Tragic Effects
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Published by The Ohio State University Press


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Ruined Theater

Adaptation and Responsibility in Brecht’s Antigonemodell


In fact it seems that the primary effect of a production like mine today is to tear down and ruin as much of the theater as possible.

Known, don’t know, over known
day after day, moon after moon,
overfull, pain after pain,
horrors of hate abate not
ever.¹

B E R T O L T B R E C H T returned in late 1947 to a shattered Europe. To a Europe in which memory would be forced to bear the “horrors of hate,” in which art would have to confront incessantly the contours of that hatred and to place itself at odds with a tainted history. In 1947, to be sure, art could do little else. A mere five years after Heidegger had insisted on the concurrent flow, the Zwiesprache of poetry and history evidenced in Hölderlin’s Dichtung der Ströme, their dialogue had been irrevocably changed, leaving irruption and discord as the artist’s only tenable position. For the dramatist returning out of fifteen years of exile, that rupture expressed itself in an existential as well as an aesthetic register. Even Brecht’s initial overtures towards a post-war, divided Germany required an intermediary, Switzerland,

that maintained (however questionably) its own status as neutral bystander; likewise, even his first commissioned production for the Berlin theater, *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*, required the intervention of another theatrical vehicle in order to come to fruition.

That supplemental production, conceived as a second role for Helene Weigel during rehearsals for the lead in *Mutter Courage*, was a new adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* as translated by Hölderlin. It was hardly a rousing success in its first incarnation; the production closed a mere four weeks after its premiere at the Stadttheater in Chur in January 1948. Yet the materials Brecht generated out of that initial production—beyond his rendering of the play itself, a visual and textual record consisting of script, photography, sketches, and commentary collectively published in 1949 as the *Antigonemodell*—have maintained an intriguing afterlife as an example of critical debate over the function and practice of modern theater. In December 1947, Brecht outlined his objectives for this project in typically irreverent fashion: “In fact it seems that the primary effect of a production like mine today is to tear down and ruin as much of the theater as possible.”(AJ 797) But what does it mean to “ruin” theater, precisely in the moment in which the rest of the world is occupied with picking up the pieces? What is at stake for Brecht—embittered by years of exile and dismayed by post-war Germany’s reticence with respect to the recent past—in positing the idea of a theater in ruins?

On a very superficial level, it would be immediately possible to say that Brecht’s *Antigone* “ruins” its source text twice over, insofar as the play is situated at some distance from the plot and structure of both Sophocles’ drama and Hölderlin’s translation. Yet elements of Sophoclean and Hölderlinian drama prove effective nevertheless in producing an essentially Brechtian text, and not only in the sense of the anti-Aristotelian epic theater. By adapting a text steeped in classical tradition (again, twice over—the Greek and the German) Brecht weaves a sense of historicity directly into the fabric of the text, not merely by bringing the material into the present day but by showing the process by which stories are recorded and performed. In doing so, he allows both violence and its resistance to rise to the play’s surface on a structural level, making form resonate with the political themes of the piece.

This exposure of the process of “making history” takes tangible form in what Brecht calls the “Modell,” a collection of script, notes, photographs, and sketches that create a record of the play’s performative genesis and development. Beginning with initial rehearsals and extending potentially into infinity is a gathering of materials—in effect, a history—meant to serve as both an example and an impetus for future productions. In its multimedial
incarnation as the first installment in a planned series of Modelle, the Antigone represents for Brecht the genesis of a new “way of doing theater” (eine neue Spielweise) far more than it suggests a return to the dramatic stuff of ancient Greece. Brecht’s adaptation develops from a concept of translation as a quintessentially modern paradigm: his Antigonemodell blends the remains of a distant, even inaccessible aesthetic tradition with the novelty of modern methods of artistic production, effectively offering a prototype for translation in the age of technological reproducibility.

What this implies for Brecht’s work will prove not to be so distant from Benjamin’s discussion of the potential effects of the photographic image as mass medium in his essay The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility. For Brecht as for Benjamin, concepts such as authorship, immortality, and genius had been co-opted and thus corrupted by fascist ideology, leaving entirely unsettled—but also entirely open—any remaining possibilities for artistic production. By using photography alongside extensive textual commentary to record the ongoing adaptation of a “classic” play (not to mention a legendary translation), Brecht attempts to achieve the “shattering of tradition” that Benjamin sees in the decline of the primacy of the singular art work.2

Taken as a whole, then, Brecht’s Antigone des Sophokles marks an intriguing if little-examined moment in the development of a modern concept of tragedy, a moment of transition in which the classical text morphs into what Brecht describes as a “theater of the scientific age” (Theater des wissenschaftlichen Zeitalters). In its “through-rationalization” (Durchrationalisierung) through the lens of scientific inquiry, the concept of authorship will be more closely related for Brecht to the piecework of the assembly line than to the toils of the individual genius: “The modern division of labor has recast the idea of creativity in many significant areas . . . so that the isolated, original invention has lost significance” (Die moderne Arbeitsteilung [hat] auf vielen wichtigen Gebieten das Schöpferische umgeformt . . . so daß die isolierte ursprüngliche Erfindung an Bedeutung verloren hat [BFA 25: 76]). Embedding this challenge in his radical reformulation of tragedy—a genre whose founders had been revered literally for millennia—Brecht takes on the task

2. Interestingly enough, in a twist that leaves Brecht’s engagement with tragedy even more proximate to Benjamin’s essay, the consequence of this destructive moment for Benjamin will be nothing less than a new kind of catharsis. With respect to film as the “most powerful agent” (machtvoller Agent) of mass movements, Benjamin writes in the artwork essay: “Seine gesellschaftliche Bedeutung ist auch in ihrer positivsten Gestalt . . . nicht ohne diese seine destruktive, seine kathartische Seite denkbar: die Liquidierung des Traditionswertes am Kulturerbe.” Benjamin, GS I.2. 478 (The social significance of film, even—and especially—in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic side: the liquidation of the value of tradition in the cultural heritage [SW 4, 254])
of formulating the stakes of a theater in ruins. It is a project that demands a confrontation with the violence of literary and historical transformation, with the urgency implicit in the attempt to represent through art a history that has become unrepresentable. In a new “time of need” (dürftige Zeit), a time in which, as Hannah Arendt notes, Brecht struggled openly with the notion “that he felt himself unequal to the formidable task of being a poet in a time such as this,” both Antigone and the text she inhabits offer the expression par excellence of responsibility to the dead, to the signs of the past both written and unwritten, both remembered and forgotten.3

It was not his idea. Hans Curjel, director of the Stadttheater in Chur, had previously collaborated with Brecht in 1927 at the Kroll-Oper in Berlin and now offered him a choice of several pieces, including Macbeth and Racine’s Phaedra (BFA 8:489). Brecht opted for Antigone—Antigone in a new adaptation, the ancient Greek text reimagined in his own epic theatrical vision and recorded as both text and image in the photographs, sketches, and remarks that make up the Antigonemodell. Following the suggestion of his collaborator Caspar Neher, he chose Hölderlin’s translation as his German source.4 In opting for Antigone he joined a trend, most famously taken up at the time by the avant-garde dramatist Jean Anouilh, of adapting Greek tragedy in the context of anti-Fascist politics. Anouilh’s own Antigone (1945), which transformed the heroine essentially into a modern resistance fighter and Creon into a puppet of the totalitarian state, was markedly more successful than Brecht’s was in 1948, perhaps due to its wholly contemporary, thus more immediately accessible context.5 Brecht’s version is partly consistent with this overall inclination, for he also modified the details of Sophocles’ plot in ways that render its conflicts more contemporary: most notably, in his version the war in Argos has not yet ended, and Polynices

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rather than falling in battle with his brother) is a deserter whom Creon himself kills for failing to stand firm against the enemy; moreover, not only Polynices’ corpse is left to decompose in the open, but the bodies of all Argean soldiers are mutilated and left on the battlefield as well. Brecht also adds a prologue in the initial version that plainly aims to link the events of the tragedy to the present day: below a hand-lettered sign that reads “Berlin, April 1945, daybreak,” a scene plays in which a deserter is killed and strung up in front of his home, where his two sisters discover him and argue bitterly over whether to endanger their own lives by claiming his body.

Yet even as Brecht’s adaptation maintains a political stance unmistakably tied to the contemporary critique of power and its abuse, he also insists in his opening remarks on the ancient text’s essentially insuperable distance from any modern events whatsoever, despite superficial resemblances. In fact, it will be this distance that, in properly epic-theatrical fashion, helps to engender the Greek tragedy’s effect on a modern audience:

For the theatrical undertaking before us, the Antigone drama was chosen, because from a thematic standpoint it could achieve a certain currency and because it presented formally interesting tasks. With respect to its political material, to be sure, its analogies to the present emerged as more disadvantageous than originally thought: the great figure of resistance in the ancient drama does not represent the German resistance fighters, who must appear as most significant to us. Their poem could not be written here. . . . It will not be immediately clear to everyone that this play is not about those resistance fighters, and only those to whom it is clear will be able to muster the degree of foreignness necessary to see with profit (mit Gewinn) that which is worth seeing in this Antigone play: namely, the role played by the assertion of power in the disintegration of the state. (BFA 25:74; my emphasis)

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6. This is implicitly true of Sophocles’ version as well, where in line 10 Antigone refers to the treatment of philoi as enemies, indicating that all have been left unburied (ton echtrôn kaka, “that evils belonging to (proper for) our enemies are coming upon our friends” [Jebb 1.10]). However, that implication is not emphasized in Hölderlin’s translation; Antigone speaks merely of the “enemy’s ills” (Feindesübel) that have befallen the “dear ones” (die Lieben), without suggesting that the enemies have been treated likewise (FA 16: 265).

7. See Wilfried Barner’s account of the project’s development from a complete transformation of the Greek source to an engagement with its mythic content; he argues that Brecht’s early interest in rendering the story current by showing the effects of political resistance ultimately proves untenable, leading Brecht, through a “process of working-through and testing-out” (Prozeß des Erarbeitsens und Erprobens), to call this knee-jerk connection to the present into question [192f.]. Barner, “‘Durchrationalisierung’ des Mythos? zu Bertolt Brechts ‘Antigonemodell 1948,’” Zeitgenossenschaft: zur deutschsprachigen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert: Festschrift für Egon Schwarz zum 65. Geburtstag (Frankfurt a.M. 1987), 192f.

8. “Für das vorliegende theatralische Unternehmen wurde das Antigonodrama ausgewählt, weil
The “poem” dedicated to German resistance could not be written in the end over the abiding marks of Antigone’s own resistance, of her defiant refusal to allow a brother to depart from this earth unburied and unmourned. Although Brecht’s and Neher’s original goal had been a contemporary recasting of the play’s representation of resistance, that actualization has met with its own resistance. As a result, the tragic text remains detached from the new and rooted in a particular history that will likewise not go gently in the transformation to contemporaneity; for Brecht the text itself in its ancient form resists such transformation, and it is precisely this resistance that helps to generate an alienating effect on the audience. That critical element which for Brecht makes the play “worth seeing”—its enactment of both the abuse of power and its resistance in a moment of political crisis—will thus extend to the formal process of adaptation itself and its assumption of a certain defiance for the sake of the ancient text it references. While the content of the tragedy resists its potentially new configuration into a version of modern-day events, its formal demands will model a new “way of doing theater” that takes into account the ruined landscape in which dramatic art will have to situate itself. Insofar as the “profit” to be procured from theatrical representation rests in the viewer’s capacity to take note of that which is “worth seeing,” moreover, that Spielweise will be integrally linked to the economy of seeing that Brecht attempts to distill and reproduce in the photographic images of his Modell. Seeing theater—and seeing, in turn, precisely how theater is constructed as an event—makes possible not only a critical understanding of the aesthetic space but a new ethico-historical awareness as well.

What Brecht describes in his introductory remarks to the Antigonemodell as the desire to slake the vague “thirst for the new” (Durst nach Neuem) in post-war European culture represents for him nothing more than an over-determined response to the “fear of the return of the old” (Furcht vor der Rückkehr des Alten), which might refer to the dread of memories returning as well as of history repeating itself (BFA 25: 73). The task of a “theater of the scientific age” will lie in this double confrontation with the past and the apprehension that accompanies its remembrance; in short, it must call
into question how history is to be remembered. As he writes in his Kleines Organon für das Theater, written in 1948 just after the Chur production of the Antigone, “stories can be told very differently” (Geschichten sind sehr anders zu erzählen), and it is this telling difference that will make it possible not only to relate historical events on the dramatic stage but also, more importantly, to lay bare the process by which the past is itself reconstructed and transformed as history. The Modell attempts to produce and reproduce this process, to make certain that it is seen, acknowledged, confronted. By compelling the critical stance so vital to Brecht’s epic theater, then, the persistence of a gap in the modern viewing of classical tragedy—and, in particular, the reception presented by Brecht’s own Modell—will allow the spectator to survey the ruins of theater both ancient and modern and consider the passage of time and ideological investment that rendered it as such.

As I will argue here, however, the ethical and critical sway of the Modell proves ultimately to be much less self-evident than Brecht’s comments let on. For at the same time that the play’s form encourages its audience to reflect critically on the brutality of the modern state, Brecht commits a violence of a different kind—namely, an overstabilization of his sources—in the (perhaps irresistible) gesture of leaving his own signature. In some ways, the result is not entirely distant from the motives Brecht aims to criticize.

If Brecht’s decision to stage a Greek tragedy appears surprising at first glance, his choice of Hölderlin’s translation over any other in 1947 ought to seem at least as curious, despite his explicit affinity for its “Swabian cadences and schoolish Latin constructions” (schwäbische tonfälle und gymnasiale lateinkonstruktionen) (AJ 795 [16. Dec. 1947])9 The National Socialist party, drawing rhetorical support from the youth movement inspired by Hölderlin at the turn of the century, had all but usurped the poet’s image in the service of the Vaterland; already enthroned by Stefan George as the voice of German destiny, already linked to the war heroism of Norbert von Hellingrath (to whom Heidegger dedicated one of his first published essays on Hölderlin, the 1936 “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry”), Hölderlin the radical revolutionary had risen under the Nazi regime to a legendary status as icon of a luminous cultural past, as heroic beacon of hope for Germany’s future resurrection as a Kulturnation.10 Perpetuated not least by

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9. Berlau confirms Brecht’s affection for Hölderlin’s “folklorish Swabian idiom, which he was constantly pointing out as he read it to me…” (Bunge 167)
Heidegger, the cultic image of Hölderlin as messenger, as seer—even as messiah—had overshadowed his more dubious history: his enthusiasm for the French revolution, his madness, even the daunting nature of the poetry itself. Meanwhile, his complex relationship to classical Greece had been reduced to the conviction that a more profound study of the ancients served the sole purpose of solidifying national identity.

To be sure, Brecht was hardly unaware of this heritage of ideological appropriation; in conversations with Hanns Eisler (who set Hölderlin’s poetry to music) he clearly expressed his general distaste for Hölderlin’s poetry, particularly in light of what had been done to it in the twentieth century. Why, then, when presented with the opportunity to stage an adaptation of Sophocles’ text, did he follow Neher’s suggestion and turn to Hölderlin’s translation? The decision may have proven even more personally motivated than Brecht’s comment about the familiar appeal of “swabian tones” lets on, for Hölderlin’s Antigonä—an eccentric text at the very least, at most a translation that undermines the very possibility of establishing identity of any sort, national or otherwise—mobilizes an experience of the foreign that mimics the acute dislocation of the recent exile. While still in America, Brecht had already considered problems of translation when he recorded in textual and photographic form the painstaking process of developing a theatrical performance, that of Charles Laughton in a Los Angeles (Beverly Hills) production of Galileo Galilei (1947). Entitled Aufbau einer Rolle: Laughtons Galilei (Constructing a Role: Laughton’s Galilei) the published text shows how the challenges of bringing his own work to the American stage shed light upon the parallel problems of negotiating between two languages and bridging the gap between text and performance.

in Hölderlin und die Moderne, ed. Gerhard Kurz et al. (Tübingen: Attempto, 1995), 157–59. Albert focuses her highly informative discussion on the year 1943, in which the hundredth anniversary of Hölderlin’s death served as a crucial marker of the resilience of German culture. In an historical moment in which resources were scarce, the event was given the highest priority, and its commemorations remain influential even today; it was the year that Goebbels founded the Hölderlin-Gesellschaft and Beissner published the first volume of the Stuttgarter Ausgabe.


12. See Albert’s discussion of how German exiles likewise adopted Hölderlin as their own: “Wie die Exilanten schien er auch ein ‘Fremdling im eigenen Haus’” (155: Like the exiles he seemed to be a “stranger in his own house”). Within exile culture, Albert claims, the fragmentation and “Zerrissenheit” (torn-up, disrupted quality) of Hölderlin’s character represented a contrast to the totalizing aims of National Socialism. See also Bruce Cook, Brecht in Exile (New York: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1982).

collaboration between Laughton and Brecht, as Brecht stresses, demanded an almost constant recourse to these interconnected modes of translation:


We usually met to work at L’s big house overlooking the Pacific Ocean, since the catalogs of synonyms were too heavy to lug around. He used these folios often and with tireless patience and even fished other texts out of the most various literature—Aesop, the Bible, Molière, Shakespeare—in order to study this or that gesture or a particular linguistic form. . . . These were exercises, and he pursued them at times in numerous directions, incorporating them into the rest of his work. . . . We needed such extended studies, since he did not speak a word of German and we had to agree on the gesture of each bit of dialogue by my acting it all out in bad English or even in German and his acting it back in proper English in different ways until I could say: That’s it. He wrote down the result by hand, sentence by sentence. For days he would carry some sentences, many, about with him, changing them constantly. (BFA 25: 11)

Resulting from this negotiation were what Brecht called “theatrical thoughts” (theatralische Gedanken), new insights into the possibilities posed by the text

14. As Ruth Berlau notes in her memoirs, however, Laughton had far less confidence than Brecht indicates here in the process of developing an epic-theatrical performance, to the point that the clicking of Berlau’s camera shutter during rehearsals drove him to distraction. This apprehension led him to attempt numerous changes in the New York production of Galilei, staged after Brecht’s departure from the United States. Brecht dispatched Berlau to photograph and record the performance in detail, including phonograph recordings of Laughton explaining the changes he had made. Berlau claims to have sent over three thousand photographs to Brecht in Switzerland (Bunge 1987, 155–57).
in performance. As an attempt to harness in text and image the manifestations of these “theatrical thoughts,” the Aufbau amounts to a translation from text to performance (and ultimately to published record) that not only allows the process of adaptation to advance in new directions but tracks, both visually and textually, the steps that led to that creative result (cf. Primavesi 57).

By showing the dialectical process of crafting a performance, moreover, Brecht’s Aufbau means to proffer a new, critical way of taking pleasure in the experience of theater: “the spectator, particularly the sophisticated type, enjoys in art the making of art, the active element of creating” (Der Zuschauer, besonders der bewanderte, genießt in der Kunst das Kunstmachen, das aktive Element des Schaffens [BFA 25: 9]). Thus it brings to light the framework of theatrical performance as a negotiation of existing, written material with a more ephemeral Aktualität, the result of which is constantly in flux (immerfort ändernd), and it posits that negotiation as a creative act vital to the piece’s effectiveness on stage. This does not at all imply that a performance referencing the past must merely place that past into a contemporary context; rather, the dimension of creativity lies in illuminating the delicate links between past and present. That these tears and sutures must remain visible in particular is clear in Brecht’s recourse to a photographic record of Laughton’s performance; the still images of various scenes, which were viewed in Los Angeles and in a brief run on Broadway by barely ten thousand spectators, became, along with Brecht’s commentary, an integral part of the play’s textual fabric. Though the production failed as a piece of popular theater, then, its physical remains express Brecht’s hope for its future potency: “Thus such productions must be viewed as examples of a theater that could be possible under other political and economic circumstances” (BFA 25: 69).

15. By this time Brecht relied on photography as a means to record the progress of his work, for purposes of collaboration and creative development as well as the establishment of an archive. His 1948 versification of the Communist Manifesto, also photographed by Berlau in various stages of completion, represents another interesting example of his attempt to record the dynamics of writing and rewriting, this time not demonstrated by the actors’ performances but inscribed within the text itself. Berlau further describes Brecht’s striking method of textual correction, which he called Klebologie (“stickology”): “In order to avoid the task of recopying corrected pages in full, he would write the new text on a fresh page, cut it out neatly, and stick it to the old manuscript” (183). These attempts to mark textual modifications as such reflect a more intriguing dynamic than Berlau indicates in describing Brecht’s “weakness for clean, uncorrected manuscripts” (183); I would argue that they record for Brecht in physical form the sedimentary, fragmented nature of writing that underlies the illusion of teleological linearity.

16. “So müssen solche Aufführungen als Exempel eines Theaters betrachtet werden, das unter anderen politischen und ökonomischen Verhältnissen möglich sein könnte.”
And indeed, Brecht’s theatrical production in Switzerland and later with the Berlin Ensemble would adopt this framework as an example for the *Modellbücher*, though with an important difference: what appears here, often at close range, as the singular performance of a renowned, if fading, actor (in this sense the vestige of an “auratic” event) soon develops into a more distanced perspective with respect to *Antigone*, where for the most part the individual actors are so far away from the camera that they are barely recognizable. Despite the photographer Ruth Berlau’s retrospective laments about the poor quality of her photographs, this distancing constitutes a refinement of the *Modellbuch* as it reflects Brecht’s project; the actors, after all, should recede behind their gestures, that “grouping of characters against one another,” as Hölderlin put it (FA 16: 419), which is all the more visible from a distance. Even Weigel’s Antigone, clearly the focal point of the production, only rarely assumes center stage in the photographs; on the other hand, Berlau stood so close to Laughton that the clicking of the shutter unnerved him, forcing her to snap the images behind a glass partition (Bunge 1987, 155).

Brecht returned to Europe from America, as he states in his work journal, intending to “ruin” what was left of its theater; yet given this recently demonstrated commitment to making visible the constructedness of theatrical performance, it is impossible not to think that his new way of doing theater means to be an engagement with those ruins and not a blueprint for their total erasure. Even a ruined past speaks volumes (as Brecht’s friend Benjamin knew), if only about its own corrupt premises. Hence Brecht’s turn to Hölderlin with the *Antigonemodell* might represent an engagement with ruins in its own right: while his adaptation of the tragedy and the record of its performance lay bare the process by which the politics of historical transformation shape the receptive act, the choice of Hölderlin’s translation represents his encounter with the remains of a poetic corpus long enslaved by political motive. And insofar as the *Modell* attempts to narrate that encounter at the same time that it presents the result, the transformative process it undertakes will this time not negate its own past. Consequently, as Brecht writes in his notes to the 1951 production in Greiz, even the most difficult passages of Hölderlin’s translation must be preserved for their dialectical possibilities:

> The choral passages, into which new thoughts have likewise developed, have also been adapted. These choruses, like some other passages in the poem, can hardly be fully understood in a single hearing. Parts of the choruses sound like riddles that demand solutions. Yet their outstanding feature is
that, when studied a bit, they give back more and more beauty. The adaptation was not merely supposed to eliminate this difficulty, the overcoming of which brings so much pleasure—particularly since the Antigone has the good fortune of having been translated by one of the greatest formers (Gestalter) of the German language, Hölderlin (AB 114). 17

Like the “theatrical thoughts” that resulted from his collaboration with Laughton, the new thoughts (“neue Gedanken”) emerging out of this ongoing process of adapting the Antigone constitute an exchange between text and something intangible, something that happens in the course of developing a particular adaptation; thus creative responsibility never rests solely in the authorship of an “original” text or even, in this specific case, in Hölderlin’s act of producing a uniquely challenging translation. We will have to return to the question of how Brecht marks or effaces the specificity of language that Hölderlin has “formed” (gestaltet) in the translation, for it is here, in the text of Brecht’s Antigone, that his theoretical remarks may be most in tension with their product. In structural terms, however, his Antigonemodell presents its public with a clear, critical purpose: it illustrates the ongoing practice of translating a translation in original terms, both bridging and problematizing the gaps between text and adaptation and between past events and present perceptions. “Copying,” insofar as it becomes the basis for a new concept of creativity as a collective and collaborative act, must be a fluid art rather than a static exercise. 18 It must not only destabilize the place of an “original” per se, but it also subvert any possibility of claiming finality; every adaptation is at once part of the “original” and a product of translation, subject to the “continuum of a dialectical sort” (BFA 25: 76) that enabled it in the first place.

By disavowing the tyranny of origin in the creative process, moreover, the theatrical material produced out of this position aims to achieve not only


18. Werner Hecht, Brecht im Gespräch: Diskussionen, Dialoge, Interviews (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 86: “Man muß sich frei machen von der landläufigen Verachtung des Kopierens. Es ist nicht das ‘Leichtere.’ Es ist nicht eine Schande, sondern eine Kunst. Das heißt, es muß zur Kunst entwickelt werden, und zwar dazu, daß keine Schablonisierung und Erstarrung eintritt” (One must free oneself from the common disdain for copying. It is not “easier.” It is not a scandal, but rather an art. That is to say, it must be developed into an art, to the extent that it avoids [mere] templates and congealment).
the ruination of an entire theatrical tradition but also something like the
destruction of totalitarianism as an aesthetic system. It attempts to initiate,
in other words, what Benjamin named as the antidote to National Socialism:
in response to the aestheticization of politics, it presents, particularly on a
structural level, the politicization of art.

**Epic Theater** is the antithesis of the poetry of streams. The flow of the
river as Heidegger described it in Hölderlin’s poetry, the fluid interchange
it models between dynamism and stillness, *Wanderschaft* and *Ortschaft*, sug-
gests a synergy—if not necessarily a union—between the foreign and of
that which is one’s own; the subject submits to an uncertain movement of
history and memory that moves in two directions (*zwiefach gerichtet*), to a
transport that leaves no place for a foot to take hold. Epic theater, on the
other hand, consists precisely in the process of taking hold, of stopping, of
refusing to submit to the flow of events staged before the audience: “Since
the audiences is not being invited to fling itself into the plot as into a river, to
let itself be borne here and there indeterminately, the individual events must
be connected so that the knots become evident” (BFA 23: 92).19 The pat-
tern Brecht describes here is familiar in the context of his dramatic theory;
far from being swept away, the spectator takes firm hold of the knots that
disrupt the flow of performance, allowing the productive stoppage Brecht
finds exemplified in the iconography of technological progress—or, more
precisely, in the force of technology in the service of discontinuation.

The attitude is a critical one. With respect to a river it consists in the regu-
lation of the river; with respect to a fruit tree, in the grafting of the fruit
tree; with respect to forward movement, in the construction of driving
and flying machines; with respect to society, in the overturning of society.
(BFA 23: 73)20

If a river’s current can be regulated, made productive through redirection
by technological means, Brecht goes on to suggest, the dynamics of theatri-

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19. The passage is from the “Kleines Organon für das Theater”: “Da das Publikum nicht einge-
laden werde, sich in die Fabel wie in einen Fluß zu werfen, um sich hierhin und dorthin unbestimmt
treiben zu lassen, müssen die einzelnen Geschehnisse so verknüpft sein, daß die Knoten auffällig
werden.”

Flusses; gegenüber einem Obstbaum in der Okulierung des Obstbaums; gegenüber der Fortbewegung
in der Konstruktion der Fahr- und Flugzeuge, gegenüber der Gesellschaft in der Umwälzung der
Gesellschaft.”
cal performance can likewise be made more “productive” through its own disruption. Dramatic effect in a “scientific age” finds its stimulus not in the spectator’s propensity to let herself be swept away but precisely in the caesurae that render that affective participation impotent.

In this attitude of interruption, Brecht’s project finds itself in unexpected congruence with its two Vorbilder, both Sophocles’ “original” and Hölderlin’s translation. In his introduction to the Antigonemodell, Brecht notes the “formally interesting tasks” particular to producing Sophocles’ tragedy in modern form, claiming that the “historical remove” (historische Entrücktheit) of the piece precludes the possibility that a modern audience might identify with its heroine, and asserting that “formal elements of an epic sort,” including the structural and visual insertions of the Chorus, guarantee that viewers will remain at distance from the action as well (BFA 25: 75). Neher’s stage itself replicates that distance, as the model shows: it is divided into two realms, one small area in which the action of the play takes place and the remainder of the stage surrounding it, where actors who are not part of the current scene are seated facing the action, presenting to the spectator a model of her own activity (see BFA 25: 93). Meanwhile, center stage is surrounded by tall pillars topped by the skulls of horses, what Brecht describes as “barbarische Kriegskultpfähle” (barbarian war cult stakes). As cultic death tokens, these delineate the space in which the mythic action of the play diverges from any possible modern-historical context.

Two disruptions, then, two examples of displacement (Entrückung)—one temporal, one structural—are characteristic of the tragic drama as it plays itself out before a modern audience. And for Brecht, those disruptive elements potentiate the “freedom of calculation” (BFA 25:75) necessary to make theatrical performance productive. If tragic representation once generated its effect, in Aristotelian terms, by evoking the powerful emotions of fear and pity—or even, for that matter, by exhausting itself in Nietzsche’s Dionysian intoxication—Brecht’s reformulation of tragedy aims to mobilize its audience toward a moment of reflection by making use of the very same elements, now skewed to such an extent that it becomes impossible not to


22. As Barner asserts, this structural preservation of the drama’s “sinnlich-physische Dimension” (sensual-physical dimension) serves as a visible and omnipresent contrast to the “Entideologisierung des alten Mythos” (de-ideologization of the old myth) undertaken in a thematic sense (Barner 196).
notice their acute foreignness. Like Ezra Pound’s translation of *Elektra*, in which entire choral passages left in the original Greek intensify the disorienting experience of taking in ancient tragedy with modern senses, Brecht’s and Neher’s visual and aural dramatization of the gap between actors and spectators reveals the temporal disjunction that other modern interpreters aim to bridge.  

At the same time, Brecht’s desire to exploit the productive effects of discontinuity reveals on a textual level a certain affinity with Hölderlin’s translation in particular. Passages in which Brecht remains particularly close to Hölderlin reflect the eccentricity that voices that translation’s instability, its “madness.” And while Hölderlin’s translation emphasized this instability conceptually in the words of the Chorus (“Jetzt aber komm ich, eben, selber aus dem / Gesänge”), Brecht—as if he recognized the crucial synthesis of content and form in Hölderlin’s model—transfers the stakes to a linguistic dimension of pure rhythm: “Jetzt aber komm ich eben selber / Aus dem Takte . . .” (*But now even I myself step out of meter* [BFA 8: 224]). Instead of articulating the disruption of the “outlaw” subject inspired by the sight of a wandering, changing Antigone, language now speaks of its own rhythmic rupture. This is at once both a metaphor for the destabilizing force of tragic experience and the radical refusal of metaphor in the service of translation; for even in Hölderlin’s version, it is always already the “Takte,” the meter disrupted by the caesura, that affects the modern audience in the most immediate sense.

Such small but extremely weighted modifications to Hölderlin’s text—the measured transformation of a different sort of “original”—present the reader with a challenge, insofar as they further undermine the conventions of authorship already shaken to the core by a transforming translation. In effect, Hölderlin’s text proves to be the first text of the *Antigonemodell*—subject, like all others that will follow it, to the dialectical process of adaptation—while Brecht’s, from its inception, is already a modification. Moreover, in

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23. See Richard Reid’s introduction to Pound’s translation of *Elektra*, in which he discusses Pound’s concept of “logopoiea” as the abrupt intrusion of the unexpected in language, through which his translation depicts not only a house divided but “language at war with itself” (Pound xvii).

24. Thus it is unfounded to claim, as Ulrich Weisstein has, that Brecht’s adaptation of Hölderlin’s language constitutes a return to a “more Sophoclean spirit, without indulging in the use of eccentricity” (“Imitation, Stylization, and Adaptation: The Language of Brecht’s Antigone and Its Relation to Hölderlin’s Version of Sophocles,” *German Quarterly* 46:4 [November 1973]: 585). Indeed, in the materials that make up Brecht’s *Antigone* project there is little evidence that he is at all interested in the stylistic recovery of a “Sophoclean spirit” that would efface the “indulgence” of Hölderlin’s translation; on the contrary, he leaves much of Hölderlin’s most “eccentric” language intact (the most obvious example being, as even Weisstein notes, Ismene’s opening observation that Antigone “schein[t] ein rotes Wort zu färben”).
proposing the continuation of this process (potentially into infinity), Brecht places himself, as one adaptation’s “author,” in an equally precarious position. The Modell is “to be regarded from the start as unfinished (unfertig),” its development as much at the mercy of accident as dramaturgic intention. The remarks that frequently interrupt the script of Brecht’s Antigone, often in the form of questions posed and answers given by unknown interlocutors, stylize this state of incompletion:

Frage: Die Darstellerin der Ismene hat diese Szene ohne jeden Stellungswechsel oder besondere Geste gespielt. Aber sollte nicht wenigstens zwischen der Haltung vor dem Spielfeld und der auf ihm ein Unterschied sein, da sonst das Warten auf den Auftritt und das Warten auf Antigones Anliegen nicht verschiedenartig ist?
Antwort: Ja, Ismene könnte, ausgehend von Vers 21, beim Betreten des Spielfeldes das Gesicht verhüllen.
Frage: So war, was ihr machtet, unrichtig?
Antwort: Ja. (BFA 25: 90)

Question: The actress portraying Ismene played this scene without any change of position or particular gesture. But shouldn’t there at least be a difference between the posture/attitude before the field of action and the one in it, since otherwise her waiting for her appearance and waiting for Antigone’s request would not be different?
Answer: Yes, Ismene could, according to line 21, conceal her face upon entering the field of action.
Question: So what you did was incorrect?
Answer: Yes.

Even errors discovered in hindsight are now meant to serve a dialectical purpose; plainly interwoven into the text’s recorded history, they signal both its evolution and its potentiality. Moreover, the reproduction of a performative moment in visual form permits contemplation from an angle that can catch hold, in the very same instant, of what Brecht calls “the before and the after,” das Vorher und das Nachher: the evidence of a text’s fractured history and the questions it continues to pose. This in-between status reflects not only the content of the piece but its very structure. Its dynamics of pure mutability—indeed, of the impossibility of standing still—again brings the Modell into surprisingly close proximity to its own “Vorher” by recalling the “tragic transport” of Hölderlin’s translation, which was likewise unlimited (ungebunden); Hölderlin’s Antigone, too, was perpetually in the process of
“wandeln.” And yet at the same time the text anticipates its own “Nachher;” the visual component of the Antigonemodell, made possible by technological means, ensures that the text will also be continually marked as a product of its own time. This intervention by the future into the past opens new possibilities, just as it does for Benjamin in the artwork essay, where “process reproduction can bring out those aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the lens. . . .”

Brecht’s series of Modelle, from Laughton’s Galilei to Antigone to Mutter Courage, demonstrates that photography offers an ideal means to represent this momentary status, this position between “the before and the after.” As stop-action mode it reveals to the naked eye those ephemeral moments in performance that would not otherwise have come to such evident light. Compared with Neher’s preliminary sketches for the stage, which have the static two-dimensionality of primitive line drawings, there is even a kind of indeterminacy to the photographs, as if they were taken at random and in unguarded moments; they convey a mobility and an imperfection that hint more generally at the provisional status of the Modell (see BFA 25: 139). (This random quality begins to disappear in the Couragemodell, where the photography is of uniformly higher quality than in the previous Modelle; what this may mean, however, is that the model places greater emphasis on facial expressions rather than gestures, the actions of individuals rather than their attitudes towards one another.)

Perhaps as a direct result of his increasingly sophisticated work with photographs from the Aufbau to the Modelle, Brecht eventually conceived of this provisionality in an explicit sense (even if, ironically, the images begin to look more posed). In the Couragemodell 1949 he notes the extent to which art after 1945 cannot help but reflect a new environment, a new life characterized by its own destruction:

If life continues after the great war in our ruined cities, then it is a life of another kind, the life of others or at least that of groups that are otherwise put together, and it is both hampered and governed by our new surroundings, the new part of which is its destroyed state. Where the great piles of rubble lie, we also find valuable underground structures, the sewer system and the gas and electricity grids. Even the large, untouched building is drawn into sympathy with the half-destroyed ones and the debris it stands


26. Berlau: “If the takes are posed, the pictures that emerge may be very sharply focused, but they are unrealistic, counterfeit” (Bunge 1987, 232).
between, and under some circumstances can be a hindrance to planning. Structures must be built provisionally, and yet the danger is that they will remain. Art reflects all of this; ways of thinking are part of our ways of living. As it pertains to the theater, we fling the Models into the breakage. (BFA 25: 171)²⁷

This rich passage, with its allusions to the parallel destruction of cities, their subjects, and the art they produce—and the concomitant potency that lies beneath the rubble—establishes not only a rationale for the Modelle but a set of working hypotheses. Even if the past, the Vorher, has been ruined, art must work with what remains to ensure a Nachher. Must build provisionally, and yet never stop building for so long that the provisional becomes permanent. Must allow the “sympathetic” engagement between the ruins and that which, right next door, remains intact. Where fragmentation represents future possibility, the “untouched building” may even become the “hindrance to planning;” the implication is that it, too, must be destroyed before it can be of use. This emphasis on the primacy of destruction even finds its way into Brecht’s conception of how Greek tragedy might be productively compared with the present; unsatisfied with the contemporary prologue he and Neher presented in the initial production of the Antigone in Chur, Brecht suggests that it be replaced with “a panel with the representation of a modern city in ruins” (eine Tafel mit der Darstellung einer modernen Trümmerstadt).²⁸

Brecht posits his Modelle as likewise broken, fragmented bodies that must be put back together again. Between creation ex nihilo (which would secure the sacred status of the “original,” the “author”) and overly reverent imitation, they represent a way of working with extant materials that produces something both new and alert to its relation to the past. Brecht as “creator” of the Modell insists over and over that the copy need not be an inherently restrictive medium: “There are slavish and sovereign ways of imitating.”²⁹ The collective dread of the past returning should not hinder

²⁹. “Es gibt eine sklavische und eine souveräne Nachahmung” (Hecht 87).
the confrontation with the intact remnants of history, however scattered and irreconcilable they may be; out of the “Trümmerstadt” emerges the possibility of the new. To rebuild without this open link to history would be to deny its raw impact. To erase the remains of totalitarianism, then, would be to replicate its own founding gesture. For Brecht, art is effective as a political instrument only insofar as it depicts that which it rejects along with everything else.

Thus Brecht remained unperturbed by the howls of protest provoked by the Modelle among theater companies who were accustomed to adapting and modifying dramatic texts as their players saw fit. The notion that all subsequent productions of a particular play would have to refer to a single specimen project was profoundly unappealing to many, and there was little enthusiasm for participating in a rigidly conceived dialectics of imitation and variation where total creative freedom ought to be the norm. As Brecht states in his own defense, however, every theatrical production of an existing text has an element of imitation to it; in fact, every theatrical text is always already an imitation of human behavior (menschliches Verhalten), constrained by its own set of imperatives. There is essentially no difference between reproducing the small details of the script and those of the Modell:

What difference does it make if you find in the script that Courage gave the peasants money for burying the mute Kattrin before departing, or if you find in studying the model that she counted it out in her hand and put a coin back into her leather pouch? In truth you’ll find only the former in the script, the latter in Weigel’s figure in the model. Should you keep the former and forget the latter? (Hecht 86).

However, in arguing for the creative potential of copying, Brecht neglects to distinguish between the decision to copy (his, for example) and the externally imposed command to follow a rigidly conceived example. The former is a creative device employed not only by Brecht but by countless theatrical predecessors, from Gottsched and Lessing to Goethe and Kleist to Karl Kraus; by contrast, not even Brecht can claim to have followed the latter concept in his adaptation—except insofar as he follows his own Modelle in subsequent productions.

30. “Was macht es für einen Unterschied, ob Sie im Stücketext finden, die Courage habe den Bauern Geld für die Beerdigung der stummen Kattrin gegeben, bevor sie wegzog, oder beim Studium des Modells auch noch, sie habe es in der Hand abgezählt und eine Münze wieder zurück in die Ledertasche gesteckt? In der Tat finden Sie im Stücketext nur das erstere, das zweite bei der Weigel im Modell. Sollen Sie das erstere behalten, das zweite vergessen?

31. Cf. Brecht’s Anmerkungen zur Bearbeitung, which accompany the second production of his
Nonetheless, for Brecht the desire to create something new in theatrical production is not a sufficient reason to break with a text’s performative history. Rather, with the concept of the Modell he insists that history must be permitted to find its own way into that which is new. The point is thus to reconsider in a radical sense the place of creativity, to claim that place not for the “original” text, nor for any single director’s vision of the mise-en-scène but for the observing eye itself, the sophistication of which had been neglected: “Our theater [i.e., German theater] is not realistic precisely because it underestimates observation” (Unser Theater ist schon deshalb nicht realistisch, weil es die Beobachtung unterschätzt) (Hecht 86). The witnessing eye must take note of the fragments before it and make something of them. As a result, the Modell ultimately introduces another dimension of historical transformation by assuring at its very foundation its own infinite variability, thus the impossibility of ever being “finished” with the past. The dramatic confrontation with a textual and performative history—the self-conscious presentation of its ruins—becomes an affirmation of the relationship to the past not as something to be overcome but rather as a means of comprehending one’s own responsibility for the survival of that history. Seeing is authorship—is participation. It is up to the one who examines the Modell—the witness to its history—to view the process by which a story comes to be told and find his or her own position with respect to that story. The Modell is, as Brecht puts it, “not meant to spare us from thinking, but rather to stimulate thinking; not meant to replace artistic creation, but rather to compel it” (BFA 25:172).

Not all of Brecht’s modifications evince such a delicate intervention into Sophocles’ and Hölderlin’s texts, however. Indeed, many of his changes reflect not an engagement with the “difficulties” of the texts, as he professes in his remarks on the adaptation, but a neutralization of their unsettling power. To begin, the drastic plot alterations clearly flatten the complexity

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32. “Our actors look within themselves rather than at their environment. They take interactions between people, on which everything depends, purely as a vehicle for the display of temperament and so on. The directors use the theater pieces as motivation for their ‘visions.’ . . . We should stop this, today rather than tomorrow” (Unsere Schauspieler schauen in sich hinein, anstatt auf ihre Umwelt. Sie nehmen die Vorgänge zwischen Menschen, auf die alles ankommt, lediglich als Vehikel für die Zuschauerausstellung von Temperament und so weiter. Die Regisseure benutzen die Stücke als Anregung für ihre ‘Visionen.’ . . . Damit sollten wir lieber heute als morgen aufhören). “Hemmt die Benutzung des Modells die künstlerische Bewegungsfreiheit?” interview with Erich-Alexander Winds, Hecht 86).
of the Greek conflict. Brecht’s crude and despotic Creon, rather than representing a theoretically legitimate instance pushed beyond its own limits, now occupies a clearly indefensible position, making Antigone’s the only tenable stance in the play. Creon’s command to leave Polynices unburied is no longer transgression enough, since Brecht emphasizes that he orders his army to leave all enemy soldiers unburied; thus Creon must kill Polynices as well. Precisely because Brecht’s Creon is so wicked, Antigone’s once singular act takes on the milder character of a more general protest against the injustice of state violence.

What does this tendency to generalize the tragic conflict do with Hölderlin’s translation, which, as we have seen, bears the full weight of Antigone’s solitude in its very foreignness, in the monstrosity of its language? The shift is nearly a full reversal: while for Hölderlin Antigone’s ethical stance was grounded in the imperative to preserve the dignity of difference, Brecht’s heroine acts in the name of unity, for the sake of a larger community of which she is unquestionably part. The Chorus even chides Antigone for not recognizing this community before it is too late, for haughtily maintaining her separate status within the ruling class until its doom had become imminent:

Aber auch die hat einst
Gegessen vom Brot, das im dunklen Fels
Gebacken war. In der Unglück bergenden
Türme Schatten: saß sie gemach, bis
Was von den Labdakus Häusern tödlich ausging
Tödlich zurückkam. (BFA 8: 228)

But she too once ate from the bread that had been baked in the dark cliffs. In the shadow of the towers that sheltered sorrow, she sat comfort-

33. By expanding a single reference by Sophocles’ Antigone (tôn echthrôn kaka, “evils from our enemies as they coming upon our friends” [Jebb 5, l.10]) to an explicit proclamation, Brecht stresses that Creon acts with brutality against his enemies as well as against Polynices, which undermines any potential legitimacy of his position: “Auf rauhem Ruhplatz / Legtest, Thebe, du das Argosvolk. Stadtlos, grablos / Liegt jetzt im Freien, das deiner spottete. / Und du siehst hin / Wo einst ihre Stadt war / Und du siehst Hunde / Denen glänzet das Angesicht. / Die edelsten Geier fliegen zu ihr; sie schreiten / Von Leichnam zu Leichnam / Und von dem reichlich bereiteten Mahle / Nicht in die Höhe können sie steigen” [BFA 8: 76ff.: 128–38] (On a raw place of rest you, Thebes, laid the people of Argos. Those who mocked you and yours now lie cityless, graveless in the open. And you look to the place where your city once was, and you see dogs with gleaming faces, the noblest vultures fly there; they stride from corpse to corpse and cannot fly back up into the air after that richly prepared feast).

ably, until that which left the house of Labdakus in deadliness, returned in deadliness.\textsuperscript{35}

In Brecht’s view of the tragic landscape, then, an individual’s fate is tied to the social relations that structure a community rather than to the will of the gods. This development is already evident in his earliest notes on the adaptation in his work journal, where he writes of his plans to reduce the role of the gods to that of “the local divinity of the people, the god of joy” (\textit{der lokale volksheilige, der freudengott}) (AJ 795, 16. Dec. 1947). The emphasis on provinciality and the \textit{Volk} replaces the distant hegemony of the gods and their influence on the destiny of mortals; Antigone’s recognition of her place within the community thus emerges with the discovery that she can no longer isolate herself, that her actions and those of her family bear both personal and public consequences. Indeed, Brecht already saw this social aspect incorporated in Sophocles’ \textit{Antigone}, which made it a particularly apt choice for his project of “Durchrationalisierung.” A \textit{Berliner Zeitung} review of the Greiz production in 1951 summarizes:

Brecht says that he chose Sophocles’ drama for his adaptation because it is the only tragedy of antiquity that is not completely stifled by the inconceivable doom of a mystical fate. For him it was a matter of showing how social forces—that is, those that can be recognized and mastered by humans—hold sway in the course of the tragedy.\textsuperscript{36}

Brecht’s displacement of the interplay between gods and mortals in favor of a network of social forces unbound from divine intervention represents less his quibble with Sophocles’ (or Hölderlin’s) source text than his wholesale rejection of Aristotelian conventions in the framing and staging of tragedy. The move out of the “ideological fog” is simultaneously a break with the force of tragedy as a closed universe in which the audience sympathizes with the hero’s inescapable plight and fears for itself as a result.\textsuperscript{37} To be more

\textsuperscript{35} In producing a translation of Brecht’s adaptation I have consulted Judith Malina’s translation from 1984; however, because that translation is fairly transformative, I often resort to my own more literal renderings. See Judith Malina, \textit{Sophocles’s Antigone in a version by Bertolt Brecht} (New York: Applause, 1984), 49.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Berliner Zeitung} no. 270, 20 November 1951: “Brecht sagt, dass er das Drama des Sophokles deshalb für seine Bearbeitung gewählt habe, weil es das einzige in der Antike sei, das nicht durch das unbegreifliche Verhängnis eines mystischen Schicksals vollständig erdrückt wird. Ihm aber kam es darauf an, im Gang der Tragödie das Wälen gesellschaftlicher, also durch den Menschen erkennbarer und zu beherrschender Kräfte deutlich zu machen.”

\textsuperscript{37} With these modifications to the structure of classical tragedy, Brecht means to mobilize the
precise, then, Brecht’s polarizing stance with respect to Aristotle is in fact more directly informed by Lessing’s reading of Aristotle than by the *Poetics* themselves, which barely address at all the issue of fate in relation to the gods. Aristotle’s discussion of tragic plot is more closely linked to the notion of *philia*, which refers both to family relations and to the social matrix more generally. Understanding tragedy as the collapse of the social order thus ironically places Brecht closer to Aristotle than he would ever have cared to imagine. Nor is it entirely clear, as we will see, that Brecht’s erasure of the divine instance (and finally that of kinship) from Hölderlin’s text and his consequent shift to a wholly social register is at all successful in disrupting the attraction of empathy (*Einfühlung*).

Fate therefore becomes for Brecht a matter of social rather than divine intervention, culminating in the recognition of the subject’s inscription in the community rather than the unsettling exposure to the limits of the self. As a result, the choral passage affirming the monstrosity of every human being in Hölderlin’s text—the ineluctable relation to a “nothing” we can only represent as death—is transformed in Brecht’s version into a disavowal of excess (*Maßlosigkeit*) as the internal enemy of the self. There is no longer any explicit mention of death at all.

Überall weiß er Rat  
Ratlos trifft ihn nichts.  
Dies alles ist grenzlos ihm, ist  
Aber ein Maß gesetzt.  
Der nämlich keinen findet, zum eigenen  
Feind wirft er sich auf. (BFA 8: 209)

In every case he knows what to do; nothing leaves him at wit’s end. All of this is limitless to him, but a limit has been set. For he who does not find one becomes his own enemy.

Brecht’s Chorus thus comes to a conclusion nearly opposite from that of Hölderlin’s: it is the duty of the subject to join the community, thus to reject the solitude that for Hölderlin was essential to tragic experience.


Nicht den Magen
Kann er sich füllen allein, aber die Mauer
Setzt er ums Eigene, und die Mauer
Niedergerissen muß sie sein! Das Dach
Geöffnet dem Regen! Menschliches
Achtet er für gar nichts. So, ungeheuer
Wird er sich selbst. (BFA 8: 209)

He cannot fill his stomach alone, but he builds a wall around that which is his own, and the wall must be torn down! The roof opened to the rain!
He does not value what is human. So he becomes monstrous to himself.

Insofar as monstrosity is linked to the isolation of those who do not value “Menschliches”—do not recognize the relationship of mutual dependency that defines the community—it can no longer be said to characterize each and every subject, as it did so clearly for Hölderlin. This distinction is not at all innocent in its implications for the critical stance Brecht means to inspire in his audience. According to the definition set forth by Brecht’s Chorus, only Creon is “ungeheuer”—and we knew that from the start.39 Rather than bringing it to acknowledge the pervasiveness of monstrosity among all subjects, Brecht permits his audience to distance itself from that monstrosity, to call it by name: Creon. Or, as the messenger in Brecht’s text calls him, mein Führer.

Thus it is far too limited to understand Brecht’s Antigone text merely as an historical document that condemns Nazi ideology by drawing crude parallels between Creon’s Thebes and the Third Reich. A charitable reading would perhaps maintain that the disavowal of monstrosity implicit in Brecht’s alterations to the source texts mirrors the epic-theatrical divide between spectator and stage, allowing the audience to reflect critically on Creon’s actions and recognize the brutality behind them. However, there may also be more troubling consequences—consequences that, despite the intricacy of the Modell, remain out of the dramatist’s control. Though Brecht’s Spielweise explicitly and actively seeks to deny the possibility of identification with any of the figures onstage, there is within the text an

39. Creon’s barbarism and violence are evident not only in his speech but in the stage directions as well, where he often threatens or disparages his subjects; for example, after hearing the message that Polynices’s body has been buried, he “stands up, approaches the watchman threateningly . . . and, standing behind his bodyguard, tests the sword blade with his thumb” (steht auf, geht drohend auf den Wächter zu, . . . und prüft, hinter dem Leibwächter stehend, die Schwertschneide beziehungsvoll mit dem Daumen [AB 87]).
implicit temptation to identify with Antigone, duly noted by the interlocutor in the *Modell* and not fully acknowledged in the director’s response. Insofar as this temptation accompanies the unmistakable message not to identify with Creon, it clearly places audiences on the side of social justice, effectively protecting them from the exposure of any potential culpability of their own.\(^{40}\) In the scene in which Antigone is brought to Creon as a prisoner, she wears a high, wide board on her back (making her into, in Brecht’s words, a “center of unrest” [*Unruhezentrum*] on the stage), and at this point a question arises in the remarks with respect to an audience’s possible sympathy.

**Question:** Surely this is finally the place where the whole audience can just sympathize with Antigone, for it will feel what she feels and share her arguments?

**Answer:** It is more important that Antigone feels what the whole audience feels and shares its arguments. It is a considerable temptation for the actress playing Antigone to seek the audience’s sympathy in her exchange with Creon. In succumbing to this temptation, however, she would cloud the audience’s view into the beginnings of discord in the ruling class, to which Antigone belongs, and endanger the speculations and emotions that this view can provide. (BFA 25: 106)\(^{41}\)

The “Antwort” does not answer the question at all. The question concerns staging—how Brecht and Neher present Antigone in a crucial scene—and not, as the response seems to indicate, how an actress chooses to portray her. In fact, the stage directions in the *Modell* do make her suffering explicit and visible to the audience: “During the guard’s report Antigone staggers under the weight of the board” (BFA 25:102). As the photographs likewise make evident, sympathy is almost inescapable. And where there is sympathy with one in this encounter, there is easy condemnation of the other.

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40. Brecht’s Creon only alters his judgment of Polynices and Antigone when it is clear that the elders are turning against him; he agrees to release Antigone only to secure the support he needs to defend Thebes against attack by Argos. Thus he remains unworthy of sympathy even when he receives the message that Hämon is dead: “Frase: Soll Kreon im Unglück die Sympathie des Publikums haben? Antwort: Nein” (Question: Should Creon in his misfortune have the sympathy of the public? Answer: No).

This transformation of the play’s antagonists and the stabilization of their conflict continue in many of Brecht’s modifications to Hölderlin’s text. In casting Antigone’s resistance as more political than personal, more in the name of the community at large than for the sake of the brother she cannot replace, he renders impotent the painfully unique relationship between brother and sister on which Hölderlin’s translation relied, leaving it simply as one part of a general family dynamic. Not only does he omit Antigone’s claim that she would not have defied the state for anyone except her brother—not for a husband, not for a child—but he also mitigates the potentially incestuous desire that forged their bond; while Hölderlin presents Antigone’s desire for death clearly as a desire to lie beside Polynices (“Lieb werd’ ich bei dem Lieben liegen,” dearly I shall lie by the dear one), Brecht modifies the phrase to include her entire family, even suggesting a return to the mother’s breast: “Stilled, I will lie with the still ones” (Gestillt werd ich liegen mit den Stillen [BFA 8: 202]).

This subtle dilution of the personal in favor of the communal emerges directly from Brecht’s rejection of the Greek gods, for Hölderlin’s Antigone relies on a sense of the gods that has more to do with personal conviction (as she says of her act, her Zeus did not tell her to do it) than with religious convention, and her understanding of the role of fate is formed entirely within the framework of kinship relations. It is this layer of the text that Brecht, in expunging all divine names from the text, ultimately removes as well; Brecht’s Antigone might as well have no family any longer, for she acts not in its name but in spite of the wall of privilege it has built around her.

As a consequence, Brecht’s Antigone is notable not only for her customary resolve but also for a sheer banality, coded in the play as an essential humanity. Her behavior retains no trace of the defiant solitude that had characterized her for Sophocles and Hölderlin. Whereas Hölderlin’s translation often presents an intensification of the Greek lines, Brecht’s transformation reverses that tendency on numerous counts. Ismene, for one, no longer deems her sister’s determination to be incomprehensible or excessive; Hölderlin’s twofold declaration of excess, “It is senseless to do what is excessive” (Überflüssiges zu thun, ist sinnlos [FA 16: 271]), becomes the tamer “It is unwise to do what is futile” (Vergebliches zu tun, ist unweis [BFA 8: 202]). Meanwhile, Antigone’s desire to suffer the powerful and violent (“Laß mich aber und meinen irren Rat / das Gewaltige [to deinon] leiden” [FA 16: 273]) is transformed into a retributive gesture, trained toward the restoration of honor where it has been disturbed:

Laß aber mich das Mind’ste tun und
Meines ehren
Wo’s mir geschändet. (BFA 8: 203)

But let me at the very least honor my own where I have been disgraced.

There is no mistaking the validity of Antigone’s position here, for she no longer stands only for herself. In defending her actions, she now invokes not the enigmatic gods of the underworld but rather a *sensus communis* related to conventional notions of *Menschlichkeit*.

Kreon Immer nur die Nase neben dir siehst du, aber des Staats
Ordnung, die göttliche, siehst du nicht.
Ant. Göttlich mag sie wohl sein, aber ich wollte doch
Lieber sie menschlich, Kreon, Sohn des Menökeus. (BFA 8: 215)

Creon. You only ever see the nose in front of your face, but the order of the state, the divine one, you do not see.

Ant. That order may be divine, but I would rather have it human, Creon, son of Menoeceus.

Antigone’s disavowal of the divine instance here follows Brecht’s stated objectives in the *Arbeitsjournal* at the very start of his engagement with the text: “of all the gods [only] the local divinity, the god of joy remains” (AJ 795: *von den göttern bleibt der lokale volksheilige, der freudengott*). With this almost total removal of the gods from his adaptation—not only from the action of the play but from its very language—Brecht aims to isolate the “highly realistic folk tale” concealed within the “ideological fog” of the Greek. There is no place for the gods any longer now that the *Volk* has reached a point of clarity, a point at which it knows it can rely only on itself.

This self-reliance extends to the understanding of history in the text; whereas the gods were once the record-keepers of the tragic universe, meting out reward and punishment for a family’s actions for generations to come, here it is the Chorus who chides Antigone as well as Creon for past missteps against the *Volk*. Yet the substance of their reproach in each case differs on a basic level. While Creon is implicated for his self-isolation in the elders’ remark that he becomes “monstrous to himself,” Antigone must bear their criticism for her complacency, from which she only awakened when it was in her immediate interest:

Nicht ehe die letzte
Geduld verbraucht war und ausgemessen der letzte
Frevel, nahm des unsehenden Ödipus
Kind vom Aug die altersbrüchige Binde
Um in den Abgrund zu schauen. (BFA 8: 228)

Not until the last bit of patience was exhausted and the last outrage measured did the child of unseeing Oedipus take the blindfold, brittle with age, from her eyes in order to look into the abyss.

Forced by the Chorus to remove her well-worn blindfold, Oedipus’ daughter Antigone recognizes the abyss that has defined her family for generations. And in her incapacity to ascertain the importance of standing firm in resistance before it is too late, the Chorus sees the polis itself:

So unsehend auch hebt
Thebe die Sohle jetzt, und taumelnd
Schmeckt sie den Trank des Siegs, den viel-
Kräutrigem, der im Finstern gemischt ist
Und schluckt ihn und jauchzt. (BFA 8: 228)

Just as unseeing, Thebes lifts its feet now and giddily it tastes the victory drink, the well-spiced, mixed in the dark, and swallows it and rejoices.

Just as for Sophocles, Hölderlin, and especially Heidegger, Brecht’s Chorus remains that part of the Volk that can isolate the errors of individuals, in particular of both Creon and Antigone. However, while Creon stands for an inhuman isolation, Antigone takes a step that the elders finally describe in a collective sense; hers is an error shared by the community as such, and therefore it does not isolate her. On the contrary, it permits the polis to participate vicariously in her error and subsequent awakening—permits, if not identification in a strict sense, then a positive point of comparison: like Antigone, the community is challenged by the Chorus to peer into the abyss and recognize its own complacency. And as the title of a 1951 GDR review of the Greiz production indicates, the modern audience is sure to follow: “Theben—Chur—Greiz.”

Within the logic of Brecht’s epic theater, Antigone’s act thus represents what Brigid Doherty has described as an imitable gesture, captured in Brecht’s hybrid concept of “mitahmen,” which he used in conversation with Benjamin in 1931.42 Neither synonymous with identification (mitleiden),

42. Brigid Doherty, “Test und Gestus in Brecht and Benjamin,” MLN 115:3 (2000): 452. Doherty develops the idea of “mitahmen” as a relation in which the spectator’s response to a character “will always be mimetic before it can be empathetic”; emphasizing not “one man’s innermost likeness
nor entirely comparable to imitation (*nachahmen*), “mitahmen” still invites the spectator’s participation in the spectacle in another sense, one more on the level of self-conscious recognition than the emotional investment of classical *Mitleid*. Antigone acts not for the sake of her brother but rather in the name of her community, and the spectator who recognizes this gesture can find a point of resonance in that action.

*Frage:* Vertritt Hämon das Volk?
*Antwort:* Nein.

*Frage:* Vertritt der Chor der Alten das Volk?
*Antwort:* Nein.

*Frage:* Welche Stellung einzunehmen soll dann das Publikum veranlaßt werden?
*Antwort:* Die des Volks, das dem Zerwürfnis der Herrschenden zusieht.

(BFA 25: 118)

*Question:* Does Haemon represent the people?
*Answer:* No.

*Question:* Does the Chorus of elders represent the people?
*Answer:* No.

*Question:* What position should the audience then be induced to take?
*Answer:* That of the people observing the dissension of the ruling class.

The rejection of a totalizing violence that encompasses the primary substance of Brecht’s adaptation thus bears within itself another totalizing form, the establishment of a new community—with the audience—around the exclusive valuation of precisely that rejection. The past incarnations of resistance that Antigone invokes in the gods, in the singular bond between siblings, have lost their relevance, and in their place the tragic heroine appears not as a figure of difference but purely as representative of the *Volk*—thus of an audience that can observe from a distance the dissension and violence that will undermine the ruling class from within. An audience that can safely claim political resistance, therefore, as its own true path.

Where *Modell* stops and text begins, then, the resonance of Brecht’s *Antigone* as critical instrument begins to dampen. Perhaps Brecht would argue that it does not matter, that the evolution of performance contains within it the gradual, inevitable ruination of the text per se. However, it does matter, to another, but their interchangeability, a kind of identity the audience will be encouraged to observe critically rather than imitate sympathetically” (453).
for the *Modell* already shows how the dialectics of past and present *can* narrate a history that includes those ruins rather than dispenses with them. On this point, Brecht’s *Antigonemodell* truly remains a work in progress, not only by virtue of its expressed claim to a provisional status but also in those moments in which its best intentions might be called into question.

**EVEN IF** his epic theater is without question a didactic method, Brecht bristled at the notion, newly popularized during the 1940s by proponents of the Stanislavski method, that theater should have a moral basis.43 That tragedy, and the *Antigone* in particular, had long been understood to confront ethical quandaries relevant to a modern context did not alter his view; as he writes in his work journal, the imposition of a moral message onto art does not constitute an ethical position with respect to art. The only ethical maxim that truly counts is not to lie to the audience.

What disgusts me most of all about the German Stanislavski book is the pedestrian moral tone (*der haushacken moralische Ton*) . . . whereas the actor is really only bound to one moral precept: that in presenting human nature he not lie, for instance for the sake of a form of morality. . . . In S. he owes everything imaginable to the “word,” or to the “work”; but in reality he owes everything to the audience and, insofar as he ought to have the same concerns, to himself. (AJ 810 [4 Jan. 1948])

The interpreter of a text is in no way obligated to the text *an sich*, then; the ethical dimension of art inheres in its reception. Because, as Brecht writes in the foreword to the *Antigonemodell 1948*, it is impossible to try and summon the “spirit of antiquity” (*Geist der Antike*) in a modern age, adaptation must have a different task: “Even if one should feel obligated to do something for a work such as the Antigone, we could only do so insofar as we let it do something for us” (BFA 25: 75).45 Any obligation to the ancient text only makes sense when expressed through the text’s evolution; preservation merely for its own sake is not preservation at all. On this point

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44. An interesting counterpoint to Brecht’s imperative here is Arendt’s view that Brecht himself, who had always spoken the unvarnished truth about the social order, began to “lie” after the second World War, composing and performing work “as if one were standing in the midst of the old, familiar class conflict and as if ethnic persecution were an optical illusion” (Arendt 100).

45. “Selbst wenn man sich verpflichtet fühlte, für ein Werk wie die *Antigone* etwas zu tun, könnten wir das nur so tun, indem wir es etwas für uns tun lassen.”
Brecht echoes Benjamin’s view of translation as an integral part of a text’s history or “afterlife”: translation (by an “author”), like performance by an actor, is a means of making a piece of language resonate—in a specific time and place—as truth.

For Brecht, it is in historical moments of crisis that this resonance might most productively occur: “the primary effects seem to be concentrated where primary transitions, decisions, collapses, catastrophes have taken place” (AJ 821 [3 March 1948]). The theater in ruins is the space from which the dramatic stuff of the past can rise, phoenix-like, to new levels of meaning. Its conveyance into the present day depends upon that relationship to catastrophe, insofar as it constantly evokes both the hard lessons of sifting through the rubble and the exhilarating potentiality of transformation: das Vorher und das Nachher. The Antigonemodell does not only make reference to itself as theatrical device but also “models” a relationship to history that takes shape as its particular form of tragic effect: “main thesis: that a certain kind of learning is the most important pleasure of our age, so that it must assume a significant place in our theater” (AJ 835 [18.8.48]).

What, then, is the audience supposed to glean from Antigone? If not the intrinsic value of the “spirit of antiquity” on the one hand, if not the correlations between the themes of Greek tragedy and contemporary politics on the other: what can Antigone give her modern audience? Is there a middle ground between rigid preservation and total transformation? And if there is, how can we conceive of it?

On this point Brecht seems to have benefited from his own hindsight. In his remarks on the Greiz production in 1951, he withdraws from his categorical denial that the play offers any moral standpoint whatsoever. However, the ethical framework he sees in Antigone’s act does not permit a modern audience to find solace in her heroism; indeed, the humanity that her act represents now appears as astonishingly callous.

The great ethical act of Antigone, who rebels against the tyrant Creon, consists in the fact that she, moved by profound humanity, does not hesitate

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46. “hauptthese: daß ein bestimmtes lernen das wichtigste vergnügen unseres zeitalters ist, so daß es in unserm theater eine große stellung einnehmen muß.”
to place her own people, through her open resistance, in danger of being
defeated in a predatory war.

Antigone’s great ethical gesture, then, is this: she acts as she must, with no
regard for her security or for anyone else’s. She does not hesitate to take a
risk that could destroy her entire community. And for what? No longer only
in the name of her brother; that has already become clear. Brecht instead
emphasizes that she is “moved by profound humanity” in her decision to act,
suggesting that her ethical action is based in a more fundamental sense of
*Menschlichkeit* than the substance of society can offer on its own. It is for this
reason that Brecht can claim that his adaptation of the play is not “moral” in
a conventional sense; the “profound humanity” that inspires Antigone here
is not synonymous with the recognition of “human rights” as responsibility
to a community of others. It may even run counter to that, insofar as her
ethical stance of open resistance leads her to place that community in dan-
ger. Conventional morality is suspended, the ethical sacrificed for the sake
of a cause that will shake the community to its core. Hers is an essentially
irresponsible ethics, then, and yet Brecht insists on its value nonetheless.47

The interplay between texts presented in Brecht’s *Modell* follows a similar
pattern: his practice of adaptation is both responsible and irresponsible, both
reverent and impudent with respect to its sources. Its only ethical claim may
lie in the willingness, even determination, to sacrifice the status quo—the
integrity of the text—for the sake of its audience. As for Antigone herself,
responsibility to the past only carries weight when paired with the resolution
to change, no matter what the consequences.

Even if Brecht’s often fierce defense of the imitative dimension of his
*Modell* might undermine this interplay of *Vorher* and *Nachher* in some ways,
there is no question that his insistence on accountability to the past in and
through change emerges out of a profound dismay—a disillusionment with
a post-war German culture in which “‘going on’ is the parole, we defer and

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47. Kierkegaard’s account of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* offers a similar viewpoint, though
obviously tied unlike Brecht’s *Antigone* to to the problem of faith. Hent DeVries points out, for ex-
ample, that Abraham’s ordeal shows that in every genuine decision, the ethical has to be sacrificed in
the name of an ab-solute duty or obligation. For Kierkegaard, the name of that ab-solute would be
“God.” “Thus, to say ‘à Dieu’ is to say adieu to the ethical order of universal laws and human rights
by responding to a singular responsibility towards an ab-solute other” [33]. Thus I sacrifice the totality
of all others; but this does not lessen my responsibility to all the others. Hence I become more guilty
as I become more responsible; I remain a hostage in my obligation to those others (de Vries 34). This
results in a double bind: “in being responsive and responsible, one must, at the same time, also be
irresponsible and irresponsible.”
What Hannah Arendt describes as Brecht’s deep-seated capacity to sympathize (mitzuleiden) and consequent commitment to transforming sympathy (Mitleid) into anger (Zorn) finds a direct parallel in Antigone’s resolution to take action at all costs:

“The classics,” Brecht says, “were the most sympathetic of all men” (and as everyone knows, in Brecht’s encoded language the classics are Marx, Engels and Lenin); they distinguish themselves from “unknowing natures” insofar as they “transformed sympathy into anger,” because they knew that sympathy is “what one does not deny those to whom one denies help.” One can get rid of sympathy if one “does not put oneself in the place of a suffering person in order to suffer, but rather to end his suffering.” Thus Brecht arrived at the same conclusion as Machiavelli, whom he scarcely could have known: Whoever wants to take political action must “learn how not to be good.”

Brecht’s engagement with tragedy thus offers a touchstone for political action not in the name of sympathy (or even of fear for the self, as Lessing might have it) but outrage. Antigone is not a pitiable figure in Brecht’s vision—despite the claims to the contrary noted above, for him she is not even a sympathetic figure—and her action strikes the audience not because it evokes the bonds of kinship or the unwritten dike of the gods but because it restores authority to the collective where tyranny had reigned. It is surely no coincidence that the Chorus, emboldened by Antigone’s apparently reckless deed, turns on Creon when he concedes that the war with Argos has not ended after all.

Kreon, Sohn des Menökeus
Immer folgten wir dir. Und Ordnung
War in der Stadt; und hieltst uns vom Halse
Unsere Feinde allhier . . .
Und die von Zwietracht leben, die Schreier mit
Langen Mägen und großen Lungen am Marktplatz
Redende, weil sie bezahlt sind, oder weil nicht bezahlt,

48. “Die Klassiker,” sagt Brecht, “waren die mitleidigsten aller Menschen” (und in Brechts verschlüsselnder Sprache sind die Klassiker bekanntlich Marx, Engels und Lenin); sie unterscheiden sich von “unwissenden Naturen” dadurch, daß sie Mitleid sogleich in “Zorn verwandelten,” weil sie wußten, daß Mitleid das ist, “was man denen nicht versagt, denen man Hilfe versagt.” Man kann also das Mitleid loswerden, wenn man sich “in die Leidenden nicht, um zu leiden, versetzt, sondern um ihre Leiden zu beenden.” So kam Brecht zu dem gleichen Schluß wie Machiavelli, den er schwerlich kannte: Wer politisch handeln will, muß “lernen, nicht gut zu sein” (Arendt 93).
Jetzt schreien sie wieder und haben
Mißlichen Stoff auch: hast du denn
Etwa allzu Gewaltiges anbegonnen, Sohn des Menökeus? (BFA 8: 233f.)

Creon, son of Menökeus, we have always followed you. And there was order in the city; and you kept our enemies from our throats. [. . . ] And those who live from discord, the rabble-rousers with empty stomachs and strong lungs, speaking at the marketplace because they have been paid, or because they have not been paid, now they cry again and also speak of dangerous things: did you perhaps take on something all too violent, son of Menökeus? (cf. Malina 55f.)

The stage directions for this passage mirror that exchange of authority: “The elders surround Creon. Their tone changes completely, now they speak to him as masters” (BFA 8: 149). By the time a messenger arrives with grave news from the battlefield (the young Theban soldiers, including Creon’s older son Megareus, have all been slaughtered in a bloody confrontation, and the Argives are now on their way to Thebes, which can no longer defend itself), Creon is forced to submit to their counsel: “Zum Felsgrund / Eile und löse die Grabschütterin schnell / Antigone löse!” (BFA 8: 156: To the cliff base / Hurry and quickly release the pourer of grave dust / Release Antigone!).

While Antigone may model in word and deed a challenge to tyranny in the name of a more basic justice, however, her defiance is no longer the issue by the end of Brecht’s play. Indeed, within the framework of the plot it proves not to have had any effect at all; as Brecht’s versification of the play (the Antigone-Legende) indicates, the elders simply follow their leader into oblivion.

Und elend und furchtsam
unbelehrbar, stolperte er, der viele geführet,
jetzt der stürzenden Stadt zu. Aber die Alten
folgten dem Führer auch jetzt, und jetzt in Verfall und Vernichtung.

And wretched and frightfully unteachable, he who led many now staggered toward the falling city. But the elders still followed the leader, even now into decay and destruction.

Not only Creon is “unteachable,” as it turns out. But by depicting the unteachable in its demise, Brecht attempts to open up a space from which
to teach. This is what Antigone “can do for us,” in his words: the quaking of the rule of law, though stilled by the end of the play, becomes conceivable, while its weary reinscription is exposed as ethically bankrupt. Brecht’s reproach that the immediate past “is deferred and repressed” (wird verschoben und . . . verdrängt) thus takes on concrete form as the Theban elders follow Creon, one by one, off the stage.

By contrast, Antigone’s earlier exit becomes all the more powerful in light of this pathetic exit by Creon and the Chorus:

Nicht, ich bitt euch, sprech vom Geschick.
Das weiß ich. Von dem sprech
Der mich hinmacht, schuldlos; dem
Knüpft ein Geschick! Denkt nämlich nicht
Ihr seid verschont, ihr Unglückseligen.
[ . . . ] Euch beweine ich, Lebende
Was ihr sehen werdet
Wenn mein Auge schon voll des Staubs ist! Liebliche Thebe
Vaterstadt! Und ihr, Dirzäische Quellen
Um Thebe rings, wo die Wagen
Hochziehn, o ihr Haine! Wie schnürt’s mir den Hals zu
Was dir geschehen soll! Aus dir sind kommen
Die Unmenschlichen, da
Mußt du zu Staub werden. Sagt
Wer nach Antigone fragt, sie
Sahen ins Grab wir fliehn. (BFA 8: 127)

I beg you, do not speak of fate. I know that. Speak of him who condemns me in innocence; he has a fate attached to him! Don’t think that you’ve been spared, you unfortunate ones. [ . . . ] I weep for you, living ones, for what you will see after my eyes are already filled with dust! Lovely Thebes, father city! And you, springs of Dirce encircling Thebes, where the wagons gather, oh you groves! How it chokes me to think of what shall happen to you! The inhuman ones have emerged from your midst, so you must turn to dust. Tell those who ask about Antigone that you saw her flee into the grave.

As Antigone already knows here, the demise of a human being does not result from the gods’ imposition of fate but from the actions of other men. And the demise of an entire city will follow. Authority undermines itself when its grasp of power becomes too desperate; Antigone is the only one to recognize that in the end, though the audience is meant to observe it as
well. Likewise, where the original held sway over the translation, the *Modell* undermines that authority; the remnants of the past combine with glimpses of the present, and all of it stands as a record only long enough to be changed in the act of imitation as infinite variation. Aestheticized politics tumble into ruins; meanwhile, art gains a political voice in that very same rupture.