A Philosopher at the Door: A Theatrical Interruption

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1. Introduction

In drama—both in text and on stage—an entrance into a space serves to "further artistic purposes which could not be served in any other way," as Oliver Taplin has claimed.[1] It is often designed as "a profound—can we say life-threatening?—event," as Arnold Aronson has claimed,[2] suggesting thereby that an entrance always creates an essential shift in the scene and often places someone at risk, either the entering character or the ones already present. Such qualities are at the core of this article, which discusses several dramatic scenes introduced not in plays for the stage but rather in philosophical texts that address the art of theatre. These scenes revolve around a specific image: the arrival of a philosophical character at a house associated with theatrical activity. The interruption caused by his arrival stirs critical thinking and sets the stage for a display of philosophizing within the arena of theatre. And yet, these scenes also imply a theatrical mischief or even a misperformance in the philosopher's strategy and treat it with dramatic irony.[3]

The paradigm for the introduction of dramatic scenes within a philosophical text is obviously Plato's dialogues. Thus, the first case is Plato's image, in the *Symposium*, of Socrates's entrance into the house of the tragic poet Agathon, where a banquet in honor of the host is taking place. Although the event has already begun, Socrates first chooses to remain outside. Standing immobile in a neighbor's doorway, immersed in thought, he ignores Agathon's repeated requests from him to enter, and enters only after concluding his act. This deferred entrance is the first stage of Socrates's *agôn* (contest) with Agathon, juxtaposing the self-absorbed standpoint of a philosopher with the audience-dependent standpoint of a playwright. And yet, the publicly visible nature of Socrates's gesture implies that it is not a pure display of commitment to philosophy; rather, it is a theatrical display aiming at arousing curiosity about the ritual of philosophizing. Socrates plays to an audience no less than Agathon does.

The second case is Bertolt Brecht's image, in the dialogues of *Der Messingkauf*, of the arrival of an unnamed philosopher at a large theatre house, to hold discussions with its "inhabitants" (the practitioners) about the future of theatre. Whereas

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in Plato's dialogue the bodily standstill occurs outside the house prior to the philosopher's entrance and interrupts the indoor sequence, in Brecht's dialogues the "standstill" occurs after the philosopher's entrance and is embodied in the form of the aforementioned discussions. They allegedly take place during four nights, on the stage itself, after the evening's show, as a philosophical alternative to the theatrical show that has just ended. In these discussions, the philosopher declares his vision of subjecting the theatre to philosophical ends by turning it into a laboratory for the study of social interactions. However, he also declares that he lacks any material way of fulfilling his vision.

The discussion of Brecht creates a context for the third case—directly related to him—introduced by Walter Benjamin in three essays that address epic theatre. In these texts, Benjamin depicts the image of a sudden entrance of a stranger into a house in the middle of a family row, just as the mother is about to pick up an object to throw at the daughter, and the father is about to open a window to call the police. The stranger's entrance arrests these events and turns the scene into a tableau (frozen representation). This, Benjamin states, is how epic theatre operates: through the interruption of actions, it uncovers the extra-theatrical conditions on which the scene is based, thereby forcing us to adopt a critical attitude toward it. Benjamin's insistence that the tableau is framed precisely through the viewpoint of the stranger—a detached, rational observer—suggests that epic theatre emerges from a philosophical interruption. Within this frame of reference, Benjamin associates Brecht with Plato's philosophical dramas, thus implying the non-Aristotelian nature of epic theatre, whose mechanism of interruptions challenges the (Aristotelian) conception of drama as a representation of complete and unified actions arranged as a coherent, sequential plot.

The dialogues of *Der Messingkauf* are indeed a kind of Platonic theatre.[4] Not only that their form resembles a Platonic dialogue but also their content echoes the *Symposium*. In both cases, although coming by invitation, the philosopher's arrival creates an interruption of the stream, generating a transformation of the indoor space into a stage for performing philosophy. Still, even if Plato (a philosopher obsessed with theatre) and Brecht (a thespian obsessed with philosophy) appropriate the discursive practices of theatre within a philosophical text so as to stress the gap between the two disciplines,[5] the mischief/misperformance practiced by their philosophers actually uncover philosophy's unavoidable affinity with theatre.

2. Plato's Philosopher

The *Symposium*—the earliest known record of a philosopher "invading" the realm of theatre—narrates the occurrences of the banquet held at Agathon's house in honor of his victory at the Lenaea festival, presumably in 416 BCE. Socrates, who avoided the public celebration in honor of Agathon (174a),[6] arrives on the following day at the private banquet, and even invites his admirer Aristodemus to

accompany him. At the house, Socrates and the other guests celebrate Agathon's victory in the tragedy competition by staging a contest of speeches in praise of Eros, the divine personification of the human *erôs*.

While Socrates and Aristodemus were making their way to the banquet, the former became absorbed in his thoughts and lagged behind. Noticing that Aristodemus had stopped to wait for him, Socrates told him to go on ahead (174d-e), breaching his promise that they would arrive together (174b-d) and forcing Aristodemus to enter by himself a party to which he was not invited. The fact that Socrates, Agathon's unofficial guest of honor, not only delays his arrival but also sends his follower "instead" of him can be seen as a provocation against the host. Platonically, Aristodemus—who used to imitate Socrates's typical appearance (173b) —is the imperfect material "copy" of the "pure Form" Socrates. Theatrically, he is the "imitator" who uninvited enters the stage while everyone is waiting for the entrance of the "leading actor."

Although the door to the house stands open, awaiting the guests, and although the banquet has already begun (174d-e), Socrates remains outside at first. For an unspecified period of time, he stands immobile and fixed to one spot in a *neighbor's* doorway, immersed in thought (175a). The plot—which is based on Aristodemus's report of the occurrences to Apollodorus, the narrator of the dialogue—has already moved inside Agathon's house, and therefore this "offstage" act is made present "onstage" only indirectly, through the report of one of Agathon's servants who had been sent to bring Socrates in and returned empty-handed.

As it turns out, Socrates's outdoor gesture steals the focus from the indoor party. Although Agathon presents himself as a liberal host—as evident in his leaving the door open at the beginning of the event, in his warm welcome of the uninvited Aristodemus (174e-175a), and in his claim that he does not supervise his servants (175b-c) —a less liberal side of him is exposed in his attempts to interfere with the standstill.[7] He asks Aristodemus twice about Socrates's whereabouts, orders his servant to go look for him and bring him in, and when he hears that Socrates is standing still nearby and ignoring requests to enter, he tells his servant: "How odd…. Call him again and keep on calling him" (174e–175a). At that point, Aristodemus interferes: "This is one of his habits. Sometimes he turns aside and stands still wherever he happens to be. He will come in very soon, I think. Don't disturb [*kineite*, 'move'] him" (175a-b).[8] Aristodemus may not know for certain that Socrates will enter, but he does know that Socrates must be allowed to enter of his own free will,[9] which indeed Socrates does, without any explanation, when the banquet dinner is halfway through (175c).

The gesture most identified with Socrates's philosophizing is his idle wandering, examining people while strolling around Athens in search of someone wiser than he.[10] Still, as Silvia Montiglio points out, Plato describes movement as a mere preparatory stage: the advanced and even ideal Platonic posture for philosophizing

is a static one.[11] Marking the initial shock experienced by the soul when "falling" into the body, wandering activates the quest for wisdom, which stems from lack (*Symposium*, 200a-b), but the philosopher yearns for what is beyond movement, since according to Plato the grasping of truth can be done only in a stable position. From the *Phaedo* we learn that when the soul detaches itself from the bodily senses to inquire by itself, it sights the Invisible and the Intelligible (83a-b) and ascends to the realm of the Eternal. There, imitating the pure Forms, it ceases to stray and remains stable. This experience is what is called "wisdom" (79c-d). Such an ascent can fully happen only after death releases the soul from the chains of corporeality (66d-67a), and yet the philosopher can already perform it partly in the course of his mortal life, by turning away (*aphestânai*) from his body toward the soul as far as he can (64e), like Socrates in the *Symposium*, who turns away (*apostâs*) to stand immobile outside Agathon's house (175b).

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, the association of motionless standing with sighting the eternal truth is even more explicit. It occurs in Socrates's myth about the ascent of the gods to the very edge of the world, to feast and to behold the pure Forms, "located" in the *hyperouranios topos* (place beyond the heavens). The gods' procession is followed by human souls who wish to imitate the divine contemplating. Whereas the gods perform the ascent easily, using their well-controlled winged chariots, for the souls it is difficult: their chariots trample one another, stumble, each trying to take the lead, and some get out of control. The souls that do complete the journey stand on the outer surface of the heaven and gaze (an action of *theôria*) upon the pure Forms while being moved by the circular motion of the cosmos (247b-c). Plato's theory of recollection aims to evoke the sights contemplated by the soul in this primal scene: what it had theorized prior to our mortal life and forgot in its "fall" into the body.

Hence, it is suitable that Plato attributes the gesture of bodily standstill to Socrates (only) in the *Symposium*, where the ascent to view the pure Forms is manifested as a journey up the ladder of love—an inner movement in a static position, featuring Socrates as the climbing lover.[12] His most intense reflections occur when he performs this gesture, his body held tight while his thoughts run free. Seen in this light, his entrance into Agathon's house is preceded by a display of erotic commitment to philosophy. This is evidenced by the contemplative act itself; by Socrates's choice to perform it in a doorway, the typical spot of the lover awaiting his beloved, as well as of Eros himself (183a-b, 203d);[13] and by his refusal to enter before concluding it. Hannah Arendt's precept "All thinking demands a *stop*-and-think" is twofold in the case of Socrates, who not only stops *and* thinks but also, habitually, stops *to* think.[14]

Later in the *Symposium*, another instance of this gesture, lasting more than twenty-four hours, is reported in retrospect by Alcibiades, Socrates's ex-beloved. It is said to have occurred sixteen years prior to the banquet, at the Athenian military

camp during the expedition to Potidaea, in which both of them took part as soldiers. "When it came to midday, everyone was beginning to notice, telling each other in amazement that Socrates had been standing there thinking about something ever since daybreak. At last, in the evening after dinner, some of the Ionians carried their sleeping mats outside … so that they could sleep in the cool and at the same time watch him to see if he was going to stand there all night. And he did stand there until it was dawn and the sun rose. Then he made a prayer to the Sun and off he went" (220c-d).[15] In the *Republic*, the sun is described as the offspring of the godlike Form of the Good (506e–509c). Hence, the fact that Socrates's bodily standstill at Potidaea ends with a prayer to the sun suggests that Plato evokes here the state of mind at the top of the ladder of love, where the lover gazes at the pure Form of Beauty, which is also the pure Form of the Good, since the beautiful (*ta kala*) and the good (*ta agatha*) are essentially linked to one another (*Symposium*, 204e).[16] The same can be said of Socrates's standstill outside Agathon's house. In this sense, the two instances are implicitly presented as the outer-physical expression of the inner-mental journey up the ladder of love. No wonder that in both of them, the content of Socrates's thoughts remains unknown to us.

And yet, these standstills are also implicitly presented as an intended display. Their visible nature as well as their length suggest that they are hardly a spontaneous privatization of the public sphere for the sake of contemplation. Socrates not only stops and thinks but also shows that he does so (for example, in sending Aristodemus ahead of him, thus calling attention to his own presence through absence). It is as if he tries to arouse his audience's curiosity about, and *erôs* for, the ritual of philosophizing. As Alcibiades testifies, this impression also prevailed among the Ionian soldiers, who regarded Socrates's standstill at Potidaea as a spectacle and gathered around to see if he was going to stand still all night. Socrates's standstill outside the banquet—ignoring the stage directions sent to him by Agathon—is even more sophisticated, since his true audience is not the servant who actually sees him, but rather the diners inside the house, and above all the host himself. Through this act, Socrates indirectly demonstrates to them not only the proper philosophical order of priorities but also what he believes to be the proper theatrical order of priorities—that is, that the performance truly worth seeing is neither the one that Agathon has staged in the festival nor the banquet itself, but rather the spectacle of truth. Socrates plays to an audience no less than Agathon does, even if his theatricality poses as inwardly directed, and only indirectly aimed at an external audience, unlike Agathon's audience-dependent theatricality. In the *Symposium*, Chris Emlyn-Jones rightly claims, "The boundaries of the Socratic and the theatrical are presented at their most ambivalent."[17]

In order to enter a Greek symposium, Zali Gurevitch writes, one was required to pass through certain "doors of participation"—built in ritual—that define the *topos* of the gathering, its form and the law of partaking in it.[18] This is what

seemingly happens, concretely as well as symbolically, when Socrates eventually passes through the (open) door and joins the diners. Yet through his disruptive behavior, which began prior to his entrance, he actually redefines the *topos* of the gathering, introducing there a ritual of philosophizing. This is already evident in his initial exchange with Agathon just after his entrance. Warmly welcoming the philosopher, in an attempt to create the impression that the provocative delay of entrance hardly annoyed him, Agathon invites Socrates to his couch, adding in jest that through the bodily contact derived from reclining side by side, he himself may gain the piece of wisdom that must have come into Socrates's mind in the doorway, for otherwise Socrates would still be standing there. Socrates accepts the invitation but dismisses Agathon's playful erotic remark by stating, also in jest, that if wisdom were something that could flow through mere contact, from one who is full to one who is empty, he would value being placed beside Agathon, so that his own inferior wisdom could be filled with Agathon's superb wisdom, shown at the theatre "in the presence of more than thirty thousand Greek spectators" (175c-e).[19]

Socrates's playful dismissal of Agathon's offer masks his avoidance of revealing what had happened in his bodily standstill. The obvious assumption is that the piece of wisdom that occurred to him is the "memory" of his lessons with Diotima (his legendary teacher in the dialectics of *erôs*), including the image of the ladder of love, themes to be revealed later that evening, in his speech.[20] Moreover, the amused dialogue between Socrates and Agathon evokes a serious issue—the transmission of knowledge and wisdom. Socrates's refusal of Agathon's suggestion is Plato's way of showing that unlike what theatre persons might think, wisdom is not a good that resides in the bodily sphere of exchange, and therefore a philosopher would necessarily reject such an offer.[21] This difference of perspectives is evidenced by the fact that *haptesthai*, Agathon's verb for his proposal to touch Socrates (175c-d), is the same verb later used by Socrates to denote the grasping of truth at the top of the ladder of love (212a).[22]

Perhaps exposing his own criticism of Socrates, Plato makes Agathon interpret the philosopher's reply as yet another provocation. Suspecting Socrates of pretending ignorance, Agathon accuses him of being *hybristês* (175e). Derived from the same root as *hybris*, *hybristês* is often translated as "being sarcastic," yet actually it denotes an outrageous and even violent behavior.[23] Later in the dialogue, Alcibiades—who had not yet been present there when Agathon voiced this claim—charged Socrates with false pretenses, a theatrical feature that Alcibiades, like Agathon, associates with hubris (215b, 219c, 221e, 222a). Both of them regard Socrates's praise of others as an ironically disguised expression of contempt. This charge echoes the claim made by the comic poet Aristophanes, another attendant of Agathon's banquet, in the *Clouds*, where he accuses Socrates of scorning both gods and humans (218–34).[24] In fact, the *Symposium* directly alludes to the *Clouds*, which was staged in Athens in 423 BCE, seven years prior to the alleged date of Agathon's

banquet. This occurs when Alcibiades, in the presence of both Aristophanes and Socrates, quotes a line from this play, depicting Socrates's typical behavior in the Athenian Agora, swaggering and casting sidelong glances (362). Finding cohesion between Socrates's odd manners in Athens and his odd displays in battlefield, Alcibiades employs Aristophanes's line so as to imply that Socrates's self-control and mental stamina during the Athenian retreat in the Battle of Delium in 424 BCE, another military campaign in which both of them took part, were praiseworthy but also bore the nature of an arrogant display of skills (*Symposium*, 220e–221b).[25]

The drama around Socrates's arrival turns out to be only the prologue to his indoor performance. Socrates's performance culminates with his eulogy of Eros, in which he reenacts the fictional voice of Diotima, and cheats when unfairly referring to Aristophanes's myth of the split lovers,[26]and it ends with his attempt to compel Agathon and Aristophanes to agree that the same man could possess the knowledge required for composing both tragedies and comedies, and that he who is by art a tragedian could compose comedies as well (223c).

This argument has been read as Socrates's implicit claim for the supremacy of philosophy—which supposedly integrates tragedy and comedy—over the two dramatic genres.[27] Hence, it is interesting that Plato—by making Aristodemus, our witness, fall asleep—beclouds Socrates's explanation of his argument. This remains unknown to us, for when Aristodemus woke up, he understood that he had only heard the key points of the discussion but could not remember most of what was said. It might be that the choice of sparing us the particulars of Socrates's argument stems from the fact that the idea of unification of dramatic genres is incompatible not only with the view Socrates offers elsewhere[28] but also with the actual state of affairs in fifth-century BCE Greek theatre: as far as we know, not even a single dramatist composed both tragedies and comedies.[29] Or, as Freddie Rokem suggests, it might be yet another example of Plato's questioning of Socrates's reliability in the *Symposium*: we are told that Apollodorus verified with Socrates the details of Aristodemus's report of the banquet, but Socrates apparently only confirmed the details but did not himself provide any additional information, including about his discussion with the poets. Plato, Rokem writes, "Has in a sense even indirectly discredited Socrates for not supplying Apollodorus with these additions."[30]

Unlike Socrates's grandiose outdoor display of philosophizing before entering, his small indoor display at the end of the banquet turns out to be a misperformance. Agathon and Aristophanes were apparently not an ideal audience. Being too tired and perhaps too drunk as well, they become drowsy and do not quite follow Socrates's argument. Eventually, like Aristodemus before them, they fall asleep while Socrates is philosophizing. The scene marks tragedy's supremacy over comedy—"Aristophanes fell asleep first and then, when it was already getting light, Agathon" —and philosophy's supremacy over both: Socrates is the only diner recorded to have remained awake all night, before leaving at dawn, followed by

Aristodemus, to spend the day in the baths and the Agora (223d).[31] Plato endows Socrates with the last word in the dialogue but also creates the impression that this last word—provocative as it were—exhausts the dramatists, who are used to a more dynamic "plot." And who is more sensitive than theatre persons to audience members falling asleep in front of them?

By implying philosophy's supremacy over dramatic poetry, Socrates implies his own supremacy over the two poets. Neither of whom, as far as we know, composed plays in each other's genre. Thus, if either of them had accepted Socrates's argument, he would have admitted thereby that he is not an adept poet.[32] Still, if Aristodemus could not tell what Socrates's explanation of his argument was, and if we are asked to envision a unification of dramatic genres without having a clue as to what such unification might be, can one truly claim that Socrates wins the crown of tragedy and comedy from the two dramatists?[33] Indeed, as Diskin Clay states, "There remain dark edges surrounding the most brilliant portrait Plato ever drew of Socrates."[34]

3. Brecht's Philosopher

In his uncompleted dialogues of *Der Messingkauf*, composed between 1937 and 1951, Brecht introduces a stranger to the theatre in the theatre: the arrival of an unnamed materialist philosopher at a large theatre house, to meet a group of practitioners and to discuss with them new ways of making theatre appropriate for the scientific age (*das wissenschaftliche Zeitalter)*. These practitioners—a dramaturg, an actor, an actress, and a backstage worker (somewhat representing the audience) —are in need of a philosopher's perspective, as already stated in the opening lines of the Preamble: "The theatre people are dissatisfied. They have been involved in efforts to create a theatre of a scientific age. Science has not benefited much from this, however, while the theatre has suffered all kinds of losses."[35]

In *Short Organon for the Theatre* (*Kleines Organon für das Theater*) —Brecht's 1948 "short summary [*kurze Zusammenfassung*]" of *Der Messingkauf*, as he called it[36]—he claims that the transformation of society is an act of liberation, and that the theatre of a scientific age bears the didactic role of conveying the joys of such liberation by making dialectics enjoyable. Through artistic means, it ought to evoke and employ not only the kind of emotional sensations but also the kind of intellectual insights needed for such a social transformation.[37] Essentially, "scientific" theatre is a theatrical practice that embraces a scientific posture of experimentalism, induction, refutation, (self-)correction, etc. Practically, it is a theatrical appropriation of the new social science and its tools, more than of the natural sciences and their new technologies. As Brecht claims, the techniques of estrangement allow the theatre to utilize, for its representations, the methodology of materialist dialectics, which treats social situations as processes and seeks out their contradictory nature. "It regards everything as existing only in so far as it changes, or in other words in its disunity with itself."[38] No wonder, then, that the philosopher of *Der Messingkauf* is

a thinker who promotes a pragmatic and even utilitarian perspective, as we shall see.

The philosopher's discussions with the theatre people allegedly take place during four nights.[39] The dialogues of *Der Messingkauf* follow the practice of dialogical writing on theatre—such as Denis *Diderot*'s *Paradox of the Actor* and Edward Gordon Craig's *On the Art of the Theatre*—but allude above all to Plato. Although Brecht seems to have had only little knowledge of Plato,[40] he nevertheless shaped his own dialogues in a form that is strikingly similar to that of Plato's dialogues: a plot-based conversation grounded in a spatiotemporal setting, featuring scripted characters and a philosophical protagonist, promoting critical thinking and dialectical reasoning (often reaching a dead end), and composed as theory to be performed in one way or another.[41] Whereas the "short summary" (*Short Organon for the Theatre*) is formulated within an Aristotelian framework of a scientific-like organization into demarcated sections—a structure that, according to Martin Revermann, "suggests order, method and intellectual control"[42]—the larger and uncompleted text (*Der Messingkauf*) is formulated within a Platonic framework: reciprocal conversation, direct speeches, and competitive exchange of views. One of its tables of contents (circa 1945) actually includes the explicit reference "[The V-effect] in everyday life (Grammar, Socratic dialogue)," marking it as a conscious decision to work within this tradition.[43]

The choice of having the philosopher arrive at a house associated with theatre—to display his skills and to debate with its "inhabitants" while drinking wine together—evokes the *Symposium*. Brecht is said to have studied this dialogue while he was seeking material for "Socrates Wounded" (*Der verwundete Sokrates*), his 1938 short story on Socrates's bravery in the Battle of Delium. Although changing some of the details, such as having the Athenians fight the Persians rather than the Spartans, Brecht's account of Socrates's bravery draws on Alcibiades's speech at Agathon's house, in which, as we saw, this issue is (critically) discussed.[44] The philosopher of *Der Messingkauf* is probably modeled in part on Socrates, and has much in common with Socrates's method of theorizing and mode of competitive argumentation.[45] Nevertheless, he is hardly a Socratic figure, John J. White writes, adding: "He is no more this than he is simply the Marxist Brecht in disguise."[46]

Making up just a portion of the vast bundle of materials comprising the complex text of *Der Messingkauf*, the dialogues feature a performance of philosophizing the theatre, at the theatre, after the audience has left. Literally taking the place of the theatrical show that has just ended, it is a performance wherein the debaters are both its performers and its spectators. Relating to the choice of conducting it on the stage itself, the dramaturg says: "You as a philosopher like to see behind the scenes [*hinter die Kulissen*, 'behind the stage wings'], and you as an actor can play to the auditorium, even if there's no audience. We can talk about theatre and feel as if we were holding this conversation in front of an audience, as if we ourselves were performing a little play. And we'll also be able to stage one or two

little experiments, if necessary, to clarify what we're talking about."[47] A similar situation occurs in Plato's *Gorgias*: Socrates arrives at the venue where the Sophist Gorgias has just performed an *epideixis* (public display of skills) and their debate over rhetoric seems to take place at this venue, or just outside it. Subjecting Gorgias to his method of dialectical refutation, Socrates turns the Sophist's performance space into a stage for performing philosophy. Still, the setting of the *agôn* after an *epideixis*, at or by the same venue, also implies the danger that the philosophical discussion evolving there would become, too, a display of skills.[48]

Plato's best example of a philosophical alternative to the theatre is introduced in the *Republic*, where Socrates and Glaucon delay their return to Athens and remain in the Piraeus to watch a torch race on horseback followed by a nocturnal celebration (328a). Eventually, however, they and their local fellows occupy themselves with a different performance: the all-night outdoor spectacle is replaced by an all-night indoor debate at Cephalus's family house over justice and the Ideal State. This logic can be carefully applied to *Der Messingkauf*: it introduces a nightly discussion taking place on the occasion of attending a theatrical event while nevertheless challenging it by performing philosophy on the very stage where the theatre pieces are shown.

Moreover, Brecht creates the impression that some of the discussants actually participated in the evening's show (at least on the First Night, it is a performance of *King Lear*,[49] hardly a random choice given the various references to this play in *Der Messingkauf*). As White claims, the fact that they gather for a discussion taking place on the very stage where they had just performed implies that the experience of that show has strengthened their resolve to critically reassess their work.[50] Unlike Plato, who claims the supremacy of the spectacle of truth (introduced in philosophical discussions) over the spectacles of the theatre,[51] Brecht claims no such hierarchy. Still, the way his philosopher discusses imitations, exposing his desire to "move beyond them" to the "things themselves," recalls Socrates of the *Republic*.[52] By juxtaposing two different performances—the theatrical and the philosophical—Plato and Brecht confront an issue around which the "quarrel" between these two disciplines revolves: What is truly worth seeing?

Whereas Plato's Socrates enters the private house of a celebrated theatre person, Brecht's philosopher enters a theatre house. Both of them are expected guests: Socrates is Agathon's unofficial guest of honor, and the philosopher of *Der Messingkauf* arrives by invitation of the actress. However, unlike Socrates—whose affinity to theatre is stressed by Plato—the philosopher is truly a stranger to this practice. Although he has attentively watched the evening's show as well as the audience's reaction to it, just as Socrates attentively watched Agathon's "show" in the *Proagôn* (*Symposium*, 194b),[53] he is unfamiliar with the vocabulary of theatre (for example, "the fourth wall"), does not much value this art, and his interest in it is limited to its potential for philosophical use. As the philosopher explicitly

says, he is interested in the theatrical apparatus of producing representations of human interactions, only so far as the representations correspond to what is being represented, since it is "the way people live together [*das menschliche Zusammenleben*]" that interests him the most.[54]

By interrupting the practitioners' habitual activity in favor of a thinking of the stage on the stage, the philosopher echoes Brecht's own claim that the future of theatre is a philosophical one.[55] Hearing the practitioners' complaints that the discussion seems to focus on how he could benefit from a theatre of a scientific age rather than how they could benefit from such a theatre, the philosopher admits: "I feel like an intruder and an outsider in this building with all its mysterious practical bits of apparatus." As he states, his interest in arriving there can be compared to that of a scrap-metal dealer who approaches a brass band with the intention of buying the musical instruments not for of their artistic value but for their commercial value as metal. This image—from which the dialogues' title is drawn (*Messingkauf* means "buying brass")—marks the philosopher's interest not in the art of theatre itself but rather in its application: the possibility of "melting down" the theatre apparatus and "molding" it, as raw material, for his own "scientific" ends. "I thought we might use your imitations...simply to find out the best way to behave," he explains. "We could turn them into something similar to physics…and develop techniques from them."[56]

The philosopher knows that his perspective is strange to the practitioners: "You never discuss things on the stage, after all. You excite all sorts of passions, just not the passion for discussion." Indeed, the more he elaborates his vision for a theatre endorsing analysis and knowledge rather than feeling, the more disturbed they become. Still, his disruptiveness seems to be grounded less in his aim of turning the theatre house into a home for philosophy, and more in his specific philosophical attitude, invested in dialectical materialism and interested in "ruthlessly" (*rücksichtslos*) using the theatre for extra-theatrical ends.[57] No wonder his main antagonist, the actor—whom Brecht defines as one who is interested above all in expressing himself and in being admired—claims of the philosopher: "He's no theatregoer. … He's got no feelings for art. He's out of place here. … He knows nothing about art, and what's more, he doesn't want art: it makes him sick, he'd like to see it abolished."[58] This is not what the actor regards a philosopher to be, as evident from his comment, referring to the philosopher in the third person: "Quite frankly, I've started to wonder if he's really a philosopher." For the actor, the role of a philosopher is to explain why art is like this or like that, a demand to which the philosopher replies, directly addressing him: "I'm a philosopher who didn't have enough loaf for the kind of philosophizing you were talking about."[59]

As the philosopher states, the need to turn the theatre into a site for research of human behavior is driven by historical urgency: "We are living in dark times, when people's behavior towards one another is particularly abhorrent and the deadly activities of certain groups of people are shrouded in an almost impenetrable

darkness, so that a great deal of thought and organization is needed in order to shed some light on people's social behavior."[60] Unlike Plato's Socrates, whose vision seems to be a philosophical reclaiming of the theatre, Brecht's philosopher envisions a philosophical appropriation of the theatre for an extra-theatrical need. And yet, the subjection of the theatre to such a need, justified as it might be, can be done only at the price of estranging it and changing its nature, as Martin Puchner rightly claims.[61] The fact that the set of the evening's show is being dismantled by the backstage worker during the First Night discussion, until the discussants find themselves on a dusted empty stage, seems to symbolize the philosopher's mission of "dismantling" the house to which he was invited.[62] However, the fact that such a mundane activity of set dismantling is carried out while the discussants philosophize can also be read as implying that the theatre of the future—despite its philosophicality, which marks a radical critique of the existing theater—will never be a total negation of theatre.[63] It will still engage, in some way or another, with the material routine of theater-making.

As part of his vision, the philosopher coins the term *Thaëter* to denote the theatre of the future, so as to distinguish it from the current one.[64] The practitioners' initial response to this term is general laughter, joined by the philosopher himself. As the dramaturg says in a different context, there is a kind of laughter which happens when a true word is spoken. "That's how an inventor might laugh on finding the solution after seeking it for a long time: it was so simple, and it took him so long to see it!" The philosopher of *Der Messingkauf* is indeed an inventor, but—and this is typical of Brecht—the irony is that this materialist admits lacking any material way of fulfilling his vision: "I've got no resources, no building, no theatre, not a single costume, not even a pot of make-up. I'm backed by *nobody* and *nothing*."[65] Just as philosophy interrupts theatre, life itself interrupts philosophy.

The philosopher's misperformance facilitates an unexpected performance by the dramaturg—the only practitioner who is a guest on the stage, stepping for that out of his cold office, where scripts he is supposed to have read are "staring" at him "reproachfully," as he claims.[66] Unlike Plato, who even when criticizing Socrates still undoubtedly crowns the latter as the hero of his dialogues, Brecht's hero in the dialogues of *Der Messingkauf* seems to be the dramaturg rather than the philosopher. In the list of dramatis personae, the dramaturg is described as one who needs the perspective of the philosopher so as to bring about "a new lease of life for the theatre," and hence puts himself at the philosopher's disposal and is willing to apply his own knowledge and abilities for the conversion of the theatre into a *Thaëter*.[67] However, it is clear from the text that it is the philosopher—lacking not only the practical ability but also a deep understanding of the theatre—who is in need of the perspective of the dramaturg, the "resident-thinker" of the theatre rather than the *Thaëter*. Through his chorus-like interventions in the *agôn* between the philosopher and the actor, the dramaturg leads them to realize how science and

art can be fused in the process of creating new theatre, which will insist on being a playful activity while at the same time committing itself to the political struggle by combining entertainment and instruction, the emotional and the rational.[68] This reversal—wherein the philosopher is the one who actually puts himself in the dramaturg's disposal—is described by Mary Luckhurst as "a tongue-in-cheek debunking of the philosopher's classically privileged status."[69]

4. Benjamin's "Philosopher"

In 1939, two years after Brecht began working on *Der Messingkauf*, his close friend Benjamin published anonymously the second version of "What Is Epic Theatre?" (*Was ist das epische Theater?*), his famous essay on Brecht's theatre. Its first version was composed in 1931 but published only in 1966, twenty-six years after Benjamin's suicide and ten years after Brecht's death. In both versions, Benjamin claims that the task of epic theatre is less the development of dramatic action, namely the construction of well-made plots, and more the uncovering of conditions (*Entdeckung der Zustände*) through interruption (*Unterbrechung*) of processes. To establish this point, Benjamin introduces what he terms "the crudest example": an intrusion of a stranger into a house in the middle of a family row. It reads as follows: the mother is just about (*im Begriff*) to pick up an object—a pillow in the first version, a bronze bust in the second—to throw at the daughter, the father is just about to open a window to call a policeman, and at that very moment a stranger suddenly appears at the door.[70] His entrance, interrupting the sequence, arrests all subjects and objects in a particular constellation. The moment of violence that began abruptly also stops abruptly, turned into a frozen image—"*Tableau*, as they used to say around 1900"—leaving us with no knowledge as to what would happens next.[71]

Benjamin also evokes this image in his essay "The Author as Producer" *(Der Autor als Produzent*), composed in 1934 but published only *posthumously*. Repeating his claim that epic theatre uncovers the extra-theatrical conditions on which the scene is based, through the use of interruptions (a mechanism that here Benjamin associates with "the method of montage decisive in radio and film"), he invites us to imagine a scene compatible with the one to be found in the second version of "What Is Epic Theatre?." After describing the sudden entrance of a stranger, just as the mother is about to throw a bronze statue at her daughter and the father is about to call the police, Benjamin concludes: "The process is interrupted [*Der Vorgang ist unterbrochen*]."[72]

Curiously, such a scene is not to be found in any play known to me, including Brecht's plays. According to Judith Butler, it is "apparently drawn not from a play, but from a daydream, perhaps."[73] The closest example from Brecht, as if paying late tribute to Benjamin, is the prologue to his 1948 adaptation of Sophocles's *Antigone*. The prologue's plot is set to April 1945 in Berlin, telling the story of two sisters named "First Sister" and "Second Sister." Returning home from an air-raid

shelter, they discover that their brother has been hanged outside for deserting the army, and dispute over recovering his body. The Second Sister is just about to step out to cut him down, the First Sister is just about to prevent her from doing so. At that very moment of family row, a stranger, an SS Man, appears at the door. The action freezes. We are left with no knowledge as to what would happens next, since the plot immediately shifts to ancient Thebes.[74]

Benjamin's original image has been interpreted by notable scholars such as Butler, Samuel Weber, and (perhaps most intensely) Rokem. Thus, I will limit myself to discussing the way it can be read as yet another example of a disruptive entrance of a philosophical character into a house (indirectly) related to theatrical activity. Hence, the first issue at stake is the philosophical "inclination" of a character about which nothing is said, including its reason for arriving at the house. Benjamin offered different answers regarding the identity of the stranger—a counterpart of Benjamin himself, who observes epic theatre through his philosophical lens, "freezes" the stage apparatus and uncovers its dialectics. In the first version of "What Is Epic Theatre?" the stranger is identified with Brecht's Herr Keuner, the cynical and a-social "thinking man;" in "The Author as Producer" he is identified with the epic dramatist; and in the second version of "What Is Epic Theatre?" Benjamin indirectly evokes Socrates in this context by claiming that Brecht followed Plato in turning the undramatic figure of the sage into the hero of his drama.[75]

In Plato's drama (the *Symposium*), the outdoor bodily standstill creates an interruption of the indoor sequence: Socrates's delaying his entrance, in favor of a theatrical immobile standing, steals the focus from the banquet and diverts Agathon's attention. By contrast, in Benjamin's reading of Brecht's "Platonic drama" it is the interruption of the sequence that creates the indoor bodily standstill: the stranger's uninvited entrance arrests the agents' movement and turns the scene into a theatrical tableau, assembling issues of family, gender, class, etc. Such a tableau is explicitly defined by Benjamin as a "dialectics at a standstill [*Dialektik im Stillstand*]." The dialectical image is the "rock of astonishment [*Fels des Staunens*]*"* from which we observe the sequence, and against which the sequence breaks.[76]

The astonishment caused when watching actions arrested midway is the means by which epic theatre revives a Socratic praxis, Benjamin writes in the first version of "What Is Epic Theatre?," hinting at the conception that *thaumazein* (wondering) is where philosophy begins.[77] Later in the text, he claims: "One may regard epic theatre as more dramatic than the [Platonic] dialogue (it is not always): but epic theatre need not, for that reason, be any the less philosophical."[78] The evocation of Plato serves Benjamin in defining epic theatre as philosophical but nevertheless non-Aristotelian. This matches the impression that the image of the stranger's interruption of a family row is introduced to show how Brecht challenges the Aristotelian notion of drama as a representation of complete and unified actions,

arranged as a coherent plot according to the law of probability or necessity, and progressing towards a meaningful end.[79]

As Max Statkiewicz has showed, Benjamin's allusion to the ancient *thaumazein* is incompatible with the kind of amazement (*Verwunderung*) Brecht had in mind: not a theoretical puzzlement in the face of enigma, but rather a practical attitude that begins with observing people's behavior and opinions and leads to social transformation.[80] Still, this does not yet undermine Benjamin's claim that by provoking astonishment at things which are taken for granted, epic theatre forces both the spectator and the actors to adopt a *Haltung* (critical attitude), the spectators (the stranger) toward the scene, the actors (the family members) toward their roles.[81] This is already embodied in the etymological connection between *Haltung* and *Halt* (stop) or *halten* (to stop), which brings us back to Arendt's precept, whose German version is *Halt an und denk nach*. Moreover, Benjamin's insistence that it is precisely through the viewpoint of a stranger that the tableau is framed suggests that the latter's ability to turn a scene into a frozen representation calling for critical reflection arises from his very position as a detached third party—an embodiment of estrangement (*Verfremdung*) itself, as Rokem calls him.[82] The stranger is a "philosopher" at the door to the "theatre": a bystander who is nevertheless involved in the scene by forming its representability and turning it, through his dispassionate gaze, into a theatrical display. That is to say, epic theatre uncovers the conditions that allow for a dramatic scene by estranging and subjecting them to the gaze of a rational spectator.[83]

In Benjamin's eyes, "the more often we interrupt someone in process of action, the more gestures we obtain."[84] It is in this sense that the stranger's entrance is an image of epic theatre: by interrupting actions that are still unfolding, it generates citable gestures that—precisely through their incomplete form—defamiliarize the scene and uncover the sociopolitical, economic, and gender condition (*Zustand*) on which it is based. Lacking any context for what is happening, the stranger is confronted with the sight of troubled faces, rumpled bedclothes, an open window, and a devastated interior—a situation that only seems untypical but according to Benjamin is typical of bourgeois life.[85] Yet, the turning of the scene into a transparent standstill uncovers this "natural" row in its artificiality, thus leaving the stranger with the task of making sense of it.[86] Although the standstill assembles real relations, it is not a realistic depiction but rather a montage-like picture of contradictions in social conditions; here, the conditions that enables such an astonishing family scene wherein the violence is practiced by the mother, while the father, unable to protect his daughter, is about to call the police ("the greater paternal authority," as Butler calls it) to intervene and restore domestic order.[87]

The interruption leaves us with only the gesture of violence—actions arrested before they become lethal. But interruption does not necessarily lead to intervention:

we do not know the stranger's reaction to the scene, how he would act, and whether he would enter the house or remain in the liminal position of the doorway. Still, even if the sequence were to resume one way or another (the very notion of interruption presupposes and ongoing continuous action), it would be perceived differently, since the misperformance caused by the interruption has already uncovered the conditions for the performance of violence in their artificiality. Observed from "the rock of astonishment," the tableau presents the familiar as unfamiliar, even *Unheimlich*. As Benjamin claims, by creating such gaps in our automatized perception, epic theatre opens up a space for reflection (including the possibility of imagining a different set of conditions), which would influence our future behavior versus society.[88] Finally, however, the standstill is here at the same time a precondition and a result: the interruption of the stream is what sets the stage for a philosophy of interrupting the stream.

5. Conclusion

The cases examined here exemplify the Platonic mechanism of introducing a dramatic scene, shaped by theatrical devices (here, regulation of entrances into a space), within a philosophical text. The first case, Plato's own image of Socrates's entrance into Agathon's house in the *Symposium*, exhibits the logic of the "domestic dialogues" —a group of Platonic dialogues narrating Socrates's invited or uninvited, scheduled or spontaneous, visits to houses of notable figures in Athens and its surroundings, and his turning of these houses into a home for performing philosophy.[89] In the *Symposium*, this phrasing encompasses the two meanings of "to perform": Socrates is both doing philosophy and presenting a display of philosophy. Moreover, he does so at a party celebrating Agathon's theatrical skills, in front of an all-Athenian group of aristocrats,[90] among them Aristophanes, whose *Clouds* is a satirical depiction of Socrates. In his defense speech, as recorded in Plato's *Apology*, Socrates would claim that Aristophanes's malicious depiction of him has nourished the legal charges against him (18c-d, 19c), although the *Clouds* was staged almost twenty-four years prior to the date of Socrates's trial.

The drama around Socrates's delayed entrance sets the stage for his *agôn* with Agathon. Introduced in a domestic setting, it is a contest between two skilled, talented performers: the newly praised young dramatist and the disruptive, elderly philosopher. Plato's design of this dynamics marks his preference for the private, self-sufficient nature of Socrates's wisdom over the public, audience-dependent nature of Agathon's wisdom; that is, his preference for the philosophical spectacle of truth over the spectacle presented at the theatre. However, it also exposes his criticism of the performative strategies of Socrates, who plays to an audience much more than he is willing to admit.

The second case, Brecht's image of the arrival of an unnamed philosopher at a large theatre house to philosophize with the practitioners, exhibits the logic

of a desired transformation of the theatre into an art of entailing pleasure for the didactic, scientific-like purposes of dialectical materialism. Subjecting the "inhabitants" to his own mode of argumentation, the philosopher seems at first to follow in the footsteps of Socrates. However, unlike Socrates, whose rivalry with the theatre people actually exposes his own bent for the theatre, the philosopher of *Der Messingkauf* remains a stranger at the house, since his interest in the theatre is limited to the application of this art to extra-theatrical ends. He is interested in the theatre only so long as it can serve as potential "raw material" for "re-molding."

The philosopher's plan is to turn the theatre into a laboratory for the study of social interactions, where imitated incidents from real life are examined for the purpose of discovering proper laws of behavior. Noticing his interlocutors' uneasiness with this idea, he coins the neologism *Thaëter* for the theatre of the future, as if inversion of two letters (*a* and *e*) in the German word *Theater* accounts for the kind of transformation he envisions. However, the philosopher admits that he lacks any way to fulfill his vision, thus illuminating its utopian nature. It is the dramaturg who proposes how science and art can be fused in the process of creating new theatre. This is possibly where theatre could be at home with philosophy, rather than experience it as an intrusion by a disruptive stranger.

The third case, Benjamin's image of the entrance of a stranger into an unnamed house in the middle of a family row, exhibits the logic behind the perception that Brecht is a creator of a "Platonic drama." According to Benjamin, the philosophical quality of epic theatre is directly related to its use of interruptions. Challenging Aristotle's model of drama, epic theatre interrupts the representation of complete actions, arrests the flow of the plot, and turns the scene into a tableau comprised of citable gestures, which forces us to stop and think about what is shown. In the case of the family row, adopting such a stance toward the artificial representation of violence is necessary for exercising a critical evaluation of the actual, extra-theatrical violence, Benjamin claims. "The more far-reaching the devastation of our social order …, the more marked must be the distance between the stranger and the events portrayed."[91]

Brecht's use of interruptions is regarded by Benjamin as "proof" that epic theatre works to arouse astonishment rather than empathy.[92] The tableau revealed to the stranger indeed evokes astonishment, stemming not only from the proportions of domestic disorder but also from the recognition that such violence is not an exception: it has become an ordinary rule. However, as Rokem has showed, in his 1940 essay "On the Concept of History" (*Über den Begriff der Geschichte*) Benjamin was no longer able to consent to the idea that astonishment is the beginning of philosophy. In this essay, composed shortly before Benjamin tried to escape Vichy France, he writes: "The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are 'still' possible in the twentieth century is *not* philosophical. This amazement is *not* the beginning of knowledge—unless it is the knowledge that the

view of history which gives rise to it is untenable."[93] At that point in history, the real and tragically unastonishing interruption was that caused by the theatricality of fascism.

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Notes

1. Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in the Greek Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 67.
2. Arnold Aronson, "Their Exits and Their Entrances: Getting a Handle on Doors," *New Theatre Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2004): 336.
3. I consent to Marin Blažević and Lada Čale Feldman's definition of "misperformance" as the cracking of the mirror of representational illusion in the form of "the irruption of the awkward or the embarrassing, the enlightening or the shocking reminders of what is at stake when we perform, actors and spectators alike"; Marin Blažević and Lada Čale Feldman, "Misperformance," in *Performance Studies: Key Words, Concepts and Theories*, ed. Bryan Reynolds (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 51.
4. See Martin Puchner, *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 110–12.
5. "Minding [this] gap," Puchner writes, is "a way of doing theatre and philosophy, but without hoping to do away with the 'and'"; see Martin Puchner, "Afterword: Please Mind the Gap between Theatre and Philosophy," *Modern Drama* 56, no. 4 (2013): 549.
6. All references to Plato's works follow the Stephanus pagination.
7. See Kevin Corrigan and Elena Glazov-Corrigan, *Plato's Dialectic at Play: Argument, Structure, and Myth in the "Symposium"* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004), 33n21, 94, 97.
8. Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. M. C. Howatson, ed. M. C. Howatson and Frisbee C. C. Sheffield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.
9. Ruby Blondell, "Where Is Socrates on the 'Ladder of Love'?" in *Plato's "Symposium": Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, ed. James H. Lesher, Debra Nails, and Frisbee Sheffield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1[illegible]51.
10. As Socrates claims in his defense speech—as transmitted in Plato's *Apology*—he was given a divine mission to examine himself and others (28e–29a, 33c), in order to show the Athenians their ignorance through his knowledge of his own ignorance (29d–30a).
11. Silvia Montiglio, *Wandering in Ancient Greek Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 172–76.
12. The only instances of Socrates's gesture of standstill are those mentioned in the *Symposium* (175a-c, 220c-d).
13. Dominic Scott, "Socrates and Alcibiades in the *Symposium*," *Hermathena* 168 (Summer 2000): 32n12.
14. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, 1978), 4, 78; emphasis in the original.
15. Plato, *Symposium*, 5.
16. Blondell, "Where Is Socrates on the 'Ladder of Love'?" 159.
17. Chris Emlyn-Jones, "The Dramatic Poet and His Audience: Agathon and Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*," *Hermes: Zeitschrift für klassische Philologie* 132, no. 4 (2004): 403.
18. Zali Gurevitch, "The *Symposium*: Culture as Diamonic Conversation," *Human Studies* 21 (1998): 439.
19. Plato, *Symposium*, 59–60. Socrates's irony is evident here. First, he calls Agathon's spectators "Greeks" (*hellênôn*), which implies an event that attracted not just Athenians but also foreigners. Second, the number stated by him—more than thirty thousand—is clearly exaggerated. The ancient Athenian Theatre of Dionysus could seat as many as seventeen thousand people, perhaps

even quite a few less. See John P. Anton, "The Agathon Interlude," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 37, no. 3 (1996): 212.

20. Can it be that Socrates coordinated in advance the subject for the contest of speeches with the physician Eryximachus, who proposes it in real time (176e–177d)?

21. See Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 47–48.

22. See John Bussanich, "Socrates and the Religious Experience," in *A Companion to Socrates*, ed. Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 209.

23. Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1978), 34–36.

24. In the *Clouds*, Socrates—appearing on stage suspended in air, inside a basket, elevated and insulated—says that he is scrutinizing (*periphronô*) the sun (225). *Periphronô* means both "to contemplate" and "to hold in contempt." Indeed, the farmer Strepsiades thinks that Socrates is scorning the gods (226); see Aristophanes, *Clouds*, trans. Peter Meineck (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000), 18–19. Plato evokes this scene in the *Apology*, where Socrates dismisses his portrayal by Aristophanes (19c), but in the *Sophist* Plato has Socrates claim that philosophers look down from above on the lives of those below them (216c).

25. See S. Sara Monoson, "Socrates in Combat: Trauma and Resilience in Plato's Political Theory," in *Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks*, ed. Peter Meineck and David Konstan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 141.

26. On Socrates's cheating, see Freddie Rokem, *Philosophers and Thespians: Thinking Performance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 7, 53–54.

27. Rokem, *Philosophers and Thespians*, 38–40.

28. In the *Republic*, Socrates—who is also the narrator of the dialogue—quotes himself as having said that "even in the case of two kinds of imitation that are thought to be closely akin, such as tragedy and comedy, the same people aren't able to do both of them well" (395a); see Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 1032. No explanation is offered by Plato for Socrates's change of opinion between the two dialogues. See Rokem, *Philosophers and Thespians*, 30–31.

29. See Oliver Taplin, "Fifth-Century Tragedy and Comedy: A *Synkrisis*," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 106 (November 1986): 163. As David Konstan states, the fact that Socrates feels the need to offer this thesis, and to compel both poets to agree with him, shows how radically distinct tragedy and comedy were in Greek theatre; see David Konstan, "Defining the Genre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy*, ed. Martin Revermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 28–29n2. David Wiles writes: "No one in antiquity, except Socrates in a flight of fancy at the end Plato's *Symposium*, seems to have questioned the principle that tragedy and comedy are opposites, practiced by different playwrights and different actors"; see David Wiles, "Aristotle's *Poetics* and Ancient Dramatic Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*, ed. Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 104.

30. Rokem, *Philosophers and Thespians*, 28–29.

31. Plato, *Symposium*, 63. See also Anton, "Agathon Interlude," 231.

32. Debra Nails, "Tragedy Off-Stage," in *Plato's "Symposium": Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, 179n1.

33. Puchner, *Drama of Ideas*, 19. For the claim in favor of Socrates's victory, see, for example, Helen Bacon, "Socrates Crowned," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 35 (Summer 1959): 430.

34. Diskin Clay, "The Tragic and Comic Poet of the *Symposium*," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 2, no. 2 (1975): 239. James A. Arieti, however, is not so bothered, as he refuses to take all the arguments in the *Symposium* seriously, including Socrates's. This dialogue, Arieti claims, mocks both philosophers and poets as people who speak nonsense about things beyond their grasp; see James A. Arieti, *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), 107.

35. Bertolt Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," in *Brecht on Performance: Messingkauf and Modelbooks*, ed. Tom Kuhn, Steve Giles, and Marc Silberman (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 11.

36. See Bertolt Brecht, *Journals 1934–1955*, trans. Hugh Rorrison, ed. John Willett (New York: Routledge, 1996), 392; Martin Revermann, *Brecht and Tragedy: Radicalism, Traditionalism, Eristics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 53–54.

37. Bertolt Brecht, "Short Organon for the Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Thom Kuhn (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 239, 246, 257. See also Revermann, *Brecht and Tragedy*, 60–62.

38. Brecht, "Short Organon for the Theatre," 242. See also David Barnett, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory, and Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 18–19.

39. I follow here the division of the text as offered in the version comprising its 2014 English translation. On the editorial approach behind this division, see Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 1–4. David Barnett points out that the movement between the four nights, as if between consecutive Acts in a stage play, dramatizes the mechanism of the dialectics; see Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, 52.

40. John J. White, "The Thorn of Sokrates: Georg Kaiser's *Alkibiades Saved* and Bertolt Brecht's *Sokrates Wounded*," in *Socrates in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Michael Trapp (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 120.

41. Part of *Der Messingkauf* was staged by the Berliner Ensemble in 1963, with Ekkehard Schall, Brecht's son-in-law**,** playing the role of the philosopher.

42. As Revermann points out, the title and structure of *Short Organon for the Theatre* seem to be modeled primarily on Francis Bacon's 1620 *New Organum* (*Novum Organum*), another scientific-like treatise; see Revermann, *Brecht and Tragedy*, 55–56, 60–61.

43. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 120; John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), 245–52.

44. See White, "Thorn of Sokrates," 123–25; Anthony Squiers, "Philosophizing with Brecht and Plato: On Socratic Courage," in *Philosophizing Brecht: Critical Readings on Art, Consciousness, Social Theory and Performance*, ed. Norman Roessler and Anthony Squiers (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 94–97. Brecht dedicated his "Socrates Wounded" to the Playwright Georg Kaiser for his 1919 play *Alcibiades Saved* (*Der gerettete Alkibiades*), another text that draws immensely on the *Symposium*.

45. "I have another passion besides curiosity, you see: it's argumentativeness," the philosopher admits; see Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 20. This recalls Plato's portrayal of Socrates's passion for argumentative competitiveness, showing that the latter does not differ much from the Sophists in that matter. There is plenty of evidence for this feature in Plato's works, but the most notable occurs in the *Republic* (336b-d): "If you truly want to know what Justice is, don't just ask questions and then refute the answers simply to satisfy your competitiveness or love of honor," Thrasymachus tells Socrates; see Plato, *Republic*, 981. Indeed, it takes a Sophist to identify this bent.

46. White, "Thorn of Sokrates," 121; White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, 248–50n17.

47. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 13.

48. Kathryn A. Morgan, "Plato," in *Space in Ancient Greek Literature*, ed. Irene J. F. de Jong (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 420.

49. See Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 22.

50. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, 243n7.

51. See S. Sara Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements: Athenian Politics and the Practice of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 212–19.

52. Puchner, *Drama of Ideas*, 108.

53. *Proagôn* (literally, "before the contest") was an event in which each of the tragedians who were chosen to participate in the theatre festival competed against his colleagues by presenting, with his actors and chorus, a spoken demonstration of the subject-matter of the plays he would stage. Held from around 444 BCE, the *Proagôn* probably took place on the day before the official competition of plays.

54. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 13–14, 63–64; Puchner, "Afterword," 549.

55. Cited in Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 43. In his 1953 "Katzgraben Notes," Brecht echoes his philosopher's idea of what is philosophical theatre, stating: "My theatre … is a philosophical one, if the term is understood in a naïve sense. I take it to imply an interest in people's behavior and opinions"; cited in Brecht, *Brecht on Performance*, 251.

56. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 16–18.

57. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 11.

58. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 11, 24.

59. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 26–27. See also Puchner, *Drama of Ideas*, 107–8.

60. These words are found in Fragment B52, dated 1939–1941 and editorially ascribed to the Second Night discussion. In Fragment B15, dated to the same years and editorially ascribed to the First Night discussion, the philosopher speaks of a theatre that would address the countless people who are suffering and in danger, so that they can become aware of the causes for their suffering and danger; see Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 37, 51.

61. Puchner, "Afterword," 549.

62. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 13. See also Mary Luckhurst, "Revolutionising Theatre: Brecht's Reinvention of the Dramaturg," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, 2nd ed., ed. Peter Thompson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 196.

63. Puchner, *Drama of Ideas,* 110–12.

64. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 18. In a fragment dated 1939–1941 the philosopher assures his interlocutors that "the *thaëter* is not going to stay open for all eternity. It is meant only as a remedy for the ills of the time, of our own time in particular—which is, undeniably, a pretty bleak one"; see Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 107. For the philosopher, the reconstruction of the theatre is not an ideal but a necessity connected with the extra-theatrical struggle, Puchner claims. "From this perspective, the antitheatrical moment, the reduction and reorientation of theater, is a rebuke to fascism's full-blown theatricality, its exploitation of an emotional theater for political purposes"; see Puchner, *Drama of Ideas*, 110.

65. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 94; emphasis in the original.

66. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 13.

67. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 11.

68. Brecht, "*Messingkauf*, or Buying Brass," 27, 42, 65, 83, 93. Brecht voices this idea in his appendix to the text; see 124–25.

69. Luckhurst, "Revolutionising Theatre," 197–98. See also White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, 246.

70. Interestingly, this image coincides with the Greek notion of the stranger (*xênos*) as *thuraios* (the one at the door or just outside it). *Thuraios* derives from *thura* (the house door), and as William James Booth claims, "The stranger was such only in relation to that door and the space within that it encloses; and so likewise was the space within, the house and its family members, defined in part by those whom they exclude"; see William James Booth, "Foreigners: Insiders, Outsiders and the Ethics of Membership," *Review of Politics* 59, no. 2 (1997): 259–60.

71. Walter Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [First Version]," in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1973), 4–5; Walter Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [Second Version]," in *Understanding Brecht*, 18–19. See also Samuel Weber, "Family Scenes: Some Preliminary Remarks on Domesticity and Theatricality," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 98 (1999): 356–57; Judith Butler, "Theatrical Machines," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26, no. 3 (2015): 40.

72. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings*, *Vol. 2, Part 2: 1931–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 778–79.

73. Butler, "Theatrical Machines," 39. Recently, Betinne Menke has suggested that Benjamin's image is a citation not of a dramatic scene but rather of a dramatic device: the *episodion* (episode), known from ancient Greek theatre, where each entrance of a protagonist sets up another time-space for his/her speech, between the chorus' songs and dances. "Every stage entry has the character of an interrupting intrusion by a stranger," Menke writes, adding that the freeze-framing of the family row exhibits what Benjamin terms the "episodic quality" (*episodische Charakter*) of epic theatre: its use of interruptions for setting off episodes which break the sequence and open up a space for reflection; see Bettine Menke, "Theater as Critical Praxis: Interruption and Citability," in *Poetic Critique: Encounters with Art and Literature*, ed. Michel Chaouli et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 136. The citation is from Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [First Version]", 4.

74. I am grateful to Freddie Rokem for suggesting this idea to me.

75. Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [First Version]," 5–6; Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [Second Version]," 17; Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 779.

76. Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [First Version]," 12–13.

77. Benjamins implicitly refers to Socrates's claim as introduced in Plato's *Theaetetus* (155c-d). Aristotle famously echoes this idea in his *Metaphysics* (982b).

78. Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [First Version]," 4, 6. See also Stanley Mitchell, "Introduction" to *Understanding Brecht*, xiv–xv.

79. See Max Statkiewicz, "Brecht's (Non-)Philosophical Theater," *Brecht Yearbook* 26 (2001): 278; Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 98–102.

80. Statkiewicz, "Brecht's (Non-)Philosophical Theater," 279–81. See also Revermann, *Brecht and Tragedy*, 83.

81. Benjamin, "Author as Producer," 778.

82. Freddie Rokem, "'Suddenly a Stranger Appears': Walter Benjamin's Readings of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre," *Nordic Theatre Studies* 31, no. 1 (2019): 10, 18–19.

83. Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [Second Version]," 17. See also Weber, "Family Scenes," 358; Phoebe von Held, *Alienation and Theatricality: Diderot after Brecht* (Oxford: Legenda, 2011), 66–67.

84. Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [Second Version]," 19–20; Walter Benjamin, "Studies for a Theory of Epic Theatre," in *Understanding Brecht*, 23.

85. Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [First Version]," 5; Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [Second Version]," 19.

86. See Rokem, "'Suddenly a Stranger Appears,'" 13–17.

87. Butler, "Theatrical Machines," 40.

88. Butler, "Theatrical Machines," 41; Howard Eiland, "Reception in Destruction," in *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), 4; Carl Weber, "Brecht's Concept of *Gestus* and the American Performance Tradition," in *Brecht Sourcebook*, ed. Carol Martin and Henry Bial (London: Routledge, 2000), 44.

89. This group includes the *Symposium*, the *Protagoras*, the *Parmenides*, and the *Republic* (or at least book 1 of this dialogue, which was probably composed apart from and prior to the rest of the text).

90. All the named characters in the *Symposium* are from Athens and its surroundings, a rare situation in Plato's dialogues. "The *Symposium* is a distinctly Athenian affair," Leo Strauss notes; see Leo Strauss, *On Plato's "Symposium*" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 40–41.

91. Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [First Version]," 5.

92. Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre? [Second Version],"18.

93. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, *Vol. 4: 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392; emphasis in the original; Rokem, "'Suddenly a Stranger Appears,'" 11.