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A THEATRE WITHOUT ACTORS

> "But everyone who is in favor of a living theatre will no longer be in favor of the Volksbühne."[1]

When Tim Renner, then secretary of state for cultural affairs in Berlin, announced in March 2015 that Frank Castorf's term as artistic director of the Volksbühne would end in 2017, his reasoning was clear. After twenty-five years, it was time to "develop the Volksbühne further," to "rethink" where this storied theatre would go next.[2] As the agent of change, Renner had identified Chris Dercon, then still director of London's Tate Modern—a highly regarded museum director with decades of experience as a curator, and none as a theatre maker.

That the Volksbühne urgently needed a makeover, that the theatre had lost its ability to reconceive itself in the last years of Castorf's directorship, was not a self-evidently compelling notion. Castorf himself, easily Germany's most influential director through the 1990s and the early 2000s, had survived years of critical failures from about 2005 and had found his way back to his old anarchic strength with a string of remarkable productions after 2011—but the Volksbühne had always been more than Castorf's theatre. In the years immediately preceding Renner's announcement, Herbert Fritsch, who was one of the ensemble's brightest stars in the 1990s and had reinvented himself as a director in the 2010s, staged a number of enormously acclaimed and popular shows at the Volksbühne; René Pollesch continued to go from strength to strength; and Christoph Marthaler still made Castorf's theatre his home in Berlin, similarly without real signs of artistic exhaustion. The Volksbühne staged experiments in opera (directed by Fritsch, Pollesch, and David Marton), it continued a decades-long engagement with dance theatre (most recently, as in Castorf's early days, under the direction of Johann Kresnik), and it regularly collaborated with independent artists' collectives

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such as Gob Squad. Bert Neumann, the resident stage designer who had been associated with the theatre since the early 1990s, and who was no less responsible for its aesthetics than was Castorf himself, was as much of a creative force in 2015 as before—certainly the final design he devised before his untimely death three months after Renner's pronouncement transformed the theatre's space as radically as any of his earlier works. Removing all the regular seating, he installed a vast expanse of asphalt in the auditorium, level with the stage edge at the front and rising in a gentle slope to the back of the house. Originally intended as the design for Castorf's *Brothers Karamazov*, it remained in place as a semipermanent memorial to Neumann for the entire final season. Finally, unlike in the mid-2000s, there was no indication that the theatre was any less of a draw for actors than in Castorf's early years: longtime stars, including Sophie Rois, Kathrin Angerer, Milan Peschel, and Martin Wuttke, had returned to its stage in recent years; others had risen to fame in the last decade, such as Marc Hosemann, Alexander Scheer, Fabian Hinrichs, and Lilith Stangenberg. Nothing about the Volksbühne in 2015 suggested that this was a theatre in aesthetic decline.

As the new leadership set up transition offices in 2016, though, it became clear that the "rethinking" Renner had promised was going to involve a radical transformation. At a first meeting with the theatre's entire staff, Dercon and his head of programming, Marietta Piekenbrock, could not identify a single play they were considering for their opening season, mentioning instead a number of dance productions. They admitted that they had not taken serious steps toward building an ensemble of their own.[3] That first impression proved accurate when Dercon announced the program for 2017–18: a season comprised primarily of dance pieces, mostly imported from elsewhere, and a total of at most three original productions that would qualify as *Sprechtheater*—the spoken-word theatre that remains the core of the German theatrical repertoire.[4] Piekenbrock had intimated at the staff meeting that such performances would not disappear from the Volksbühne, but would no longer be the "central pillar" of its work. By late 2017, she pronounced that assembling an ensemble of actors made little sense given the kind of programming she and Dercon were considering: "a multidisciplinary program with an international orientation" was incompatible, she argued, with the long-term agreements on which ensemble systems rely.[5]

Piekenbrock was spelling out the organizational consequences of Dercon's vision for the new Volksbühne: a venue he described as "a new kind of hybrid creature," a place that would offer "different artistic disciplines a chance to find new theatrical forms." What Dercon envisioned was "a kind of not postdramatic theatre, but a metadramatic theatre, where all the arts are invited to use the space, to use our workshops, to think through theatrical form."[6] Curiously, however, such a rethinking of theatrical form apparently does not require performers with long-term contracts. To Dercon's mind, "ensemble" should not narrowly refer to a group of actors, but rather ought to include "musicians, dancers, experimental artists, and directors, too." From that perspective, the choreographer Boris Charmatz and the director Susanne Kennedy, who at other German theatres might hold positions as resident artists or directors, "naturally are part of our ensemble."[7]

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The word, in Dercon's usage, severed from its institutional and professional meaning, is reduced to its etymology: a mere synonym for people working together.

The dissolution of the Volksbühne's ensemble and network of frequently returning actors has attracted much negative media attention, but it may not have been the most radical step Dercon and Piekenbrock took: they also disbanded the Volksbühne's dramaturgy department. Of the theatre's seven full-time dramaturgs, they retained only one (who had tenure, since she had been at the Volksbühne for almost thirty years). Instead, the theatre's team now includes programmers for visual arts, film, and "text"—a position occupied by a former art magazine editor. Virtually none of the shows listed in this year's program identify production dramaturgs. The new Volksbühne thus has become the *only* major theatre in Germany that is operating without a permanent staff tasked with thinking about theatre *and* without a permanent ensemble of performers tasked with giving that thinking concrete form on a stage.

It is difficult to overstate how drastic a departure from institutional tradition this is. It was the German-speaking theatre world, after all, that gave birth to both the idea of ensemble acting and to the profession of the dramaturg—and in modern German theatre, all publicly funded houses, even the most provincial ones, have dramaturgy departments as well as groups of actors on at least yearlong contracts. In dispensing with both, the Volksbühne's leadership does not just signal a break with established structures; it implies that for theatre to be properly rethought, the rethinking needs to be done by people without prior involvement in the making of theatre. By extension, it implies that there is no difference between artists in other disciplines experimenting with "theatrical form" in nontheatrical settings and the history, tradition, and present practice of theatrical forms themselves. What is lost, alongside experts in conceptual and practical theatre work, is a sense of what makes theatre *different* from the other arts: a sense of what justifies the existence of a building with a vast stage and a large auditorium, and a sense of what discipline-specific skills and techniques are required to make such a space work.

Paradoxically, Dercon has paired this dismissive attitude toward discipline specificity with an ostensible commitment to reconnecting the Volksbühne to theatre history—to reinventing "repertory" as a museum of "iconic pieces of theatrical . . . history."[8] In interviews, he has lamented the disappearance of the theatrical past: "everything that happened in the '70s and '80s seems to have been forgotten. . . . It is very important to confront a younger audience not just with experiments, but with the theatre of the past—because that seems to have just vanished."[9] Piekenbrock has coined the phrase "radical repertory" for this turn to historical productions, a move she casts as a rejection of a "cultlike devotion to the new" that she sees as typical of much German theatre, and that

> often goes hand in hand with a loss of what was yesterday. We explicitly want to position ourselves in opposition to that, and ask, what ideas of the classic avant-garde could play a special role for our artists and audiences. We want to use the term "repertory," which literally means "site of discovery," after all, in a way that will allow us to develop an inventory of modernism and

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> investigate what of that work could be relevant for us today. . . . We'll decide on a case by case basis which pieces of theatre history can be made contemporary and brought back to the stage: as model productions, reconstructions, pastiches, or through a rereading.[10]

"Rereadings" are an essential part of any German theatre's programming: no repertory is made up of new works alone. But such rereadings rarely (if ever) transport the work of the past without transforming it into contemporary theatre. Dercon apparently hopes for a more faithful transfer of historical pieces into the present: "unlike art history, theatre history is often lacking in detail. For the most part, there are no documents, no filmed record. To us, repertory also means making the attempt to narrate history. To bring back artistic approaches that haven't been fully digested yet."[11]

As anyone can attest who has bothered visiting the (*pace* Dercon) extraordinarily rich archives of Berlin's theatres, including those of the Volksbühne, German theatre maintains an unusually strong connection to its past. In fact, it is part of a dramaturg's professional responsibility to research and produce accounts of previous productions of plays, and copies of those summaries are often found in the many hundreds of binders of production documentations held at the archive of Berlin's Akademie der Künste. The Volksbühne also maintained a near-complete collection of video recordings of shows staged there over the past twenty-five years. And on the stage, too, few theatre cultures are better at keeping at least some productions alive for as long as the German repertory system can. Although it is an extreme outlier, Heiner Müller's *Arturo Ui*, with Martin Wuttke in the title role, still remains in rep at the Berliner Ensemble, twenty-three years after its first performance in 1995. Dimiter Gotscheff's remarkable staging of Chekhov's *Ivanov*, first performed at the Volksbühne in 2005, was not dropped from the repertory until 2015. In almost all major theatres, productions commonly retain their place in the repertory for two or three years.

It is therefore in the nature of repertory theatre as it is practiced in Germany to counteract the stage's rapacious appetite for new work. The only contexts in which theatrical productions have longer lives are the commercial worlds of Broadway and the West End, where nothing is more desirable than shows that can run unchanged for years on end—and the world of dance theatre, with its set choreographies. The latter appears to be the model Dercon and Piekenbrock have in mind, which is why one of the productions featuring prominently in their current program is Jérôme Bel's *The Show Must Go On*. This piece, first devised in 2000 and enjoying a long run on the international touring circuit since then, performed by a different cast of (usually) amateur dancers every time it is staged, was not even rehearsed under Bel's supervision at the Volksbühne—but there is nothing unusual in that. Nor, needless to say, is there anything unusual in the reappearance of a major work of dance in the sometimes distant aftermath of its first staging: Pina Bausch's works still enjoy a rich theatrical life, after all, years after her death; some of Bel's other pieces are also regularly being restaged, including in Berlin. It is normal, in the world of dance, for productions to be revived, disconnected from their point of origin, by different

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performers, while still being considered "the same" productions. The same is true in musical theatre. But there is practically no equivalent to such a practice in the world of *Sprechtheater*—in Germany or elsewhere.

If there is a kind of theatre that comes close to dance's condition of reproducibility, it is Beckett's—especially in his late work. Predictably, he is the single dramatist either Dercon or Piekenbrock have mentioned in any of their interviews; and an evening of short Beckett pieces was part of the event with which they opened the Volksbühne's main stage in October 2017. Directed by the playwright's former assistant Walter Asmus, the triptych of *Not I*, *Footfalls*, and *Eh, Joe* may have *felt* like a faithful re-creation of Beckett's original productions. In fact, they were contemporary stagings, in German, performed by a contemporary actor (Anne Tismer) whose vocal patterns in *Not I* certainly did not mimic Billie Whitelaw's in the version directed by Beckett in 1973; the text had been trimmed; and the figure of "the Auditor" was also absent from Asmus's production. Presenting these plays on the vast stage of the Volksbühne, in front of an auditorium with more than eight hundred seats, drastically affected their impact, too: visually, this was a very different production from the one audiences saw at the Royal Court in London. As many reviews attest, Tismer's mouth in *Not I* became unrecognizable a few rows back, with the performance reading as an audio track playing in the dark.[12]

If the rationale for including these short plays in the opening season appears to be that Beckett can be revisited or reproduced with minimal historical distortion (whatever that may actually mean), the erasure of the actor's body also seems programmatic. It is announced, counterfactually, in the Volksbühne's description of the production: "On the completely dark stage of *Not I* (1972) no actors are present. Only a spotlit mouth, ejecting a breathless inferno of words. The piece is considered one of the most innovative in theatre history: a visionary bridge to performance art." Tismer is no more absent from the stage in this production than Billie Whitelaw was in the 1970s, or Lisa Dwan in the English-language version of Asmus's staging that has been touring internationally since 2005. But identifying the disappearance of the actor as what is "innovative" about Beckett's play fits well with the overall vision of the Volksbühne's new leadership: a theatre that realizes the "visionary" potential of *Not I* in collapsing theatre into performance art. A theatre that can make do without "actors" altogether. In Susanne Kennedy's *Women in Trouble*, which opened in November 2017, individual performers are rendered indistinguishable underneath latex masks; they move their lips, but the sound is prerecorded. If liveness remains the base condition of theatre, here, even more than in Beckett's pieces, the feat is to make life appear as lifeless as possible. Movements of mouths are uncoupled from speech, the aural rhythm of the performance protected from the unpredictability of the human voice and body. Bodies are still present, and they need to be skilled bodies, too: they need to be able, after all, to move their lips in time with the prerecorded sound. But that skill is being employed entirely in the service of a director's work, with no individual artistic autonomy on the performers' part.

Both in this use of actors and in their attitude to theatre history, Dercon and Piekenbrock think as curators rather than as theatre practitioners: productions can

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exist independent of the bodies that make them; shows can be recovered from the past, examined and reproduced, as if they were objects rather than events unfolding in space and time, one individual and irreducible performance at a time. In and of itself, this application of a curatorial perspective to an art that everywhere resists curation would merely be a curiosity—if it were not for the fact that their vision is displacing a theatre that centrally relied on the autonomy of its actors, and that derived much of its energy from a rigorous and aggressive engagement with political, literary, and theatrical history.

What makes Dercon's belief that "everything that happened in the '70s and '80s seems to have been forgotten" so particularly odd in the context of an interview about the Volksbühne is that few theatres have returned more obsessively to those decades than Castorf's. Castorf himself seems almost incapable of directing anything without engaging in some way with Heiner Müller; Müller's *Der Auftrag*, which he directed at Anklam in 1983, remains a constant reference point in his work. He even turned to Beckett in his first years at the Volksbühne, staging a long weekend of "Beckett Late Nights" as the opening celebration of his second season, which featured his productions of *Catastrophe* and *Rough for Theatre I*.[13] Also part of that event: Herbert Fritsch's first outing as a director. The play? *Not I*. The same occasion began his decades-long effort of rethinking the legacy of surrealism and Dada, with a staging of short pieces by Daniil Kharms.[14] After 2011, Fritsch pursued that project primarily at the Volksbühne. His vastly successful and critically acclaimed *Murmel Murmel* (in rep from 2012 to 2017) gave theatrical form to a seemingly unstageable "play" published by the Fluxus artist Dieter Roth in 1974 (176 pages filled with repetitions of that one word, "murmel"—"mumble"); his 2015 *der die mann* was built from 1950s and 1960s Dadaist texts by Konrad Bayer. And although Pollesch's work is not in as close dialogue with the 1970s or 1980s, it has been shaped by a tireless working through the Brechtian heritage; it is difficult to think of a theatre maker who has taken the *Lehrstücke* more seriously, and his plays frequently riff on and allude to Brechtian stage tropes.

Pollesch's engagement with Brecht, though, is informed by a rather different sense of how theatre encounters its own history than Dercon's. Far from believing that plays, let alone performances, of the past can be resurrected, he argues that *only* actors connected to the text's point of origin can really bring it to life. Impressed with a video clip of Therese Giehse's 1971 performance in Peter Stein's production of *The Mother*, he reasoned that its power derived from Giehse's biography as a "Brecht player"—"nowadays, no one is able to make the text happen like that anymore." "I only hear the text if the players rewrite it in their own particular way, not when they plod their way through the score and swear devotion to it. When I hear Therese Giehse, it's become her text and not Brecht's." Making "texts happen" depends on "bodies that can play them"[15] —and once those bodies are gone, the text's ability to live on a stage disappears with them.

Pollesch is an exception among Volksbühne artists in his attitude to texts from the past (Castorf has a very different attitude: "With classics, it's my duty to conjure up their original anarchic potential").[16] But he is not exceptional in his understanding of what actors do. Where he sees Brecht as an intellectual

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ally is in their shared conviction that actors "need to take responsibility" rather than "submitting to the text as an authority"; they both believe in the "emancipatory power of playing."[17] This sense of the actor as an autonomous, empowered participant in the theatrical process is a historical constant over the Volksbühne's past twenty-five years, and it explains why Pollesch found the idea, apparently proposed by Dercon, of organizing a "retrospective" of his plays patently ridiculous: "it's as if he thinks I own a blueprint and all I need to do is slot the people in."[18] There may not be a playwright further removed from this model than Pollesch, though, who has long been adamant that every one of his texts is composed in the rehearsal room, in direct response to what works and does not work for that particular cast, in that particular moment. His actors do not make up the words, but they can reject them or reshuffle them; and any given play only achieves the effects it does with the cast that cocreated it. (Although he publishes his texts, Pollesch does not allow them to be staged by other directors or companies.)

Herbert Fritsch finds a striking image for what made the theatre work under Castorf: "this Volksbühne project was or is really a power station, a human power station, and the actors on its stage are the fuel rods."[19] Given the overwhelming focus of scholarship and media attention on directors as the shaping influence on this theatre (and on German theatre in general), this may come as a surprise, but Fritsch insists on it as a distinguishing feature of the Castorf directorship from the start. Carl Hegemann, who worked as a dramaturg there, on and off from 1992 until 2017, confirms the paradoxical structure of the company: "it was a rigidly hierarchic place, with a Stalin-like figure at the top, but where everyone did whatever they wanted without fear. And not only that: there was an explicit desire for everyone to do what they wanted and to take responsibility for their work."[20] The actors themselves attest to the same principle. Bernhard Schütz describes the Volksbühne as a place where "difference was desired and wasn't simply allowed, but encouraged. That there was room for subjectivity was a key element of our work." Performers were not simply expected to submit to different directors' expectations and needs: "At the Volksbühne, you're actually mostly allowed to remain autonomous. Without autonomy, this place wouldn't work at all."[21] Sophie Rois notes that Castorf has "no interest in disciplining a recalcitrant actor"—instead, from the earliest days, "we could always work in self-determined fashion."[22] And Alexander Scheer identifies that very recalcitrance as a central feature of the Volksbühne's ensemble: "this is a collection of very, very idiosyncratic people. We are so profoundly different in what we bring to the game. If someone drops out, those scenes need to be completely restaged."[23]

On the one hand, that irreducible difference was a source of conflict that Castorf actively encouraged, even stoked: in the last year of his directorship, multiple broadcasts featured a scene recorded during the dress rehearsal of his *Judith* in which he was seen screaming at his actors, lecturing them about the mismatch of their "mouse brains" (*Mäusehirne*) and the sublime quality of the text they were butchering.[24] It is also evident that working at the Volksbühne, whether with Pollesch's exceptionally dense, long, and loopy texts, or with Castorf's extraordinarily willful rehearsal methods, was exhausting for everyone involved. Castorf's methods are designed to demand too much of his actors: scenes are usually

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rehearsed only once; he commonly reads the text out loud using a microphone, especially when working on adaptations of novels, throwing lines to the actors who pick them up on the fly; final decisions about what might or might not be included are not made until the day a show opens; at most, there is one complete run before opening. "That," as the actor Robert Hunger-Bühler reports, "is how he always rehearses. Every slight effort to practice something or repeat it gets torpedoed. Everything is always done once only. He utterly hates theatre rehearsed to death."[25] But in demanding that his actors take every possible risk to fail, Castorf also utterly relies on them to make the show work. Scheer describes the exhilarating effect of this kind of theatre: "Nothing is produced artificially here: the overexertion is real, and the exhaustion too. States of being are just there, you don't need to play them anymore. You're real. You don't perform the show —the show performs you."[26] As Schütz notes, this kind of effort is impossible to pull off individually: "no matter who in the ensemble I'm playing with, I can rely on them to offer me something if I'm not fully alert in a given moment, or if I can't figure out what to do. They pass you the ball in a way that you can immediately respond and don't have to do a lot of thinking. Those actorly offers are so strong here that you can instantly connect back up."[27] And Marc Hosemann insists that it requires the ultimate professionalism to do what Castorf demands of them: "you have to be fearless. To step onto the stage on opening night and do something you've never done before . . . that's not child's play, it demands total concentration. And it creates a kind of liveness that is unique to the theatre."[28]

Castorf's theatre, then, pushes the truism that every show is "different every night" to an extreme. In depending entirely on the actors' physical, emotional, and intellectual ability to pull his (often very long) productions together on the night, he delegates an uncommon degree of responsibility to them. The exceptional pressure he puts them under becomes manageable only because they are also given near-total freedom. Actors, as Joachim Fiebach has argued, "are the privileged and central element of [Castorf's] stagings"—but they are also constantly placed in confrontational, even uncomfortable situations in order to challenge them to play.[29]

This principle of a collaboration fueled by conflict animated the entire theatre throughout Castorf's directorship. It affected not simply the relationship between directors and actors, but that between designers and directors, and between the creative staff and production personnel as well. From the start, Bert Neumann worked largely autonomously, sometimes creating sets that posed nearly insurmountable challenges to his directors. As Schütz reports, Castorf first began using live video when Neumann built a set (for the Tennessee Williams adaptation *Endstation Amerika*) featuring an interior bathroom that was invisible to the audience—and since the designer refused to open the space up, the director was forced to come up with an alternative solution that would come to redefine his stage work for the next decade: "a lot of developments were the result of conflicts like this. It wasn't really about concepts."[30] In Henry Hübchen 's account, the director and cast spent ten days staring at the perplexing set, unable to figure out what to do with it until, on the eleventh day, a

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camera appeared—and from then on, larger and larger screens became regular features of Neumann's designs.[31]

The contrast between this vision of theatrical creation and the vague outline visible in Dercon and Piekenbrock's pronouncements could not be starker. On the one hand, a notion that productions can be curated and reproduced; on the other, a mode of working that insists on theatre as a phenomenon of the moment, repeatable to a degree, but entirely dependent on context and on a specific set of performers and circumstances. On the one hand, a sense that the theatre should be a venue for visiting artists, a place that can provide services and support, but is not devoted to a particular art form or set of professional skills or practices; on the other, a vision of a theatre strictly hierarchically organized but constantly collapsing those hierarchies, a collective of creative workers struggling and collaborating with each other, at a high level of specific competence and to a point of exhaustion, engaged in a fierce conquest to produce something compelling, something interesting, something perhaps new. On the one hand, an understanding of performance that can envisage a director's return to the "roots" of the theatre thus: "she masks her actors and plays recorded texts as voice-overs, combatting the presence that makes the stage so weighty and, at the right moment, demonstrating that the ritual of theatre can still tell us everything after 2500 years."[32] On the other, a theatre that insists on the irreducible reality and autonomy of the actor's individual body and voice, on a stage, in front of an audience, and defines itself as a heterotopia for performers: "at the Volksbühne, actors are people who have their own meaning, their own language, their own individuality, and carry themselves autonomously without a director pulling their strings every move. This is a space for people like that."[33] Both are visions, ideas, idealized concepts certainly corresponding at most imperfectly to the reality of working at or attending the two versions of the Volksbühne. Neither is inherently politically or aesthetically more progressive than the other.[34] But one is grounded in a century-old vision of a building made for (and by) "the people";[35] the other is disconnected from that history and from the institutional traditions and structures on which it nevertheless continues to rely. Inevitably, though, that disconnect itself is now part of the Volksbühne's developing history.

ENDNOTES

1. Bertolt Brecht, "Tendenz der Volksbühne: Reine Kunst" (1927), in *Bertolt Brecht: Werke: Große Kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe,* 30 vols., ed. Werner Hecht et al. (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag and Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988–2000), 21 (1992): 195–6, at 196.

2. Quoted in Jürgen Balitzki, "Die Demontage des Räuberrads," radio feature for *Deutschlandfunk*, transcript of a broadcast from 21 July 2017, 7, *www.deutschlandfunk.de/21-07-2017-das-feature-demontage-des-rauberrads-die-letzten.media.599cab57604fa2d6be829-dace2d8a4d9.pdf*, accessed 6 January 2018. All translations are my own.

3. An audio recording of the meeting is available at *https://soundcloud.com/t-fischer/irgendwo-ist-etwas-schief-gelaufen-mit-die-agendas*, accessed 6 January 2018.

4. For an analysis of that program, see my "How to Kill a Great Theatre: The Tragedy of the Volksbühne," 20 May 2017, *www.dispositio.net/archives/2452*, accessed 6 January 2018.

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5. Ulrich Seidler, "Programmchefin über Vorwürfe: 'Die Volksbühne ist eines der freiesten Theater,'" *Berliner Zeitung,* 13 December 2017, www.berliner-zeitung.de/29287672, accessed 6 January 2018.

6. Chris Dercon, "Wir sind ein neuartiges Mischwesen," interview with Barbara Behrendt, *Deutschlandfunk*, broadcast of 28 December 2017, at 7:42–8:40, www.deutschlandfunk.de/volksbuehnen-intendant-chris-dercon-wir-sind-ein-neuartiges.911.de.html?dram%3Aarticle_id=406833, accessed 6 January 2018.

7. Ibid., at 10:50–11:22.

8. Chris Dercon and Marietta Piekenbrock, "Partikel," in *Volksbühne Berlin: I want to be free—Programm 2017/18*, ed. Timo Feldhaus (Berlin: Volksbühne Berlin, 2017), 104–15, at 113.

9. Dercon, interview with Behrendt, at 4:55–5:21.

10. Jürgen Kaube, Kolja Reichert, and Simon Strauss, "Interview mit Chris Dercon: Unser Theater soll eine Schule des Befremdens sein," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* 20 December 2016, www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buehne-und-konzert/chris-decron-gibt-auskunft-ueber-programm-fuer-berliner-volksbuehne-14584652.html, accessed 6 January 2018 (Permalink: http://www.faz.net/-gs3-8oll8).

11. Ibid.

12. See Dirk Pilz, "Chris Dercons Volksbühne: Große Gesten, wenig Gehalt," *Berliner Zeitung,* 12 November 2017, www.berliner-zeitung.de/kultur/theater/chris-dercons-volksbuehne-grosse-gesten–wenig-gehalt-28831016, accessed 6 January 2018; Christine Dössel, "Die Volksbühne atmet mehr den Geist eines Museums als den eines Theaters," *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* 13 November 2017, www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/theater-die-volksbuehne-atmet-mehr-den-geist-eines-museums-als-den-eines-theaters-1.3746007, accessed 6 January 2018; Daniele Muscionico, "Zurück zu den Vätern," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* 15 November 2017, www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/zurueck-zu-den-vaetern-ld.1328555, accessed 6 January 2018.

13. It is true that Beckett has not been a mainstay of the Volksbühne's repertory since the early 1990s, but that does not explain Dercon's apparent sense that Beckett has been forgotten in Berlin, and that "young audiences" only got to "rediscover" his work when that triptych of short plays made their appearance in October (as he claimed in the interview with Barbara Behrendt). Both *Waiting for Godot* (at the Deutsches Theater, since 2014) and *Endgame* (at the Berliner Ensemble, since 2016) are currently in other Berlin theatres' repertories, and the DT *Godot* was one of ten "most remarkable" productions nationwide to be invited to the 2015 Theatertreffen. If Dercon and Piekenbrock want to reconnect to a lost theatrical avant-garde, they might have to dig a little deeper. A dramaturgy department would normally help with that.

14. For more details, see the archived website of Castorf's Volksbühne, at https://volksbuehne.adk.de/deutsch/volksbuehne/archiv/spielzeitchronik/1990_bis_2000/index.html, accessed 6 January 2018.

15. René Pollesch, "Die Volksbühne als Haus des Dritten," in *Republik Castorf: Die Berliner Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz seit 1992*, ed. Frank Raddatz (Berlin: Alexander, 2016), 277–301, at 285–6.

16. "Neues und gebrauchtes Theater," in *1992–2017: Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz—Fotoalbum*, ed. Thomas Aurin, Carl Hegemann, and Raban Witt (Berlin: Alexander, 2017), n.p.

17. Pollesch, 286, 294.

18. Lydia Dykier and Jakob Gerber, *NADRYW: Die Volksbühne als letzte Realität (Kurze Fassung)*, documentary film, 2017, at 54:58; www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CA9r6KnwL4, accessed 6 January 2018.

19. Herbert Fritsch, "Ein Haus mit einer manisch-depressiven Grundstruktur," in *Republik Castorf*, 303–21, at 312.

20. Carl Hegemann, "Castorfs Bucharin," in *Republik Castorf*, 213–31, at 223.

21. Bernhard Schütz, "Das Wichtigste ist, dass alle Schauspieler Verantwortung übernehmen," in *Republik Castorf*, 201–11, at 209. The history of Castorf's artistic directorship is studded with anecdotes about new directors coming to the Volksbühne for a single production only to fail in their efforts

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to shape the ensemble to their expectations. This difficulty in establishing new collaborations is the flip side of the (positive) narrative that portrays the Volksbühne as a house where exceptionally long-lasting relationships between directors and actors could flourish.

22. Sophie Rois, "Wer ist das, vor dem man sich da ausbreitet?" in *Republik Castorf*, 127–37, at 127, 130.

23. Alexander Scheer, "Das gefährlichste Theater der Welt," in *Republik Castorf*, 139–57, at 151.

24. Discussed in exhaustive detail in the comments section after Wolfgang Behrens, "Das Prinzip Mann," *Nachtkritik,* 20 January 2016, *http://nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12037:judith-an-der-berliner-volksbuehne-baut-frank-castorf-mit-prominenter-unterstuetzung-aus-friedrich-hebbels-drama-und-viel-fremdgeraune-einen-fuenfstuender&catid=42&Itemid=100476*, accessed 6 January 2018.

25. Robert Hunger-Bühler, "Tobende Ordnung," in *Castorf: Arbeitsbuch 2016*, ed. Dorte Lena Eilers, Thomas Irmer, and Harald Müller (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2016), 126–7, at 126.

26. Scheer, 145.

27. Schütz, 208.

28. *NADRYW*, at 46:38.

29. Joachim Fiebach, "Stanford Lecture: Das Theater Frank Castorfs," in *Castorf: Arbeitsbuch 2016*, 134–39, at 136–7.

30. Schütz, 210–11.

31. Quoted in Balitzki, 9.

32. Susanne Kennedy, "Women in Trouble," in *Volksbühne Berlin: I want to be free*, 39–42, at 42.

33. Lilith Stangenberg, "Es muss brennen!" in *Republik Castorf*, 177–87, at 184.

34. One could easily begin to question the supposed political radicalism of Castorf's Volksbühne by asking why so very few of its productions over a quarter of a century were directed by women, for instance.

35. As the inscription over the Volksbühne's front doors read before the building was heavily damaged in WWII: "Die Kunst dem Volke!"—"Art for the people!"

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