

Wolfgang Fritz Haug. *Philosophieren mit Brecht and Gramsci*. Berlin und Hamburg: Argument, 1996. 168 Seiten.¹

Wolfgang Fritz Haug's attempt to philosophize with Brecht and Gramsci provides one of the best discussions of Brecht's philosophy yet to appear. For Haug both Brecht and Gramsci philosophize from the practical needs of ordinary people and everyday life. Both develop a philosophy of praxis that relates theory to concrete problems and that elaborates theory according to the practical needs of the moment. Both reject academic philosophizing and abstraction in favour of concrete thought and both are original, underappreciated thinkers.

Previous studies of Brecht's thought interpreted his ideas in relation to Marx, Lenin, Lukács, Benjamin, and Korsch. Indeed monographs and scholarly studies have been devoted to Brecht's relation to all of these figures. As far as I know, no one had yet read Brecht in relation to Gramsci. The result establishes a surprising convergence but striking differences as well that Haug does not hesitate to elucidate. Brecht becomes in this reading someone who conformed to the Gramscian model of the "organic intellectual," producing art and thought that would serve the people and contribute to emancipatory praxis. He is to be read, in Haug's formulation, not so much as a "philosopher among the poets" (Gerd Irrlitz) but as "a poet among the philosophers" (103), developing a mode of practical and poetic philosophizing.

At stake is, as Haug stresses, the future of Marxist philosophy and Brecht's use-value for thought and practice today. The end of Soviet communism discredited many thinkers associated with Marxism, yet precisely the collapse of what is arguably a distorted form of Marxism in the Soviet bloc makes possible new readings of the Marxist classics, allows their insights and productivity for thought and action today without the ideological blinders of the past. Thus, although it seems like an inauspicious time to return to neo-Marxist classics, the time is also ripe for rethinking basic philosophical issues within the Marxian tradition that were often clouded over or thrust aside in the ideological battles of the Cold War. Both Gramsci and Brecht are appropriate candidates for such a rereading, since neither was a dogmatic or orthodox Marxist in the (discredited) tradition of Marxism-Leninism. Both were highly original thinkers who often stood in conflicted relations to the orthodoxy of the day. And while both tended to toe uneasily the party line of their respective parties, they continued to develop unorthodox, even heretical ideas.

Haug's project enables us to see more clearly than before the specific lines of Brecht's Marxism by means of an enlightening dialogue with Gramsci. He also deploys, among others, Adorno, Bloch, Benjamin, the neglected, maverick philosopher Günther Anders (109ff), and the moral philosopher Ernst Tugendhat (129ff) to highlight the specificity of Brecht's contributions. The lively, engaging book is well-written and convincingly argued, and while not pedantic, it provides a systematic overview of Brecht's positions on epistemology, social philosophy, ethics, and politics. The opening chapters make clear Haug's claim that Brecht is in no way a conventional philosopher who develops a metaphysical philosophy or writes systematic academic prose. Brecht thought in aphorisms or in literary forms like the *Messingkauf Dialogues*, or the *Me-Ti: Book of Changes*, both of which Haug draws on, as well as aphorisms from the

¹ From: *the brecht yearbook* 22, 1997, pp. 494-96.

Schriften and other publications. In an April 1948 letter to his Marxist teacher Karl Korsch, Brecht describes his preferred form of philosophizing:

Manchmal wünschte ich, Sie hielten ein Journal mit vielen Eintragungen in der Baconischen Form über all die Gegenstände, die Sie gerade interessieren, unmethodisch im ganzen, ich meine antisystemisch. Solche wissenschaftlichen Aphorismen könnte man einzeln, in der oder jener Zusammenstellung...verwerten, sie wären alle fertig zu jeder Zeit; anstatt einen davon umzubauen, könnten Sie einen neuen bauen usw. - Es wäre sozusagen epische Wissenschaft! (1 1)

For Haug this practical, experimental mode of thinking is characteristic for Brecht and related to Gramsci's philosophy of praxis, which is also materialist, scientific, and oriented toward concrete problems of everyday life.

One of the more surprising connections Haug suggests, however, is with the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, especially with his ordinary language philosophy. For instance, the following passage by Brecht could have been inspired by Wittgenstein: "Die Philosophie sollte sich mehr mit den Reden der Leute als mit den Reden der Philosophen beschäftigen" (16). Haug provides copious examples of Brecht's clever analysis and use of language to demonstrate that his philosophy of praxis is bound up with critical analysis and reconstruction of language, bringing linguistic critique into the area of ideology critique. Obviously this connection is linked in turn with Brecht's aesthetic activity, which is concerned with uses of language and reconstructing aesthetic forms and genres for practical and political purposes. This linguistic focus also provides new perspectives for interpreting Brecht's famous materialism, his critique of objectivism, and his practical epistemology. In Haug's formulation "Erkenntnistheorie muß vor allem Sprachkritik sein" (65ff), and in a detailed philosophical *Auseinandersetzung* between Wittgenstein, Gramsci, and Brecht he shows how Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy holds that "the meaning of a word is its use" and that his conceptions of a philosophical grammar can be used to develop a materialist philosophy of praxis of the sort desired by Brecht and Gramsci.

The final two chapters of the study link Brecht and Gramsci to ethical philosophy and "the ethics of politics." As noted, Haug draws on Günther Anders and Ernst Tugendhat to develop Brecht's ideas on moral and political philosophy. The result of his enterprise is to situate Brecht in the currents of Western philosophy devoted to search for the good life and the good society. Rejecting the predominantly theoretical orientation of classical philosophy, to philosophize with Brecht and Gramsci for Haug "bewegt sich in unserem geschichtlichen Werktag and ist wesentlich experimentelles Denken" (155). A philosophy of practice emerges that is materialist, immanent (i.e., a "Denken der Diesseitigkeit"), ethical, and political, oriented toward the needs and problems of human beings. It is Haug's merit to show how Brecht and Gramsci can contribute to developing a Marxist philosophy of praxis and to show that Brecht's work continues to be of value for contemporary theory, as well as aesthetic practice.

My only critique of Haug's excellent book is the neglect of Brecht's aesthetic theory and artistic oeuvre. Haug's theoretical focus succeeds in elucidating Brecht's philosophical positions and defending them against alternative idealist or dogmatic materialist conceptions. Yet with some exceptions he fails to show how Brecht's ideas are operative in his aesthetic practice as well. The project of (re)thinking Brecht's artistic works in relation to his philosophical thought thus remains a challenge for Brecht scholarship today.²

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² In the 2nd edition (2006) two chapters on aesthetics have been added.