Heiner Müller and Martin Wuttke: staging new images in a time of change

Denise Varney

This article explores the performative representations of post-reunification German theatre through an analysis of the textual, visual and aural image-making of the Berliner Ensemble's The Resisible Rise of Arturo Ui and Germania 3 Ghosts at Dead Man, directed and written by Heiner Müller respectively. It suggests that the theatrical representation of historical and legendary twentieth century figures, such as Hitler and Stalin, old communist leaders and the mythical Erbkönig, form part of the re-mapping and re-configuring of culture that is taking place in contemporary Germany. This is especially so in regard to the inter-relations between the past and the changing political borders in the present that connect with the broader historical transitions effecting 'east' and 'west' Europe. These include the end of the Cold War, the eastwards expansion of the European Union and the movement into a globalized economy.

Within German theatre, particularly where Heiner Müller is concerned, the question of history and the response to local change drives both a conservative and radical theatre practice. On the conservative side, from 1995, canonical texts such as Brecht's and Shakespeare's (along with Müller's) form the basis of the Berliner Ensemble's strategy for surviving in a market economy. But it is also understood they will be radically restaged through the aesthetics of Müller's image and sound-based post-dramatic and post-ideological theatre. Arturo Ui can be seen as the exemplar of the new direction. The text, protected by the Brecht Estate, will be given a visual and aural

make-over that brings it into the contemporary era. Müller's new work, Germania 3, with its incomplete scenic fragments and ghostly figures, deploys the aesthetic form that seems, with the benefit of hindsight, to have accompanied the continual displacement and fragmentation of narratives of identity and place that marked the twentieth century. This article contends therefore that Müller's post-reunification theatrical offerings at the Berliner Ensemble, now separated from the state that funded it, are acutely and tellingly situated at the intersection of culture and politics.

The article draws on archival documentation of the performances and performance-making process to elucidate the flow of information from the conceptual and discursive stages of planning, through to the rehearsal process and performance. It focuses on the tension between a positioned view of history and the arbitrary connectedness, inventiveness and translation of points of view to visual and aural stage practice. Two themes – Vergangenheitsbewältigung (coming to terms with the past) and Feindbild (the concept of the enemy) – stand out as powerful theatrical forces just as they figure in the broader debates about reunification that continue today. Like many other German-language concepts, they are best left untranslated as I do in the analysis that follows.

Part One: Bringing together three events: two theatrical productions and a momentous political change.

1 The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui

During the extended prologue of the Berliner Ensemble's 1995 production of Bertolt Brecht's The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui,¹ actor Martin Wuttke's Arturo Ui moves around the stage like a salivating dog. Bare-chested and in military breeches, with white gloves making paws of his hands, and with his tongue stained red and hanging out, Wuttke's body, is part pointer-dog, part-wolf, panting, impatient and on guard.

Those who know the play are well-prepared for the Ui-Chicago gangster-Hitler parable and are interested in Heiner Müller's interpretation of the play for the contemporary era. It is one of the very few times (with the exception of fragments from the Fatzer material in 1993-4) that Müller, on whom the survival of the Berliner Ensemble has fallen, has directed one of its founder's plays. Ui's Hitler element means that the production finds itself identified with a post-reunification 'Hitler –Welle', a wave of plays about Hitler, including Eva – Hitler's Lover (1997) at the Berliner Ensemble, that are 'a surprise success with the public' and accompany the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War Two (Seibt 1997).²

Wuttke's salivating dog, added to the text as a kind of prehistory of Arturo Ui as animal, is accompanied by Erlkönig D. 328, Franz Schubert's composition for baritone and piano of Goethe's romantic ballad. (In German mythology the Erlkönig symbolizes death.) Together, the

visual and aural imagery are the first indicators of the tenor of the mise en scène of this production.

2 Germania 3 Ghosts at Dead Man

Germania 3 Ghosts at Dead Man³ is the second in a sequence of plays, beginning with Germania Death in Berlin (1956, 1971), in which Müller probes the period of German history from the failed socialist revolution of 1918 to the collapse of the East German state in 1990. It was drafted in early 1995 in Santa Monica before rehearsals for Arturo Ui began in May. The text was circulated for discussion before being published posthumously in February 1996. This was a month after Müller intended commencing rehearsals for its first production at the Berliner Ensemble.

The play begins with a scene entitled Military Parade at Night which is set at the Berlin Wall where two guards keep watch. It could be the beginning of Hamlet. One guard is Ernst Thälmann, whose historical counterpart was a founding member of the German Communist Party (KPD) who was arrested and executed by the Nazis in 1944. His fellow guard is Walter Ulbricht, also an historical figure, who from 1950 to 1971 was first secretary of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) that ruled East Germany (GDR) from 1946 until its electoral defeat in 1990. In 1961, Ulbricht had ordered the building of the Wall. While the stage directions indicate tracer shots and shells aimed at escapees, Thälmann despairs at real existing socialism in this the hard-fought for socialist state:

Thälmann: The mausoleum of German Socialism. Here is where it's been buried. (Müller 2001: 184)

Ulbricht, on the other hand, has nothing but contempt for the misguided escapees or for workers who snore away 'in fuck cells with district heating from Rostock to Johannegeorgenstadt, their skulls hugging the TV screen' (184).

For the Berliner Ensemble production that opened in June 1996, director Martin Wuttke, born in 1963, dispenses with the historical personas. Müller's vision of the two old communists as the good and bad cops of the dictatorship of the proletariat is a reference that the younger director believes is lost on today's ideologically blended audiences. In the Wuttke production, two male performers, one older and taller than the other, in top hats, black T-shirts and tails and with bare feet, enter the stage. They could be clowns or Shakespearian grave diggers. They stare out at the auditorium so that the line – 'The mausoleum of German Socialism. Here is where it's been buried' – is directed into the baroque splendour of the Berliner Ensemble theatre where the elegant caryatids hold up balconies and red velvet lined boxes. According to a witness this delivery elicits

‘a long laugh from spectators’ (Beauregard 1996). The laughter of the bourgeoisie and the self-irony of lost hope.

As these remarks suggest, Wuttke’s production marks something of the cultural shift that has accompanied political change. Where Müller’s work deals relentlessly with the self-critique of the political subject in history, it also seems single-handedly to carry the weight of German history and German fascism. Wuttke’s approach is lighter.

3 die Wende

On 9 November 1989, the SED, the ruling party of the German Democratic Republic, made the surprise decision to open the Berlin Wall allowing the free movement of people from the east and west of the city and the country for the first time in twenty-eight years. Less than a year later, First Secretary Erich Honecker has resigned and the SED was in crisis. A people’s movement, similar to those that spring up in other member countries of the Soviet bloc, began demonstrating for a ‘democratic-socialist revolution’ that culminated in a demonstration in East Berlin attended by one million people (Brockmann 1991: 6). A year later, on 3 October 1990, under Article 23 of West German Basic Law, which states that individual states of the former German territories could enter the federation whenever they chose, the GDR rejoins the western state. The collapse of East Germany ends the forty-year division of the country into two separate political, economic, cultural and geographic states. The event is known as die Wende, translated as the change or turning point.

4 The debate

A detailed discussion of die Wende and the reunification debate is beyond the scope of this article, however, a brief survey of the positions taken by some of the more prominent intellectuals will set some aspects of the context for the performance analysis.

Prominent figures in the reunification debate included Jürgen Habermas who wrote in support of a Federal Republic and Günter Grass who opposed it. But neither was able to influence events. Karl Heinz Bohrer argued for reunification within a European rather than nationalist context and dismissed the ‘third way’, the idea of a reformed democratic socialist state, as a combination of idealism and parochialism (Bohrer 1991: 72ff). Of concern was also the ‘failure of the intellectuals’ to lead debate during the reunification process (Lewis 1992: 245). Andreas Huyssen described intellectuals from East and West Germany in the months after October 1989 as wandering ‘in that phantasmagoric no-man’s land of our political desires without the protective divide of the wall’ (Huyssen 1991: 36). Despite the reform agenda that motivated the protest movement in the GDR,

die Wende is both a victory over oppression and a crisis of history, of ideology and of political activism. It signalled the over-arching spectre of the post-ideological era of global capitalism.

Heiner Müller, a key figure in European post-dramatic theatre whose global influence is widely manifested in postmodern theatre culture, is busy working-up this material. As the wall opens, he was fulfilling a contractual arrangement, made in 1988 with the Deutsches Theater, to stage his translation of Shakespeare's Hamlet combined with the first East German production of Hamletmaschine. The resultant eight-hour version of the two plays took place in 1990 at the same time as the first free democratic elections in East Germany since before World War Two are held. Critic Carl Weber described how 'watching Heiner's production, I was awed by the way all these recent events had left their mark on the narrative that the performance was unfolding. I rarely had seen such an obvious if mediated representation of very recent history' (Weber 1996: 26).

As this example suggests, within the discourses surrounding the theatre there was, almost immediately, an acute awareness of the dynamic and formative relations between culture and politics. Müller was a key participant in debates about reunification even as his own position resisted the binaries of for or against. His concern was rather more with the meaning and effects of the GDR's inevitable economic and political collapse. 'The wall', he wrote, 'was an attempt to stop time, a self-defence against the economic assault of the capitalist West' (Müller 1992: 365). For all that, he remained one who questioned and provoked, finding in the new situation both a creative imperative to represent and a responsibility to remember the past. Berliner Ensemble dramaturge Holger Teschke recalls Müller as saying in 1995 that 'since the wall fell there is a vacuum. What we at the Berliner Ensemble must do is vacuum research, experimental drilling' (Teschke 1998).

Where Müller's theatre is concerned, the post-wall 'vacuum' or the 'no-man's land' is filled with elaborate and ambiguous imagery, from new configurations of the human and animal, to new negotiations of and with the mythical and historical legacies of the past.

Part Two: Performative representations of post-reunification German theatre

5 Vergangenheitsbewältigung - (coming to terms with the past)

Reunification activated a new phase of coming to terms with the past for West and East Germans. Among the challenges of the changed situation was a renewed confrontation with World War Two. Huyssen observed that Zweistaatlichkeit, the division of Germany into two states, had served to rationalize part of the guilt of national socialism. This occurred through the prevailing idea that division was 'if not punishment for Nazi aggression, its legitimate and permanent consequence' (Huyssen 1991: 109ff). On this mainly western view, the sudden reunification of the two Germanies was cause for reflection in that it changed the balance of crime and punishment.

The eastern side had its own problems to face. As Thomas Fox has observed, 'the Cold War produced partisan historiography about the Second World War on both sides of the ideological divide' (Fox 1999: 5). For East Germans, coming to terms with the past would include a changed relation to the holocaust. From the eastern side of the wall, the Federal Republic had been perceived as a continuation of Hitler-Fascism by different means. Michael Clyne's study found that because many GDR leaders had been victims of the Nazis, there was a sense in which all its citizens were 'absolved' of Nazi crimes (Clyne 1995: 66). Müller as a public figure helped produce the GDR view in writings that cast the Federal Republic as 'the other German state, legal successor to the German Reich' (Müller 1985: 342). Fox's Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust (1999) analyses how over the years the SED had engineered a holocaust master narrative that served to legitimize its own moral and political position. Fox's study analyses writers and film makers who variously collaborated, interrogated and contested the state position in a way that prefigures some of the questions raised about the theatre in this article.

But if reunification meant that West and East Germans were reunified with the Nazi past, both sides were also forced to reflect on socialist history. Stephan Brockmann identifies a further kind of Vergangenheitsbewältigung that had to do with partisan representations of socialism (1991: 19). For East German intellectuals, artists and citizens, coming to terms with socialism meant coming to terms with real existing socialism: the SED, the Stasi (East German secret police) and the issue of Stalinism. For West Germans, there was the loss of the socialist alternative that the GDR represented, for better or worse, as utopia or demonic image or a complex of the two. In a reunified Germany, the changed political terrain meant that the crimes committed in the name of socialism joined those of National Socialism as the key events of a shared history.

In the theatre of Heiner Müller that deals specifically with Nazism and state socialism – Germania Death in Berlin and Germania 3 Ghosts at Dead Man – coming to terms with the past coheres around the images of Hitler and Stalin. In his autobiography Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen (War without Battle: Life in Two Dictatorships), Müller wrote about bringing the two together for the first time using the war as the *mise en scène* :

Mich interessiert, was Deutschland betrifft, der Zweite Weltkrieg. Jetzt ist es möglich, Hitler und Stalin in Beziehung zu setzen, auch im Theater. (Müller 1992: 257)

(When it comes to Germany, what I am interested in is the Second World War. It is now possible to put Hitler and Stalin into relationship, also in the theatre.)

What I want to show in my analysis is that through Müller's involvement in Arturo Ui and the Germania 3 Ghosts at Dead Man at the Berliner Ensemble (itself struggling with the problems of

commercialism and leadership), 'east' and 'west' Vergangenheitsbewältigung come together in the form of Hitler and Stalin. That 'it is now possible' points to the powerful way in which, while the GDR remained in existence, Stalin could not be theatricalised or commodified in the way Hitler was, for example, whose *grund* state was long gone. The interface of these two theatrical figurations takes place, significantly therefore, at a time when the two old enemies – communism and capitalism – have ceased to be each other's demonic Other.

6 Feindbild: the demonic Other.

Feindbild is related to Vergangenheitsbewältigung in that it refers to the image of the enemy. It is a fluid concept in that adversaries can change with the new political situations that arise. The concept is particularly apt for Müller's post-dramatic theatre that speaks through the layering of images rather than character, narrative and plot. Feindbilder in the plural form is used, therefore, as a key to understanding the re-mappings and re-configurations of the past that are concretized in the performances discussed here.

In a perceptive reading of reunification, Alison Lewis has shown how the division of the two great opposing ideologies of capitalism and communism kept a kind of balance within the German psyche. For East Germans, 'the "*Feindbild*" of capitalism' was a way of "abjecting" the negativity of the socialist experience and legitimizing the GDR as 'an antifascist, socialist alternative to the capitalist West'. (Lewis 1992: 258-60).

Müller was well aware of the dramatic power of Feindbild, in particular, Carl Schmitt's concept of '*totales Feindbild*', the absolute image of the enemy (Müller 1992: 314). The loss of the "Feindbild" of the fascist-capitalist state on the other side of the wall produced an anxiety that led Müller to this response:

Jetzt kann man nichts mehr an den Gegner delegieren, jetzt . . . können die sozialen Widersprüche sich entfalten, befreit von Ideologien. Der Jubel von einigen deutschen Intellektuellen über den Golfkrieg, die klammheimliche Freude über einen neuen Hitler, verrät die Angst vor einem Leben ohne Feindbild. Die Verteufelung der DDR, die Dämonisierung der Staatssicherheit, bedient nicht nur die Wonnen des gewöhnlichen Antikommunismus, sondern betäubt auch diese Angst. Wer keinen Feind mehr hat, trifft ihn im Spiegel. (Müller 1992: 360).

(Now that one can delegate nothing more to the opponents...the social contradictions are able to unfold, free from ideology. The celebration of some German intellectuals over the Gulf War, the clandestine joy about a new Hitler, betrayed the fear of life without Feindbild. The demonization of the GDR, the demonizing of the State Security, served not

only the blissfulness of the usual anti-communism, but also numbed this fear. One who no longer has an enemy, meets it in the mirror.)

Beyond the binaries of 'east' and 'west' Europe, communism and capitalism, 'without the protective divide of the wall' (Huyssen 1991) there is, Müller suggests, the fear of exposure to what has been 'numbed', buried or deferred. In such a changed political and psychological context, the theatre can step into the mirror. It can fill the vacuum and divert through images of the other, through, as I will show in the next section, producing temporary theatrical Feindbilder.

Part Three: '*Da liegt der Hund begraben*' – (that's where the dog lies buried - the heart of the matter)

7 The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui

In the movement and sound prologue added to Brecht's text, Wuttke's salivating dog can be read as a multi-layered, perverted and subversive Feindbild whose difference from Brecht's gangster-fascist creates a fascinating and troubling image.

In the first instance there is the sheer virtuosity of Wuttke's performance and its duration. Writing about theatrical productions of Kafka's Metamorphosis, Hector Maclean has pointed to 'the enormous problems which the human actor encounters in representing animal physicality in the theatre'. It relates in its detailed movement construction to exploring 'the experience of merging and opposing human and animal/insect physicality' (Maclean 1991: 48ff).

When the lights come up on an empty stage in the Berliner Ensemble production, a human body is crouched on all fours on top of an industrial engine that occupies the central stage space. Keeping watch on the auditorium, the human/animal backs down from the engine, silently and stealthily. In a fluid motion, he/it pads and then lopez around the stage. The merging and opposing of the human/animal and human/machine creates a figure that is, and is not, human. There is strength in the muscularity of the arms and torso, lit so that the white skin is luminous and metallic. The image and its movement is a powerful assemblage of cool machinery and brute strength, a dehumanized figure of the industrial age and a sign of the awful potential of the white masculine subject.

Bringing the Erlkönig soundtrack into consideration, the image intensifies. In Goethe's version, the emphasis is on the tragedy of the unheeded cry for help. In the ballad, a father rides with his sick child through the forest on a stormy night. The child, delirious with fever, begs his father to save him from the elven king, and is terrified of being torn from his father's arms. But the more agitated the child becomes, the more the father tells him to be calm. And by the time they reach their

destination, the child is dead. Schubert's piano composition adds menace to the drama and builds the intensity of the child's terror.

The Erlkönig adds a powerful layer to the performance. It functions in Goethe's narrative as a Feindbild, that is, as an image of the child's fears, the enemy, here death. Accompanying the performative human/animal figuration of the salivating dog, Arturo Ui is semiotically connected to the Erlkönig. Put to work for Vergangenheitsbewältigung, the mise en scène sets up a discourse in which figures from the past, the Erlkönig and Arturo Ui, are physicalized and prowl around the stage. Through this network of associations, it is but a small leap to read this figuration as a reworked interpretation of Hitler-Fascism. Arturo Ui/Hitler/Erlkönig is a Feindbild, a metaphor for the enemy that the fatherland failed to ward off and from whom it failed to protect its people. Set within the context of the 1990s, Hitler, the holocaust and the Nazi past continue to pursue a reunified Germany, conjured as a sick child crying in the night. Does the scene suggest the nation is still sick and, if so, who or what does Ui represent today? Such is the questioning and provoking that takes place through the discourse of the *mise en scène*.

The image is also much more than its historical and mythical qualifications. Wuttke's Ui is a body-in-motion that is 'intensive' – in the sense that Brian Massumi uses it: of 'movement, in process, [that] cannot be determinately indexed to anything outside of itself' (Massumi 2002: 24). It resists fixed meaning and moves through several possibilities at once. It is the Hitler of memories, stories and nightmares from the past, but also neo-Nazis, punks, proletarians, dogs, underdogs to be kicked and stepped on, pitied, feared and fed. It is a moving indefinable, unfixable Feindbild conjured in the wake of reunification and its aftermath. These additions are in part of the virtuosity of Wuttke's performance and Müller's imposed metatext.

Only when the body comes to rest downstage at the end of the sequence, with the elegance of the powerful animal in repose, does it become a relatively static image. Ui's face is clean shaven without the characteristic moustache but the hairline is a combination of the 1930's razor cut and contemporary punk, a caricature of the Hitler coiffure. While there are familiar signifiers of the character, Arturo Ui, together with its referent, Hitler, Müller's staging of the figure as dog displaces the certainty of the association and opens up a gap for more contemporary struggles with fascism and its conditions of continuing possibility. Gone from this early stage of the production is Brecht's pre-formed gangster. In its place is an engagement with the problem of how to present the trauma of remembering and 'putting into relationship' a shared fascist past.

The movement sequence also makes the political point that, unlike the more creative and affirmative qualities usually associated with becoming, here the usage is grounded in the history of dictatorship where becomings can go off on a number of trajectories from the radical and creative to the tyrannical and fascistic. This point – not given sufficient weight in Deleuze and Guattari's

writing – is heavily underlined in Müller and Wuttke's *Ui*. As the fable unfolds the becoming animal is the Feindbild, the Other as abject with an intense and sadistic desire for inclusion and self-annihilation.

The ambiguity is entirely consistent with Müller's preference for fluid metaphors that the spectator and critic can chase around the stage. What can be said is that the transformed hybrid creature at the beginning of the performance is not predetermined to become a tyrant and monster by historical circumstances, so much as tyrant-becoming is a product of contemporary perversions. For *Ui*, it was easy. He merely followed the pieces of information that fell his way.

The merging and opposing of human and animal (*Ui* as dog) together with the mythical and romantic *Erlkönig* is typical of Müller's layered style and is characteristically disturbing. But there is a further layer that needs to be considered. Wuttke's performative creation revels in its power to simultaneously attract and appal, and behind that is Müller's characteristic irony. The sequence is also a perversion of myth. Arturo *Ui* is no mythical or archetypal subject enacting a master narrative of German identity. He demonstrates the very mortal human-animal aspects of the rat up the drain pipe and the dog after a bone. Returning to Brecht's parable, *Ui* waits for the good and bad bourgeoisie of Chicago to show their moral corruption. On this view, *Erlkönig* is a comforting romantic diversion, a temporary Feindbild.

This unpicking of the disturbing network of images that congeal around the figure of the human/animal on stage also points to the duplicity of theatre as a space of reconciliation and psychic healing. Bearing in mind Müller's poetic 'truth':

Der Augenblick der Wahrheit wenn im Spiegel
Das Feindbild auftaucht. (Müller 1992: 362)

(The moment of truth, when in the mirror
The image of your foe appears.)

the theatre merely fills the mirror with images. It mediates the postponed and deferred past that remains as a threat to the present and to the subject conceived as the enemy. We can find in these ironic but disquieting pronouncements Müller's unrelenting and confrontational insertion of the historical into the forgetful face of contemporary life.

A further word about the dog. In a speech given by Müller in 1985 when he won the Georg Büchner Prize of the (West) German Academy for Language and Poetry, he made several references to Büchner's 1830 play about the poor soldier Woyzeck. In a complicated connection, he links Woyzeck with a dog. In Büchner's play of the same name, Woyzeck is a pathetic abjected

member of the Prussian military machine who in a fog of delirium and jealous rage murders his girlfriend, the mother of his child. In his enigmatic rhetorical style Müller proposed that 'Woyzeck lives where the dog is buried, the dog's name: Woyzeck' (Müller 1985b: 106). This is also a reference to the German saying, 'Da liegt der Hund begraben' – literally translated as that's where the dog is buried. Thus Woyzeck is cast as a dehumanized underground figure (a rhizome) and the name of a dog. The phrase, 'Da liegt der Hund begraben', is figuratively used to say 'that's the heart of the matter'. Woyzeck, the criminal underdog, is also by association, the heart of the matter, the key to the present. Ten years later, Martin Wuttke's *Ui* digs up the dog that lies buried, takes on its ghostly form and prowls the stage as a dog. Wuttke/Müller have gone creatively to the heart of the matter, raking over the past to ask questions of the present. The image becomes part of Müller's ongoing critique of German history, digging over the rubble in the building lots as well as in the basements. As he wrote, when the state collapses 'everything comes up, that was beneath, hidden or buried' (Müller 1992: 257). One thinks in the context of these references to the building works that both demolished the old GDR and built a reunified Germany, including in particular, Berlin Mitte, the district around the Berliner Ensemble theatre. The theatre itself has become a site for the process of Vergangenheitsbewältigung.

The affective domain of the images provokes audiences to make their own connections with the contemporary situation, whatever it is deemed to be, from the resurgence of the far right parties in the eastern states of Germany, to George Bush to Saddam Hussein and the Gulf War. These connections are offered in the absence of and after ideology. The 'west' German actor's body, the 'east' German director, the former 'east's' flagship stage and the post-reunification audience – bourgeoisie and tourists – make a strange new assemblage of meaning possibilities.

Part Four: Germania 3 Gespenster am Toten Mann – Hitler and Stalin

8

In this section I turn to Müller's last work for the theatre, Germania 3 Gespenster am Toten Mann, directed by Martin Wuttke, who had been appointed Artistic Director of the troubled Berliner Ensemble after Müller's untimely death on 30 December 1995. I argue that the aesthetic representation of 'east' and 'west', communist and fascist, in Germania 3 constitutes a further stage in the process of Vergangenheitsbewältigung. The problem of the Nazi and socialist past is brought together in the meeting of Stalin and Hitler in a figuration that can be read on the stage as competing Feindbilder. Their comparison has been prefigured in an earlier scene when one Russian soldier at Stalingrad asks the other:

- 1: Who'd you like better, Hitler or Stalin.
- 2: They both have blood on their hands, it is ours. (188)

The lines draw attention to the discourse within the former communist states that tries to evaluate the century's tyrants. The Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Germania 3 remains welded to the identifications and perspectives of the East German artist and intellectual. One of the actors, Thomas Anzenhofer, notes that only one scene in the play is told from a West German perspective (Rehnitz 1996: 55). The dominant view is counter-hegemonic to West German narratives of history and culture and has the effect of preserving as well as investigating the rapidly dissolving East German viewpoint. Lewis has identified Müller's role in the 'sober analysis of the demise of the East German intellectual' and this performance text is both an aesthetic confrontation with 'the postcommunist identity crisis' and its creative outlet (Lewis 1992: 262).

The significance of Germania 3 as a creative outlet for reunification ought not be underestimated. Whatever else has been said and written about the loss of the socialist state, Müller has said that the end of the GDR also brought years of stagnation to an end. Referring to the drafting of Germania 3 he wrote,

Zu Zeiten der DDR gelang mir kein Dialog zwischen den beiden. Ich konnte Stalin nicht zum Reden bringen. Er blieb eine stumme Figur. In den letzten Monaten in Kalifornien fing er plötzlich an zu reden.

(At the time of the GDR I arrived at no dialogue between the two [Hitler and Stalin]. I couldn't bring Stalin to speech. He remained a mute character. In recent months in California he suddenly began to talk.) (Müller 1995: 226).

Germania 3 is divided into nine discrete scenic fragments each with its own title, historical context and historical, literary and fictional characters. Stalin appears early in the performance following the first scene at the Berlin Wall with Thälmann and Ulbricht described at the beginning of the article. Later in Scene 4, Hitler is in his bunker at the Chancellory when Stalin enters. In between the bringing together of these two figures is a long scene, entitled Siegfried: A Jewess from Poland, that includes fragments of the following texts:

- Hebbels's The Nibelungs (1862)
- Holderlin's The Death of Empedokeles (1799)
- two Russian soldiers at the siege of Stalingrad
- two German officers of the invading army
- fragments of Kleist's The Prince of Homburg (1811)
- three German soldiers starving on the Russian front

The effect is that Stalin and Hitler are separated by different literary and dramatic traditions and served by different historical events. Yet the textual fragments work as accretions – the growing of separate things into one – that models the political situation in Germany where the text is produced. The clashing Feindbilder of Hitler and Stalin are brought together on the contemporary stage with other old adversaries.

Martin Wuttke and the creative team approach the text as an ensemble piece that includes the addition of a chorus of thirty. Most of the performers play more than one role. The stage is divided into a white half and a black half and scenes are put into place on one or the other half or across the divide. The spatial metaphors of division and crossings are clearly inscribed in the mise en scène of the production and mirror the bringing together of different but thematically linked texts (Rehnitz 1996).

9 Stalin: Why fear an empty chair

Veteran Berliner Ensemble actor Eckerhard Schall plays Stalin. The spectacle of the communist actor embodying the GDR's own 'Hitler' is theatrically exciting. Some in the audience will remember his famous performance as Arturo Ui in the original 1959 Berliner Ensemble production. Schall arrives at the first rehearsal with his part meticulously prepared to show to the talented young West German actor who is directing him. Wuttke likes the way Schall begins comically and ends tragically. The problem of the creation of the estrangement effect worries the actor. This effect is Brecht's technique for making the familiar strange in order to ask questions of what might otherwise be unremarkable. The creation of the effect does not worry Wuttke, who is confident that his overall vision as the director is already well-distanced from Stalin, World War Two and the socialist experiment in East Germany (Rehnitz 1996).

Schall plays Stalin as a mountain of a man whose size fits the crimes. In the early stages of rehearsal, he prowls the Kremlin wrapped in a white quilt that enhances his bulk, but the prop gives way to a white dinner jacket in performance. The west's view of Stalin is reinforced in the alcohol-fuelled monologue full of power and paranoia but is undercut by the image of Stalin in an elegant white dinner jacket. This staging decision makes Stalin less Other, less an image of Feindbild, and more familiar, more contemporary and even more human.

Schall delivers the monologue with only a chair as a prop. The choice is suggested in the text when in his delirium, Stalin notices a chair and tells himself rhetorically: 'It is a chair. And nothing else. Why fear an empty chair' (185). The image of Stalin alone at night at the Kremlin recalls Müller's comments on the effect of the collapse of the GDR regime. To be 'suddenly

without an opponent' meant that one became 'his own opponent' (Müller 1992: 351). Stalin is now presented as alone and well aware of the lack of the reassuring function of the Feindbild. Once, he recalls in his ramblings, it had been easy to make a friend an enemy and execute an ally. Bucharin had been close enough to call Stalin by his pet name:

Stalin: Koba, why did you need my death.
That was Bucharin, darling of the Party
I needed him as enemy, he was
The best. (185)

Enemies are best. The empty chair is a further image of the paradox of totalitarianism: leadership as chaotic, the absence of control and the vacuum at the top. Dressed in a dinner jacket rather than the habitual army uniform, Schall's Stalin becomes a magazine idol, an image of bourgeois masculinity with just a touch of the Russian mafia. In an inversion of the estrangement effect directed at Stalin, the contemporary image of capital's entrepreneur class is estranged on the historical figure of totalitarian rule. This reading suggests that Wuttke and the creative team work through the figure of Stalin to make an ironic comment on the entrepreneurs of global capital and of state socialism.

10 Hitler and the Pink Giant

Wuttke, whose Ui/Hitler is the dog that lies buried in German culture, imagines early in the creative development process that Hitler is a womanly man.

Wuttke: Hitler ist ein Mann mit breiten Hüften, mit Frauenbecken, leptosom, tendenziell nackt. (Rehnitz 1996: 12)

(Wuttke: Hitler is a man with wide hips, a woman's pelvis, asthenic, a tendency towards nakedness.)

The othering of Hitler first as dog and later as womanly man, in both cases, not a man, demonstrates how after a long history of representations going back to Charlie Chaplin and The Great Dictator (1940), Hitler is a much less potent stage figure than Stalin.

Volker Spengler's Hitler contrasts with Schall's Stalin in that he is tall and leaner, elegant almost like a woman. He is located on the black side of the stage and is barefoot, with black top hat and tails. He carries a candle. Stalin witnesses Hitler's last moments as in the bunker shots are heard and gasoline is prepared. Stalin outlives Hitler and exits waving, but he remains under observation by the figures of Rosa Luxembourg and the legendary Hagen.

Stalin's witnessing of Hitler's last moments both in the text and the performance presents the two demonizing projections of the era of division: 'Hitler-Fascism' on the one side and Stalinism on the other. The two Feindbilder compete on the same stage, but there can only be one totale image. Hitler is feminized and diminished while Stalin remains as the substitute figure for the loss of the socialist alternative in contemporary Germany and the triumph of capitalism.

The cycle of betrayal and revenge, of which there are other instances in the play not mentioned in this article, continues in the final scene. Spengler returns as the serial killer, known by the press as the Pink Giant, who prowled the Brandenburg region during the period of reunification. In this scene, the Hitler figuration continues to adhere to the actor's body. He remains bare-footed and in black trousers but in this scene his upper body is naked and he wears a red rose in his hair. The semiotic connection between Hitler and the appearance of a serial killer at the time of reunification gives form to fears of a 'renaissance of fascism' (Müller 1992: 312). In this dramatic fiction the Pink Giant has just killed a Russian officer's wife and her children. In his rambling speech as he masturbates over the corpses, it becomes apparent that the murders are revenge for Russian atrocities that go back to the end of World War Two. In 1945, twelve Russian soldiers had raped his mother while his father stood watching. This is a fresh confrontation with the war. But then again, the story may be the illusions and projections of a madman. Crippled psychically for life by this childhood trauma, or suffering delusions, the serial killer hails Stalin and asks the corpse of the Russian officer's wife, 'Did you cry when he died, till your Young Pioneer's kerchief was dripping wet?' (216) The Pink Giant lays down a new image in the ceaseless production of demonic projections that allocate blame, guilt and enact atonement.

11 Men in Suits

In an interview in 1995, shortly before his death, Müller was asked how the theatre would deal with the experience of reunification. In his reply he described the overpowering pressure of contemporary experience as beyond the explanatory capacity of language. The complexity and ubiquity of bureaucracy, for example, was 'much more powerful, much more prominent in a democratic society than in any one of the former Eastern dictatorships' and produced 'a feeling of dizziness' (Weber 2001: 221).

When in Germania 3 Hitler and Stalin appear as men in civilian dress: in suits, the sign par excellence of the twentieth century corporatism and twenty-first century global capital – the competing enemies might be gentlemen at a dinner party slicing up the new Europe and putting it on their plates. With Hitler and Stalin on the same stage in a reunified Germany, there is a merging of the Feindbilder into a Hitler/Stalin, West/East, capitalism/communism assemblage that suggests something of the unrepresentable and dizzying conditions of the future.

Part Four: Conclusion

In conclusion, in this article, I have been interested in the ways the concepts of Vergangenheitsbewältigung and Feindbild are indicative of the ways in which two post-reunification performances relate to the changed political and cultural circumstances of their production. The performances foreground Heiner Müller and his participation in the intellectual and cultural response to the Wende but they are also distanced from his controlling influence and involve, therefore, negotiations and displacements across text, artistic co-workers and the changing conditions of production and reception. Arturo Ui is Bertolt Brecht's text written against the rise of Hitler during World War Two and is directed by Müller in the period in which East Germany has been reunited with the western state. Germania 3 is arguably an unfinished text written from an 'east' German perspective but is now directed by the young 'west' German actor Martin Wuttke who negotiates its style and content with a mixed 'east' and 'west' creative team that includes older Berliner Ensemble actors and newer members.

The performative representations of post-reunification German theatre, as they are played out at the Berliner Ensemble, the flagship cultural institution of the East German state, are creatively engaged in the re-mapping and re-configuring of 'east' and 'west' Europe. At the same time, the performative nature of the representations effectively brings the new Europe into being. This article has proposed that in the critical and creative intersection of three events – two theatrical and one political – change is visible and the new is glimpsed. As part of this process, we see the critical and provocative theatre of Heiner Müller historicized by the postwar generation of Martin Wuttke, who quickly and deftly assimilates the crossing of borders.

---

¹ Brecht (1976)

² All translations of original German unless otherwise stated are by Melinda Hetzel, research assistant to the author.

³ Müller, Heiner (2001). All further references to the text are from the same edition and will be referenced by a page number in brackets after the quote.

References

Beauregard, Victor (1996) 'Ghosts and the Dead Man', Hunter On-line Theater Review, Accessed: 8 June 2004, from <http://hotreview.org/articles/ghosts.htm>.

Bohrer, Karl Heinz (1991) 'Why We Are Not a Nation - And Why We Should Become One', New German Critique 52: 72-83.

---

¹ Brecht (1976)

² All translations of original German unless otherwise stated are by Melinda Hetzel, research assistant to the author.

³ Müller, Heiner (2001). All further references to the text are from the same edition and will be referenced by a page number in brackets after the quote.

References

- Beauregard, Victor (1996) 'Ghosts and the Dead Man', Hunter On-line Theater Review, Accessed: 8 June 2004, from <http://hotreview.org/articles/ghosts.htm>.
- Bohrer, Karl Heinz (1991) 'Why We Are Not a Nation - And Why We Should Become One', *New German Critique* 52: 72-83.
- Brecht, Bertolt (1976) *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui : A Parable Play*, trans. R. Manheim, London: Eyre Methuen.
- Brockmann, Stephen (1991) 'The Reunification Debate', *New German Critique* 52: 3-30.
- Clyne, Michael (1995) *The German Language in a Changing Europe*, Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fox, Thomas C. (1999) *Stated Memory : East Germany and the Holocaust*, Rochester, NY: Camden House.
- Huyssen, Andreas (1991) 'After the Wall: the Failure of German Intellectuals', *New German Critique* 52: 109-143.
- Lewis, Alison (1992) 'The Writers, Their Socialism, The People and Their Bad Table Manners: 1989 and the Crisis of East German Writers and Intellectuals', *German Studies Review* 15(2): 243-266.
- Maclean, Hector (1991) 'Becoming Animal: Dramatisations of Kafka's Metamorphosis and A Report To An Academy', *Antithesis* 4(2): 48-59.
- Massumi, Brian (2002) *Parables for the Virtual : Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Müller, Heiner (1985) 'Fatzer + / - Keuner' trans. J. Agee, in Margaret Herzfeld-Sander (ed.) *Essays on German Theater*, New York: Continuum, pp. 338-349.

- (1992) *Krieg Ohne Schlacht : Leben in Zwei Diktaturen*, Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.
- (1995) "'Theater ist feudalistisch". Dramatiker Heiner Müller über das Berliner Ensemble, DDR-Nostalgie und Rechts-Links-Verwirrungen.' *Der Spiegel* (12): 226.
- (2001) 'Germania 3 Ghosts at Dead Man' trans. C. Weber, in Carl Weber (ed.) *A Heiner Müller Reader*, Baltimore/ London: The John Hopkins University Press, pp. 178-216.

Rehnitz, Alban (1996) in *Theaterdokumentation der Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste*, Archiv D573, Berlin: unpublished.

Seibt, Gustav (1997) 'Der Führer privat', *Berliner Zeitung*, 14 April.

Teschke, Holger (1998) 'Heiner Muller for Instance', *New German Critique* 73: 12.

Weber, Carl (1996) 'From Schiffbauerdamm to Fisherman's Warf: Remembering Heiner Muller', *New German Critique* 73: 19-30.

Denise Varney is Senior Lecturer in Theatre Studies in the School of Creative Arts at the University of Melbourne, Australia. She has previously published essays on Brechtian and feminist theatre and is co-writing a book on Australian women writers and directors, due for publication in 2005. She is currently working on a three year research project on German theatre since reunification.

Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:

VARNEY, DENISE

Title:

Heiner Müller and Martin Wuttke: staging new images in a time of change

Date:

2005

Citation:

Varney, D. (2005) Heiner Müller and Martin Wuttke: staging new images in a time of change. Performance Research, 10(2).

Publication Status:

Published

Persistent Link:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11343/34895>