

Press kit

Benjamin and Brecht. Thinking in Extremes

26 Oct 2017 — 28 Jan 2018

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Information

Title	Benjamin and Brecht. Thinking in Extremes
Exhibition dates	26 Oct 2017 — 28 Jan 2018
Venue	Akademie der Künste, Hanseatenweg 10, 10557 Berlin Tel. +49 (0)30 200 57-2000, info@adk.de
Opening hours	Tue – Sun 11 am – 7 pm open on Mon, 25 Dec and Mon, 1 Jan, closed on 24 and 31 Dec
Special opening hours	18 Nov, 13 + 14 Dec and 27 Jan: 11 am – 12 pm, 20 Nov: 5 – 10 pm
Admission	€ 9/6, Free admission for under 19s and Tuesdays from 3 pm
Website	adk.de/benjamin-brecht
With the kind support of	The exhibition is funded by the FRIES Group, the Society of Friends of the Akademie der Künste, the Goethe-Institut, the Hamburg Foundation for the Advancement of Research and Culture, and by Alexander Kluge, Munich.
Opening	Wednesday, 25 October 2017, 7 pm
Media partners	Cicero – Magazin für politische Kultur, Deutschlandfunk Kultur, Exberliner, perlentaucher.de, Philosophie Magazin, taz, Zitty Berlin
Publications	<i>Benjamin and Brecht. Thinking in Extremes</i> Erdmut Wizisla on behalf of the Akademie der Künste (ed.), Akademie der Künste / Suhrkamp, Berlin 2017 284 pages, 122 images, ISBN 978-3-518-42083-6, € 32 <i>Murder in the Elevator Shaft. Plot of events by Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin.</i> Graphic Novel by Steffen Thiemann (woodcuts) Akademie der Künste, Berlin 2017 32 pages, 30 images, ISBN 978-3-88331-223-1, € 7,50
Concept, texts, transcriptions	Ursula Marx, Anett Schubotz, Iliane Thiemann and Erdmut Wizisla (project management)
Assistance	Naomi Boyce
Exhibition design, realisation	Antje Mollenhauer, Jörg Scheil, Isabel Schlenther, Simone Schmaus (head of exhibition design), Julia Bernhard (editing), Mount Berlin, Villa Schmück Dich, museumstechnik berlin
Graphics	Friedrich Forssman (exhibition), Heimann + Schwantes (public relations)
Image editing, lithography	f1bild*, Stefan Jordan
Registrars	Catherine Amé, Stefan Kaltenbach
Lighting, media technologies	Vanessa Bahlecke, Wolfgang Hinze, Uwe Ziegenhagen, act !worX
Conservational care	Volker Busch, Cornelia Hanke, Marieluise Nordahl
Education programme	Marion Neumann (head of Education Programme), Martina Krafczyk
Press and public relations, website, social media	Rosa Gosch, Marianne König, Dorothea Walther, Mareike Wenzlau, Anette Schmitt (head of press and PR)

The Akademie der Künste is supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.

Press release

Benjamin and Brecht. Thinking in Extremes

The relationship between Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) and Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) was an unusual one – between critic and poet, commentator and author, art theoretician and theatre director, scholar and artist, metaphysicist and rationalist. Benjamin and Brecht's relationship reflects a century of extremes: in their conflicts as well as their productivity, in their astonishing ability to allow for the validity of contradiction, and in their harmonious moments as well as their unsettling ones. Much of what motivated them seems disturbingly relevant today: What is radical art? How does one confront social crisis? Who writes history?

For the first time an exhibition is dedicated to the subject of Benjamin **and** Brecht. Taking advantage of both archives that are housed at the Akademie der Künste – the Walter Benjamin Archive and the Bertolt Brecht Archive – the conditions for such an exhibition are ideal. It shows the topicality of their friendship, its historically documented aspects, resonances from friends and enemies, and moments of reception in ideas and art. Starting from their close personal relationship, this exhibition responds to Benjamin's and Brecht's names becoming ciphers, models for art and a particular view of the world.

On display is a selection of original items, some of which are lesser-known: Brecht's chess board and a Chinese figure of Laozi, manuscripts of poems, diary entries, letters and photographs – key documents illustrating the pivotal and conflictual points in this relationship. The historical material is supplemented by original film and audio documents, and including recordings of early Brecht productions. Furthermore artistic works comment on past events from present-day perspectives: by Zoe Beloff, Adam Broomberg / Oliver Chanarin, Edmund de Waal, Felix Martin Furtwängler, Friederike Heller, Alexander Kluge, Mark Lammert, Jonas Maron, Thomas Martin / Irina Rastorgueva / Jakob Michael Birn, Marcus Steinweg and Steffen Thiemann.

An extensive accompanying programme consists of readings, lectures, concerts and theatrical debates. Contributors include: Alexander Kluge, Corinna Harfouch, Lorenz Jäger, Mara Delius, Friederike Heller, Kathrin Röggla, Marcus Steinweg and Hanns Zischler.

The book accompanying the exhibition is published by Suhrkamp Verlag. It was edited by Erdmut Wizisla, director of the Bertolt Brecht Archive and the Walter Benjamin Archive at the Akademie der Künste, and head of the exhibition's curatorial team.

The exhibition is funded by the FRIES Group, the Society of Friends of the Akademie der Künste, the Goethe-Institut, the Hamburg Foundation for the Advancement of Research and Culture, and by Alexander Kluge, Munich.

Chronicle. Benjamin and Brecht

1924

Summer | Capri

Benjamin asks Asja Lacin, a theatre director from Riga, to introduce him to Brecht. However, Brecht is not interested.

November | Berlin

Lacin persuades Brecht to meet Benjamin. The meeting takes place but nothing transpires and Brecht and Benjamin seldom meet.

1929

June | Berlin

Benjamin informs Gershom Scholem that he has gotten to know Brecht. The “very friendly relationship with Brecht” is based “on the well-grounded interest one is bound to have for his present plans.”

1930

April 25 | Berlin

Benjamin and Brecht plan to “annihilate Heidegger” in a critical reading group.

June 24 | Frankfurt am Main

Benjamin gives his radio talk *Bert Brecht* on Südwestdeutscher Rundfunk.

July 6 | Frankfurt am Main

Benjamin’s *From the Brecht-Commentary* is published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*

September | Berlin

Benjamin, Brecht, and Herbert Ihering plan to edit the journal *Krise und Kritik* (Crisis and Criticism) for the Rowohlt publishing house.

1931

Early February | Berlin

Benjamin tells Scholem that his interest in the situation in Germany does not extend beyond the small circle around Brecht.

February 6 | Berlin

The *Man is Man* production at the Gendarmenmarkt Theatre provokes a debate about Brecht’s theory of epic theatre. Benjamin, who attends the opening night, defines its principles in his essay *What is the Epic Theatre?*, which is rejected by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

June 3 | Le Lavandou, France

Collective work is done on the *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*. Conversations about Trotsky, Kafka, the political situation in Germany, and the development of a “typology” for different kinds of habitation.

1932

February 5 | Berlin

Benjamin’s article *A Family Drama in the Epic Theatre* appears in the *Literarische Welt* on the occasion of the world premiere of Brecht’s *The Mother*.

1933

October 20 | Paris

Benjamin refers to his agreement with Brecht’s output as “one of the most important and strongest elements” of his whole position.

End of October, beginning of November | Paris

Benjamin, Brecht, and Margarete Steffin stay at the Palace Hotel, Rue du Four. They intend to write a crime novel together.

1934

March 5 | Paris

Benjamin plans a series of lectures on *L'avant-garde allemande* in which each subject – the novel, the essay, the theatre and journalism – is explained through one representative figure: Kafka, Ernst Bloch, Brecht or Karl Kraus.

March 15 | Svendborg

Benjamin sends his books to Brecht in Denmark.

June 20 | Svendborg

At Brecht's invitation, Benjamin arrives in Denmark. He follows the completion of the *Threepenny Novel*.

August 29 | Svendborg

Long and spirited debates about Benjamin's Kafka essay take place, which Brecht accuses of encouraging "Jewish fascism" and increasing the mystique surrounding Kafka instead of dispelling it.

October 20 | Svendborg

Benjamin departs.

1935

February | Paris

Benjamin writes a review of *Brechts Dreigroschenroman*, which is not printed.

May 20 | Paris

Benjamin writes to Brecht: "The *Five Difficulties of Writing the Truth* have the dryness and therefore the infinite preservability of thoroughly classical texts. They are written in a prose that has not existed in German before."

June 16 | Paris

Brecht takes part in the International Writers' Conference for the Defense of Culture and sees Benjamin.

1936

April | Svendborg

Referring to Benjamin's essay *Problems in the Sociology of Language*, Brecht writes: "It's written in a grand style, it gives a broad view of the material, and shows that present-day scholarship should be approached with reserve. That's just how a new encyclopedia should be reserved."

August 3 until mid-September | Skovsbostrand

Benjamin's second visit with Brecht. They collectively revise Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

1937

April | Svendborg

About Benjamin's essay *Eduard Fuchs, the Collector and Historian*, Brecht writes: "I mean your moderately tempered interest on the subject of your work had helped to provide this economy. There's not a bit of ornament, but the whole piece is grateful (in the good old-fashioned sense), and the spiral is never prolonged by a mirror. You always stick to your subject, or else the subject sticks to you."

Around September 12 | Paris

Brecht and Helene Weigel arrive in Paris. Benjamin visits rehearsals of *The Threepenny Opera* at the Théâtre de l'Étoile and writes a text in French about the play's sources and characters.

October | Paris

Brecht directs *Frau Carrar's Rifle* in the Salle Aydar, with Helene Weigel in the title role.

1938

May | Paris

Benjamin attends the premiere of *Fear and Misery in the Third Reich* in the Salle d'Iéna.

June to October | Svendborg

Benjamin is in Denmark. Discussions are held about Virgil and Dante, Baudelaire, Freud, Marxism and its interpretation, political persecution in the Soviet Union, Stalin.

In a letter to Kitty Marx-Steinschneider, who lives in Jerusalem, Benjamin writes that despite his friendship with Brecht, he must be careful to carry out his work on him "in total isolation."

1939

March 20 | Paris

Benjamin sends Brecht and Margarete Steffin his *Commentary on Poems by Brecht* to forward to the editors of the journal *Das Wort*.

End of March | Paris

Benjamin is among those who receive a ditto machine copy of the proofs of Brecht's *Life of Galileo*.

April 23 | Basel

The *Schweizer Zeitung am Sonntag* publishes Brecht's *Legend of the Origin of the book Tao-tê-Ching on Lao-tze's Road into Exile* with Benjamin's commentary.

Mid-June | Zurich

The journal *Maß und Wert*, anonymously publishes *What is the Epic Theatre?* in its July/August issue.

Late 1939 or early 1940 | Paris

After a conversation with Heinrich Blücher, Benjamin notes that his commentary on Brecht's *Reader for City Dwellers* is "a pious falsification," which obscures Brecht's complicity in the "errors" of the workers' movement.

1941

August | Santa Monica

Günther Anders brings Brecht, who had just arrived in the USA, the news of Benjamin's death. Brecht reads *On the Concept of History* and calls these "lucid and clarifying (despite all metaphor and Judaism)": one thinks "with horror about how few people there are who are even prepared to at least misunderstand something like this."

In memory of Benjamin, Brecht writes four obituary poems. In *Casualty List* he writes "So also left me the contradictor / Who knew so much, who was seeking for the new / WALTER BENJAMIN."

Introductory text to the exhibition

It was a friendship of paradoxes. Contemporaries called it unique, productive, asymmetrical, and disastrous. Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht met around 1924 and were in intense communication and exchange for over ten years, from May 1929. Sometimes they worked together, and their relations became closer after 1933, once both had fled Germany. The two men spent around a year together in total, mostly at Brecht's house in Denmark while in exile, where they played chess, listened to the radio, talked about their work, and engaged in sometimes fierce arguments sparked by their different spheres of influence, working methods, and mentalities. Once forced to defend his close relationship with Brecht, Benjamin conceived the expression thinking in extremes. Connections such as these are dangerous, Benjamin declared, but they enable a new reach and freedom of thought because they allow things that seem irreconcilable to be brought together. The relationship between Benjamin and Brecht was an attempt to make such contradictions fruitful. It was an unusual constellation of critic and poet, commentator and author, art theorist and theatre director, scientist and artist, metaphysicist and rationalist.

The exhibition is founded on this personal affinity, and carried by conversations between Benjamin and Brecht, based either on transcripts of their discussions or pieced together, sometimes rather freely, from texts and comments. A selection of manuscripts, prints, photographs, and objects from the archives illustrate the most important themes they discussed : interventionist thinking, the epic theatre as a philosophical form of performance, their jointly-conceived detective novel, the use of Kafka's writings as a model, a derogatory poem about Stalin, models for living, an argument about Baudelaire, and more. The Akademie der Künste houses both archives, and the curatorial staff was able to plumb an embarrassment of riches – though it is by no means the entirety. What is on display is a quintessence of the archival material in sixteen fragments. Unless otherwise noted all the exhibits originate from either the Walter Benjamin Archive or the Bertolt Brecht Archive.

Artistic commentaries capture the contemporary culture by casting an alternative vision on what is supposedly already known. But this is not merely to celebrate a relationship that became significant for the 20th century – it is about exploring possibilities, discovering certain clues and depths, and documenting the abrupt, the unpolished, the incomprehensible, but also the sudden accord. And it's about irony – in keeping with Brecht's motto: "This is not completely serious to me."

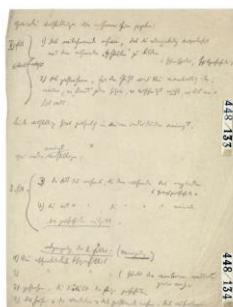
The exhibition is funded by the FRIES Group, the Society of Friends of the Akademie der Künste, the Goethe-Institut, the Hamburg Foundation for the Advancement of Research and Culture, and by Alexander Kluge, Munich.

Key documents in the exhibition



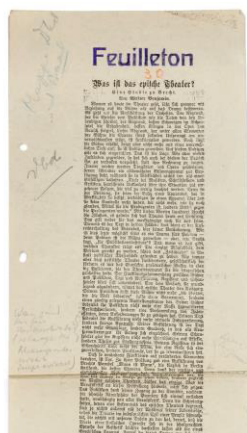
Chess It was the Tactics of Attrition that Suited You

Chessboard from Brecht's Berlin apartment on Chausseestraße 125, Berlin, Brecht Weigel memorial
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Akademie der Künste, Berlin



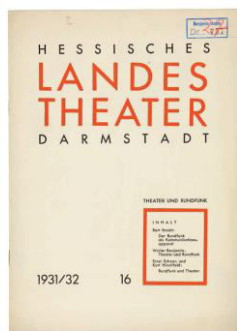
Living Familiar Thinking, Ready-Furnished Existence

Bertolt Brecht, with Walter Benjamin, writing a schema for habitation (June 8, 1931)
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Bertolt-Brecht-Erben / Suhrkamp Verlag



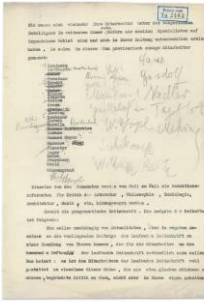
An Adversary Why This Monkey Business?

Walter Benjamin, *What is the Epic Theatre?* (1931) *Frankfurter Zeitung* galley proof with annotations by Bernhard Diebold, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Bernhard-Diebold-Archiv
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Akademie der Künste, Berlin



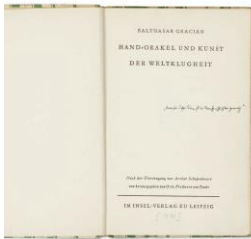
Radio The Listener's Revolt

Blätter des Hessischen Landestheaters, Darmstadt, Leipzig, vol. 5 (1931–32), no. 16: Theater und Rundfunk, (July 1932)
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Akademie der Künste, Berlin



Crisis and Criticis Interventionist Thinking

Walter Benjamin, Memorandum to Crisis and Criticism (1930)
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur



Gracián Overcoming Difficulties through the Accumulation of the Same

Walter Benjamin's dedication to Brecht in Balthasar Gracian, *Hand-Orakel und Kunst der Weltklugheit* (The Art of Worldly Wisdom), Leipzig, Insel, 1931
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Akademie der Künste, Berlin



Kafka Craving for Books

Franz Kafka, *The Trial*. Berlin, Die Schmiede, 1925. First edition with three handwritten notes claiming possession by Brecht, one on the jacket.
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Akademie der Künste, Berlin



A Crime Story Murder in the Elevator Shaft

Walter Benjamin, chapter organization on the crime novel planned together with Brecht (1933)
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur



Marx Communism is the Middle

Karl Marx, 1861. Framed photo of Marx at the lectern in Bertolt Brecht's Berlin apartment on Chausseestraße 125. Photographer: Beard, London. Brecht Weigel memorial
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Akademie der Künste, Berlin



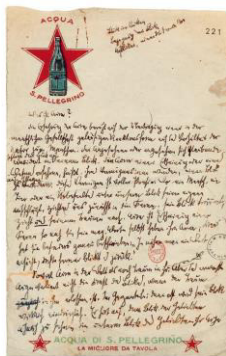
Fascism Every Cell Convulses under Their Blows

Walter Benjamin, Diary 1938.
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur



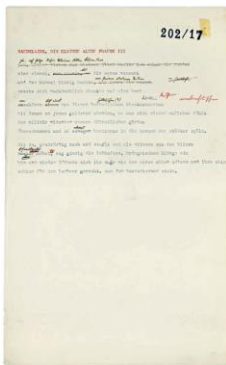
Stalin Oh Great Ox

Bertolt Brecht, The Farmer's Address to His Ox (1938) from the Svendborg Songs
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Bertolt-Brecht-Erben/Suhrkamp Verlag



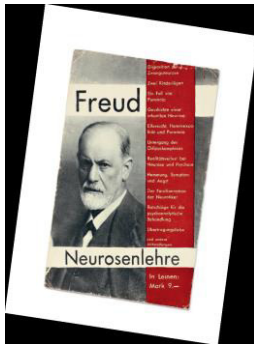
Aura All Mysticism, from a Position that Opposes Mysticism

Walter Benjamin, What is Aura? Draft for the follow-up to *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (between 1936 and 1939), page 1 of 2
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur



Baudelaire Secret Agent or Poet of the Petty Bourgeoisie?

Charles Baudelaire, *Les petites vieilles III*. German translation: Bertolt Brecht (1938)
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Bertolt-Brecht-Erben/Suhrkamp Verlag



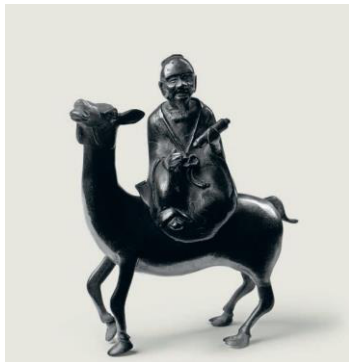
**Freud
Does Sexuality Die?**

Publisher's brochure, on whose back cover Walter Benjamin noted key words for the Arcades Project
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur



**Institute for Social Research
Artificial Silk Heels**

Helene Weigel and Bertolt Brecht to Walter Benjamin (Svendborg, February 6, 1935)
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Bertolt-Brecht-Erben / Suhrkamp Verlag



**Laozi
You Understand that Hardness is Defeated**

Daoist wise man, riding a stag. From Brecht's "book room" in his Berlin apartment on Chausseestraße 125, Berlin, Brecht Weigel memorial
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni © Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Overview of artistic works and commentaries in the exhibition

Zoe Beloff

Parade of the Old New, 2016–17

Paint on corrugated cardboard

Courtesy of the artist

This painting is in progress. New panels are being painted in response to current events as they unfold.

Exile, 2017 (work in progress)

Film, 45 min

Directed by Zoe Beloff

Camera: Eric Muzzy

Walter Benjamin played by Eric Berryman

Bertolt Brecht played by Afshin Hashemi

Courtesy of the artist

“I have been reading Benjamin for twenty years and Brecht for close to ten. I think of them as comrades. Perhaps that sounds presumptuous. But I don’t think so. I believe that it is only if we invite these men to come down from their pedestals and engage in discussion with us that their work can have meaning. More than ever, today we must work *with* them, not *on* them.” (Zoe Beloff)

With Brecht’s *Parade of the Old New* (1939), the Manhattan-based activist’s historical painting is a warning against the resurgence of fascism – a prime example of the interventionist thinking that Benjamin and Brecht believed necessary before 1933. Her film *Exile* also updates an old question: What does it mean to be both a refugee and an intellectual today?

Zoe Beloff is an artist and director. She lives in New York. In 2012 she directed a version of Brecht’s *The Days of the Commune* (1949), conceived as a comment on the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin

Tactics of Attrition, 2017

Photographs, fiber-based prints

Chess pieces belonging to Brecht

Courtesy of the artists

Bertolt Brecht vs. Walter Benjamin, 2017

This chess computer was produced for the exhibition with the support of Square Off, the world’s smartest chess board: squareoffnow.com

Courtesy of the artists / Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Broomberg & Chanarin’s chess automaton reconstructs a game played between Benjamin and Brecht in 1934 from its opening until the moment captured in the photographs. From there the game continues, simulating Brecht and Benjamin’s possible moves, and concludes by showing variations of the game’s endings.

“Viewers are therefore offered a prediction of the past, albeit within the narrow confines of an algorithm. Yet in light of what later transpired between these two friends, we cannot avoid a lingering sense of melancholy for what did in fact happen, nor resist the urge to rewrite history.” (Broomberg & Chanarin)

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin are artists who teach at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg (HFBK). Broomberg lives in Berlin; Chanarin in London. In 2011 they presented an update of Brecht’s poetry collection *Kriegsfibel* (*War Primer*, 1940–45) under the title *War Primer 2*.

Edmund de Waal

my problem with the Frankfurt School, 2016

Porcelain vessel holding shards of a Song Dynasty tea bowl, in an aluminum and Plexiglas vitrine
Private collection, courtesy of the Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin/Paris

casualty list, 2017

porcelain vessels, porcelain tiles with gilding, tin boxes, tin box with shards, Cor-Ten steel pieces and porcelain shards (some with gilding) in an aluminum and Plexiglas vitrine
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin/Paris

Edmund de Waal, in whose family history Benjamin left a fleeting trace, offers an ironic commentary on the Frankfurt School. His vitrine *casualty list* is a response to Brecht's epitaph poem *Die Verlustliste (The Casualty List, 1941)*.

"There is something about the fugitive beauty of the change of light and shadow around gold that makes me think of how memory works, how a casualty list navigates the space between the silence of things and the silence of people." (Edmund de Waal)

Edmund de Waal is a ceramicist. In 2010 he published the novel *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, which enjoyed worldwide success. He teaches ceramics at the University of Westminster and lives in London.

Felix Martin Furtwängler

Verwisch die Spuren, 2017

Collages

Wood, paper

Courtesy of the artist

B&B Reiseandenken, 2017

Postcard series in a cardboard box

Digital print after etchings, edition of 5

Courtesy of the artist

Svendborger Gespräch, 2017

Film by Felix Martin Furtwängler and Uwe Gräfe

4:49 min

Courtesy of the artist

Using a verse from Brecht's *Reader for City Dwellers* (1927), Felix Martin Furtwängler explores the materiality of text and ideas in space. His collages are a commentary on a typology for living spaces developed by Benjamin and Brecht in the summer of 1931. The film *Svendborger Gespräch* (Svendborg Conversation) revolves around the mysterious, dark, and incomprehensible, while the series of postcards deals with people and locations concerned with Benjamin and Brecht.

Felix Martin Furtwängler is a painter and graphic artist. He lives in Berlin and Allgäu.

Alexander Kluge

Benjamin Brecht Container, 2017
Courtesy of the artist

“My generation has it easy because we stand on the shoulders of literary forefathers who lived through more violent times than we do (at least in our hemisphere). For me, Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht are rocks of reliability. Because their flashes of insight, thunderbolts and shocks still reverberate within me, they have become my guiding forces through the jungle of the 21st century. The Alexander Kluge Archive has contributed a *Benjamin Brecht Container* to the exhibition based on this perspective of thought and inclined toward these affinities.” (Alexander Kluge)

Alexander Kluge is a filmmaker, author, and member of the Akademie der Künste. He lives in Munich. The Akademie der Künste maintains his archive.

Mark Lammert

Bildnis H. M., 1993
Ballpoint pen, paper
Courtesy of the artist

Bildnis H. M., 1995
Ballpoint pen, paper
Courtesy of the artist

Bildnis H. M., 1996
Charcoal and silverpoint pen, paper
Courtesy of the artist

Portraits of a director and dramatist during rehearsals in a ballroom, on a trip to Verdun, and as a dead body. Mark Lammert's drawings recall Benjamin's death, by bringing out the paradox between the apparently cold gesture of registration and of restrained mourning. It is a chapter about death, as in Brecht's fragment *Fatzer*, which Benjamin highly esteemed.

“In a pathology situation, New Year's 1996, the light is planetary brightness. The line shivers in the cold of winter, not to be stilled by any level of alcohol. It records with the help of charcoal, which forms the colors, carmine red and Naples yellow. The paper is handcrafted and infinitely resistant.” (Mark Lammert)

Mark Lammert is a painter, illustrator, graphic artist, and set designer. He is a member of the Akademie der Künste and teaches at the University of the Arts, Berlin (UdK).

Thomas Martin / Irina Rastorgueva / Jakob Michael Birn

BRECHT-BENJAMIN-PASSAGE // BRECHT-BENJAMIN-ARCADE // ПАССАЖ БРЕХТА-БЕНЬЯМИНА, 2017
Installation
Courtesy of the artists

An exhibition within the exhibition, an *orbis pictus* of the kind that Benjamin loved. A Brecht-Benjamin train connects the years 1917 to 2017; one would like to imagine Benjamin inside it, on his way to see Asja Lacin in Moscow. In the center stands a model of a *One-Way Street*, which becomes a two-way street through his confrontation with Brecht.

“This connection is thematically extended into the present through an analysis of Brecht’s and Benjamin’s work and the dialogue between the two.” (Thomas Martin / Irina Rastorgueva / Jakob Michael Birn)

Thomas Martin is a dramatist, poet, and director. He lives in Berlin. Irina Rastorgueva is an artist and web designer. She lives in Moscow. Jakob Michael Birn is an architect and visual artist. He lives in Berlin.

Marcus Steinweg

Eine gewisse Schiefelage, 2017

Diagram of Terms, collage drawing

Courtesy of the artist

Thinking is “an eminent narcotic,” Benjamin knew. Marcus Steinweg tests the validity of the exhibition’s title, *Thinking in Extremes*, by collecting all the terms and ideas of the protagonists on a *Mindmap*.

“There is always a certain imbalance. The equation is not solved. Doesn’t that fact exemplify the truth of this friendship, insofar as both men were theoreticians of imbalance? Both oppose the consensus that suffused the bourgeois theatre and the thoughts of their time with stereotypes of false harmony.” (Marcus Steinweg)

Marcus Steinweg is an artist and philosopher. He teaches at the State Academy of Fine Arts Karlsruhe and lives in Karlsruhe and Berlin.

Steffen Thiemann

Mord im Fahrstuhlschacht, 2017

Woodcuts

Courtesy of the artist

In autumn 1933 Benjamin and Brecht wanted to write a detective novel. Steffen Thiemann made woodcuts of its plot, found in Brecht’s estate, under the title *Tatsachenreihe* (the series of events), adding Benjamin’s ideas as footnotes. *Murder in the Elevator Shaft* is a story of blackmail with a deadly ending.

“And so I followed the wooden path, cutting clues into planks that I thought I had read in the text, letter for letter (what a stupid idea), reinterpreted footnotes and discovered pictures that you can either like or just overlook, on the assumption that this might at least have pleased the perpetual track eraser and the tireless track reader – those two big B’s.” (Steffen Thiemann)

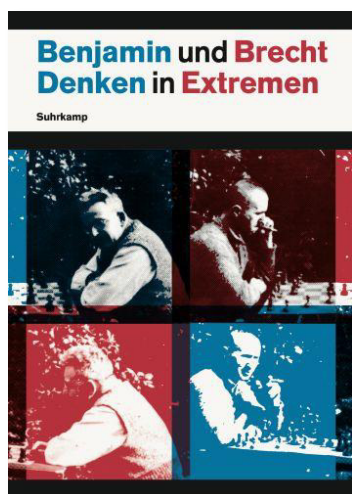
Steffen Thiemann is an author and graphic artist. He lives in Berlin and the Uckermark.

Publications

Benjamin and Brecht. Thinking in Extremes

Communication between the well-known Svendborg chess partners recalls the royal game: It employed tiring tactics, surprise attacks, retreat, strategic partnership, checkmate – and a new game. The essays and artistic commentary in the book turn the spotlight on an extraordinary constellation, in which Benjamin and Brecht appear as contemporaries in a century of extremes. They developed models for art, for politics, thought processes and for life itself; sometimes “extreme on a trial basis” and sometimes playful.

With texts by: Minou Arjomand, Zoe Beloff, Durs Grünbein, Barbara Hahn, Alexander Kluge, Bernd-Peter Lange, Burkhardt Lindner, Thomas Martin, Ursula Marx, Frank-M. Raddatz, Jan Philipp Reemtsma, Kristin Schulz, Marcus Steinweg, B.K.Tragelehn, Erdmut Wizisla as well as artistic contributions by Adam Broomberg, Oliver Chanarin, Carlfriedrich Claus, Edmund de Waal, Felix Martin Furtwängler, Mark Lammert, Jonas Maron and Steffen Thiemann.



Benjamin and Brecht. Thinking in Extremes

Erdmut Wizisla on behalf of the Akademie der Künste (ed.),
Akademie der Künste / Suhrkamp, Berlin 2017 , 284 pages, 122 images
ISBN 978-3-518-42083-6, € 32

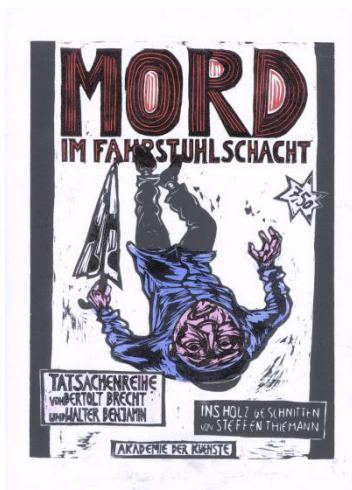
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Press departement
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030 740744-298
terhorst@suhrkamp.de

Murder in the Elevator Shaft. Plot of events by Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin. Graphic Novel by Steffen Thiemann (woodcuts)

Benjamin and Brecht decided to write a crime novel in autumn 1933. Steffen Thiemann has turned Brecht's plot into woodcuts and set down Benjamin's ideas as footnotes. It's a story about blackmail that ends fatally.

With texts by Steffen Thiemann and Erdmut Wizisla.



Murder in the Elevator Shaft. Plot of events by Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin. Graphic Novel by Steffen Thiemann (woodcuts)

Akademie der Künste, Berlin 2017, 32 pages, 30 images
ISBN 978-3-88331-223-1, € 7,50

Review copy:

please contact presse@adk.de

Events

Venue (unless otherwise noted):

Akademie der Künste, Hanseatenweg 10, 10557 Berlin

Wednesday, 25 October 2017, 7 pm, free admission

Opening

Welcoming address: Jeanine Meerapfel, President of the Akademie der Künste

Introduction to the exhibition: Erdmut Wizisla

Readings by Corinna Harfouch and Hanns Zischler, Music: Peter Thiessen

Wednesday, 8 November 2017, 7 pm, € 6/4

Heinle, Brecht, Baudelaire. Benjamin and the Poets

Lecture by Lorenz Jäger

Introduction and discussion: Mara Delius

Lorenz Jäger recently presented a much-discussed biography on Walter Benjamin. In the context of the exhibition *Benjamin and Brecht* he will speak about Benjamin's relationship to poets: his childhood friend Fritz Heinle, whose poems Benjamin esteemed highly, Bertolt Brecht, with whom he shared a productive friendship, and Charles Baudelaire, whose work he interpreted and translated. Does connection truly exist?

Saturday, 18 November 2017, 8 pm, € 12/8

"One can't learn *not* to learn."

Welcoming address: Jeanine Meerapfel

Alexander Kluge: From the Benjamin Brecht Container, Discussion partner: Kathrin Röggl

Members read Benjamin and Brecht

In conjunction with the exhibition Alexander Kluge is opening his *Benjamin Brecht Container* with texts, films, music and surprising ideas. Alongside Kluge, Akademie members Volker Braun, Friedrich Dieckmann, Durs Grünbein, Christoph Hein, Kerstin Hensel, Mark Lammert, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, and Kathrin Röggl read and comment on texts by Benjamin and Brecht. In addition, performative tours will take place under the direction of Kerstin Hensel with students from the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts.

Monday, 20 November 2017, 7 pm, € 6/4

In the Jungle of the Paper

Bertolt Brecht: *Notizbücher* [Notebooks], vol. 3

Book launch with Kathrin Röggl, Martin Kölbl and Peter Villwock

In collaboration with the Suhrkamp Verlag

Exhibition open 5–10 pm

Brecht's theatre play *Im Dickicht* is the main focus of his notebooks from 1921. Unlike his usual methods, he worked on this piece alone and on all scenes simultaneously. Walking along, back and forth, under the falling leaves of the chestnuts, he noted down word exchanges and shreds of sentences in a notebook and on loose sheets of paper. Like a mosaic, he arranged the pieces into a most unusual theatrical work. This new volume reconstructs the nearly ecstatic writing process and reveals an unknown side of Brecht, the dramatist.

Sunday, 26 November 2017, 7 pm, € 13/7

Passages

A concert with music by Arnold Schönberg, Hanns Eisler, John Cage and Mauricio Kagel.

Landesjugendensemble Neue Musik Berlin

This event was specially developed for the exhibition with the Landesjugendensemble Neue Musik Berlin, a regional youth ensemble founded in 2013. Making reference to Benjamin's principle of passages and to life in

the city, the arc of music spans from Schönberg and Eisler to works by Cage and Kagel in our times. In the youngest ensemble of the Landesmusikrat Berlin, school and college students, aged 15 to 24, perform under the direction of Gerhard Scherer and Jobst Liebrecht.

Tuesday, 5 December 2017, 7 pm, Akademie der Künste, Pariser Platz 4, 10117 Berlin, free admission

Brecht's Film Legacy at the Academy

Closing presentation of the digitalisation project with Martin Koerber, Anja-Christin Remmert, Jenny Schall, Johanna Schall, Bernd Stegemann, Maxi Zimmermann, Moderation: Cornelia Klauß

Nearly 50 films can be found in the Bertolt Brecht Archive – a unique collection from the period between the 1920s and 1970s – which contain private moments in his life, Brecht's production work and the reception of his work. In cooperation with the Deutsche Kinemathek, and funded by the LOTTO-Stiftung Berlin and the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the films have been preserved and digitized. The archive staff introduce the project, followed by a discussion on the presentday significance of the archival materials.

Tuesday, 12 December 2017, 7 pm, € 6/4

A Certain Imbalance. Slivers on Benjamin and Brecht

A lecture by Marcus Steinweg

Marcus Steinweg loves to take up a thought, to regard it as foreign, to hold it up to its own truth, to allow for doubts, and thus to find something new. Often it is the obvious, which might not occur to us otherwise.

Steinweg, a visual artist and philosopher, talks about Benjamin and Brecht and reads *Splitter. Haschisch*, *Tränenökonomie*, *Einverstandensein*, *Brauchbar?*, *Schach*, *Träumen mit Benjamin* and more.

Wednesday/Thursday, 13 / 14 December 2017, 7:30 pm, € 13/7,
combined ticket, exhibition open until midnight

Never-Ending Crisis

A theatrical experiment tracing the footsteps of Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin. Visitors are invited to a reenactment of a meeting, recorded in writing, about the journal *Crisis and Criticism*, that Benjamin and Brecht wanted to publish in 1931.

With Friederike Heller (direction), Peter Thiessen (music), Sabine Kohlstedt (scenery and costumes), Eva Löbau and Philipp Hochmair (performance). In collaboration with the Brechtfestival Augsburg

Saturday, 27 January 2018, 8 pm, € 13 /7, Exhibition open until midnight

Closing Event

Never-Ending Crisis. A theatrical experiment tracing the footsteps of Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin.

With Friederike Heller (direction), Peter Thiessen (music), Sabine Kohlstedt (stage and costume), Eva Löbau and Philipp Hochmair (performance) Music: Matthias Bauer (acoustic bass) / Floros Floridis (reeds)

Tours / Theatrical tours

Education programme / Guided Tours

For the exhibition "Benjamin and Brecht. Thinking in Extremes" we offer the following guiding tours and workshops:

Regular tours

- Tuesdays 5 pm, Sundays at noon
- 13 and 14 Dec, 9 pm, following "Never-Ending Crisis. A theatrical experiment" (exhibition open until midnight)
- Public holidays: tours on 31 Oct and 26 Dec at noon; exhibition closed on 24 and 31 Dec
- Tours in English language:
5 Nov at noon and 7 Jan at noon

€ 3 plus exhibition ticket (free admission for under 19s and Tuesdays from 3 pm), no reservations required

Theatrical tours with students from the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts

Director: Kerstin Hensel

- 12 and 26 Nov, noon, 3 Dec, 2 pm
- 18 Nov, 10.30 pm, on the occasion of the event "One can't learn not to learn. From the Benjamin Brecht Container"
- 27 Jan, 10 pm, during the closing event (exhibition open until midnight)

€ 3 plus exhibition ticket (free admission for under 19s and Tuesdays from 3 pm), no reservations required

Curator's Tours with Erdmut Wizisla

- Further information at www.adk.de/benjamin-brecht

€ 3 plus exhibition ticket, (no reservations required)

Special tours, as well as for school classes

- Special tours in English and French as well as guided tours for school classes, with prior reservation at kunstwelten@adk.de

Exhibition ticket plus 30 € (groups of students get free admission to the exhibition)

Tours for blind and visually-impaired visitors

- 10 Nov, 3 pm
- 4 Jan, 12.30 pm, public theatrical tour

Reduced exhibition ticket (6 €), accompanying person free admission, with prior reservations at kunstwelten@adk.de

Workshops for children and young adults

- Further information at www.adk.de/kunstwelten

The Bertolt Brecht Archive

The Bertolt Brecht Archive was founded by Helene Weigel on 1 December 1956. The Archive contains Brecht's extensive literary estate as a writer and director, as well as his personal papers. The holdings are also continuously being expanded with new collections. The total holdings comprise well over one million items.

The Bertolt Brecht Archive includes the departments for Manuscripts (literary papers and collections, manuscripts of works, prints, diaries and notebooks, working materials, letters, manuscripts by others, etc.) and the Archive Library comprising a special library on Brecht as well as Brecht's and Weigel's private libraries and the holdings of research materials (translations/treatments and a collection of prints).

The Photo Archive comprises photos of and by Brecht and Weigel, the Hainer Hill Archive, the Vera Tenschert Archive as well as the Photo Archive of Ruth Berlau and the Berliner Ensemble.

The archival materials also offer access to documents on the Berliner Ensemble, documentation (theatre, film, radio, events, exhibitions), Modellbücher ('model books') as well as audio and film documents.

In 1974, the Helene Weigel Archive was founded. The same location also houses the Isot Kilian Archive, Hans Dieter Hosalla Archive and Gerhard Seidel Archive.

Contact

Bertolt Brecht Archive
Chausseestraße 125
10115 Berlin / Germany
T +49(0)30-200 57-18 00
bertoltbrechtarchiv@adk.de

The Walter Benjamin Archive

The Walter Benjamin Archive was founded in 2004 as an institute of the Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur in the Akademie der Künste (Academy of Arts). The Archive preserves Walter Benjamin's Literary Estate as well as an extensive collection of his personal papers. In an ongoing process, the holdings are being expanded with a collection on the reception of Benjamin's works. The Archive also provides the basis for the Werke und Nachlaß Collected Works, the new critical edition of Benjamin's works edited by Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz, and published successively since 2008 by the Suhrkamp Press.

In addition, the Walter Benjamin Archive comprises the Florens Christian Rang Archive, the Archive Library, the Leo Löwenthal Library and the collections on Fritz Fränkel and Gisèle Freund. The holdings in the Theodor W. Adorno Archive in Frankfurt am Main can also be accessed through the Walter Benjamin Archive.

Contact

Walter Benjamin Archive
Luisenstraße 60
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T +49(0)30-200 57-40 56
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walterbenjaminarchiv@adk.de

Press Photos

Benjamin and Brecht. Thinking in Extremes

26 Oct 2017 — 28 Jan 2018

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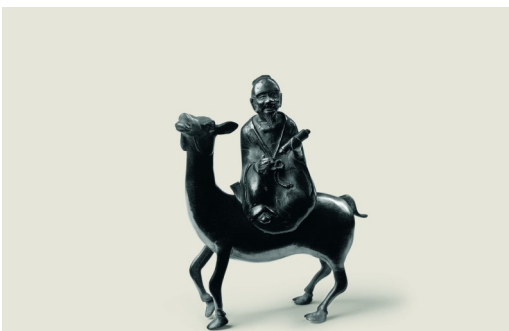
Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin playing chess,
1934, Skovsbostrand/Denmark
Photo: unknown
© Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Bertolt Brecht Archive



Walter Benjamin in front of Bertolt Brecht's house, summer 1938,
Svendborg/Denmark
Photo: Stefan Brecht
© Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Walter Benjamin Archive



Bertolt Brecht, around 1931
Photo: unknown
© Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Bertolt Brecht Archive



Daoist rider, figurine from the Brecht-Weigel-Memorial
Photo: Marwan Bassiouni
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Franz Kafka, *Der Prozess (The Trial)*, first edition, 1925, from Brecht's possession
 Photo: Marwan Bassiouni
 © Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Bertolt Brecht Archive



Chess board from Bertolt Brecht's possession
 Photo: Marwan Bassiouni
 © Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Bertolt Brecht Archive



Adam Broomberg/Oliver Chanarin
Ermattungstaktik, 2017
 Photo from a series of 32 photos of Bertolt Brecht's chess pieces
 Photo © Adam Broomberg/Oliver Chanarin



Woodcut from Steffen Thiemann's Graphic Novel *Mord im Fahrstuhlschacht* after Benjamin and Brecht, 2017
 © Steffen Thiemann