detlef Müller. Berlin – Weimar – Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997, p. 345.

Finally a third beginning:

Twelve years a woman dressed as a man.  
In a factory in Mainz, a night watchman who – as the tax authorities found out one day – is a woman, has been working well for twelve years. She had appropriated the papers of her husband, who was living separately from her, and applied for a job disguised as a man. She even played the role of a good family man by getting married to a woman, the mother of two children, in a civil ceremony.<sup>4</sup>

The first beginning is borrowed from a short story by the German author Anna Seghers. She has written different versions and a script for a film, too; one of her first versions was entitled *A Position of Trust* (Der Vertrauensposten) from 1933, the last one *The So-called Rendel* (Der sogenannte Rendel), referring to the name of the main figure. Like the following ones, this short story points back to an incident that shook the city of Mainz in the years 1931 and 1932: the case of an unlucky family who lost its bread-earner which forced the abandoned wife to take over the working place of her husband by also taking over the opposite gender role as a man.

The second beginning is borrowed from Bertolt Brecht who wrote his own version of the story in 1933, too, called *The Job or By the Sweat of Thy Brow Shalt Thou Fail to Earn Thy Bread* (Der Arbeitsplatz oder Im Schweiß Deines Angesichts sollst Du kein Brot essen), with a subtitle that clearly refers to the Bible (Genesis 3:19). Brecht's version opens up a broader context by immediately intertwining the local incident with more global questions of the existential social challenges under economic pressure in the aftermath of World War I.

Finally, the last quoted beginning turns out to be the first one in chronological order: It is taken from an article in a magazine called "A Book for All" (Ein Buch für alle). This article highlights the same incident mentioned before and shows how the newspapers found(ed) their own story, in which the woman – "Maria Einsmann, a brave woman!"<sup>5</sup> – turned into "a real man" with stereotypical behaviour and appearance: "The 'night watchman' sat there with legs apart, in shirtsleeves, a tankard of beer in front of her"<sup>6</sup> (a picture later to be given prominence in the illustrated magazines). Thus they prepared the ground for a public discussion, a ground, that turned out to be a socio-economic battlefield, forcing the protagonist(s) to act in a specific way: "Josef alias Maria Einsmann as comrades in arms." "What a story!"<sup>7</sup>

- 4 Zwölf Jahre als Mann verkleidete Frau. In: *Ein Buch für Alle*. 1932, Issue 1. As cited in: Jan Knopf. *Brecht-Handbuch. Lyrik, Prosa, Schriften. Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984, p. 262.
- 5 Maria Einsmann, eine tapfere Frau!. *Mainzer Volkszeitung*, 22. 8. 1932.
- 6 B. Brecht. The Job, p. 114.
- 7 Josef alias Maria Einsmann als Kampfgenossen. *Mainzer Volkszeitung*, 20. 8. 1931.

"For 12 years dressed as a man." In: *Frankfurter Illustrierte*. Das Illustrierte Blatt, 27. 8. 1931



In August 1932, Bertolt Brecht and his friend Anna Seghers met each other and presumably fell into a conversation about the Einsmann case,<sup>8</sup> one that Seghers even adapted for a short story. Whether Brecht was animated to write "The Job" as an alternative draft or whether he was already working on a text of his own, is difficult to assess. But in contrast to Seghers' portrayal focusing on a narrative of a courageous woman while suffering from the socio-economic circumstances, Brecht traces back the transformation of his "Mrs. Hausmann" – as he called his main figure – into a man to her economic exigency.<sup>9</sup>

Seghers and Brecht both transferred the events to the end of the 1920s in order to aggravate the social topic, since at this time the fight for a working place meant the fight for survival. In the winter of 1931 and 1932 pre-fascist unemployment was ultimately at its peak. As Jan Knopf underlines, the narratives of both storylines are also more striking in presupposing the death of the man and attributing the discovery to an industrial accident. Otherwise, however, the versions of Brecht and Seghers differ. While Seghers is primarily interested in the fate of women in the private sphere, Brecht is concerned with the elaboration and clarification of the social situation itself. The man is considered the "bread-earner of the family" and therefore also the "head of the family." What has economic and social causes, however, is ideologically presented as the "nature" of the respective gender. With this case, according to Knopf, Brecht is able to prove the opposite.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For further details see the very informative article: Siegfried Mews. Der Arbeitsplatz oder Im Schweiß Deines Angesichts sollst Du kein Brot essen. In: Jan Knopf (ed.). *Brecht-Handbuch*. Vol. 3. Prosa, Film, Drehbuch. Stuttgart – Weimar: Springer, 2002, pp. 220–227.

<sup>9</sup> See: Werner Hecht. *Brecht-Chronik 1989–1956*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997, p. 355.

<sup>10</sup> See: J. Knopf. *Brecht-Handbuch*, p. 262. Knopf also refers to: Kirsten Boie-Grotz. *Brecht – der unbekannte Erzähler*. Die Prosa 1913–1934. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978, pp. 158–163.

Brecht parallelizes this story of gender change with the logic of the capitalist market by closely linking both as a striking history of "evolution:" "In a few days the woman became a man, in the same way as men have become men over the millennia: through the production process."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Brecht's narrative also deals with the public reaction to the case. Society, and that means here above all the so-called public opinion of the "common sense" whipped up by the yellow press, takes revenge on the woman by making her case a nuisance and by declaring her a "monster." Everything has to be "unbelievable," the woman has to be denigrated as a "biological monster" in such a way that it can no longer appear as a social symptom of the un-nature of social conditions.<sup>12</sup>

In Latin *monstrum* means: the demonstrated, the shown, the displayed – which in turn is also able to demonstrate, show and display, in this case, not at all the indecency of a woman acting and behaving like a man, rather the indecency of the socio-economic conditions and restraints themselves.

The job of night-watchman in a big factory is not undemanding. The nightly round of the yards, workshops and stores calls for reliability and courage, qualities that have from time immemorial been called *manly*. The fact that Hausmann's widow [orig.: "die Hausmann"] was equal to these demands – she even received a public commendation from the management for having caught and secured a thief (a poor devil who was trying to steal some wood) – proves that courage, physical strength and presence of mind can be shown by anybody, man or woman, who really needs a job.<sup>13</sup>

In this crucial passage of the text, regarding the skills that such a job requires, Brecht uses the term *geliefert werden können* that is translated by the term "shown." But this sounds too harmless to capture the compulsion and force hidden behind the inherent requirement towards anyone "who really needs a job:" i.e. the demand to provide, to perform, and to fulfill. Actually, all these meanings refer to workers and their skills *as goods* that can be sold and that in consequence belong to those who can pay for them. In addition, they also point to the intersectional field that opens up when it comes to existential questions of economical as well as social survival.

The main narrative of the short stories as well as of the newspaper articles mentioned before circles around the motif of a woman who has to become a man due to socio-economic circumstances. Thus, a local case of gender change mirrors a global situation of oppression and discrimination that is based on the exploitation of the lower classes. In the shape of different

<sup>11</sup> B. Brecht. The Job, p. 114.

<sup>12</sup> See: J. Knopf. *Brecht-Handbuch*, p. 263.

<sup>13</sup> B. Brecht. The Job, pp. 113–114.



perspectives on/of the same plot the texts commonly offer different examples of how to deal narratively with such real cases, in print media as well as in literature: Here and there facts are functionalized for fiction. At the same time, this very case is specific – both, in terms and by means of art – because it reveals the impulse and motivation for what Brecht called the *Verfremdungseffekt* and its field of application: a defamiliarization of the supposedly familiar and a historicization of what appears absolute and unchangeable.

But what about “the job” as such a matter of course?

Mediated through a linguistic perspective, some specific features of the relevant terms are striking. Even in the genus of the German terms a gender hierarchy is evident. It is telling that the job hunt (DIE Arbeitssuche) is female in German language, while the working place (DER Arbeitsplatz) is male. As well as the job market (DER Arbeitsmarkt) is male, in opposite to unemployment (DIE Arbeitslosigkeit) that is female. But who achieves the “hunted?” And what is finally required not only to get there but also to keep the achieved?

Adjusted to this inner – not only linguistic – order, the titles of the quoted stories create a suitable narrative: When “A Position of Trust” is offered, the very conditions of achieving and keeping the job are unquestionable: only “By the Sweat of Thy Brow Shalt Thou Fail to Earn Thy Bread.” Nevertheless there show up certain intrepid ones who dare to re-claim such a demanding “position of trust” despite these biblically cruel conditions: “The so-called Rendel.” Or: The real so-called Einsmann. Or: Brecht’s so-called Hausmann. Respectively: The so-called Maria or Josef – what accidentally biblical references, again! But although the different stories have female protagonists, they are still carrying a “man” within their names: *Einsmann*, *Hausmann*, *Mustermann*<sup>14</sup>... What irony that *Mustermann* – as a sample on model identity cards from Germany – is a woman in Austria – i.e. a *Musterfrau*!

Model identity cards from Germany and Austria



14 This invented surname “Mustermann” (i.e. sample man) is a placeholder on every draft of a German identity card, whether for male or female applicants. But the picture on the model identity card is usually that of a woman.

What about “gender,” by the way?

There is a note from Brecht from 1931 regarding the supposedly unchangeable, absolute idea of gender:

[Surrender gender]

- 1 Under economic pressure – decreasing demand for labour people even give up their gender.
- 2 Astonishment is expected from the fact that *gender is not absolute*.
- 3 So fight the idea that gender is absolute. How does it manifest itself?
- 4 “Gender = [equals with] absolute” means: the consciousness of a man is determined by his manhood, not by his social (but his en-gendered) being.
- 5 The being (reacting) of the man (within society) is determined by his consciousness (belonging to a certain eternal gender category).
- 6 If the proposition that *consciousness determines being* is right, then the case [Einsmann; V.D.] presents itself just like this [...] <sup>15</sup>

There is a short text added to a picture story in the newspapers of 1931 regarding the Einsmann “case” that sounds like a direct comment on Brecht’s note: “Just like this, ‘He’ went for years to his working place. As night watchman and as factory worker his employers regarded ‘Him’ as a notably painstaking worker.”<sup>16</sup>

“12 Years with a Job as a Man.” In: *Frankfurter Illustrierte. Das Illustrierte Blatt*, 27. 8. 1931, p. 916



15 Bertolt Brecht. [Das Aufgeben des Geschlechts]. In: Bertolt Brecht. *Werke. Bd. 21. Schriften I. Große Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*. Edited by Jan Knopf – Werner Mittenzwei – Klaus-Detlef Müller. Berlin – Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992, pp. 539–540.

16 12 Jahre als Mann um Arbeit zu bekommen. *Frankfurter Illustrierte. Das Illustrierte Blatt*, 27. 8. 1931, p. 916.

But Brecht himself does *not* present the case *just like it is* or was, but in a “strange,” estranged way: he shows the events that occurred by means of a figure (the woman) that becomes a so-called “monstrum,” an “alien” (a like-man) by acts of covering her actual gender on the one hand and by dis-covering the deceit by the authorities and the press on the other. Brecht de-*monstrates* these processes of “othering” – i. e. mechanisms of making someone alien or strange – and installing the one as “the other” in order to mark “the order:” the order of genders as well as the order of distributing working power and workplaces as a reflection and effect of the order between the different classes. Usually the term *othering* (making the other) is used in specific, namely, post-colonial contexts. There it describes processes of pejorative exclusion by means of external attribution. But by reversing these processes to self-determined, self-responsible acts of *Verfremdung* (making strange), such kinds of *othering* could trigger almost empowering actions.<sup>17</sup> In this way Brecht uses a figure of strangeness not only to estrange the real events but also to make the allegedly familiar and usual socio-economic mechanisms un-familiar.<sup>18</sup> On the detour of a figure that is consciously changing herself and coincidentally “othered” by society the very conditions of this society and the correlating mechanisms to re-establish the order become visible, observable, and – potentially – mutable.

Yes, it is me. [...] I am both of them.

Your original order

To be [a] good [worker] while yet surviving

Split me like lightning into two people. I

Cannot tell what occurred: [working for] others

And [for] myself could not both be achieved.

To serve both self and others I found too hard.

Oh, your world is arduous! Such need, such desperation!

[...]

Something is wrong with this world of yours.<sup>19</sup>

“What a story!”

By manipulating this passage by some changes from former general human to labour aspects, it becomes explicit how “Brecht is [...] in his exposure of the bourgeois capitalist order and its gods [or: goods; V.D.] who go along with it.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> In my research on aspects of strangeness and foreignness (Fremdheitsforschung) I use othering in this broader sense; see for example my series of events called *Reihen Weise Fremd / Strange in Series*, <https://reihenweisefremdstrangeinseries.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, see my forthcoming article: Veronika Darian. Strange(rs) Among Strangers. Some Remarks. In: *The Brecht Yearbook 45 / Das Brecht-Jahrbuch 45*. Selected proceedings from the IBS's 16th Symposium (Leipzig, June 2019) on *Brecht Among Strangers / Brecht unter Fremden*. Ed. by Markus Wessendorf. Guest editors Micha Braun – Günther Heeg – Vera Stegmann. Rochester, New York – Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Bertolt Brecht. *The Good Person of Szechwan*. Translated by John Willett. Edited by Tom Kuhn and Charlotte Ryland. London – New Delhi – New York – Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2009, p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> Elisabeth Wright. *The Good Person of Szechwan*. Discourse of a Masquerade. In: Peter Thomson – Glendyr Sacks (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 121.

Through split up figures like Mr. and Mrs. Hausmann or Shen Te and Shui Ta from *The Good Person of Szechwan* Brecht examines the material conditions of gender behavior within its relation to class as well as the relation of class oppression to sexual repression.<sup>21</sup>

But what about class, after all?

I am referring to a quote of Frederick Engels from his study about *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* from 1884 where he writes the following on the just mentioned topic:

The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules.

In the great majority of cases today, at least in the possessing classes, the husband is obliged to earn a living and support his family, and that in itself gives him a position of supremacy, without any need for special legal titles and privileges. Within the family he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat.<sup>22</sup>

A slight shift of Brecht's proposal mentioned before supplemented by the aspect of class with its sentences in reverse order may reveal the inherent links between the socio-cultural and socio-political requirements regarding gender and class:

- 6 If the proposition *consciousness determines being* is right, then the case [...] presents itself just like this.
- 5 The being (reacting) of the bourgeois man (within society) is determined by his consciousness (belonging to a certain eternal socio-political, ideological, and gender category).
- 4 “Gender combined with a higher class = [equals with] absolute” means: the consciousness of the bourgeois man is determined by being a bourgeois man, not by his social (his en-gendered and by-birth) being.
- 3 So fight the idea that gender and class are absolute. How does it manifest itself?
- 2 Astonishment is expected from the fact that *gender and class are not absolute*.
- 1 Under economic pressure – decreasing demand for labour people even give up their gender. But they cannot abandon their class. They even merge – or rather: are merged – in the class.

<sup>21</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Frederick Engels. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Edited and with an introduction by Eleanor Leacock. Based on the translation by Alex West published in 1942. New York: International Publishers, 1972, p. 137.

“Surrender gender” i.e. giving up gender out of existential misery in Brecht’s reading ends up in merging – or being merged – in a faceless proletarian mass that is terminologically tied to the matériel battles of World War I when other faceless masses found themselves used as cannon fodder.<sup>23</sup>

Frau Hausmann, who cannot be accused of leaving any stone unturned, is thought to have worked as a waitress in a suburban bar, amid photographs (some of which she had posed for after being found out) showing her in shirtsleeves playing cards and drinking beer as a night-watchman and to have been regarded as resident freak [als Monstrum<sup>24</sup>] by the skittle players. Thereafter she probably sank without trace into the ranks of that army of millions who are forced to earn their modest bread by selling themselves, wholly, in part, or to one another, shedding in a few days century-old habits which had almost seemed eternal and, as we have seen, even changing sex, generally without success – who are in short lost and, if we are to believe the prevailing view, lost forever.<sup>25</sup>

In the story of Anna Seghers another fate overtakes the main figure: after being discovered as a woman not only the press and the common sense but also the employer makes every effort to re-establish the order again.

Then the management said: “We only want your good. [To be understood in the double-sense it provides; V. D.] We will take a difficult position and give you an easy one.” The easy job looked like this: Bucket, broom, scouring pad. Katharina [aka Brecht’s “Mrs. Hausmann” aka the real “Mrs. Einsmann;” V. D.] got a fright. But she accepted it, because children remained children and bread remained bread, she reached out and scrubbed.<sup>26</sup>

“What a story!”

All these narratives show how a young woman is going to be proclaimed an “incredible nuisance,” a “freak,” a monstrosity by assuming the identity of her deceased husband and thereby possibly taking over his job. Brecht and Seghers both turn the incident of a woman who becomes a man out of existential necessity into a case: a case of suspicion of public opinion, a historical case for their own historiography and socio-psychology of the little people and, last but not least, a case of their specific narratives.

23 For further details see also: Ana Kugli. *Feminist Brecht? Zum Geschlechterverhältnis im Werk Bertolt Brechts* (= *Forum Deutsche Literatur* 6). München: Verlagsbuchhandlung Martin Meidenbauer, 2006, p. 159, fn. 197.

24 B. Brecht. *Der Arbeitsplatz*, p. 52.

25 B. Brecht. *The Job*, pp. 115–116.

26 A. Seghers. *Der Vertrauensposten*. In: *Argonautenschiff*, p. 91.

In addition to and also beyond the obvious ideology-critical and propagandistic readings which were imposed onto the texts of Brecht and Seghers in their history of publication and reception, a glance at the genesis, adaptation, and metamorphosis of these case histories opens up an intertextual structure. Even if only rudimentary reference can be made at this point, it actually continues to the present. The narratives shift and focus the perspective(s) according to their respective time and direction. Gender change in its artistic treatment potentially stands for more than the critique of production mechanisms and social conventions. The specific ways of writing and presenting this intersectional field between gender and class deeply question the relations between origin and the fake as well as identity and its construction. Gender change, masquerade, and the exhibited game irritate the stereotypes and role models called up and put the categories of the unworthiness or credibility of the formation and acceptance of a (gender) identity constantly up for debate. Beyond this, they imperceptibly provoke reactions on the part of the recipients, who – as a possible impact of the *Verfremdungseffekt* – seek to locate themselves between identification and distancing, and who are enabled to change the circumstances – at least potentially. As I quoted before: “*Verfremdung* is, then, a process of historicizing, of portraying incidents and persons as historical, that is, as ephemeral.”<sup>27</sup> But an important question remains:

Where does this get us? We arrive at a point where spectators no longer see the persons [...] as unchangeable, closed off to influence, helplessly resigned to their fate. They see: this person is like this because the conditions are like that. And the conditions are like that because the person is like this. But this person can be imagined not only as he [or she; V.D.] is but also otherwise, as he [or she, V. D.] could be, and the conditions too can be imagined other than they are. We arrive at a point where the spectators have a new attitude [...]. [...] The [spectators] are welcomed [...] as those who change the world rather than accept it, who intervene in natural and social processes in order to master them.<sup>28</sup>

As Stephan points out, “the story of the Rendel family is not fiction. It can be read in the daily newspapers of the crisis year 1932.”<sup>29</sup> But what happened to the real Maria “Seppel” Einsmann and her wife Helene, both about forty years old at the time, remains unknown.<sup>30</sup>

27 B. Brecht. *On Experimental Theatre*, p. 143.

28 *Ibidem*, pp. 143–144.

29 See: Alexander Stephan. *Anna Seghers im Exil. Essays, Texte, Dokumente*. Bonn: Bouvier, 1993, p. 82.

30 See: A. Stephan. *Zu einer wiedergefundenen Erzählung von Anna Seghers*. In: *Argonautenschiff*, p. 112.



Veronika Darian is Assistant Professor of Theatre Studies at Leipzig University, focusing on transmediality and transculturality. She received her PhD in 2004 with a dissertation on ekphrasis and the relation between theatre, language, image, and power in the age of sovereignty (*Das Theater der Bildbeschreibung. Sprache, Macht und Bild in Zeiten der Souveränität*, Munich, 2011) and taught at the Freie Universität (FU) Berlin and Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf. Her major research interests include questions of gesture and gestural research (*Gestische Forschung. Praktiken und Perspektiven*, co-ed., Berlin, 2020; *Verhaltene Beredsamkeit? – Politik, Pathos und Philosophie der Geste*, ed., Frankfurt am Main, 2009), artistic practices of iteration (*Die Praxis der/des Echo. Zum Theater des Wiederhalls*, co-ed., Frankfurt am Main, 2015), and the relation between theatre, arts, and history/historiography (*Mind the Map! – History Is Not Given*, co-ed., Frankfurt am Main, 2006). Her further research and teaching focus on theatre in societies in transformation, theatrical research on foreignness/strangeness (Fremdheitsforschung), theatre and age(ing), biography and narration in theatre, dance, and performance, theatre and/of things and “scenes of obstinacy.” Contact: darian@uni-leipzig.de.

#### Abstract

The study takes Bertolt Brecht’s short story *The Job or By the Sweat of Thy Brow Shalt Thou Fail to Earn Thy Bread* (Der Arbeitsplatz oder Im Schweiß Deines Angesichts sollst Du kein Brot essen) from 1933 as a starting point to discuss matters of gender and class between the two World Wars in Germany. Brecht refers to a true and characteristic event of that time when a woman was forced to take over her husband’s working place after his death, unrecognized, in order to ensure the survival of her family. She becomes a man in all her habits and attitudes in public as in private situations, but society perceives her as a “monstrosity” – not least because of her/him pointing to socio-political difficulties and economic challenges of these times by undermining social and gender affiliations. The different (re)presentations and narratives of the same story – on the one hand by the two authors Bertolt Brecht and Anna Seghers, on the other by the sensation-seeking yellow press – refer to the socio-political explosiveness of the attribution of gender roles within the framework of economic realities. Especially in Brecht’s version, artistic strategies of estrangement (Verfremdung) are used for this purpose, focusing on the figure of the woman which turns out to be alienated even in two ways – firstly by the inhuman economic circumstances, secondly by an unpitying, unemphatic society.

Keywords: Bertolt Brecht, Gender change, Labour, Der Arbeitsplatz, The Job, Anna Seghers, Estrangement, Verfremdung, Alienation, Gender roles, Narrativity, Intertextuality, Socio-politics, Class

Anders Carlsson –  
Alice Koubová –  
Kent Sjöström

## *Buying Brass.*

## A Method Re-Examined