

2018-01-23

Mutter Courage und ihre Erbe: Mother Courage and her Legacy

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Young, A. G. (2018). Mutter Courage und ihre Erbe: Mother Courage and her Legacy (Master's thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada). Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca>. doi:10.11575/PRISM/5442
<http://hdl.handle.net/1880/106361>

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Mutter Courage und ihre Erbe:
Mother Courage and her Legacy

by

Adrian Young

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN DRAMA

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JANUARY, 2018

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Abstract

Mother Courage and Her Children is a play that has seemingly lost its place in the world. Brecht's original intent was to use *verfremdungseffekt* to distance his audience from the violence that had swallowed them and use that distance to let his audience have a long, critical look at society. However, in modern Western society we have been desensitized to the sort of violence and the context that Brecht wanted critical distance from. We live in a world that the play does not anticipate. The context of the contemporary world does not necessarily allow for the Brechtian playing of *Mother Courage*. Therefore, a contemporary interpretation that is more in touch with the current world is required. This document examines the attempt to bring the play, and its significantly important context, to a contemporary North American audience in order to see if the words of the play still reverberate.

Acknowledgements

My Supervisors

Bruce Barton and Pil Hansen.

Cast

Val Campbell; Alex Dan; Daniel Gibbs; Brian Jensen; Ben Jones; Armin Karame; Mitchell Kirby; Nicole Logan; Nina Solberg; Spencer Streichert; Danelle White; Bryson Wiese; and Jennifer Yeung.

Design Team

Graham Frampton; Adam Kostiuk; Denis Nassar; Bianca Manuel; Scott Reid; and Cai Samphire.

Musicians

Saulo Neves; Daniel Pelton; Brian Speirs; Darcy van Helden; Connor Wilde.

Production Team

Allison Bajt; Colin Barden; Cherie Caslyn; Luke Dahlgren; Scott Freeman; Steve Isom; Kristin Jones; Brian Kerby; Michelle McKey; Gwen McGowan; Andrew North; Lisa Roberts; Halina Supernat; April Viczko; D.W. von Kuster; Julia Wasilewski; and Laryssa Yanchack.

Running Crew

Emily Adams; Laine Breaker; Michael Fischer-Summers; Alissa Grams; Virginia Maxfield; Whitney Ollenberger; Amy On; Annie Pattison; Elizabet Rajchel; Laurel Simonson; and Elias Stang.

Setup Crew

Ryan Dickinson and Barry Owen.

Stage Management Team

Mitchell Craib; Skylar Desjardins; and Tauran Wood.

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For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

James 2:26 (King James Bible)

Chapter 1

Sustained Courage

From western society, four productions of Mother Courage and Her Children are examined for indications of the play's continued perseverance as an effective and important work.

Tony Kushner, American playwright and recent translator of *Mutter Courage Und Ihre Kinder* (hereafter *Mother Courage*), does not read or speak German (Brecht, *Mother Courage* v). This implies two things: that the play has an incredible power to motivate someone to commit to such a difficult task; and that there is something about the play that, regardless of language, reverberates with people long after its original context.

This first chapter is an examination of four different productions of *Mother Courage*, beginning with the 1949 East Berlin production that catapulted the Berliner Ensemble into existence and propelled *Mother Courage* as a work on the world stage. Then the focus shifts to the United States for a look at the Performance Group's production in 1974 in New York. We then move to 1984 England with an examination of the Royal Shakespeare Company's production at the Barbican. Finally, the lens returns to the United States with the much more recent revival of *Mother Courage* in 2006 in a translation written by Kushner, the same translation that I used for this thesis production. Each production speaks to a very different time and place. The context of each production is radically different and yet they all prompted use of the same play.

Therefore, as Kushner demonstrates, there must be something about the play that reverberates regardless of time or place. These four productions are intriguing for their production concepts and the proximity that the production location had to a large conflict. However, an investigation into the individual contexts of each production is not wholly dependent on identifying a connection to war. This chapter means to explore the context of four productions that seem significant to the history of the play in an attempt to illuminate the impact of Brecht's ideas, and the extent to which the context was a factor in subsequent productions and the reception of his play.

The production of *Mother Courage* in 1949, directed in collaboration by Erich Engel and Bertolt Brecht, is both a blessing and a curse to any production that follows it. It both stands as a great example of the power of the play and seemingly looms over any other attempt at producing the play. Brecht's Model Book is partly responsible for this effect. His detail and sophistication when it comes to the documentation of his process is an incredible treasure chest of information. The other thing that helped cement this production to forever stand as a monument to the play's power is its place in the repertoire of the Berliner Ensemble. In the course of its lifespan, the production was staged over four hundred times (Thomson 59) within Berlin and then across Europe when the show was taken on tour. The impact that this production had on not only *Mother Courage* as a play, but on Brecht's widening appeal as a playwright, is perhaps immeasurable. The issue that comes from this is that when one production becomes so powerful and immediately recognizable as the 'original' production of a play, it can be forgotten that its creation came in a specific time and place. Brecht himself understood that adaptations to theatrical work need to be made depending on context, and that

Model books can sometimes be more of a hindrance than a benefit if used as gospel (Kuhn, Giles, and Silberman 183).

While the production that premiered in January, 1949 was not technically by the Berliner Ensemble, the people working on the show would go on to form the ensemble and the ensemble members were the people performing this production for the next ten years. In 1949, however, the time and place of the production were unique in a way that is impossible to replicate. Brecht wrote the play in 1939 as World War II got underway and then directed it only a few years after the conclusion of the war. The Berlin and Germany that the play was being performed in were only a few months away from being separated into two states. Germany was a very different country from the one that existed when Brecht wrote the play. The people that came together to form the Berliner Ensemble were survivors. They were Jewish and Communist refugees, prisoners of the Nazis, soldiers that had been drafted into anti-aircraft units, as well as theatre professionals that had survived either the camps or the bombing of Berlin (Honegger 99).

Germany was destined to heal slowly. The audiences that came to see the production had to walk past destroyed buildings and rubble as they made their way to the Deutsches Theatre. However, the incoming separation of Germany offered Brecht an interesting opportunity to “signal to the communist authorities that, if he were to be offered a significant subsidy, he might lend his name to a theatre company in East Berlin” (Thomson 65). Prior to the German Democratic Republic establishing itself in October, 1949, Brecht and his wife, Helene Weigel, had been forming the Berliner Ensemble and submitted a proposal to the municipal authority to fund the new group (Barnett 47). However, the proposal was not approved, forcing

the group to turn to the SED (the Socialist Unity Party of Germany) for funding, which they received (Barnett 48).

The success of the production of *Mother Courage* was what allowed for the creation of the Berliner Ensemble. While the production created a critical debate about Brecht's style of theatre, the reaction to the production was overwhelmingly positive. This included both packed houses and enthusiastic reviews (Barnett 41). Not only did this success allow for the creation of the Berliner Ensemble, but it also facilitated the continued influence of this production of *Mother Courage*.

In 1956, the Berliner Ensemble production of *Mother Courage* premiered at the Palace Theatre in London. The production happened in late summer, shortly after the death of Bertolt Brecht himself (Thomson 83). This is a tragic coincidence, considering that this production changed the shape of Brecht's acceptance in England. *Mother Courage* and the two other productions touring were performed entirely in German, once again implying the power that this play has even among those who cannot truly understand the words. The authority of this specific production partly came from the things that one does not need to know German to understand, such as the lighting, set, and music. Lessons learned from the travelling *Mother Courage* would go on to be incorporated into a production by one of England's biggest theatre companies: The Royal Shakespeare Company (Esslin 65).

Helene Weigel, who played Mother Courage in the original production, has been a large factor in why the production is idolized, not only because of her iconic portrayal, but because of the moments within the part that she made famous. One example of this is Mother Courage's silent scream after refusing to acknowledge familiarity with the body of her son, Swiss Cheese.

This scream was influenced by a picture in a newspaper of an Asian mother screaming over her dead son's body (Honegger 100). Brecht himself admired how Weigel could find the perfect balance of character and actor. "Weigel's way of playing Mother Courage was hard and angry," he wrote, "that is, her Mother Courage was not angry; she herself, the actress, was angry" (Brecht, *Journals* 388). This tension between the character and actor is one of the main aspects of Weigel's performance that has been emulated by others. Weigel's performance, as well as the continued graft of the Berliner Ensemble on the play, will initially serve as ghosts that haunt those who work on this play, but as time goes on their techniques are exorcised in attempts to reach new audiences that are ignorant of that context.

In 1975, The Performance Group premiered *Mother Courage* at the Performing Garage in New York. The production was developed over close to a year under the direction of Richard Schechner (Ryan 79) and it opened almost two months before the end of the Vietnam War. A production of *Mother Courage* had not been performed in New York since its Broadway premiere in 1963, and while most productions in the United States used a translation by Eric Bentley, the Performance Group unanimously decided to use one by Ralph Manheim instead (Barnes 32).

The production took place in a less traditional space, rather than being under a proscenium arch or on the thrust stage. The performance was instead environmental. Audience members could sit, lean, or crouch anywhere they liked (Schechner 152). The transparency of the production even went as far as the creation of a green room, within sight of the audience, where the actors went to relax when they were not on stage (Schechner 153). This open nature let Schechner explore his concepts of spatial relationships and the "ritual nature of the theatrical

transaction” (Thomson 112). The show ran approximately four hours in length and it included a dinner break with food prepared by the cast—with Swiss Cheese “on the menu” (Thomson 115). Schechner brought the theatrical transaction to the forefront by sitting in the house and keeping track of the purchases before the show began. Once the show had started, the register would be returned to Mother Courage and each transaction in the show would be accounted for by a loud noise (Harding and Rosenthal 328). The noise sounded for both the transactions Mother Courage makes with other characters and each time she sold an item of food to an audience member during dinner. This way the audience was always aware that theatre, like Mother Courage’s merchandise, was part of a business transaction.

As part of his experiment with space, Schechner cut the mobile wagon that is seemingly essential to the play. Instead he had a store on the western wall of the space, although pulleys were still used, both to recreate the difficulty of pulling the cart and as props in the deaths of the three children (Ryan 80). Schechner’s explanation for this was that “wagons in America are identified with pioneers [...] and with traveling and going places. In choosing to have a store rather than a wagon, we created what we thought was an American image of a wagon” (Ryan 80). Schechner’s concern was seemingly that Mother Courage would be perceived by Americans as a pioneer that progresses, rather than an unrelenting business woman who does not learn anything. This bold change, along with Schechner’s other experiments with space, came from the Performance Group’s attempts to break the illusion of the performance (Harding and Rosenthal 328). The impression given by Schechner is that, by breaking down normal theatrical expectations, he could have a more effective performance that trades theatrical illusion for

theatre business. For Schechner, *Mother Courage* “is a play that deals fundamentally with the lower middle class and its illusions” (Ryan 81).

Another element of *Mother Courage* that the Performance Group’s production experimented with was the acting of the play. The acting styles within the play “covered a wide range from pantomime to farce” (Ryan 91). Brecht’s plays are renowned for their style of *verfremdungseffekt*, or alienation, which is a technique which prevents the audience from losing themselves within the narrative in order to preserve a conscious and critical observer. The Performance Group wanted to take these ideas a step further by trying to pull the space between actor and role even further apart than Brecht did within his performances (Harding and Rosenthal 328). Schechner wanted the audience to be able to see the actor both in and out of character (Ryan 92). This included the green room within the space, audiences seeing actors prepare before the show, and the long period of rehearsal where most rehearsals were open to the public (Schechner 154). In one case, Elizabeth Lecompte played a Swedish General with a mustache that was indicative of the masculine nature of the character, but she did not change the feminine way in which she spoke naturally for the role. The performers of the show, rather than becoming their characters, decided to tell the stories of their characters (Ryan 93). However, it is extremely difficult to know if Schechner’s use of *verfremdungseffekt* was effective without a close survey of his audience. *Verfremdungseffekt* is supposed to make an audience consciously aware of their feelings about a play, allowing them to be critical of the play and their feelings about it more easily. By reminding the audience of the actors playing the roles, Schechner hoped to stop the audience from identifying with the characters—a method also used by Brecht.

All of these different elements that were experimented with by Schechner and the Performance Group were not received fondly by Clive Barnes in his review of the production for the *New York Times*. Barnes expressed a sense of dissatisfaction over what he perceived as Schechner's lack of fidelity to Brecht and the Model Book (Barnes 32). He did not think that the environmental style of the Performance Group worked for the play at all. He insisted that not only does *Mother Courage* have "nothing to do with spatial relationships or their exploration," but also that "Mother Courage's wagon is not a theoretical dramatic idea, but a tangible theatrical metaphor" (Barnes 32). Barnes also believed that the cast was "generally speaking [...] not mature enough for the play" (Barnes 32). After musing on the problems with the experimental style, he asked the theoretical question that he did not believe the Performance Group had asked: "What is it the playwright wanted?" (Barnes 32). This is a question that will seem rather ironic after an exploration of the RSC production.

In May of 1975, shortly after the end of the Vietnam War, Schechner and the Performance Group cancelled a performance of their *Mother Courage*. They instead involved students from the University of Michigan in an interpretation of the Thirty Years War, transposed to Indochina, in an attempt to represent the impact on both Vietnam and the United States (Thomson 116). Schechner believed that the events of the play were about the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer and about how, inevitably, the middle class are ground down, as well (Ryan 82). While Schechner directly acknowledges the impact of the Vietnam War within the timeline of his production of *Mother Courage*, it is not clear whether the war had any impact on the Performance Group's decision to perform the play; although it is safe to speculate that this was the case.

In 1984, the Royal Shakespeare Company produced a version of *Mother Courage* directed by Howard Davies and starring Judi Dench at the Barbican Theatre in London. Davies had a history of struggling with Brecht's work, as in a 1977 production of *Days of the Commune* that stands as one of the only productions that Ian McKellen has ever regretted being in (Eddershaw 98). The struggles led to Davies abandoning efforts to stage Brecht for a period of time. He did not attempt to direct Brecht again until the 1984 production of *Mother Courage*.

The translation used for the production was written by Hanif Kureishi, who worked from a literal translation by Susan Davies (Eddershaw 100). Kureishi's main focus was to reduce the distance that Brecht's work was known for. He stated that, in his view, there was nothing "left of the alienation concept in *Mother Courage*" and that he thought that "the character goes against some of the things that Brecht believed about alienation" (Eddershaw 100). Kureishi went even further with this by integrating the songs into the play to make them seamless parts of the action and world, something that may have "upstaged the action" and "aimed for atmosphere rather than meaning" (Kleber and Visser 121).

Both Kureishi and Davies agreed on encouraging the audience to empathise with *Mother Courage*. Davies wanted to cast Judi Dench as she fit more of his ideas of the empathy that he wanted audiences to have. Davies was a great admirer of Trevor Nunn, who at the time was Artistic Director of the RSC, and wanted to approach *Mother Courage* the same way that Nunn approached Shakespeare, by humanizing every character (Eddershaw 101). However, all of this lends to a feeling that the play was approached without a clear understanding of the previous work—not only Brecht's ideas, but the play itself. Neither the director, the designer, the translator, nor the actress playing *Mother Courage* had ever seen the play before, and Judi

Dench deliberately did not read the play until the night before rehearsals began (Eddershaw 102).

The design of the production also supported Davies' wish for the audience to respond more empathetically with the characters. The design for *Mother Courage* was intended to make her smaller in stature to go along with her warm and amusing character. The set design, by John Napier, had the look of a Heath Robinson contraption, with a giant rotating axle attached to a caravan with a chimney that is reminiscent of a factory. Some reviewers of the production found that this design, while impressive at first, overpowered the production, especially considering the play was meant to occur in a naturalistic manner, because of the influence of Trevor Nunn on Davies (Billington 1017). Davies, himself, admitted that the set was poorly constructed and that "the actors lost all confidence in what [they] had achieved in rehearsal because they became preoccupied with the fear of the set going wrong" (Eddershaw 103).

Reviews, however, were mostly positive about the production. Michael Billington of *The Guardian* applauded the naturalistic approach of the production and saw only the set as an issue. Benedict Nightingale of *The New Statesman* also appreciated the naturalistic approach while wondering if Brecht was right in his own views, suggesting that Brecht's directorial approach to his own plays may not be as suitable. Christopher Edwards of *The Spectator* questioned Brecht's importance, finding it suspect, and lauded a magnificent production that breaks away from the shadow of Brecht's ideals. Quite a common response to this play was to appreciate its ability to be like other plays of the time, rather than being a work of Brecht's.

Every conceptual aspect of the production seemed to go against what Brecht would have, and had, done with the play. The British public discovered that it liked Brecht as long as it

was performed nothing like the way Brecht would have done it (Thomson 92). Not only did Davies and Kureishi smooth out the play to avoid Brecht's epic invention, but they also incorporated the Aristotelean tradition that Brecht had set himself against (Thomson 92). The result was something much safer and familiar to the public. The production occurred in the aftermath of the Falkland's War, making it topical. However, the implication of the production is that the British public of the 1980s does not like its theatre to be political, and that three decades after the original production, Britain needed to smuggle Brecht into London under the guise of something other than Brecht (Thomson 93). This is a rather unfortunate assertion, considering Britain's history of potent political drama and authors.

Tony Kushner has written that his reason for writing a new translation of *Mother Courage* was that "a new version of Brecht's masterpiece was needed, rendered in an idiom at home in the mouths of American actors and the ears of American audiences" (Brecht, *Mother Courage* v). There is then an irony that so soon after the Public Theater, the first company to use the translation, performed its 2006 production of *Mother Courage*, the National Theatre in England asked to use the translation. This popularity proved that Kushner's translation anchored the play to something in the contemporary world.

Kushner's translation, according to Charlotte Ryland's introduction, manages to reproduce the "rough edges and idiosyncratic language of Brecht's German." She continues that Kushner's rich language keeps the historical, cultural, and geographical images of Brecht's original, though she admits that Kushner does lose some of the "echoes of medieval religion that are so central to the play." The other major case for a loss in translation relates to the humour of the play. In those cases where Brecht's humour cannot be translated directly, such as German

idioms that do not work in English, Kushner compensates by inserting a joke of his own. This is shown where Kushner adds in more contemporary references, such as the idea of the rich getting tax exemptions. Kushner admits that he originally wanted to recreate the context of the 1949 production, but decided that it was impossible, both because of the “antique echoes” of the language Brecht used and the way that audience members are not connected in the same way as in Brecht’s time (Kalb, *Interview* 104). Kushner also discusses the feeling of audience members laughing out loud together. He considers this to be the main reason for his changes to the jokes: to make that moment of audience consolidation happen.

The production was directed by George C. Wolfe and starred Meryl Streep as Mother Courage. This *Mother Courage* followed the events of September 11th and shadowed the events of the conflicts both in Afghanistan and in Iraq, but one of the consistent conceptual rules within the production was that there should be no specific references to these contexts within the performance. The production never wanted a spectator to “think of a specific historical moment” (“Theater of War”). This idea certainly echoes all of the previous productions that do not refer specifically to the conflicts that they are in close proximity to. The productions all seem to suggest that the proximity is enough to reflect the purpose of the performance. The 2006 production, staged outdoors in the Delacorte Theater, shies away from anything that would give away a specific war. The design makes use of a revolving platform at centre stage that is reminiscent of Brecht’s own production, the machinations of which are shown to the audience and add to the dehumanizing experience of the play (McCarter 1).

One similarity that the 2006 production holds with the 1984 production is that, like Howard Davies, George C. Wolfe believed that *verfremdungseffekt* was no longer necessary

(Kalb, *Still Fearsome 2*). Wolfe's argument was that movies and television have taught us to automatically distance ourselves from all the things that we see. Kushner also noted these changes in the way we perceive the play, but for him it was because of the context. He wanted to translate the play for a contemporary "American" audience, but he was acutely aware that, even considering September 11th, Americans have never experienced war the way that Brecht's European audience in 1949 did (Zinman 64).

An interesting irony in reviews of this production is that the performance was praised for its ability to reconnect the audience with the horrors of war that movies and television had been distancing them from (Johnson 282). Many reviewers agreed that Meryl Streep is very good and that her personal acting quirks, while noticeable, did not distract from the performance. The reviews of this production, unlike in 1984, seem to not even hold a notion about Brechtian performance. Across multiple New York-based publications there is a distinctive lack of acknowledging the play outside of the context of who was working on this specific production. The playwright translating, the director, and the star actress are all held in acclaim and as responsible for the good and bad of the play. At this point, the context of the original production is so far removed that perhaps even the ghosts of Brecht and Weigel no longer hang over it. The public has seemingly forgotten the original context. Audiences have come a long way from "What is it the playwright wanted?" in 1975 and the grateful cries for distance from Brecht's ideas in 1984. It would seem that that the ghosts of the Berliner Ensemble no longer haunt the theatre-going public.

The four productions examined here all treat Brecht's work with different levels of reverence. Some clash more with Brecht's original objectives than others, and each production

uses a different version of Brecht's language: the original German plus three different translations. However, Brecht was aware of the changes needed depending on the context. He knew that "temporary structures have to be built and there is always a danger that they will become permanent" and that "they immediately meet with strong opposition from all supporters of the old ways" (Kuhn, Giles, and Silberman 183). Brecht understood that his own Model Book may occasionally hinder instead of being beneficial and that when it came to Model Books in general, "they were designed not to make thought unnecessary but to provoke it; not to replace but to compel artistic creation" (Kuhn, Giles, and Silberman 183). When Brecht brought his production to Munich, "he sought what was visually effective and beautiful, but he never slavishly followed his own model" (Kuhn, Giles, and Silberman 243). It would seem that while Brecht might not have been able to anticipate the occasionally drastic changes that would be brought to his work, he was not completely offended by the idea. However, it seems difficult to imagine someone as ideologically motivated as Brecht rolling over and allowing performances like the RSC production to go without a serious debate on Aristotelian techniques.

In his "Courage Model 1949," the only time that Brecht refers to World War II is in his haunting opening thought: "If life goes on in our ruined cities after the great war, then it is a different life" (Kuhn, Giles, and Silberman 183). This feeling seems to echo throughout all the productions of *Mother Courage*. Every element of the play, even those not understandable without translation, lead us to the same warning: we have not learned. Everything else seems to change, including the context, time, place, and language. As the years have progressed and other media have desensitized audiences to the horrors of war that were so real and visceral for Brecht and his original audience, contemporary productions need to reconnect us with that

warning instead of distancing us from it. For Germany in 1949, the violence was real. Audience members would have to climb over rubble to attend the play. In America in 2006, the violence is distant. The impressive quality of the play is that even in two drastically different contexts, the message of the play still communicates. The play itself stands as a testament to the power of Brecht's ability to transcend. Even when his work is changed from its original form or intention, it still communicates.

Chapter 2

A Stagnant Wheel

Winter 2015, prior to the submission of Mother Courage and her Children as a thesis project, ideas for how to perform the play in the contemporary age start to be conceptualized.

Mother Courage and Her Children is a play that has seemingly lost its place in the world. Brecht's original intent was to use *verfremdungseffekt* to distance his audience from the violence that had swallowed them and use that distance to let his audience have a long, critical look at society. Why and how does one bring *Mother Courage* to a North American stage in 2017? Regardless of how much I enjoy this brilliant play, I decided that I could not direct it unless I answered these questions. However, in modern society we have been desensitized to the sort of violence and the context that Brecht wanted critical distance from. We live in a world that the play does not anticipate. The context of the contemporary world does not necessarily allow for the Brechtian playing of *Mother Courage*. Therefore, a contemporary interpretation that is more in touch with the current world is required. One of the things I wished to explore with this production was whether a large change in context could work. Changing the context allows the production to ask one of its biggest questions: 'Have we learned anything since the time of Brecht's setting, the Thirty Years' War?' Even when the way that war is fought changes, the realities and effects of it stay the same, as does the ability of some to attempt to profit amid the tragedy, regardless of what they are selling and who is buying.

Both the common patterns of war and the stranglehold of capitalism that the play deals with are relevant in a contemporary Canadian context, especially considering the number of refugees that continue to come into 'western' countries. The effects of war have not sneaked up on Canada, but have rather shown up at its door without anywhere else to go. My feeling was that audiences need to be re-familiarized with the truth that people profit from war, even when they do not directly participate in it. Brecht's original audience was aware of this as they stepped over rubble on their way to the theatre. Children like myself were made aware of it growing up in places forever changed by 'The Blitz' in England, walking home past empty lots where buildings have still yet to be replaced after the bombings. War has never been a close reality for a modern Canadian society. This makes a play about the distance between war and people apt for this contemporary world where people could watch a phone recording of Saddam Hussein's hanging. War is much easier to deal with when it can be accessed on a display and, more importantly, can be turned off and put away when convenient. However, context is everything and war is not convenient.

When I first started thinking about directing *Mother Courage*, back when it was one of five plays I was submitting as proposals for my thesis project, I had a list of ideas that I was initially most curious to play with. The first idea I ever wrote down for *Mother Courage* was that the show would be performed by actors in the form of a travelling company, with all the machinations of the performance on display. This immediate connection between theatrical transparency and travelling companies came from my experiences growing up seeing mummers' shows and pantomimes very often. The 'travelling company' idea would eventually evolve into the ensemble that the final production contained. Perhaps the idea of transparency became the

first to actually take shape in the creation of the show, and looking back on it now it may have even been the driving force behind it: letting the audience see every little detail of the production and not allowing them to be able to avoid critical thinking when convenient. It is interesting, then, that failure to be transparent would also become a driving force behind the show.

The other initial ideas, after the transparent machinations and ensemble, were as follows:

- The lights would get brighter between sequences, when narration occurs.
- Actors would go neutral, almost like dolls, between the scenes.
- Mother Courage's cart would only have the illusion of movement and would, in fact, be a giant wheel that would never truly move. It would resemble a hamster wheel. This was meant to represent Mother Courage's unchanged character in the play. This idea evolved in the initial thinking to become both a representation of the 'wheel', as in the original invention of mankind, and a sort of grinder that chews up good attributes—specifically, the ones that Mother Courage and her children represent: wisdom, bravery, honesty, and kindness.
- One of the actors would sell the tickets for the show every night and then count up the earnings and post them in front of the audience, in or out of the show. This idea was perhaps the most natural evolution of theatrical transparency.
- Finally, I became obsessed with Helene Weigel's feelings about Mother Courage. Brecht enjoyed that when he watched Weigel play Courage, he could also see how Weigel felt

about Courage while simultaneously seeing Courage. This was something I wanted to incorporate in every actor with every character.

These ideas came to form my initial bank for the dramaturgy, design, and acting direction of the play, giving me a starting point when entering into the process of directing the play.

The first fundamental concept that became clear was the use of transparent machinations: making sure that the audience can see anything happening on and off the stage and know how and why it is happening. This meant that not only did the stage elements need to be transparent, but so did the production process and costs. Influenced by the Schechner production, I thought that the best way to make the production transparent would be to make sure that the production costs involved in the show were known to the audience. How this would be executed was to have a large blackboard indicating the overall budget of the show and the way in which the budget was spent, down to every small detail. This was then to be compounded by an actor who would, before the performance began, note on the board how much the show had made through ticket sales while the tickets were being sold and add the number to the total sales on the board. This felt like an interesting idea because not only did it stay true to the transparency concept of the show, but it also informed the audience of the distribution of money in a university theatre performance. Also, this meant that the blackboard could also show the audience the economy of student-driven theatre. This led to the idea of another blackboard that would contain the personal costs of each of the actors while performing the show, while also showcasing how each benefitted from participating. In some cases, such as for myself, Val Campbell, and the actor who would play the Cook, there would be money from the department involved as well as, in my case, a degree. However, in the case of the

undergraduate actors, there would be no such recompense, even while they incurred other costs necessary for survival. The board would have showcased if any of the actors received credit for the production, of which there were at least two. These ideas were later abandoned because I did not figure out the best way to present why the actors would be part of a show they received nothing financial for doing. Multiple ideas were considered for ways to present that information, but none of them felt that they fairly showcased the student side of the economy of a theatrical production for which the environmental structure of the school is responsible. None of the actors would be working on the show if they did not believe they were getting something out of it. However, I did not discover a way to present the actors external values, such as training, dreams, and desires, on something like a monetary chart.

This first concept of transparency, along with the attempts to fully commit to it, was my way of discovering Brecht's Epic Theatre in 2017. However, I wanted to make sure that my own ideas would work synergistically with Brecht's, and in the cases that they opposed one another, be able to analyze and evaluate why that was. One of the first sets of ideas for creating this synergy came from analyzing the structure of the play and figuring out the best way of utilizing Brecht's transitions between scenes. Very rarely do ideas discovered so early make it into a performance, but the one that did was that of raising the stage lights and house lights for every transition. While this idea did evolve after the later creation of the two acts of the play, in the final performance every transition in the first act utilized this idea. The purpose of this was twofold: to shine an unpleasantly revealing light on every aspect of how the machination of changing scenes worked, and to wake the audience up from any hint of rhythm and emotional

engagement that the scene had allowed them. This seemed a simple and effective way to keep Brecht's critical distance alive at all times, at least in the first half.

A different execution of highlighting transitions that did not end up in the final version, at least in its original incarnation, was the idea that the actors would become doll-like during these transitions. This idea was flawed because it was overcompensating for this concept of highlighting transitions without actually having a clear narrative purpose. It also raised the problem of figuring out what actors not currently in a scene would be doing. Would they still be acting like dolls? The doll-like acting during transition was quickly discarded and did eventually evolve into the actors simply returning to the ensemble space within the audience seating during the transitions. The important thing, I decided, was not for the actors to act the transitions, but rather to make it very clear that the moment the transition began, they stopped acting altogether.

As mentioned earlier, my original design impulse was that of a massive, single wheel that would turn but never move. Everything and everyone in the play would revolve around its stagnation and be unable to escape from the circumstances of each scene. This idea is in opposition to a much older idea I had about doing the play outside and moving around the campus over the evening. The removal of this 'outside' idea and its execution doubtlessly saved many from the nightmare of what a very different and practically difficult version of this play could be. The earlier idea, in my estimation, was more spectacle than substance and unable to adequately represent the feeling of being trapped within one's circumstances that the play creates. One can hardly be trapped if they can escape into a campus Starbucks after Swiss Cheese's death. Instead, the audience would be trapped within the theatre with the company,

and all would be at the mercy of the play and its power to drain the energy of the people involved. The image of the large wheel under these circumstances felt like a watermill, which further reinforced its impact. All of these impulses came from my experience and interest as a designer, but started to become more visual spectacle than fundamental concept. Therefore, they required reining in and I had to figure out why these bold images were so intrinsic and interesting to me; otherwise I would be giving the designers a guessing game. Their importance lay in the illusion of movement that they gave. The illusion of movement became the topic of one of my many conversations with Scott Reid, the set and projection designer, and ended up becoming the connection between set and projection that was responsible for some of the more interesting visuals in the show.

These first three concepts led to what was my original 'matrix statement,' a conceptual statement that can be referred back to when deciding if ideas are staying true to the vision of the piece: *An old wheel turns in place without progressing, though its function has changed: it has become a blender.* The start of the statement presents an object and its original, almost paradoxical purpose. It continues on to show how that function has altered and evolved to become something much more violent. The statement showcases how something that is seemingly harmless can, through the shifting of time and context, become exceptionally dangerous. I wanted the matrix statement to hold true to Brecht's emphasis on circumstance. A wheel that spins in place no longer functions as a wheel and this, for me, is the story of Mother Courage herself. She is someone who never progresses in the play, and the character on stage in scene twelve is the same as the one in scene one, despite the time that passes and the circumstances that change. This is a warning to us as readers and audience members as well. If

we see a blender and its effect and continue to call it a wheel, have we learned as little as Mother Courage?

Through the matrix statement I was able to hold onto the Brechtian elements I felt were most important. I was able to transform initial, specific ideas into broader concepts that allowed me to stay true to the images that I saw as vital to the play, without simply trying to create theatrically fascinating moments within a situation that felt forced. Growing up, I saw mostly Shakespeare on the stage and came to find the term 'director's concept' to be quite contaminated. Usually it implied that the director had taken *Richard III* and placed it in 1930s Gangland Chicago, or something similar. It was a term that meant taking a play from a specific time, place, and cultural context and placing it in completely new ones, and rarely does it seem that the reasons for the move are meaningful to the play. Rather than using re-contextualization to create *verfremdungseffekt*, the reasons are often to establish a familiarity and visual design and style that is popular with audiences. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to me, as an artist, to make sure that the only concepts involved in a play are those that are drawn from the play itself. Art is context.

This previous statement might, at first, seem ironic, as I chose to set a play based in the Thirty Years War in World War II instead, but this was done out of a desire to create a parallel between Brecht's audience and my audience while also conceptually retaining the specific time, place, and cultural context of Brecht's own production. Simply put, I decided that it was more important to mirror the original production context than accurately recreate the play. I wanted the best of both worlds: to be able to elicit the emotional and critical distance from the play Brecht wanted for his audience, while also closing the distance between his and my audience.

This is a play written in 1939; Brecht was in Sweden, having had to abandon his own country out of fear of the Third Reich. This is also a play first produced by Brecht in 1949 after he returned to his fractured country post-war. His audience climbed over rubble to get into the theatre. It is impossible to recreate the context of Brecht's audience, so the question moving forward was: 'What are the ways that the show can close the distance between Brecht's audience and a 2017, North American audience?'

The first step became glaringly obvious: I needed a translation ready for a 2017, North American audience. The only one that I considered attuned to a contemporary audience was Kushner's 2006 translation of the play, written for the previously discussed Public Theatre production. It was also used in the 2009 Production by The National Theatre in London (UK), starring Fiona Shaw, which is a production I will return to later when discussing the music of the show. In the process of deciding, I also looked at translations by Eric Bentley, John Willett, and David Hare. However, all three came across as stiff and formal uses of British English. I found that the more a translation looked for accuracy in its interpretation, the further it got from the lived-in world of the play. It is generally exceptionally difficult to do a pure translation. Most 'translations' would be better described as adaptations or interpretations. This is true for all of the 'translations' of *Mother Courage*, and I felt that Kushner's interpretation, language, and style was what would best communicate the play to a North American audience in 2017.

When discussing the original production of the play, Brecht and Weigel described the idea of suffocation—not as a violent act that one person commits on another by choking, but instead as a simple covering of a flame. In a play that contains so much violence and tragedy, the only thing that Weigel considered unforgivable in Courage's behaviour was her suffocation of the

bright flame of the angry, young officer in scene four. Directly following the death of Swiss Cheese, Courage goes to complain to the army Captain about the mistreatment of her cart, which soldiers had torn to ribbons searching for the cash deposit box Swiss Cheese had thrown in the river. They were still suspicious of Courage's involvement with Swiss Cheese even after he is executed anonymously. In comes a young officer ready to fight the Captain, his reasoning being that he was promised a reward for an act of bravery on the battlefield and instead discovered the captain had spent the money on prostitutes and alcohol. Courage teaches the young man a bitter lesson: you either have to learn to "eat shit" or be beaten down until you are dead. The soldier accepts the hard lesson and leaves, telling Courage to "go fuck yourself in hell," while Courage, upon being invited to make her complaint to the Captain, decides to instead withdraw the complaint and retreat.

For Courage, this moment involves relearning a lesson she had learned long before—in the act of teaching it to a new generation. It is also perhaps the closest she comes to progressing as a person in the whole play. But alas, circumstance is everything, and the arrival of the young soldier puts a quick end to such lofty ideas as rebellion for him and her. This moment, along with Helene Weigel's feelings about this moment, is how I came to imagine what the whole play should feel like: it should be suffocating. The Young Soldier's strong response to hearing Mother Courage's lesson is something that I wanted to replicate within the audience. The experience of the production should be draining and all-consuming, leaving no time to think 'what's next?'. Instead, it should force the audience to be constantly asking 'how is this happening right now?'. This would be reinforced by Kushner's three or more-hour long translation and style. Kushner too believed that the act of witnessing *Mother Courage* should leave the audience exhausted,

which is no surprise coming from the author of *Angels in America*, a show that requires the dedication of a whole day to fully experience. Through the use of a suffocating tone, I believed that the audience could come to understand why circumstance is everything for Brecht.

Of the initial five ideas that I started with, the only one that remained in the finished product was transparency—and even in that regard the true transparency I initially envisioned was never fully achieved. Technically, the lights did get brighter between sequences, so that was the specific execution of an idea that stuck. The other ideas all changed and evolved drastically. However, these ideas did go on to influence the fundamental concepts of everything in the show, from design to dramaturgy. Transparent machinations, highlighted transitions, the illusion of movement, suffocation, and Brecht’s original context became the fundamental concepts that all other ideas would fall within moving forward. The specifics and execution of the ideas would reform how the production and rehearsal of the show worked, but these over-arching concepts would be pervasive throughout every facet of the show as it moved forward into its next phase.

Chapter 3

Transparent Distance

Spring 2016, after the acceptance of Mother Courage and Her Children as the thesis piece, the discovered five concepts are honed to become dramaturgically effective.

Once the play was submitted and accepted, I was able to move forward with the five concepts that I had defined. Technically, there are only four concepts, as ‘highlighted transitions’ should fall under the umbrella of ‘transparent machinations.’ However, I believed that the transitions, both the transitions within the play and the transitions in and out of the theatrical space, were so important that they needed to be thought of, and executed, separately, even if technically they enhanced the transparency. It was incredibly important to determine the details of the ensemble—which was the first instinct I had for this play and the one that had led to the primary concept of transparency.

The first practical question that needed to be answered before the aesthetics of the ensemble could be discovered was: ‘How many members will the ensemble contain?’ I ended up using colour-coded sticky notes on a wall, each having a single character from the play written on it. I reorganized them until I felt that I had a considerable amount of work for each actor. I did not want any actor to only have one small part and feel like they were unnecessary in the scale of the show. This led to thirteen ensemble members, with each having as many as six roles. I assigned the roles in order to give the parts that actors played impact in the metanarrative of the show. For example, I wanted the actors who would play Swiss Cheese and Eilif to be among the

soldiers who kill Katrin. I also wanted the actor playing the soldier responsible for the death of Swiss Cheese to be the Young Soldier Mother Courage talks to in Scene Four. Every actor that played multiple parts was given roles that were affected metatheatrically by the other roles they played and, therefore, would visually affect the audience.

At this point, I already knew that all of the members of the ensemble would stay inside the theatre for the entire show. If I wanted the audience to feel trapped, I could not give them constant visual reminders that they can leave. Instead the actors would be trapped in the theatre with the audience. This was extended to placing the actors with the audience when they were not a part of a scene. And to keep the transparency sharp, all costume and physical changes that the actors needed to make to become other characters would be done in the audience. The only changes that happened on stage would be those of the characters within the scene. For the most part this was done throughout the whole rehearsal process. However, once the two acts were fully realized there were some changes that would need to be hidden from the audience; but that came later.

All of these ideas also reflect my aesthetics as an artist: I like to use the expectations of an audience to affect them. By utilizing the expectations of theatrical convention, specifically the disconnect from actors, I felt that the ideas of distance and the transparency that were fundamental to this production would be better communicated. With the audience and actors now so close together, the next idea that began to blossom was what the actors would be doing if they were not 'in play.' This was the point when the early 'doll-like' transitions idea changed to simply not acting. The potential audience roles that were starting to bloom mixed with the actor ideas. If the audience was, at times, taking the role of witnesses, then so could the actors. The

times when the ensemble would be acting were obvious; all other times the actors sat with the audience and watched. However, unlike the audience, they had the ability to watch and then join a scene and act. I wanted the undertaking of acting to become special to the ensemble. To be able to take action and transition from witness to participant is difficult and requires serious motivation, especially in the context of World War II. It was at this point that I knew what I truly wanted from the ensemble.

The Berliner Ensemble was made up of survivors. These were men and women that had been on the run from the Nazis, imprisoned by them, and sent off to camps by them. After the war, they had gone to East Berlin to work with Brecht and the vast majority of them shared his socialist and communist sympathies. They went from surviving to surviving together and working towards a greater purpose. My ensemble was never going to be the Berliner Ensemble, but then my *Mother Courage* was never going to be Brecht's *Mother Courage*, either. However, I did want to try to mirror the Berliner Ensemble. I wanted the audience to see a group of students working together, trying to make money, trying to survive, and working towards a greater purpose. These 'perfect world,' communist sympathies would create the layers I would ask the actors to buy into later. There would be three distinct layers of performance while working on the play, and transitioning between them became the bedrock of the ensemble.

One of the early problems with the idea of the blackboard that contained the economy of student-driven theatre was figuring out how to let the students express why they would do a show while receiving nothing. This earlier problem became the first layer. Every actor that accepts a role in the show is doing it for personal reasons, and this is perfectly acceptable in our democratic society. However, for the ensemble I would need them to leave these reasons, and

this layer, at the door to the rehearsal room. This was because the second layer was the one I wanted the actors to be committed to *as actors*. They could be their solipsistic, human selves outside the rehearsal room, but as actors they needed to commit to the second layer: an idealistic, communism-based ensemble that was working together and for each other. I felt this was the best way to mirror the Berliner Ensemble and, potentially, the tone of that group in post-war East Berlin. The third layer would be the content and characters of the play, which because of the play's content and my setting shift would be both capitalistic and fascist. Each of the three layers were extremely different from the others ideologically, which I planned in order to make the transition between each simpler for the ensemble. To break it down: outside of the production, each person's priority is to look out for themselves; when they enter the theatre, they become an ensemble member and their priority is to the group's survival and success, and the individual is set aside. A sense of self then returns when playing a character, but the characters in the play are all surviving by representing and feeding off an institution, and what matters most is that institution's brand. For *Mother Courage and her Children*, the cart is more important than they are individually because they cannot survive without the income the cart brings. 'Self', 'Group,' and 'Brand' became the three worlds at work in the production; however, to cement these worlds in the minds of the actors and make them easier to buy into, I created the following rules that I asked them to live by:

- All members of any rehearsal are equal and shall treat each other as such.
- All resources within the theatre are to be shared. This includes food, water, and time. As such, a person should not use a resource in the theatre without offering to share it with another beforehand.

- Before entering the theatre for rehearsal, all actors will turn off their cellphones.
- At the beginning of each rehearsal, all actors will sing the Canadian National Anthem together. This can be performed with or without accompaniment.
- After leaving the theatre at the end of rehearsal, whether alone or in a group, each actor must turn on their phones and text someone. The content of this text must be something from that rehearsal. This can be a story from the rehearsal or a line from the show. The text can be to anyone, regardless of their involvement in the show. This text must be sent before leaving the building.

In relation to these rules, the thing that I was most curious about was if they would be fully committed to and for how long. The problem with ideal communism, and why it is impossible to fully attain, is the question: 'Who enforces the rules?' This leaves a power vacuum that will always eventually be filled. In this case, the power vacuum would most likely be filled by me, which would create a totalitarian system instead. Fortunately, the rules were enforced by the members of the ensemble as well as myself. Almost everyone would remind those who had broken a rule about the rule, whether because of a phone that was still on or if the anthem had not been sung yet because someone was late. When the ensemble was given a break, one of the members would always say loudly to the rest of the room: "I'm going to get water, does anyone else want some?" Interestingly, the only rule that I think ended up not working was the final one. The idea behind the rule was to give the ensemble a clear 'out' that would let them transition back to their own lives the same way that the rules, and more specifically the anthem, allowed them an 'in' into the mindset of the ensemble. The reason it did not work was because there was

no way of knowing whether an actor was following the final rule or not. This was unfortunate because it was a rule in place for their benefit.

One of the toughest things for student actors to do is to let go of their predispositions and take risks when playing with theatre. Experienced actors are much more competent at taking risks. This is one of the things that I always work at as a director with students, and creating the ensemble led to a unity within the cast which allowed for the members, of all levels of experience, to be comfortable with one another and with the roles that they were playing—especially considering that some of the roles they were playing would involve doing terrible things to each other in one scene, and then being friendly the next. I was surprised at how quickly all of the students took to the ensemble model. However, this discussion of the ensemble bypasses the more intense exchanges of ideas during the production process. Once the ideas and execution behind the ensemble were decided, the questions to be deciphered with the contextual dramaturgy of the piece became more apparent.

As the ideas progressed and evolved I became concerned that the dramaturgical transparency of the piece, while fundamental to my production, would start to work against Brecht's own dramaturgical and critical distance. Pulling down theatrical conventions does not necessarily mean creating critical distance. I worried that in this quest for complete transparency, I would lose the ability to utilize theatrical conventions that Brecht might have used. This was not necessarily a problem, as my first question when doing the show involved discovering its place in 2017 North America, but I did not want the question to become rhetorical. It is a very cheap and easy decision to remove Brecht's ideas about theatre from his plays, and I was wary of falling into this trap. Therefore, I needed to come up with a way to make

both critical distance and transparency core ideas in the evolution of the production. I did this by embracing the contradiction between the two. The production would have complete transparency and hide nothing from the audience. The design, direction, and dramaturgy would find all the points of distance that existed and decide when to maintain a distance between the audience and the show, breach the distance, or highlight when the distance was problematic or created a contradiction. This became the most fundamental design idea, with every facet of the design playing with the distance of one point to another as appropriate. The first place that this needed to be considered, upon the accepted submission of the play, was playing with the distance from 1624-1636 (the play's setting) to 1939 (the play's creation) to 1949 (Brecht's first production) to 2017 (with my own production).

For Brecht, the Thirty Years' War was a parallel to his own time and to the war that took place between when he wrote and then produced the play. However, while common knowledge among his own German audience, the Thirty Years' War would be too distant for a contemporary North American audience whose mandatory education does not include it. Therefore, I thought that Brecht's idea of creating a parallel with his own context needed to be preserved rather than lost in the straight playing of the Thirty Years' War. World War II worked perfectly. It is not only an appropriate parallel in distance to Brecht's use of the Thirty Years' War, but also it would continue the work of another important conceptual idea: Brecht's original context. World War II *is* Brecht's original context. There is no better way of dealing with the distance between 1636, 1939, 1949, and 2017 than visually replacing the Thirty Years' War with the war that took place between 1939 and 1949. This created a fascinating conflict that would drive the experience of the production: the conflict between the visual design (World War II), the content of the play

itself (the Thirty Years' War), and the sensibilities of the spoken language—a very contemporary Kushner translation. This meant that, at any given time, the audience's knowledge might be in conflict with both what they were hearing and what they were seeing. This was the best way, within the production, to retain and utilize Brecht's own *verfremdungseffekt*. I could use these conflicts to keep the audience asking questions by using the inherent contradictions to give them critical distance when it was required.

Having a new context meant needing to understand how every single character would translate to the new canvas. This turned out to be a very simple process, with no character posing a problem. Instead, what posed the problem was the words of the play and deciding how to fully adapt the context. We decided to do a deliberately imperfect job; every word in the play would remain unchanged. The listed dates, names, and places would remain the same, regardless of the lack of connection to World War II. The religious importance within the original play and Kushner's own adaptation of that factor would also remain. The religious element of the play remained in Kushner's translation because the Catholic and Protestant conflict was the reason behind the Thirty Years' War—even though his North American audience would be less familiar with this kind of religious conflict. In World War II, however, the only religion that had particular significance was Judaism, and for a very different reason. Deciding this early allowed me to foresee what would be the most common moments of *verfremdungseffekt* for our audiences: when they would hear lines like 'the Catholics are coming' and visually would see Nazis arrive instead. From this point on, I will refer to the sides of the conflict by the opponents in World War II: the Catholics became Nazis and the Protestants became the Allied Forces.

This translation of setting led to another use of distance in the dramaturgy to create *verfremdungseffekt*, though in a very different way than Brecht could have used himself: the use of Brecht's original German words within a contemporary English translation for a North American audience. I wanted every occasion of the Nazis talking to each other to be in Brecht's written words. This created not only *verfremdungseffekt* for the audience during moments where this occurred, but also a solid reality within the play: when Germans speak to each other, they always speak in German; when Germans speak to outsiders, they speak in English in heavy accents. Upon applying this rule set to the play, we realized that it worked very well except in two sequences: scene four and scene eleven, where there are extended sequences of German. This was far more extensive in scene eleven, where half the scene would take place in German; but in scene four there would only be one speech. The decisions for how this would be practically applied and translated came later, with both the use of projections and the decision of splitting the show into two very different acts.

The use of World War II visually, when combined with the use of the German language, left a clear question on the table: how realistic was the play and performance going to be? For a production that utilized transparency fundamentally, some of the ideas were starting to give the sense that the play would be presented realistically. However, this was another benefit of Kushner's translation: while the words are contemporary, the tone and way language is used is not. This meant that the production did not have to be realistic and that the ideas in play simply reinforced the perspective of distance on different design fields. However, with a war as well documented and mythologized as World War II, the much more difficult question that I needed to start exploring was: 'What are we selling?'

In the contemporary day and age, World War II is the stuff of myths and legends wrapped up in a very cruel and legible reality. It is the war responsible for the current incarnation of many elements of contemporary Western society. Numerous institutions, allegiances, and power structures in place today stem from this war. Such an incredible tapestry of history is definitely part of the mandatory education system in North America, and with that comes the expectation of a well-known story: Nazis are the ultimate bad guys, and we beat them. I will come back to this statement when discussing costume design later. However, the reason I use it now is because Brecht's play does not contain 'bad guys'; it contains human beings and what those human beings do to each other under the circumstances of the moment. Translating each army into World War II counterparts was simple: the Germans would stay German and the Holy Roman Empire became the Nazis. The Protestant state became the Allies, which worked rather nicely since the Anti-Hapsburg Allies were made up of Sweden, The Netherlands, France, England, and Scotland. The vagueness of who the Allies were helped project this sense of what people know about World War II, which is that 'we' won and the Nazis lost. It is a war that was so focused on the enemy that we forget who 'we' were. Americans in particular like to forget the role of their country's complacency in Hitler's rise to power and their tardiness in entering a war that was well underway before they decided to swoop in (after Japan's provocation) and make sure everyone remembers that they were responsible for its ending in victory. Perhaps the biggest myth of World War II is that the Nazis were defeated at all, considering how prevalent they continue to be in contemporary society. It turns out that you can defeat the National Socialist German Workers' Party, but you cannot defeat their ideas.

The legendary tales of World War II, however, gave an intriguing answer to what we could sell with/in the play: World War II itself. Contemporary art forms have become very adept at selling World War II. Between movies, television, books, and video games the commodification of World War II is so prevalent that the video game series *Call of Duty*, the fifth highest-grossing media franchise of all time, moved away from World War II because of content fatigue, only to come back to it with 2017's version of the game. To put this in perspective, the media franchise, fifth in all time gross after Pokémon, Star Wars, Harry Potter, and James Bond respectively, exhausted World War II as a source of content. Millions of people around the world have individually killed more Nazis through these games than ever existed. If history could not teach us that Nazis are the enemy, video games have reinforced this idea since *Castle Wolfenstein's* release in 1981. However, World War II is not unique in this fetishization of military conflicts in media. Something that is abundantly clear in contemporary society is that Western culture has no problems or concerns creating a commodity out of societal scars.

Using these ideas, we could create a literal theatre of war: theatre that portrays and peddles society's image of the World War II legend. The idea that was most prevalent in our production was selling World War II 'merchandise' to the audience. We, as a company, would sell World War II to the audience just as Mother Courage sold to the soldiers. On the cart there would be copies of *Call of Duty*, the motion picture *Saving Private Ryan*, and other media presentations of World War II ready for consumption, and these items would be up for sale for everyone. This would be reinforced by the image of Mother Courage selling a copy of *Saving Private Ryan* to Nazis. This idea definitely evolved as the show continued production, but the biggest problem was that it was simply too expensive to maintain the stock required to sell these

things. The question that put an end to this route for selling was: 'How are we going to make money?'

The implementation of World War II is summed up in two images focusing on Nazis. One of them worked and one was potentially problematic. The image of Mother Courage selling to Nazis was something that I thought reinforced the character; she will sell to anyone, even Nazis. However, the problem was that by using a cultural symbol of evil, like the Nazis, it became much more difficult to showcase that both sides of the conflict within the play are problematic. I did not want the audience to take sides with the Allies, but rather see themselves as caught in the middle of the conflict as so many were. I knew the audience would automatically dislike and distrust the Nazis, but I wanted to make sure they felt this way about every soldier.

While the selling of World War II 'merchandise' idea ended, there was a continuation from the question that ended it ('How are we going to make money?'). This question and the answers that were later discovered all grew from the 'economy of theatre' ideas within the initial exploration of theatrical transparency. The immediate idea that emerged was as follows: in order to sell anything to the audience, there would need to be a form of external performance that connected the audience directly to the actors. This idea also emerged so easily because of my own interest and research in immersive theatre. However, this immediately brought back the deliberations about how to use *verfremdungseffekt* here and with other concepts that I was in the process of creating. I was not happy with the idea that the audience would be solely consumers of products. An audience's relationship with a play can change very quickly. With each change and moment experienced, I would need to know if their critical distance changed, taking into account the changes from scene to scene. This was simplified by creating multiple

roles for the audience. The audience, over the course of the night, would be consumers, witnesses, and participants. By figuring out when the audience was playing each of these roles, I was also able to discover the relationship the audience would have with the ensemble. With all of these ideas now in play, the production could move forward towards the design process.

Chapter 4

Conflict of Interest

Autumn 2016, the production marches onwards into its design process. Many designers join the process and their work both draws from the five conceptual concepts whilst reinforcing them.

Designing a show that lives within its contradictions is an interesting experience. In fact, one of the things that was most exciting about managing different design fields for such a show was the opportunity to discover what would emerge out of those conflicts. Chronologically, the first field of design I was working on was the music with Denis Nassar. I had brought Denis on board to be the composer a month before the department had assigned the final set, costume, and lighting designers. I had already begun work with Denis on the music by the time I had my first meeting with Scott Reid, the set designer. I would have meetings with Bianca Manuel, the costume designer, and Graham Frampton, the lighting designer, approximately two weeks after my first meeting with Scott. Through early discussions with Scott, I knew that I wanted him to also design the projections for the show. I wanted projections to be an integral part of creating the scenery and the tone of scenes, and I wanted the set to take full advantage of projections and vice versa. With Scott designing both, this led to a synergy between the two that was fundamental in turning a series of contradictions into a visually consistent final product. However, this also meant that, in order to maintain the integrity of the five original concepts, each design field would need to reconcile each concepts significance. This was done through the paramount importance of the 'distance' between 2017 and Brecht's context and the way each designer and

each facet of design would use this concept to reinforce all of the other original concepts. This was instead of transparency being dominant as it had seemed previously. I felt it necessary with this production to organize it as such and embrace the contradictions that came up. In order to explain the way in which the initial ideas for each design field were dealt with separately, and yet contributed to a final synergetic piece, I will approach each design field separately.

SET

Early on in the process of staging *Mother Courage*, there was a reshuffle of who the designers would be for the show. This meant that when I first met Scott Reid it was to discover whether or not he would design the show. This very quickly turned into the first meeting about how the show would be designed. It did not take long before we were using the original concepts of my pitch and turning them into design concepts for the show. We may have gotten a little ahead of ourselves with the excitement of what we could do with the concepts, considering Scott was not yet officially designing the show. Fortunately, this did not turn out to be a problem, and by our second meeting we had a phrase that would go on to become one of three major statements that would influence everything about the visual design of the show: Precipice of Violence.

For this meeting, Scott brought a number of images from the Second World War. We were still figuring out the best way to breach the visual distance between World War II and the present day without being literal. We did not want to have set pieces that looked like camps or European buildings. There were two photos that drew us in and created this idea of the 'precipice of violence' that would become fundamental to the visual design. The first was a photo of two children standing in front of a bombed-out church during the Second World War.

The thing that was so striking about this picture was that the church looked as though it would collapse at any moment, crushing the children below. However, because a photograph is only a single moment, one can never know how much longer the church, or those children, lasted. The second was a photo of an unexploded parachute mine, hanging over the streets of London. This image would later be used far more literally than we anticipated when, in the final design, we included an unexploded mine, hanging from its parachute, looming over the stage. These two images seemed to reverberate with the concept of suffocation that was so important to the audience's experience of the show and being inside the theatre. Every scene in *Mother Courage* comes so close to violence, both in content and in proximity. Every scene feels like we are either approaching a horrible moment of violence, or that we just happen to be looking the wrong way when it happens. The only true moment of violence that is enacted onstage is the death of Katrin in the second to last scene. Because the play avoids visual violence, there is an awful tension throughout the whole play that is only released with the gunshot that kills Katrin. With violence always casting a shadow on the action of the play, we wanted to determine the best way to utilize this tension, which could make or break certain, exceptionally dramatic moments in the play when the violence does take place, albeit a few feet offstage.

The reason why the picture of the unexploded mine turned into a physical reality of the design is because these mines are still a physical reality in many countries. The mine breached the distance between World War II and now beautifully, as they are still being discovered all over Europe and, more specifically, Germany. This past August, an unexploded British ordnance was discovered during construction in Frankfurt, and seventy thousand people were ordered to evacuate the area. That number represented the largest evacuation in Germany since World

War II (Doubek). The discovery of these ordnances is a common occurrence. In May of 2017 fifty thousand people needed to evacuate in Hannover, and in Christmas 2016 fifty-four thousand people had to evacuate their homes in Augsburg (Doubek). The idea of an explosion meant for 1945 occurring in 2017 was the definitive example of this precipice of violence. No matter how much time passes, the threat remains. In fact, the threat will get worse, the further the distance, because of the breaking down of components within the explosives over time. This is sadly proven by the eleven bomb disposal technicians who have died on the job in Germany between 2000 and early 2016 (Doubek).

There was a disappointing problem that was created because of my own choices in staging. In the quest to discover the best place to keep the live band on stage throughout the performance, I decided to form them around the hanging mine. This seemed visually ideal, as it created an interesting visual while also keeping some semblance of balance on the stage. However, this decision ended up reducing the impact that the mine was supposed to have. The placement of the band around the mine meant that the characters could not interact with it or remind the audience of its perpetual threat. And even if the audience remembered it, the musicians playing in front of it with impunity reinforced the absence of danger. The stage was constantly busy with a number of design ideas; therefore, it is not surprising that one or two were lost. However, I think that the threat of the mine was a major design choice that I neutered with my staging choices. Unfortunately, being so accustomed to being around the mine myself, I forgot the threat it was intended to create.

While the photograph of the mine had obvious design influence, the influence of the image of the children and the church would prove less literal. The idea of the precipice of

violence was now influencing the design, but the bombed-out church would lead us to more images of bombed-out buildings. Now, such buildings are perhaps the most obvious visual aesthetic choice when trying to recreate an active World War II setting. However, breaching the distance visually between now and World War II did not necessarily mean creating the western front on the stage. Instead we returned to the five original concepts, and specifically the illusion of movement, to discover what it was about the photos of bombed-out buildings that resonated for us: the furniture. So many of the photos of bombed out buildings showed soldiers pulling out what furniture was left from the building and sitting outside. The fact that the buildings could still collapse made it clear that they should do anything they wanted to do outside, rather than inside, but also that they should take the inside with them. This allowed us to connect the visual ideas to the illusion of movement concept that came out of thinking about the cart very early on. If remaining inside is no longer an option, take everything with you outside; and if you can no longer stay outside where you are, take what you can with you and leave. While this idea should probably come quite naturally when directing a play named after a character who pulls her life around with her, it was a vindicating moment because the five concepts that were created so early were still so intrinsically involved in the design process months later. The five concepts were still appropriate and relevant to the play and production.

Something that I always communicate specifically to set designers when I begin working on a show is that I like to create a set that not only impacts the characters, but also impacts the way in which I can block the show. I like working within the restrictions that a set can give and making the most out of the set by blocking with its facets in mind. This communication led us to creating a set that the ensemble could manipulate at will and at any moment in the show. We

came up with the pieces that we knew we wanted on the stage, but nothing could be static. We needed to be able to move everything, and quickly. This gave me a lot to play around with in the rehearsal process. We were able to work with the actors to figure out both the ideal blocking and the most interesting ways to use the furniture. As we did not want to use designed building debris on stage, we would use the furniture to create the idea of the wreckage left by the war: piles of unused furniture that could to be used by the actors and designers, by the characters within the scenes, and even by the audience at the end of the performance. It was exciting to have a design that was malleable and allowed for design improvisation. It was reassuring to have a design that could be adapted to the needs of the process.

Considering that the cart is a primary symbol in the play, it may be surprising that the set around the cart was essentially being designed first. However, this never came across as strange in the design process because knowing how the world of the play was going to work allowed us to know what Mother Courage would want to carry her through it. And in a very effective way, the movement the cart implies led to the designed movement of the set, which then fed back into the design of the cart. However, the cart was definitely not going to be the one I imagined early on. It would be less metaphorical and more what one might call an actual cart. Having a practical cart for the family to actually drag through this ever-changing, manipulated world felt more interesting. We designed the cart while working with Julia Wasilewski, Properties Master for the SCPA, to figure out what we would have in the cart. Another large change from early ideas was that Mother Courage would be selling wares available during the 1940s, which was a far cry from the contemporary World War II merchandise that I had originally wanted her to be

peddling. I felt that the production was already peddling World War II so much that reinforcing it through Mother Courage's own, in character, sales was too much of a stretch of the script.

Something that I was not able to let go of from the original ideas was the large wheel. We ended up designing the cart with two large wheels. This allowed for the cart to still contain the visual I imagined of a large, churning wheel while also giving the impression that the cart should really be being pulled by a large, four-legged animal, rather than the humans that were strapped to the yoke. As such, the cart needed to be designed with a yoke that the human pullers would have to attach themselves to. I believe we never got the action of the yoke right. I still agree with its function in design; however, the practical nature of the harnesses ended up being too awkward within a show with a thousand other difficulties to prioritize. I believe the visual still worked, but something of the laborious nature of the yoke was lost in the labyrinth of technical difficulties. In fact, the laborious nature of the cart that was originally designed ended being lost over the course of the process. Originally, the cart was designed to be difficult in every way. We wanted it to look like it was required for the characters to survive while also being another burden. In our original design, balancing the cart would be difficult and pulling it would be arduous. However, during the rehearsal process, the technical requirements to make the cart safe for practical use by actors would end up, unfortunately, being communicated visually as well. In the performance, the cart had lost its problematic nature and instead became a rather reliable and surprisingly nimble support for the family. While this was not what was originally intended, it did have the unanticipated benefit of taking focus away from the cart. The audience would focus on it when it moved, but it would very quickly disappear in the clutter of the stage in the static scenic moments. This helped communicate that Mother Courage is not out of place in

this context and conflict; she blends in. The cart, like Courage, can adapt to the given context. The cart had the ability to both be the centre of the production and staging, as well as blend into the context of the scene when required.

While the design of the set was adaptable and fluid, we had a sense that we needed something to anchor the whole piece. Something that was difficult throughout the design process for this show was to make sure we were communicating what the distance was between these different time periods that we were working in. We had endless furniture that implied the WWII era, but we did not have anything that was from 2017. We needed something that would not only create interesting staging opportunities, but which could also contribute to the feeling of suffocation, while also bridging the distance between the two times. So we created something that exists in our time, but that has lasted since that time; an art piece that carried the implications of both times while acting as a monument to the gap that the play was bridging. This monument was designed to have the aesthetic of a World War II era bunker, but as it exists in 2017: covered in graffiti and eroded by time. For its shape we were influenced by contemporary World War II monuments. There were stairs leading up to a cavernous interior. The slanted roof, at its highest point, carried a slab that might be reminiscent of a gravestone, if not for the bullet damage that it had sustained. This, of course, would turn out to be a terrible premonition, understood by the audience only after the play ended with Katrin's body left atop the monument. Within the interior were epitaphs created by the cast and crew: we invited everyone to write the name of a loved one they had lost in chalk. This would be our graffiti.

This piece was a monument to war bunkers, a monument to monuments, and a monument to the people we wanted to remember—a reminder that all of these things are

perpetually and unwittingly connected. This feeling was created more literally in the movement of the audience to the stage in the second act of the show, when, upon seeing the monument much more closely and being able to climb into it, they might discover a name they recognize written on it. The monument needed to epitomize the nature of the stage pieces and their capacity to be interpreted completely differently, depending on the audience's spatial relationship with them. Especially considering most of the audience would be physically higher than the monument in act one and then be within its shadow in act two. We knew the monument needed to be able to move as well as the rest of the set, but now we had a centrepiece to revolve around that anchored every moment of the play and that transcended all of the worlds we had created for the play. The addition of the monument also meant that, visually, the show did not revolve around the cart. While the cart is the most important thing in Mother Courage's world, it is not the most important thing in the world of the show. It is a dangerous priority. Her failure to realize this is why her daughter is left, out of reach, on top of the monument, and why she has to abandon the body at the end of the show.

The process and work we did with the set design stayed true to the five original concepts that had been discovered so early on. In the search for transparency we had even decided to remove all of the masking within the theatre. This meant removing all the curtains within the theatre and allowing the audience to see into the wings and the shops connected to the University Theatre. This was another case of discovering a facet of the design that could give both a metaphorical and literal transparency for the audience. Though many things evolved in ways that I did not anticipate, and perhaps should have, because we had stayed true to the five

original concepts, even moments that did not succeed in their original intent still had merit within the production.

PROJECTION

The original intent behind the use of projections was for them to be an extension of the ideas going into the set. Projections would work well with the adaptability required of the set, and using projection also allowed us to create interesting intertextual moments for the audience. The way we took full advantage of this was by using images of real locations and battlefields from World War II. Our set was made up of a lot of furniture and items that would create the feel of bombed out areas. By covering these pieces with images of the historical areas, we were able to create interesting intertextual scenery that could change easily and constantly. Furthermore, the ability to use images of actual locations to augment the staging created opportunities to play with the visual distance to World War II from moment to moment. However, while the projections definitely acted synergistically with the ideas of the set design, the projections also took on a life of their own.

One of our inspirations during our research into projections, and while we were figuring out the best way to utilize them, was informational videos from the 1930s through to the 1950s. We had discovered these when looking at propagandistic military videos from the era that had been shown in movie theatres to inform the public on news from the front. While those videos were influential, the nature of Brecht's work and *Mother Courage* felt more in line with the informational videos. This is especially true when considering Brecht's *Lehrstücke* ('Learning Plays' that encouraged understanding through participation). As such, we decided to create a

visual motif that would continue throughout the play. What we created was something we called 'The Human Orchard.' We decided to use informational video of the life of an apple tree. I have no doubt that this decision was heavily influenced by design work I was doing with Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* concurrently while working on *Mother Courage*. An apple tree is a being that will have everything it ever produces ripped from it, and everything it is will be used up throughout its life. It produces apples for as long as it can until it is no longer able to provide, at which point it is made into any variety of wooden objects. In the end, all that is left is sawdust. This felt like an appropriate analogy for the way Mother Courage and her children are presented in the play. While the play ends with Mother Courage continuing on without learning, her seeds are all gone and the future seems to contain little but sawdust for her. 'The Human Orchard' felt especially appropriate considering the sheer quantity of furniture that we were using as the set for the production. Again, the discovery of how interesting projections were as intertextual scenery that effectively combined with the furniture ensured their use not just during the play, but in the intermission, pre-show, and scene changes as well.

One of the things I have always done, as a director, is include performance in every moment leading into and out of a show. This instinct is so prevalent that it very early led to the ensemble selling of goods that happened before and during the show. One of the reasons why the intertextual scenery discovery was so exciting was that it led to uncovering ways to use it in all of areas of the theatre. With a museum-style information booth in mind, we decided to set up a projector outside of the theatre that was playing the production life of an apple tree in its entirety. We also used specific moments from the video during the transitions. An example of this is during the transition following Swiss Cheese's death; we included the chopping down of

one of the orchard trees from the video. The culmination of this metaphor came within the final image of the stage performance. Another example: at the end of the performance, if an audience member turned around to look back at Mother Courage while they were leaving with the actors and band, or if they stayed, the whole floor of the stage had the ground of a ruined orchard projected onto it. Every tree felled.

The 'news from the front' videos became a huge influence on the way the show opened. Since the play would open up with two soldiers on the military front talking, a re-creation of that style of video was not needed. However, I was able to continue with my interest in ensuring that every moment in a theatrical production is being performed. I always want, when an audience enters a theatre at the beginning or after intermission, for there to be something already in action on stage—something that gives the audience an early invitation into the world of the play so that they are ready, not surprised, once the lights change and the show begins. After the intermission, I simply had Mother Courage and the Cook already living their new, colder existence as the audience entered. This felt like enough action to reintroduce the world, considering the more participatory action happening outside of the theatre. However, for the opening I wanted to imply the World War II era pre-shows. As the audience would be walking into a theatre for the opening images, I wanted the two soldiers already in place atop the monument and for them to be watching some sort of show themselves. The two soldiers were watching the silent 1925 *The Wizard of Oz* that predates the Judy Garland classic. The later, classic musical came out in cinemas on August 25, 1939—six days before World War II officially started. However, the audience would have a visual connection to that film, given its prolonged existence in the zeitgeist. Also, I thought the subtitles that the silent version used were effective

at giving a glimpse at the show's own style of subtitles to come. *The Wizard of Oz* is a tale about a woman and her three followers, each of whom has a significant character flaw. It was a natural choice for the pre-show.

LIGHTS

Graham Frampton, the lighting designer for this production, had to begin his design process with a large challenge placed before him. Projections were to be an integral part of the show, potentially being used in every single scene and sequence. He had to light a show where, at any moment, the projections could be working against the lights. This was another conflict that became characteristic of the show and the ability of the design team to embrace these conflicts and design with them in mind. The team took these challenges in stride and our design process became very fluid as ideas that popped up in one area were able to return and influence the others.

The first conflict we had to tackle was natural vs. unrealistic and colourful musical lighting. The set design was a happy medium between these two tendencies. We had managed to create an unrealistic set that constantly provided realistic images. We had early ideas for how to do a similar thing with lights, but decided against that. As each design field dealt with distance in its own way, it was more effective for lights to start on their own path and then immediately reconcile any conflicts or contradictions with the set and projections as part of the process. The set was so adaptable that it was almost certainly going to be able to adjust to the needs of lights for staging. This meant that while the initial ideas for how set and lights would deal with the distance to Brecht's original production were different, with the two facets being designed

alongside each other, we were able to immediately address the contradictions that came up, allowing each element to inform the design of the other. The musical elements of the play also gave us a lot of food for thought when it came to how far we could go with the lights.

Rather than making the lighting subtle to make it easier to use projections without letting the light bleed overpower them, we decided to use sharp and severe lights. Specifically, we were influenced by the classic era film noir lighting of the late 1930s to the early 1950s. This gave us not only a direct bridge to the cinema from when Brecht was writing, but also a style of lighting that was both realistic and theatrical. However, this also created the need for a lighting fixture that could be utilized in multiple ways, only one of which was the sharp shafts of light for noir style lighting.

The other idea that created the desire for this, yet unknown, fixture was the fact that we were putting on a musical. While I doubt Brecht would embrace the contemporary behemoth that is the Broadway or West End Musical, we wanted to use the expectations of our audience to our advantage. This meant that the lights, like the music, needed to deal with the distance from Brecht's 'musical' to the musicals that are so popular today. This worked very well with the shafts of light we wanted to use to create the impression of film noir. Contemporary musicals use a huge number and variety of lights that are able to create movement as well as remarkable colourful images. To utilize the visually striking nature of musicals we knew we wanted to use a wide colour palette, but we also kept coming back to this idea of 'spotlights' to create both the shafts for the noir look *and* the visual qualities of big musical numbers. This could also suggest the inescapable image of the Berlin Wall and the searchlights that hung over it to catch any trespasser attempting to make it into West Germany. We needed to create practical spotlights

that would dramatically and theatrically illuminate Eilif for his big number in scene two, but also harshly hold Swiss Cheese's face as his body is refused acknowledgement by his mother. As such, we decided to create a tower with two lights that could be utilized as spotlights or searchlights at any given moment. These lights would be off stage but still highly visible and heavily affecting the action of the play. The lights would be manually manipulated so that they could go back and forth visually between musical spotlights and military searchlights—between a worker emancipated through song and a soldier caught behind enemy lines.

COSTUMES

Considering how much influence the set, projection, and lights exerted on each other, it might come across as strange how separate the costume design process was. This was not something that was done deliberately. The conflict and contradictions that often came up and had to be resolved between other design fields did not happen nearly as much with costumes. There were many facets of the other design fields that needed to be considered with costumes, such as colour palette, but for the most part the design of the costumes was developed as a separate entity. Bianca and I decided to look at each character separately and figure out, in our production, how much of that character lives in 2017 and how much of that character lives in the original context. This meant discovering what characteristics would be consistent between the eras and how that would be implied for each character through their costuming. For example, Mother Courage was someone who wore clothing available in Brecht's era, but in a style that has very recently become fashionable again: a jacket with the sleeves made of a different fabric than the rest of the article.

While we worked on characters individually to figure out which era would be the greater influence and what style that suggested, the soldiers' costumes prompted a further, more direct, conceptual discovery. My previous feelings over the 'myth' of World War II came back in a very direct manner. A Nazi uniform would be instantly recognizable for our audiences. There was no distance that had to be breached here because when it comes to Nazi uniforms, people recognize the symbols and the style.

I mentioned earlier that World War II was so focused on the enemy that what the Allied forces looked like can be forgotten. This was a concept we took full advantage of when designing the Allied soldiers uniforms. We took different pieces from different militaries to create a vague impression of a force that was in opposition to a very specific collection of Nazis. Something I realized when watching the production was that we could have dressed every Allied soldier in almost any item of clothing, as long as it was a dull shade of green, and the audience would probably still have known exactly what force it was. They might not have known which military was being represented, but because they were *not* the Nazis, visually, then they must be the Allies. This paradox around accuracy really helped to reinforce the nature of the war and its impression on contemporary western culture.

One of my favourite aspects of the play, and of much of Brecht's work, is the way in which characters are affected by their environments. We brought this idea into the costume design by giving every character only one outfit, but with pieces that, like the set, were adaptable to the given situation. If the scene was in winter, there were pieces of the outfit to be added, and in the height of summer there were pieces of the outfit to be removed. This embraced the adaptability that was occurring everywhere in the design while also reinforcing the

transparency concept. Also, this gave control of the clothing to the actor, who could change the way they were wearing an item of clothing when it felt right for the character. This, again, allowed multiple processes to influence each other as the production moved along. The play takes place over a long period and time's effect on the characters was echoed through their clothing, and the adaptability of the costumes allowed the environment's impact on the characters to be immediately reflected.

MUSIC

Previously I mentioned that both the music and lights needed to deal with the expectations that contemporary audiences have for what a modern musical is. One of the reasons I was so keen on doing the Kushner translation was because of the lyrics he had written for the play. I felt that, more than any other translation I read, he had created a text that was both crass and poetic, beautiful and irregular. I still have the soundtrack for the version done at England's National Theatre within my music library. For that production, the music was composed and performed by Northern Irish Musician Duke Special. Duke Special's renditions of the songs give the impression of a haunted, vaudevillian carnival. In particular, his rendition of the main theme influenced me significantly and his finale was perhaps the most significant reason I committed to making my production of the show a musical. Denis Nassar came on board as both Composer and Music Director, and it would be quite easy for this entire thesis to only contain the work Denis and I did in designing the music and applying the composition to the play.

Jazz was the natural choice for the show. Not only was it the music of the era, but its perseverance as a musical genre means it has evolved and influenced many different styles since. This gave us a genre of music with a distinct origin and a myriad of ways that it affects contemporary music to utilize in the composition. There are also direct connections between jazz and the fascism of World War II. While the Nazi regime banned the broadcasting of jazz on German radio, Benito Mussolini was a fan. In fact, his son, Romano, played with some of the best jazz musicians of the era, including Chet Baker (Kiefer). These direct connections between the genre and the era only served to further reinforce its importance within the fiction of the play and the reality of the production. We went through the songs to figure out what style of jazz was appropriate for each. Again, the most important word in the design process was ‘distance,’ so we had access to styles of jazz that had emerged since the war. One example of this was Yvette’s *Song of Fraternization*, an autobiographical number about a woman who fell in love with a soldier from the army that had occupied her town. The song has heavy implications of sexual abuse, but it is also about loving her abuser and missing him in his absence. For this song we used bossa nova, a type of Brazilian music with its origins in jazz and samba, popularized in the 1950s and 1960s. Bossa nova is soft and gentle, but also melodic and melancholic. One of the first things we learn about Yvette in the play is that she loves to talk—often, as she herself admits, just for the sake of talking. With this song and style we were able to give her a few minutes to serenade for her own sake, rather than for someone else. The staging of the piece was designed to reinforce this by giving the feeling of a jazz club singer wandering through her audience. One significant difference, however, between our song and traditional bossa nova is that we cut the acoustic guitar. The song was written on a guitar, but in the actual performance

the guitar was absent. This is indicative of a lot of the work we did with the songs, using a suitable structure but not being beholden to it. It felt appropriate for Yvette's song to sound beautiful, and yet to those who know the style of music it would be somewhat hollow.

The other example that I will use for the effect of style within the compositions is the *Farmhouse Song*. As mentioned earlier, Romano Mussolini played with Chet Baker. With the *Farmhouse Song* we did not use jazz or any style associated with it. Rather, the *Farmhouse Song* was composed in the style of a Chet Baker composition, including a two-minute trumpet solo after the singing had ended. Chet Baker's music is usually slow, melodic, and pleasant to listen to. The sequence has Courage and Katrin discovering a voice within a farmhouse singing a song about small and insignificant concerns. It is a snide moment from Brecht that is reminiscent of the opening sequence of the show with the two soldiers. The soldiers complain at how townspeople are complacent and ignorant of the dangers of the world, to the point where they do not feel the need to name their children because only war gets people counting and taking stock. Late in the play, Courage and her daughter discover a very complacent town. It is rare in the play that we discover a character's real name. The play deliberately does not reveal the names of any of the townspeople involved in the final scenes. Rather than being designed to make the audience think the town was complacent, our version of the song was designed to allow audience members to become additional members of that complacent town. Later in the process, when the staging required the audience to be moved to under the monument during this song, the trumpet solo took on the additional role of filling the time until people were settled.

With jazz and its myriad of descendants in style we had a vast catalogue of ways to design and use each song. However, the question that kept emerging was: ‘Is the show going to become a musical or a jazz show?’ Jazz does not lend itself to the style that musicals often use: a huge number of instruments and large crescendos that everyone can sing in the shower after seeing the show. Jazz is chaotic and improvisational; this nature is what makes it work with this play so well stylistically. As we created the songs, we decided which songs could take on moments that would be musical in nature—that is, the songs that would use jazz styles and instruments, but would also have moments drawn from performative musical numbers, large and containing crescendos. Not every song required much changing, as some had naturally found this balance on their own. The Chaplain’s *Song of the Hours*, for example, used monastic and ecclesiastical choral singing in its opening, only to cheekily break into a Saxophone solo. However, the Cook’s song, named *Cook’s Song*, lent itself to gaining musical moments because of the repetition of the verses. We gave that song some fun moments by having the more obvious crescendo at the end of each verse be undercut by a spoken, almost comedic, statement. Instead, the real crescendo came earlier in each verse, within the tonal change of the lyrics. Each verse contained the lyric, “before the night descends.” The idea is that people with good virtues get themselves killed early, “before the night descends,” because good virtues, as the song suggests, only lead to bitter, violent, and quick ends. The best examples of songs that evolved to become more musical-like numbers were Eilif’s *The Song about the Soldier and his Wife* and the main theme, *Mother Courage*. This helped bridge the distance from a popular show from Brecht’s time, a jazz show, and a popular show from today, the musical.

The Song about the Soldier and his Wife is the song we chose to be the most like a musical number of all the songs. Its structure and spine were inherently jazz, but the way the song had to be sung was reminiscent of leading male tenor musical numbers. Eilif is someone who needs to be the hero of his own story. He is obsessed with becoming a soldier and the freedom he believes it will give him to do what he wants. The song, taught to him by his mother, is about a soldier who goes off to war against the advice of his wife. The soldier, inevitably, dies brutally, drowning in icy water, and his wife never discovers what happened to him. For Mother Courage, who sings the song herself after Eilif finishes, it is a song about how it does not matter how wise the wife is, she will still feel the pain of losing her husband because she will be unable to stop him. For Eilif, it is a song about the freedom to do what he wants, and perhaps he finds the concept of someone always waiting for him romantic. After all, later in the play he requests the Cook and Chaplain to not tell Courage and Katrin that he is going to be executed, and Courage still believes he is out there at the end of the play. In Kushner's translation, there is no duet. Eilif sings and then Courage sings. However, we liked the idea that the song was so catchy and fun to sing that Eilif would enjoy jumping in and forcing a duet. He loves his version of the song sung by the heroic tenor lead. Courage, like Brecht, is trying to teach the young something about what it really means to be a soldier. Unfortunately, the song is potentially too much fun to communicate this lesson. It clearly fails at teaching Eilif, and while the song was incredible to listen to, I do not know if the song succeeded in walking this careful line for communicating its message to the audience.

The main musical theme, which we simply named *Mother Courage*, was something that we knew would repeat over the course of the play. By happy coincidence, because of its

placement we went into intermission with a reprise of the main theme. The song was originally designed to completely represent the jazz influence that would appear in the rest of the music. However, because the opening rendition of the song is inherently an advertisement for Mother Courage's business, the song evolved to also have the catchiness of a commercial jingle. Once we had this version of the song, we were able to slow it down and speed it up to match the tone of the moment during which it was being used. The chorus, in particular, became bigger and more bombastic as these changes occurred. By the end we were left with a song that it would be difficult to describe as jazz, but it was highly adaptable to every usage it had in the play. This was especially useful for the version that ended the play, where we needed to be able to walk out of the space with what instruments we could carry. This version of the song became a lot like a marching band. So much of this production was designed to be adaptable, to be ripped up and marched off with, and the main theme embodied this, even when its final lines were sung without accompaniment after leaving the theatre:

"All war will end and time will cease. And while we live we buy and sell. And in our graves we shall find peace. Unless the war goes on in hell."

SOUND

The sound design of the show was something that seemed simple at first, but became more time-consuming as the production process progressed. Initially, I had planned to do the sound myself, but the complexities that were added to the sound created the need to bring someone on board for the sound design. Cai Samphire did very well coming into a process already in full swing and going along with the flow of it. There were constant additions to the

sound, perhaps only exceeded in number by the changes to props, and we had to test things in the space tactically in order to not take away from the time required to set up the projections.

In film, diegetic sound describes the sounds which have a known or implied source of origin within the fiction and action of the film. Non-diegetic is the opposite: sounds that are not taking place in the reality of the film, such as the musical score and sound effects. The music of our production was diegetic in nature. However, the sound was non-diegetic. The sound effects would be as realistic as possible, but the audience was never going to believe that the sound effects of gunfire were real. Since the audience would not believe the sound effects were real, each sound effect would remind the audience of the performance rather than engross them in it. We went as far as to make some of the cues so loud that the audience could feel them. This seemed the best way of creating the experience of the precipice of violence talked about earlier. The war needed to feel close, just out of sight, but not out of range. We ended up taking this even further in the design of the loud speaker plot. Since we had decided to go for authentic and realistic sounds of era weaponry, we also wanted the sound to come from all around the audience so that every outside area had a sense of danger. We placed speakers in the shop and the storage area as well as down the vom (the exit that leads to the area underneath the audience) and outside the doors into the theatre. In a way, we created a surround sound environment where each speaker was just out of sight. The desire was to change the theatre into an insular place that was hanging on the precipice of violence that had been so integral to the creation of the theatrical space. While the audience would use their suspension of disbelief, they would also likely open themselves up to be more affected by the actual gunshot that happens in scene eleven. Suspension of disbelief is not required when using real gunpowder, even if there is

no bullet. This is an example of the way that the expectations set by act one could be used effectively in act two.

AUDIENCE

To conclude this chapter, I would like to go into the design of the audience experience—specifically, the decision to create two ‘acts’ of the show. As previously discussed, one of the biggest challenges, from the beginning, that had to be dealt with in the performing of the show was how to reconcile Brecht’s audience with my own. Brecht’s Epic Theatre required distance to keep his audience critical, but the more conflicts that came up in the design process, the more I realized that embracing the conflicts between the audiences of each context might reveal the most interesting staging ideas—even if this meant conflicting with Brecht’s intentions. However, I wanted to ensure that some aspect of Brecht’s intention for the play remained alive in the work. I also wanted to embrace Kushner’s notion of exhausting the audience. I had been playing with the idea of not having an intermission. I had a very productive meeting with Bruce Barton in which we discussed the idea and ramifications of creating two completely different acts. The discussion and Bruce’s input was fundamental to what the show became. I came out of that meeting deciding that it would be a mistake to create these two acts of the show unless the experience of each was drastically different. I decided to hold an intermission after what would be the time of a normal length play: approximately two hours. The reason for this was how different the play becomes after scene eight. I wanted the audience to come back after the intermission to a very different Mother Courage: one that had almost reached defeat and was ready to give up the life of a merchant for a potentially cozier life with the Cook. This decision

was reinforced by the fact that the final few scenes are very close to each other timewise and are also set in cold temperatures. However, each act would need to look and feel fundamentally different. If I just wanted to give the audience the ability to go to the washroom, I should give them a break after scene four: technically, the half-way point of the play. Instead, the division into two acts allowed me to make the first act as big as I wanted because the second act was, by contrast, going to be intimate.

Because we decided to perform the show in the University Theatre, there was always going to be an inherent sense of scale for the show because of the angle and height of the seating. I tried to utilize this by taking the first two rows away from the audience so that, in act one, the audience is always looking down on the action. For act two, I wanted to try to change the audience's perspective of the show and of the theatre itself. The initial idea was simply to flip where the audience was—to create seating around the monument. All this seemed to do, however, was change the audience's angle and give the actors less space. I found it did not change the audience's experience in a way that felt meaningful. Instead, I came up with a strategy that would place the audience on the ground, but also have a way of moving them through the space and giving seating to those who really needed it.

I had spent a very long time figuring out the ways that the ensemble would reflect Brecht's production. In the 1951 production, the theatre was a refuge for both the actors and the audience, both metaphorically and literally. It was one of the only buildings that was still standing. The reason why mattresses were used in act two as part of the set decoration was not only for the audience; it was to imply that the actors have to sleep there, selling whatever they can to make a profit so that they can keep going. However, the ensemble learns the lesson

Mother Courage does not; this is why they do not continue trying to sell things at the show's conclusion. The decision to move the mattresses into the theatrical space, providing a luxury for very few audience members, was based on ideas I had been experimenting with for a production of *Romeo and Juliet* with Pil Hansen. Even within the uncomfortable nature of returning to the theatre after the intermission, funneled in single file by Nazis, there was still an immediate supply and demand. Audience members were being given agency without realizing it. They were deciding whether to take the few comforts left for themselves or give them up to someone who needed them. To say that act two was meant to make the audience feel like refugees is far too vague. Act two was meant to make the audience feel all the conflicts I imagined were present in Brecht's first production: comforted yet terrified.

Scene six was the first scene that I crafted in its entirety during the design process, even with its complexities: the isolated cart, the projection of rain, the soldiers singing on the monument, and the effects to create a funeral march passing by. The scene I discovered last was scene eleven. It was a scene that the whole play built up to, and the only thing resembling a climax. And yet, it was also the only scene that did not contain Mother Courage. This scene was always going to feel dangerous, and now it had to be done with the audience within the action. Therefore, the best way to do the scene was to make it as practically difficult as possible. The whole scene would be performed in darkness, almost entirely in German, and end in a blank gunshot. It was a potentially dangerous sequence. This sequence is a testament to the work everyone did to make the ideas of the show a reality. And there is no doubt in my mind that it is the most memorable scene in the play, and that the production would not have worked without it. The first two hours built up to it without the audience knowing, and the reason why the

second act only lasted under thirty minutes is because that scene was the epitome of the suffocation I had been searching for, and it reinforced the visceral understanding that the whole play communicated. It did so by conflicting with the rest of the play's style—by conflicting with Brecht's style. As noted 'distance' was the most important word throughout the design process. The final sequence allowed us to breach every distance in a moment. If the first act of the play was attempting to be true to the critical distance Brecht wanted, act two, while perhaps not having critical distance simultaneously, attempted to give the audience a moment of fear and compliance to take home with them to be critical of.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Works without Faith

Following the production, an effort is made to highlight both the achievements and trials of the fundamental concepts the show generated.

At the beginning of this document, there is a quotation: “faith without works is dead.” This comes from the bible, more specifically from the following passage in the book of James: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” The section the quotation is from refers to someone who believes in God, but lives without a desire to accomplish good works for God, and the error within that existence. I, however, use it as an application on all belief, not just religion. To think or believe something without committing to it and working towards it is hollow. I kept it on a post-it note on my wall above the menagerie of ideas that were flowing from my work on the show. I discovered this quotation when doing my initial research into the religions that I would be dealing with in the context of the play—and it stuck. If any of the show’s ideas were not being worked on, then the idea needed reworking to create a new commitment or it needed to be removed. However, I also came to see that the opposite was true as well. There were ideas that came out of the work that were interesting and seemed relevant, but then turned out to be disconnected or inappropriate. If faith without works is dead, then works without faith are misguided. This harsh, but effective, post-it note hierarchy is what led to the concepts that channeled the show to being few, but potent. This does not mean that every idea was perfect or that the execution of these concepts was flawless, however.

I would like to conclude this document by discussing a few case studies of concepts and ideas that worked as both failures and successes of the process through a consideration of the original concepts that were established: transparency, transitions, illusion of movement, suffocation, and distance.

The biggest problem with transparency is that it is impossible to ever truly achieve. Fortunately, so much of this production was the fruit of the conflict of these original concepts that it worked in our favour. However, something that always felt like a missed opportunity, even though I justified its absence earlier in this document, is transparency with the money involved in the production. The early ideas of the blackboards and other methods of communication of detailed funding and the tally of ensemble spending fell by the wayside. However, I still believe that cutting these things was the correct decision. The strategies to express the concepts were too vague, and it is simply not worth invading someone's privacy to execute ambiguous thoughts. The failure comes from not doing more work and research to find a clearer and more fundamental use of these concepts. Further embracing the student theatre format of production may have lent itself to the other ideas at work in the show and produced an even more interesting experience for the actors. Instead, there were shadows of those larger ideas throughout the process and in the performance, but without anything truly concrete to communicate. The ideas did not make it far enough before they were cut to have something solid to communicate, but I see this as an unfortunate side effect of the harshness of the 'cutting room floor' syndrome because of time and focus. That being said, if the editing method had not been harsh, and if every idea I had over the course of the production was attempting to break into the performance, we would be discussing a very different piece of theatre.

The difficulty of discovering and implementing interesting concepts at the same time as realizing the student economy ideas worked against us. Instead, there were aspects that could be applied to the ensemble that then adapted as, further into the process, their original purpose became unclear. Very early on, I asked all the cast members to bring in any canned goods that they had as extra from home, and we ended up having a substantial amount. These were meant to be shared by the ensemble during the show to further communicate their unity and that the theatre was their home; but this became complicated by the use of food on stage. The canned goods were meant to also be that food. This concept went as far as our appointing Brian Jensen, the cook, as the keeper of the food, responsible for distributing it when it was needed. He even had a small notebook where he recorded what we had and when it was used. It did not end up being used in the final production. I cut the stage food during the rehearsal process; my thought was that it was more in line with Brecht's ideas to be clearly simulating the food and drink on stage. This was an occasion where a contradiction simply killed an idea rather than creating a new, interesting opportunity.

A very different example of ideas that were altered through improvisation during execution is those of documentation. Very early on there were a lot of interesting ways to document the show's process as it progressed. With the work being done with the ensemble and the rules of the rehearsal room, there was the potential for an interesting documentation process. One of the forms this took was that there could be a camera available to everyone in the ensemble to use as they wished that would assist in documenting interesting moments. However, the obvious flaw in this idea is the reality that if anyone can use the camera, and there is not the proper incentive to use it, then no one is going to use it. This idea was almost

immediately cut and another one did not take its place. Instead, documentation fell down the priority ladder until it became highly unlikely that anything would occur in relation to it.

Further down the line, when doing character work and figuring out how I wanted each character to fit into the world of the play, I had the idea of giving Kattrin a camera. This was because she is a character that observes the world yet rarely voluntarily interacts with it. In fact, she withdraws herself from the world at times when terrible things happen to her. The script leaves little for her to do, so how Kattrin will interact with the world is largely left up to the actor and director. I decided to have her observe the world carefully and record things that interested her during the play. Kattrin has an adoration for beautiful things, as seen when she covets Yvette's hat and shoes, but she also fears contact. Giving her a camera gave her agency in the way she interacted with the world, but also gave her something to lose or leave behind when she finally had to act. I mirrored this concept with the actor, Danelle White. I gave her a camera at the read-through and told her to capture whatever interested her, when it interested her, either through photo or video. She committed to this task—although I think she also used the camera as something to keep her engaged with what was happening when she had nothing to do. This was another interesting mirror with her character. Looking at the photos and videos later, after the closing of the show, you can see her gain focus as an actor through her photography. The camera was a relatively chaotic addition because of its complexity as an object, and as she progressed through the process the things she captured started to gain a rhythm. Eventually, she began capturing the same subjects through photos and events on video. By the time her 'camera essay' gets to the actual performances, she is recording the same events every show. While the way this idea evolved within the show is interesting, it does not even remotely perform the initial

purpose: to document the process. However, having an idea that has not gone to waste and has helped an actor, to any extent, inhabit their character is an agreeable trade-off for a director.

An element that I am still unsure was executed in the most effective way is the subtitles. They were originally a very small part of the play that helped communicate the scenes that were in German in a way that felt true to Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*; but over time they became more important, especially after the designation of the two acts. This meant that the German speech in each act would be a very different experience for the audience, making the subtitles even more important. However, the execution of them was very difficult and required near-perfect timing. Nonetheless, I still think that the ideas were solid and the communication effective.

Where subtitles were less effective was with the opening descriptions of scenes during the transitions. There was simply too much occurring during the transitions for any one thing to be effective. The stage movement was the obvious point of interest and the brightness of the lights created an uncomfortable feeling that was relieved by the commencement of the next scene. This worked against the implementation of the subtitles, which also reinforced some of the propagandistic concepts of the show. Words from Brecht's opening description of scenes that did not fit with the World War II setting were blacked out over the course of the transition. This was an action also reflected in act two, but through voice rather than text. The scene titles were recorded in German and the words that did not correspond to the setting were subtly lost in the scratchy sounds of a recording designed to be reminiscent of the Cold War Era Stasi tapes. What all of this demonstrates is that the failure to communicate a concept could, later in the production process, result in other concepts being less effective. With so many conflicting ideas

working together so intrinsically, the risk of this was great. The transitions themselves, other than perhaps having one too many ideas, did what I wanted them to. They were jarring, reset the stage, and did not allow the audience to find a set pace or rhythm that would let them be complacent in their relationship to the actions of the play.

In The National Theatre's YouTube video called "An introduction to Brechtian Theatre," Tony Kushner paraphrases Brecht's feelings and foresight for the naturalism that was creeping into theatre from film. He says, "Don't compete with it, you'll lose." This creates a very interesting tension. Kushner is writing the play with what he believes is Brecht's acceptance of the way that theatre performance is evolving. Even though Brecht predicts the influence film has on theatre, it is unlikely that he would have been able to predict how simply gargantuan the film industry has become, nor how the incredible growth of the film industry would facilitate theatre's decline.

A lot of the things that Brecht did in the design of his shows are now much more ordinary parts of theatre. Some of the techniques that Brecht used to distance his audience are now a part of the audience's theatre vocabulary, and they do not necessarily know the original usage. Something that Brecht applied to his dramas and that still creates distance is *gestus*. *Gestus* is an acting practice that allows an actor to make a character's social dimensions visible, while also allowing them to embody the 'showing' or demonstrating aspect that Brecht found so important. In Brecht's theory, it is more effective to re-enact an event with amplified gestures and storytelling because the original is too understated in its reality.

Tony Kushner's adaptation of the play does not lend itself to the performing of *gestus*. The poetry of Kushner's language is very natural in its delivery and applicable to real life in a way

that Brecht's German is not. However, I did a lot of work on physicality with the actors, especially those who were playing multiple characters. Not only would this help them, and the audience, differentiate the characters, but it would also, perhaps, allow us to reach a form of gestus appropriate for the translation. The character's sound more natural, but do not necessarily look it. The intent was, as with the design, to find a balance between Brecht's moment and now: between gestus and naturalism.

The applying of gestus and getting the actors to physicalize their characters was the thing that I struggled with most over the course of the production. As the show moved closer to performance, I grew very concerned that the actors were reverting to a place of physical comfort for themselves in their acting, rather than staying in the place that was physically necessary for the characters. However, I also had less and less time to work on acting in the process and, because of the way the schedule worked, I had no rehearsal time during the two weeks prior to the performance. This was key time that I lost in the grandeur and technical capacities of the show. In the ensemble rules stated earlier, I mentioned the equal sharing of all resources, including time. This was the point in which I ran out of this precious resource.

Tech week, and the week prior, were full for me because of the technical production aspects. This meant that time to communicate with actors individually to really hammer in gestures and physical work became very limited. Fortunately, Bruce Barton made himself consistently available to me and the work that he provided to my actors and me was indispensable. Going into those final two weeks, we met and would go over the moments and characters that needed work. He would also provide ways to translate my thoughts and notes on the acting in ways that could be effectively communicated to the actors with very little time

remaining. Then, during technical rehearsals, in the moments that certain actors were not needed in the theatre, Bruce would work with them in the areas around the theatre. If I had a brief moment where I was available, I would do the same. After runs, Bruce and I would communicate over which characters and moments still needed work and we would repeat the process. I cannot overstate how important this was to the production that made it to the stage. Bruce's work and consistency with the actors was so crucial because otherwise the work they were doing in the run up to the show, and so much of the work that went in previously in rehearsal, could have been lost. This was especially true for the Chaplain and Yvette, where physically presenting their social station and how they feel about it is not only integral to the show (since this is the case with all of the characters), but integral to reminding the audience who these characters are, as their stations change multiple times. However, just as Kushner conceded to the naturalism of film when approaching Brecht, I failed to move the performances enough towards *gestus*. The balance definitively fell in the favour of naturalism. While this might have made it easier for a contemporary audience to enjoy the show, it is not the balance I had aimed for in respecting and utilizing Brecht's practice.

Perhaps the best example of the effects of the illusion of movement element came in scene six and seven. During scene six, Mother Courage's cart is in Ingolstadt and the Field Marshal Tilly is being buried. The scene, through its dialogue, calls for very specific effects to create its setting. It requires a funeral march to be occurring in the background, complete with full band music. There are also multiple soldiers singing outside and rain is pouring down throughout the scene. Every facet of the design came into this sequence. The cart would be isolated in some relatively harsh lighting, boxing it off from the outside world. There would be

projections of rain pouring throughout the scene across the stage and, by design, the rain would not be seen within the cart because of the light distortion. The monument would be moved downstage and create a separation that blocked in the cart. On top of the monument would be the soldiers, only visible because of the light bleed from the projection of rain. There was a light fixture, used for this sequence only, which created a large and colourful show from behind the monument that projected shadows onto a hazer (another item we acquired mostly for this sequence). We had a group of the assistant stage managers walk in single file in front of the back lights again and again throughout the sequence, projecting shadows of movement onto the haze. Although this may be an unusual use of ASMs, the ensemble did the majority of the work when it came to set movement, and almost every prop was already within the space at the beginning of the show. Therefore, ASMs perhaps had less to do in this show than they usually would. This fabricated march was accompanied by the sound of a funeral procession moving through our surround sound speakers as the it passed by the cart and off into the distance. The only facet of the design not fully utilized was the live music. Although, while the band did not play during the scene, there was a piece of music written by Denis used diagetically and performed by the Chaplain, the soldiers, and an onstage guitar. This was a very visually striking scene that managed a balance between an excessive and grandiose setting incubating an insignificant and intimate enclosure. This was to reinforce the contradiction that Courage's cart, and what happens to it within the context of a larger world, is inconsequential, despite being everything to her.

What all of this led to was not only the creation of the illusion of movement that was occurring in the scene; it also reinforced the illusion that Mother Courage was moving towards a

better life. I wanted the cart to be isolated, to be surrounded by a hurricane that was barely real until someone ventured out into it. Even in this seemingly peaceful scene, the precipice of violence was ever present. Mother Courage thinks that things are looking up, that she'll be able to make a real profit during her stay in Ingolstadt. She even follows the chaplain's advice to buy more goods as, he believes, the war will never end. In this play, however, even the smallest triumph cannot be experienced without a severe response. Katrin returns from the hurricane abused and scarred, but having protected the merchandise: yet another example of the cart causing irreversible damage to the children.

Scene six's final line has Mother Courage cursing the war. The next scene's first line has Mother Courage confronting anyone who would criticize the war. The opening description of scene seven states that we are seeing Mother Courage "at the height of her business career." The scene is less than a single page and is made up entirely of a reprise of the opening 'Mother Courage' theme. The blocking of the scene consisted of every member in the ensemble walking stylistically in place, the cart being pulled in place, and Mother Courage exploring the space, only to end up in the same place. The lighting for this scene was the most unrealistic of the whole performance. Every facet of design, as well as the script, is telling the audience that not only is this moment not going to last, but the very reality of the moment is questionable, at best.

I mentioned earlier that scene six was the first sequence to be fully designed. This was because everything about the ideas for the scene emerged quickly and naturally when utilizing the elements of the production. This was not the case for scene seven, which is easily my least favourite scene of the show. This is not because the idea of Courage at the "height of her business career" within a single page always makes me laugh rather morbidly; rather, it's

because I believe that I did not do the scene justice. There was much more I could have done with the scene and it ended up feeling like more of a transition from scene six to scene eight than its own scene.

The 'eye of the storm' that was created for scene six also lent itself to creating that feeling of suffocation that was so important to the production. In a lot of ways, I think the most successful aspect of the show was the realization that this 'eye of the storm' concept could be applied to the whole play and not just scene six. Once the audience joins the action in act two and realizes that the hurricane will go on forever unless they escape it, the performance truly ends. The ensemble guides them out of it and helps them leave, but they give them no words of encouragement, just a grim conjunction: "unless." Earlier, I mentioned how powerful I find that final couplet, but I do not think it can be overstated how pessimistic the final message of the play is: "All war will end and time will cease/and while we live we buy and sell/and in our graves we shall find peace/unless the war goes on in hell." The final line of the play removes the promise of peace and replaces it with a precarious assurance of hell. It is a smothering reality and I am glad I placed so much importance on that part when creating the experience of the play.

The final moment of the play used the transparency and metatheatricality of the performance to full effect. The ensemble, sans Mother Courage, and the musicians lead the audience out of the theatre during the final song. Mother Courage and her cart try to follow, but are unable to as the audience has gone up the stairs to leave. Mother Courage is stuck on the stage in the same space that she has always been, in the same place she will always be. She is a character that learns nothing and goes nowhere and her life is suffocating.

The decision to create two acts with the first being so much longer than the second also meant that we had to question our audience. In very early discussions on this aspect of the show with Bruce Barton, the thing that kept coming up was: will the audience come back for act two? Would they even want to come back? It is a play that was meant to feel suffocating, a play that was long and draining; why would someone want to come back if we give them a chance to run away after two hours in? Surprisingly, the audience did come back. One of the things that was so important to the show, and is incredibly important to me as an artist, is giving the audience agency within a narrative. My research and experiments are often in immersive theatre, but the question of agency is always one I am looking to find answers for. This does not require a show to be immersive or participatory in nature. With *Mother Courage*, I wanted the audience to evolve over the course of the show. Reading Brecht's plays, especially his *Lehrstücke*, I wanted our production to compel the audience to take agency in the way Brecht's work does. The number one goal of creating the two acts and changing the experience of the show was to turn the audience from witnesses to participants.

I believe the biggest success of the show, and the largest compliment I can give all of the people who worked hard to create it, is this: even though the audience had every opportunity to leave, they did not. The show was compelling, and although it tested their endurance, the audience wanted to be there to the end, regardless of whether or not they knew the outcome. The moment an audience member chose to come back—the moment the audience acquired their agency in the narrative—the show had achieved a form of success.

Over the course of staging our production of *Mother Courage*, there have been two monumental events in the west. The first was the UK vote in favour of an exit from the E.U. The

second was the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States of America. While many North Americans seemed to find the prospect of Trump's election to be ridiculous and unlikely prior to the vote, those of us who had been paying attention to the Brexit vote knew better. One of the places I lived growing up, and a place that is still very close to my heart, Liverpool, was one of the only cities in England to vote with a clear majority against Brexit. It was a very bitter and hollow victory amongst the country's losses and the wider realization that ethno-nationalism and xenophobia are still effective political tools in the west. We who had experienced Brexit were not surprised by Trump's victory, and the effects of both of these votes are still ongoing and continue to have major ramifications.

One of the relevant effects, when discussing this production, is the illumination of the continued breadth of white supremacy within the west. Brecht's original context, and by extension the play, are steeped in the consequences of white supremacism and, as Brecht knew too well, art is defined by its context. This is not to say that the reasons for doing the play are the events of 2017, or even 2016. This would not have been possible, considering that the play was chosen in February of 2016 and I had submitted the play, knowing I wanted to use Brecht's context and the Nazis, in November of 2015. At the time, the thing that I thought was so relevant about the play, and why it should be performed, was the emphasis on the dangers of capitalism and the inability to learn from history. However, art is context and does not exist in a vacuum. It would be extremely naïve to think that a production like this does not take on a different tone when performed in February of 2017. As with anything in life, it does not matter what your original intentions were; you need to be aware of who your audience is going to be. That includes being aware of the world they are watching from.

At the beginning of my first chapter, I noted that Tony Kushner's persistence when adapting *Mother Courage*, despite not being able to read or write in German, implied that the play has an incredible power to motivate, and that the play reverberates long after the original context. I would, and do, argue that the play's enduring relevance is proven by the fact that it was originally chosen to reflect one aspect of the world and yet was able, without the production being changed fundamentally, to also reflect other aspects simply because of the context it was being performed in. It reverberates because it motivates. It motivates because we are terrified. We are terrified of *Mother Courage*. We are terrified of someone who, from most points of view, means well and yet brings about the destruction of her family through her decisions; someone who, in her effort to protect that which keeps her family alive, guarantees their deaths; someone who does all of this and still learns nothing. We are terrified because, perhaps, we have not learned anything. Perhaps the mistakes that were made in The Thirty Years' War were made in the Second World War, and now we are making them again. This fear, however, needs to be tempered and examined, rather than projected. In our efforts to protect ourselves we may find ourselves repeating *Courage's* mistakes. The institutions we set up to nourish our lives can, in return, cannibalize the people they were designed for. It is a simple reality that proves itself every day. Whether that's through Brexit, Trump's Election, white supremacy, gun control, or all the other topics that continue to pervade our daily life in 2015, 2016, 2017, and into the future. As long as we continue to lose our children and continue to pull the cart that killed them, this play will be relevant.

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