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1 In her study *The Transnational World of the Cominternians*, Brigitte Studer notes that many cultural workers, writers, and activists who worked to transfer the energies of the powerful October Revolution to their local communities were confronted with the fact that "[b]efore the 'New Man' could be brought into being, one had to work with the old" (Studer 2015: 24). In this regard, Austro-Marxists knew Lenin's lesson: "We cannot wait twenty years until we have trained pure, communist experts, until we have trained the first generation of Communists without blemish and without reproach" (Lenin 1972: 70, 71; qtd. in Kohlmann 2019: 1058). However, without a proletarian dictatorship in sight, or without the motivating power to establish one, they undertook to work on the New Man by gradually changing the Old. The struggle against racial, gender, and class hatred was not only on the agenda of workers' libraries and party-affiliated journals and programs, but was also recognized by socialist and communist writers such as Jura Soyfer and Hermynia zur Mühlen, as well as the non-socialist Hugo Bettauer. Despite the differences between them, both political and aesthetic, these authors worked in line with Lunacharsky's motto: "If the revolution can give the soul to art, then art can become the mouth of the revolution."[1] (Lunatscharski 1974: 26) The only problem is that there was no revolution in Austria.

2 Indeed, and despite the emphatic intention to emancipate the masses by educating and liberating them aesthetically and psychologically, the cultural politics of Red Vienna largely failed to change the value systems on which inherited educational processes and cultural relations were based. This is why Austro-Marxism in general and its leader Otto Bauer in particular were often criticized as pioneers of a "petty-bourgeois" and "degenerate social democracy" (Fischer 2017: 632; see Gruber 1991: 83–87). As critics emphasize, since revolutionary culture was mostly only transferred to them and not developed and (co-)created by them, the masses were adapted to the inherited ideals of civilized humanity instead of creating new ideals and being strengthened by them in return. That is to say, the Austro-Marxist theatrical and general political-literary scene was dominated not only by Shakespeare and Ibsen, but also by Strindberg and Schnitzler, even in theaters that were under the auspices of progressive socialist organizations such as the 'Sozialdemokratische Kunststelle' ('Social Democratic Art Agency,' official title 'Kunststelle der sozialistischen Arbeit' / Art Agency of Social Democratic Labor). But simultaneously, and certainly more extensively, it was dominated by "kitsch and pulp fiction" (Pfoser 1980: 126, 127).

3 In the famous essay 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' from 1939, a sweeping yet accurate account of 20th-century mass culture, Clement Greenberg examined kitsch as the "gigantic apparition" of "popular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc., etc." (Greenberg 1989: 9). Kitsch gripped consumers by constantly providing them with easily accessible and quickly digestible *ersatz* products. In the capitalist world, the uneducated and politically underserved masses were literally inundated with commodity culture, and Greenberg argued that this would not change "as long as the problems of production have not been solved in a socialist sense" (ibid.: 18). But he also showed that these problems had not been solved even in the world's only revolutionary state, at least not to the extent that would be relevant to the masses. When speaking of mass cultural production in the Soviet Union, Greenberg examined the

aesthetic habits and needs of peasants and concluded that mass cultural production remained extremely popular there as well. Greenberg's conclusions are all the more valid when one considers the political-literary scenes where the revolution was only halfway complete: throughout the 1920s, the Viennese cultural authorities, and workers' libraries in particular, made immense efforts to change the reading habits of readers, who were fond of their Karl Mays and Ludwig Ganghofers, of adventure and crime, of patriotic and escapist literature – altogether what Josef Luitpold Stern categorized as "of inferior quality and deserving of removal" (qtd. in Pfoser 1980: 132). In such an environment, already the title of Fischer's revolutionary play *Lenin* was supposed to mark a caesura.

1. *Lenin*

> Irgendwo hab ich gelesen – die Revolution frißt ihre eigenen Kinder.
>
> I read somewhere – the revolution devours its own children.
> (Ernst Fischer, *Der große Verrat*)

4 This expectation is visible in the response by David Josef Bach to the first performance of Fischer's *Lenin* in 1928. Art director of the 'Sozialdemokratische Kunststelle,' Bach emphatically commented that, "It is an almost self-evident conclusion that a stage like the 'Schauspiele im Carltheater' ['Plays in the Carltheater'], which we can programmatically influence, include a drama about socialism, a new folk play, and most definitely a socialist one. The 'Plays in the Carltheater' opened with the socialist work of a socialist poet, with 'Lenin' by Ernst Fischer." (Bach 1929: 287) Fischer began work on this play in Graz in 1924 (see Fischer 2017: 340; Egyptien 2016: 387), but he revised it after moving to Vienna in 1927, where he came by invitation of the editorial office of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the official daily newspaper of the Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Österreichs (SDAPÖ, Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria). It was Ernst Toller who introduced him to the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, Otto Bauer, and Otto Bauer proposed to David Joseph Bach to stage Fischer's revolutionary play. Directed by Hans Abrell and performed at the short-lived Carltheater, which was founded and run by Bach's 'Sozialdemokratische Kunststelle,' the play was staged on 26 September 1928. The audience was presented with a spectacular theatrical event that brought the Soviet Bolshevik leader into the heart of Central European social democracy. By foregrounding the revolutionary dilemmas of the post-1917 era, *Lenin* was actually a lesson in recent Soviet history, but also a philosophical essay on the complexity of revolution.

5 In 1925, while Fischer was still artistic director of the Graz association 'Arbeiterbühne' (Proletarian Stage) and editor of the journal *Arbeiterwille*, he invited Helmut Ebbs (see Fischer 2017: 205) to perform Brecht's early play *Trommeln in der Nacht* (*Drums in the Night*, 1919/1922). Brecht himself later criticized this play for its vacillation and general rejection of revolution (see ibid.: 206), but Fischer appreciated it because it dealt with the fundamental question of individual survival in a period of time torn apart by war, misery, and social unrest (see Fischer 1925, qtd. in Rabinbach 1975: 177). Moreover, he considered it an example of the "Realpolitik" (ibid.) of the time, which related less to state politics than to the almost nonexistent possibilities for individual action.[2] In 'Entscheidung' ('Decision'), a chapter of his memoirs *Erinnerungen und Reflexionen* (*Memories and Reflections*, 1969/2017), Fischer recalls the Brecht performance in Graz with a question that is intentionally left unanswered: "What happened there in Moscow, was it the future, the answer, not only the political answer of socialism, but the whole, the other, the renewal from the ground of our heart?" (Fischer 2017: 207)

6 In postwar Austria, Fischer used the theater as a vehicle for achieving this renewal. His goal was to activate the spectators, and this was recognized by critics: "Ernst Fischer's work not only wants to play revolution, it wants to bring about a revolution!" (Qtd. in Egyptien 2016: 381) Yet he was aware that the theater was an extremely limited arena for intervention because it functioned as a bourgeois institution (see Fischer 1927). He tried to circumvent this deadlock and found the solution in the speaking chorus: "It is my conviction [...] that only the speaking chorus can express the masses." (Fischer 1928: 10) Traditionally an element of Greek drama, the speaking chorus was rediscovered in the early 20th century and revived by Ernst Toller, Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, and many others. In the political theater of the era, it played the important role of representing the masses, bringing them into the theater, and thus "enhancing the community-building effect" (Rosenfeld 1926: 85, qtd. in Egyptien 2018; see Rabinbach 1975: 178; Salten 1928). When Fischer used it in his early play *Der ewige Rebell* (*The eternal rebel*, 1925), however, he also drew on the tradition of the mystical or passion play (the subtitle is *Ein proletarisches Passionsspiel*/A *proletarian passion play*), elements of which were discernable in *Lenin*. Indeed, what *Der ewige Rebell* shared with *Lenin* is this dimension of heroic, individualistic, and moreover religious mythopoiesis.

Figure 1. Poster for the premiere of *Lenin* as the opening performance of the reopened Carltheater in Praterstraße 31, then under the management of the 'Sozialdemokratische Kunststelle,' 126 x 95 cm. Available online at https://digital.onb.ac.at/rep/osd/?1130A6A3, accessed February 18, 2022.

7 The plot is simple. The play begins with peace negotiations between three characters: A German general, Karl Radek, and Leon Trotsky. Their meeting leads to the famous-infamous Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of 3 March 1918, ending Russia's participation in World War I. The historical conflict between Lenin and Trotsky is condensed in this play as a confrontation between Lenin's pragmatic objectivity and Trotsky's political romanticism, or relentless realism and complacent pose. Although Trotsky's point of view is accepted by the majority of the protagonists, and Lenin's own insistence on accepting Germany's peace terms is portrayed as a betrayal of the revolution, the play is written with unending admiration for Lenin and as a monument to the sometimes unsavory truth of the revolution. The plot culminates in the assassination of Lenin and the exclamation, "Lenin is dead, long live the Revolution!" (Fischer 2016: 267). [3]

8 In the first scene of the play, a basic friend-foe relationship is established between the German general and the defeated Red Army with Leon Trotsky as its commander-in-chief. This defines the axis around which the central conflict, that between Lenin and Trotsky, is about to revolve. Trotsky refuses to recognize the harsh conditions set by the General. Animated by the idea of world revolution, he is convinced that he also has the German proletariat on his side. Assuming the pose of the victor, Trotsky refuses to sign the peace treaty, and is about to declare the war over and the army deposed. Both the German general and Lenin regard Trotsky's actions as "wanton" (ibid.: 255). Lenin claims that Trotsky is putting the revolution at risk for the sake of a "pose" (ibid.: 256). He challenges his revolutionary grandeur by exclaiming, "Woe to the revolution if it flirts with the specter of heroism!" (Ibid.: 257) In his view, the sense of reality should surpass the partly comic, partly operatic drives of the revolutionaries.

9 For a contemporary reader, it may be tempting to interpret this conflict on the revolutionary, Bolshevik left as reflecting the basic friend-foe binary between Russians and Germans – an analysis which would be consistent with Carl Schmitt's contemporary diagnosis of the conflictual nature of politics.[4] The Schmittian framework would, however, overlook the fact that the political confrontation on the revolutionary side is a clash between friends, that is, between socialist comrades committed to the emancipation of the proletariat. This conflict commonly pivoted around opposing views on the exact meaning of 'revolution'. Those who were active on the cultural and political left often wavered between, on the one hand, their devotion to freedom and on the other, political requirements that led to various forms of coercion: between the cultural project of a New Man and the need for a political and economic overhaul of the system; between a revolution of the mind and violent upheaval; in short, between *evolution* and *revolution*. Rosa Luxemburg's pre-revolutionary critique of Eduard Bernstein's evolutionary socialism was the first episode in a series of manifold debates, refutations, and perilous ostracisms that were undertaken and experienced by the activists of the international left. In what followed, these clashes were theoretically grasped in the form of a *controversy between revolution and evolution*. Arising at the turn of the century, this *r/evolutionary controversy* culminated around 1928, a year that symbolically began with the onset of the Cultural Revolution in the Soviet Union (in the spring of 1928) and ended with the founding of the BPRS (Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller / Association of Proletarian-Revolutionary Authors) in Germany (est. on 19 Oct. 1928). Significantly, this was also the year of Fischer's (and Josef David Bach's own) attempt to revolutionize the theater.

10 In the 1920s, the r/evolutionary conflict was triggered by the parting of Lenin and Trotsky, which was in fact paralleled by the already ingrained animosity between revolutionary communists and social democrats (evolutionaries, reformists). If the latter were attacked by their socialist comrades from the more radical, revolutionary left as "the main social pillar of the bourgeoisie" (Fischer 2017: 539) and later also as "social fascists" (ibid.: 540), by way of the simple equation 'if you're not with us, you're against us,' the label 'Trotsky' and 'Trotskyist' became similarly synonymous for counterrevolutionary forces. Yet this still does not make the conflict between Bolshevik revolutionaries on the one side and social democrats and Trotskyists on the other a friend-foe-constellation – precisely for the reason that all these currents shared the same ideological outset (socialism) but differed 'only' in regard to the steps needed to accomplish its supreme goal, world revolution. Throughout these most intricate developments in the second half of the 1920s, Fischer noticed the degeneration of the Soviet political climate toward an "incorrigible orthodoxy" (ibid.: 540) – yet he learned to submit to this orthodoxy:

> Die Sowjetunion ist, so gut oder schlecht sie sein mag, das einzige Land des Sozialismus, jeder Schlag gegen sie ein Schlag gegen den Sozialismus. Der Repräsentant der Sowjetunion ist Stalin, jeder Angriff auf ihn ein Angriff auf die Sowjetunion. (Ibid.: 550–551)
>
> The Soviet Union, be it good or bad, is the only country of socialism, and any blow to it is a blow to socialism. The representative of the Soviet Union is Stalin, and any attack on him is an attack on the Soviet Union. That was simple, terribly simple, the suppression of all critical reason, but at the same time a plus in power.

11 To become orthodox, Fischer struggled to confront his own weaknesses, not so much for social democracy, but rather for revolutionary romanticism and anarchism – which at that time already were outlawed as 'Trotskyism' and became the chiffre, the "generic term," for any form of "deviation" (Studer 2015: 148). In *Erinnerungen und Reflexionen*, Fischer diagnosed this inner struggle as a "sincere longing to overcome the bohemian in me, the anarchist, the selfish intellectual, and to surrender myself unreservedly to a cause I affirmed, to belong in unconditional discipline to a community of those who struggle" (Fischer 2017: 361). The code name for this longing was 'Lenin': Lenin required the abandonment of both Trotsky's permanent revolution and the humanism of Otto Bauer, whose capitulation to the proto-fascist Austrian chancellor Ignaz Seipel soon became glaring. In his retrospective critique of Bauer, Fischer posed a question that is central not only to his *Lenin* but also to Brecht's *Die Maßnahme* (*The Measures Taken*):

> Sind Humanismus und Revolution vereinbar? Sind nicht moralische Bedenken das Hemmnis jeder Tat, und müssen nicht die Männer vom Typus Seipel siegen, wenn auf der anderen Seite Hamlet ihnen gegenübersteht? Ist nicht für einen Revolutionär die Härte Seipels erforderlich – und die Humanität, deren Repräsentant Otto Bauer war, Humanität, die den Schauder vor der Gewalt überwindet, Humanität, die zu schießen wagt? Gibt es das? Kann es das geben?
> Lenin –?
> War er die Antwort –? (Fischer 2017: 338)
>
> Are humanism and revolution compatible? Aren't moral scruples an obstacle to every action, and mustn't men of the Seipel type win when it is Hamlet who is on the other side? Isn't it that Seipel's toughness is necessary for a revolutionary – together with that humanity which Otto Bauer represented, but humanity which overcomes the shudder of violence, humanity which dares to shoot? Does that exist? Is it possible?
> Lenin –?
> Was he the answer –?

12 In *Lenin*, the r/evolutionary controversy stages itself as a confrontation of political romanticism and realism, of "romanticism" and "burning objectivity" (Fischer 2016: 258), "romantic opera" and "reality" (ibid.: 261). Lenin's own *Realpolitik*, so much different than the social democratic *Realpolitik* in non-revolutionary times, resulted from the system of dispositions typical of the Russian revolutionary regime – a regime that fought not only internal (Tsarist reaction, Social Revolutionary Party) but also external enemies (Central Powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Empire, etc.). In such an environment, a revolution could not be carried out as if under clean laboratory conditions. In contrast to what became the leading slogan of the 1968 revolt 50 years later – 'Be realistic – demand the impossible!' – Lenin attacks Trotsky's revolutionary romanticism. When he speaks on behalf of the starving and suffering people, and especially the peasants fighting in the war, his voice is echoed by the groans and moans of the speaking chorus:

Chorus: Seele, weinende Seele, flieg!
Immer noch Krieg, immer noch Krieg!
[…]
Das Volk verflucht den Krieg!
Das Volk will Frieden! Frieden! Frieden! (Ibid.: 262–263)

Chorus: Soul, crying soul, fly!
We're still at war, still at war!
[…]
The people curse the war!
The people want peace! Peace! Peace!

13 The basic idea of Lenin's indictment of Trotsky is that the revolution must be constantly reevaluated according to the given political and historical circumstances. Jameson's appeal "Always historicize!" can be rephrased in this respect as 'Always contextualize!': "Romantics die for a great cause, men live for it! We need not preserve as pure a theory as possible; we must take into account the real conditions that the revolution is facing." (Ibid.: 261) In support of these 'counterrevolutionary' demands, Lenin reminds comrades Lunatscharsky, Radek, Ryasanow, Dybenko, Kamenew, and Leonid – all of whom agree with Trotsky – of the fact that the Russian peasant deserts from the front and is unable to "accomplish the impossible" (ibid.: 259), which the revolutionaries (in this case Kamenew) continue to insist upon.

14 There is a crucial difference between Brecht's and Fischer's ways of teaching revolutionary realism. Whereas Brecht's learning plays formulate the r/evolutionary dilemma not as a lesson but as a question tailored to discussion that enables concrete theatrical and political experiences through conceptually open processes of negotiation and experimentation, Fischer's own theatrical program of a "deepening of collectivity" (Müller 2020: 270) remains bound by the conventional rules of aesthetic education, especially by the inherited gap between poetic representation of politics and its material incorporation on the part of the audience. This opens up the central performative problem of this play. The speaking chorus, with which Fischer wants to "express the masses" (Fischer 1928: 10), exhausts itself in the symbolic representation of the masses. "Give us shoes, give us bread, / Take the famine away from us, / Lenin!" (Fischer 1927: 264): By echoing the rhythm and sighs of the common people, the collective speech of the chorus authorizes Lenin's position, which makes the role of the collective reduced to supporting the main heroic character of the play. "With heavy steps / Through the streets, / So we march, dark masses, / And carry Lenin's flag with us!" (Ibid.: 271): The masses thus neither act for themselves nor illustrate the "formation of the new, proletarian collective subject" (Müller 2020: 270), but rather underscore *Lenin*'s revolutionary lesson – a lesson to be learned by an audience accustomed to watch and observe rather than participate and co-create. Seen in this light, *Lenin* emerges as a perfect example of Sabine Müller's claim that the "literature of the speaking chorus movement assists politics in a highly precarious way" (ibid.: 284) because the preferred "mode of a politics of aesthetic does not differ from the representative regime of condemned bourgeois stage aesthetics" (ibid.: 283).[5]

15 *Lenin*'s revolutionary lesson is condensed in the exclamation of Lenin's assassin, "Lenin is dead, long live the Revolution!" (Fischer 2016: 267) This formula, actually a paraphrase of the French monarchical slogan 'The king is dead, long live the king,' marks a historical caesura in the pace of revolutionary progress. It does not read 'Lenin is dead, long live Lenin!' nor 'The Revolution is dead, long live the Revolution!', but suggests both an identity of Lenin and Revolution and, simultaneously, their disidentification. For the

revolution to continue (i.e. for the new revolution to begin), the old revolution must die. However, unlike the old monarchical principle, which similarly dictates that monarchy is always more than its embodiment in the body of a single king, the revolutionary dialectic demands constant change. Since the revolution can achieve its own fulfilment only by devouring the revolutionaries as its own children, those who started the social turmoil must die for it to continue. If Lenin is the Revolution, he must die while remaining alive as a revolutionary specter. But in *Lenin* there is already more to this formula. Namely, this dialectical principle is not a transparent, clear instruction on how to accomplish the revolution. Rather, it is an intuitive drive that directs the revolutionary process into a structurally uncertain future, even into its own self-destruction. After the deed is done and Lenin is murdered, Radek concludes, "Now we all know that *he* was the Revolution." (Ibid.: 268, emphasis in original) Radek's words not only express the momentous realization that Lenin's assassination was a failure – as necessary as it was – but already foreshadow the future strategy of sanctifying Lenin's name as a label to unite and keep the masses under control. At this point, the threshold of *anagnorisis* is reached – a moment of tragic insight that lays the foundation for future governmental cynicism. Henceforth, to consolidate their power, Lenin's successors are determined to sanctify his biological body. Thus Lenin lives on in the "apparatus he created" (ibid.)

16 For spectators who had background knowledge about the events of 1917/1918, this conversational play must have functioned as an aesthetic calibration of the most intricate political and philosophical questions. At the same time, it contained a call to action, self-conquest, and self-discipline, summed up by Fischer himself as follows: "One must not be like Leonid, but do one's duty in the spirit of Lenin's teaching, obey the demands of world history, be tough and unwavering, and grasp reality with one's hands in order to change it." (Fischer 2017: 361) For those, however, who were accustomed to popular, seductive, and lulling cultural products, who needed tantalizing spectacles, this "must" certainly was not very appealing. Just as "Eddie Guest and the Indian Love Lyrics are more poetic than T. S. Eliot and Shakespeare" (Greenberg 1989: 15), so were the popular Karl Mays and Ludwig Ganghofers more enticing than the passionate revolutionaries and realist reporters Fischer and Soyfer. Seen in this light, *Lenin* offers the contemporary reader the most where it falls short of what it intended to achieve – a lesson in revolutionary action. The reason is that this lesson was burdened, as Fischer himself admitted to being, with revolutionary dilemmas. As such, the play gives an account of the *Realpolitik* of theater in non-revolutionary places and times.

17 In his conversations with comrades and world revolutionaries, Lenin contrasts Trotsky's "pleasure principle" (Fischer 2017: 360) with the revolutionary "reality principle" (ibid.: 350). In a retrospective critique of the play, Fischer similarly summed up the play as being "about the gap between ends and means, idea and realization, vision and reality" (ibid.): "It was a textbook against me, [...] for whom revolution is not a means to an end, but an end in itself, a permanent shock, purification, liberation, an experience of human transcendence, a religion." (Ibid.: 351) He also acknowledged that the play had a "failed form" and that it was a "failed attempt" (ibid.: 349), whereupon he asked the rhetorical question, "Nur das Stück?" – Is it only the play that failed? Fischer added that his entire generation was driven by "the dream of a never-ending erotic union with an idea and the masses seized by it, a 'permanent revolution'" (ibid.: 360). This permanent revolution was "not so much a social upheaval as an individual and common experience" (ibid.). The Social Democratic apparatus in Vienna cared intensely about this experience, yet with only limited success in achieving a comprehensive social transformation. Accordingly, despite its sometimes collectivist expression – especially in the theater – revolutionary enthusiasm was still clothed in a bourgeois worldview

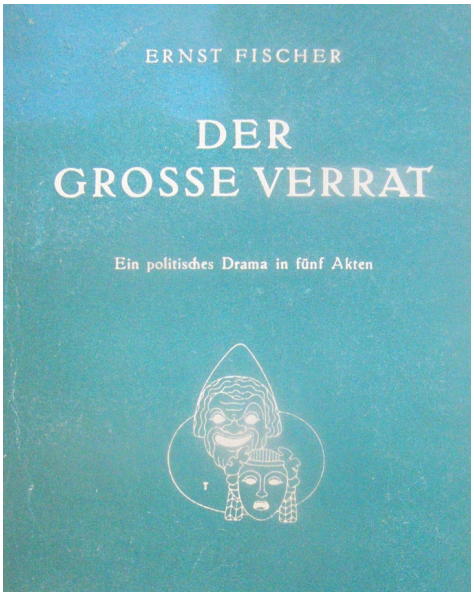
and bourgeois forms: The pressing issues of the day – "the drama of the time, big city, workers' movement, revolution" – were expressed "through the formal elements of the bourgeois-individualist play" (Egyptien 2018).

2. *Der große Verrat*

18 The paradoxical structure of Leonid's exclamation "Lenin is dead, long live the Revolution!" (Fischer 2016: 267) can be reformulated by Goethe's famous phrase uttered by Mephisto: Fischer's Lenin acts as 'a part of that force which, always willing good, always produces evil.'[6] Fischer himself also occasionally played such an ambiguous role: Before becoming one of the main representatives of the Eurocommunist movement – an independent brand of communism that in the Cold-War era sought a third way between the authoritarian socialist East and the hegemonic capitalist West (see Hoffrogge 2012: esp. 250) – he sided with the authoritarian East over an issue which became one of the catalysts of Eurocommunism: Tito's 1948 break with Stalin. The play *Der große Verrat* (*The Great Treason*) – "an excellent work, by the way" (Trilse-Finkelstein 2020) – is a document of Fischer's own "incorrigible orthodoxy" (Fischer 2017: 540), which he later renounced, saying, "I shudder at what I then became" (ibid.: 537).

19 Unlike *Lenin*, which was the author's project to overcome "the bohemian in me, the anarchist, the selfish intellectual" (ibid.: 361) and to adopt the "unconditional discipline [...] of those who struggle" (ibid.), *Der große Verrat* already speaks with the voice of that "apparatus" (Fischer 2016: 268) which was created by Lenin but was soon deformed by those who denied his legacy. It settles accounts with the heretics, such as Fischer himself once was. If *Lenin* was committed to the philosophically complex, dialectical nature of the revolution, *Der große Verrat* was written from the standpoint of a "comfortably Manichaen view of the world" (McClain 1977: 565), which means that Fischer made an unmistakable distinction between friends and foes, i. e. orthodoxy and "heretics" ("Ketzer," Fischer 1968). The main heretic – Pablo Malabranca (in reality Josip Broz Tito) – is presented as an (anti-)hero of anti-Soviet, pro-imperialist secessionism.[7]

Figure 2. Cover page of the first and only edition of *Der große Verrat* (1950).



20 The piece operates with a plethora of Cold-War binaries. The central binary – that of the West vs. the East – is presented as a rigid gendered dichotomy of man vs. woman, human vs. animal, civilization vs. nature, "freedom or collectivism" (Fischer 1950: 17). Capitalism, which promotes the wild, supposedly animal instincts in humans, is embodied by the American journalist Annabell Stimpson. Her biased, imperial view of foreign cultures and customs is complemented by a masochistic need for her own subjugation. Her wild feminine passions are best appeased by the authoritarian masculinity of the East. Indeed, Annabell is both repelled and fascinated by the imperious figure of Pablo Malabranca, the head of a satellite state of the Soviet Union who is on his way to leave that alliance and strengthen his country's international autonomy. Robin Leslie, a British major in charge of negotiating a state loan with Malabranca, praises Malabranca's son Diego for his harsh treatment of Annabell: "The colder you are, the wilder Annabell becomes. This free American woman needs a dictatorship." (Ibid.: 19) Yet not only Annabell, but all American and British characters are driven by material interests and low passions that make them unreceptive to the noble socialist ideals of immediate postwar reconstruction. Their misunderstanding of Eastern customs is profound, and their colonial exoticization of all that is foreign to them is obtuse: When Annabell says with discomfort, "I do not like men kissing," the American attaché declares, "That's the East." (Ibid.: 7) In contrast to the West, whose "strength is immorality, shiny, seductive, attractive immorality" (ibid.: 8), the socialist East is portrayed as optimistic, healthy, and forward-looking. The contrast is perhaps best illustrated by an exchange between Annabell and Malabranca's daughter Marina:

> *Marina:* Wenn Sie unser Land wirklich verstehen wollen – sprechen Sie mit den Studentinnen meiner Arbeitsbrigade, mit den jungen Arbeiterinnen und Bäuerinnen. Wir bauen eine Eisenbahn.
> *Annabell:* Eisenbahnen interessieren mich nicht.
> *Marina:* Ich weiß nicht, was Sie interessiert. Für uns ist die Eisenbahn das Interessanteste in der Welt. Das ist keine Arbeit wie bei euch, das ist… ein Volkslied ist das, eine wunderbare Ballade. So wie bei uns wurde noch nie gebaut – außer in der Sowjetunion. Das sind neue Menschen, wissen Sie.
> *Annabell:* Der neue Mensch ist genauso dumm und so schlecht wie der alte. Mensch bleibt Mensch. (Ibid.: 11)

> *Marina:* If you really want to understand our country – talk to the students in my work brigade, to the young workers and peasant women. We're building a railway.
> *Annabell:* I have no interest in trains.
> *Marina:* I don't know what interests you. For us, the railway is the most interesting thing in the world. It's not work like yours, it's… it's a folk song, a wonderful ballad. It has never been constructed the way we construct – except in the Soviet Union. These are new men, you know.
> *Annabell:* The new man is just as stupid and as bad as the old one. Man stays man.

21 "Mensch bleibt Mensch" is a response to the idea of the New Man born of revolution. What Annabell expresses here is a disillusioned anthropological constant of man as a species that cannot be changed by politics. Her words, startlingly reminiscent of Brecht's phrase "Mann ist Mann" that is aptly translated into English as "man equals man" (Brecht 1979), underscore the economic interchangeability and thus the only relative value of human beings, their names, points of view, and identities. In fact, Annabell generalizes Brecht's economic maxim into an anthropological principle that governs the world regardless of the political regime and ideology in power: Capitalism rules everything and everyone, and there is no human being beyond capitalism. This view inevitably makes revolution an irretrievably futile, naïve

endeavor. Annabell's attitude is echoed in the conversation between Diego and Robin at one of the play's waypoints. Not long before the following lines, Diego finds his way back to socialist patriotism and shortly thereafter shoots his interlocutor Robin:

> *Diego:* Glaubst du an irgend etwas?
> *Robin:* Vielleicht. Sagen wir – an die Sterne. An den Wert einer guten Rasse. An die Dummheit der Menschen. Daran glaube ich wirklich. (Fischer 1950: 45)

> *Diego:* Is there anything you believe in?
> *Robin:* Perhaps. Let's say – I believe in the stars. In the value of a good race. In the stupidity of people. This is something I really believe in.

22 "Man stays man": human resistance to change is admitted by Soviet citizen Sergei Koslow, but under significantly different premises. Koslow admits, "It is terribly difficult to create a new world. Take a plant, a piece of nature without consciousness. If you change it, make something new out of it, it always wants to return to the old form. And that's just a plant." (Ibid.: 17) Koslow does not say this, however, to prove Leslie's belief in the "stupidity of people" (ibid.: 45). Rather – as if quoting Otto Bauer's slogan that one should "not hit heads, but [...] win minds" (Bauer 1923: 282) – he signals the need to win and change people's minds. Koslow continues, "People have a consciousness. You have nationalized companies, turned the economy upside down, but you have not turned bourgeois consciousness upside down. And now it's breaking through, (*to Diego*) not only in your case." (Fischer 1950: 18)

23 From the point of view of capitalist cynicism, even the most ardent socialist has a corrupt nature, for the simple reason that he is a human being. This is the logic behind the visit that the representatives of the imperialist Western world pay to the socialist and irrevocably barbaric East. The trick, in fact, is that Malabranca, the emblematic historical proponent of independence from both the Eastern hegemon and Western decadence, is cast as a prime example of the capitalist thesis on the ingrained self-interest of all human beings and the universal human stupidity associated with it. He acts as a megalomaniac driven by vanity and imperiousness: "In this country I am the master. And I want it to stay that way." (Ibid.: 26) Malabranca's dream, however, is not only independence but also world power: "Get out of the dull small-state mentality. [...] We will be a great power." (Ibid.: 14) Moreover, his bureaucratic state system neglects the needs of the people in a manner similar to that depicted by Trotsky in *Lenin:* "Yes, we have the youngest ministers, the youngest army leaders, the strength of those who are fresh. They will rise even higher. We are just beginning. [...] Let us drink to victory!" (Ibid.: 13) These enthusiastic lines, punctuated with macho posturing that ultimately resembles that of figures from the capitalist West, signal the proximity of Titoism, Trotskyism, and predatory capitalism: "The people cheer me. Do you know why? Because for them politics is personality. The women were crazy. The world needs men, men!" (Ibid.) The equation between Trotskyism and Titoism is plain to see.

24 Because Malabranca is presented in this way, both the Soviet deputies and the British-American conspirators can only agree that there is no place for a socialist third way "between the blocs" (as Malabranca's foreign minister puts it, ibid.: 49) in the rearranged Cold-War system. This 'no-go' to alternatives is convincing when voiced by Malabranca's closest associates, not to mention family members – in this instance, his son Diego:

> *Malabranca:* Malabranca oder Maduros – das ist die Frage! Sein Weg oder mein Weg – wähle, Alfonso!
> *Außenminister:* Gibt es keinen dritten Weg?

Diego: Deinen dritten Weg hat es nie gegeben. (Ibid.: 50)

Malabranca: Malabranca or Maduros – that is the question! It's his way or my way – choose, Alfonso!
Foreign minister: Isn't there a third way?
Diego: Your third way never existed.

25 The caricature of Malabranca as a womanizer and family despot (he kills Diego to demonstrate that people in his country do not shoot other people, especially British and Americans, simply out of passion) not only proves the imperial prejudice against Eastern barbarism, but also legitimizes Soviet action against revisionism. Accordingly, Malabranca's maneuvers lead him to ultimately submit to American terms. By gambling away socialism at the cheap price of 30 million dollars, he confirms that seeking to achieve "independence with capitalist bank loans" (ibid.: 33) is an impossible undertaking. This is underscored by Malabranca's deputy prime minister Juan Maduros, who maintains a pro-Soviet stance throughout the play: "We are independent only in the world of socialism," Maduros says (ibid.). The same message is further underscored by the Soviet attaché Morosow: "There is only one world of socialism, just as there is only one world of capitalism. [...] Today there is nothing but these two fronts. And between the fronts no grass grows and no tree blossoms." (Ibid.: 32)

26 The r/evolutionary dilemma in *Der große Verrat* revisits Lenin's original problem, "What is to be done?" posed in Marina's question, "And what – what shall we do? What can we do?" (Ibid.) Similar to *Lenin*, only less philosophical, *Der große Verrat* revolves around this question of action, which is really the question of Fischer's time. In the socialist regimes established at the end of World War II, the dilemma was no longer 'evolution or revolution.' In one way or another, revolution had already been accomplished: in Russia in 1917, and in the rest of the Eastern Bloc during and immediately after the end of the War. The question now concerned the specific socialist version of evolution. In a way that does not seem transferable to the post-1953 and post-1956 world, around 1950 the Soviet Union still presented itself as a system that framed the relationship between state and people as a partnership of equals. The characters of Morosow, Maduros, and even Malabranca's otherwise loyal daughter Marina criticize the bureaucratic nature of Malabranca's regime, including its fatal policy of continuing the war by other means. In this context, Maduros remarks on something that echoes a line from the speaking chorus in *Lenin* ("We're still at war, still at war!" Fischer 2016: 262): "We have continued the war into the postwar project of reconstruction." (Fischer 1950: 9) Along with Marina, then, Maduros is a channel through which the old r/evolutionary question is expressed; his is a voice that demands democratic evolvement out of 'war communism' for the good of socialist people. In his critique of 'their' (but actually Malabranca's) style of rule, he remarks, "We command instead of persuade, we do not tolerate criticism and democratic discussion. [...] We act as if there had never been a revolution before us, as if we were the first and had nothing to learn. There are laws of socialist revolution that cannot be broken with impunity." (Ibid.: 23) Although they express demands that soon became the central tenets of Eurocommunism and thus also the starting point for a critique of Stalin's Soviet Union, for both Maduros and Marina there is no other way than to side with those who saved the world from Hitler's further expansion and liberated humanity from the "world of the past" (ibid.: 24).

3. The revolutionary pulp fiction

27 Fischer's undertaking in *Lenin* was to report on the "size and power of the greatest and most powerful historical event, the Russian Revolution" (*Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 23.9.1928, qtd. in Egyptien 2018). Reconciling his own revolutionary ambitions with the expectations of the audience that the inherited forms of aesthetic

communication would be respected, he invented a new genre – the political myth. He defined it as "factual reporting in all the scenes in which political events take place: this concerns the rhythm and soul of the masses as performed by the choirs; both the dry prose and the verse of the hymn; both the newspaper report and the drunken melody" (ibid.). Yet the problem with the reporting, however, is that despite its educational purposes, it was incapable of bringing about political change. This was even apparent if one considers the proverbial cultural irreconcilability of countries as distant as Russia and Austria, which was emphasized in Felix Salten's slating review of *Lenin*: "What is Russian cannot be translated into the European; Russia does not really belong to Europe, neither in its spiritual nor intellectual structure." (Salten 1928) This can be rephrased by saying that *Lenin*, unavowedly, exemplifies how without a political and economic new beginning in place, the culturalized revolution could not evolve into revolutionary culture. While the latter was organically linked to revolutionary upheaval, the former was merely a substitute – wishful thinking and an evocation of a 'revolution to come.' This was underscored by yet another critic, who wrote for *Die Rote Fahne* and voiced the revolutionary (communist) discontent with Fischer's creation: Willi Schlamm claimed, "No reasonable person could have doubted for a moment that a theater of the 'Kunststelle' would not shake the artistic level of the Viennese theater scene; it was certain that it would not bring a revolutionary element into the bourgeois theater misery. In Vienna, too, the revolutionary theater will be created by none other than the revolutionary proletariat." (Schlamm 1928) This is where the bourgeois and communist critics agreed: Fischer's *Lenin* could only function as a myth about the Revolution, but not of it; the play produced messianic messages, but lacked followers who adhered to them; despite the collectivism embodied in the speaking chorus, the play was unable to bridge the proscenium that separated the stage from the mass of individuals sitting in the audience. *Lenin* was a monumental undertaking which, however, failed to appeal to the masses.

28 Similar observations can be made about *Der Große Verrat*: Both plays were sensational in that they brought great historical watersheds – Lenin's dispute with Trotsky, Tito's break with Stalin – to the "global capital" (Pfoser 1980: 103) of social democracy. By focusing his telescope on these turning points, Fischer exploited the potential of a spectacle while simultaneously failing to make it seductive. If one understands pulp fiction as a cultural artifact that is rich in sensational content, then *Lenin* and *Der große Verrat* are example cases of precisely that – but failed examples. This is how the 'Wirkungsästhetik' (impact aesthetic) of Fischer's spectacle was summed up by Leopold Jacobson in his critique of *Lenin*: "Beaumarchais so gripped the audience with *The Marriage of Figaro* that they rushed out of the theater to make revolution. After Ernst Fischer's 'Lenin,' the spectators prefer to go to sleep." (Jacobson 1928)

29 In his later publications and actions, Fischer self-critically reflected on his literary work and articulated the r/evolutionary dilemma in a more philosophical, less programmatic fashion. In 'Geistige Partisanen,' an article published in *Die Zeit* in 1968, he articulated it in terms of the relationship between intellectuals and political organizations: "An intellectual who affirms socialism knows that no idea can be realized without organization. At the same time, he knows that any organization deforms that idea." (Fischer 1968) The question is, "So, as an intellectual, should he take the risk of organizing, or stay out to save his soul?" (Ibid.) This way of expressing the r/evolutionary dilemma was extraordinarily new for Fischer. Long gone was the time when he was aware that "the party was no longer Lenin's party," but nevertheless forced himself to believe that it still did not devolve into "a party that honored the dead Lenin in order to destroy his work and replace the dialectic of revolution with bureaucratic pragmatism" (Fischer 2017: 536). This was the time when, despite the risks, the only way to stay active was in and through organization. For characters in *Lenin* and *Der große Verrat*, much like for Fischer himself, the urgency of action, of deeds, suppresses concerns

– undoubtedly present – about possible misdeeds. Yet when Fischer maintained that "any organization deforms [the] idea" (Fischer 1968), it had already become the hallmark of the anti-institutional spirit of the new political era. In 1968, Fischer asked rhetorically, "Here the dream – there the deed, and often the misdeed?" (Ibid.): The characters in the two plays are not concerned with answering such questions, for the decision to act has already been made. Rather, the question for them is 'What kind of action?' and, relatedly, 'What kind of socialism?'

Today, *Der große Verrat* reads as a culmination point of a world without alternatives, a time which dictated the need to side with Stalin in order not to support Hitler. It is a fascinating document of the "undialectical simplicity" (Fischer 2017: 537) not only of the author himself, but of the Cold-War era as a whole. Simultaneously, it was the culmination point of a long process of petrification of that r/evolutionary dynamic which had driven the interwar decades. Although critical writing about the play is scarce to nonexistent, it is known that *Der große Verrat* was frequently performed in countries that were Soviet allies and at the Soviet-funded Scala Theater in Vienna. It was well suited to underlining official Soviet policy regarding Yugoslavia and any similar deviation from the Soviet course. What one learns from it today is, namely, that approval of a play by the highest political authorities cannot guarantee that the reader and viewer will be delighted and seduced, as is the case with mass cultural products. Similar to the conversation play *Lenin*, *Der große Verrat* expelled the traitors and attempted to captivate the audience by using this as a warning. However, trapped in a theater of representation, it proved incapable of achieving what it intended: political persuasion on a grand scale. Unlike commercial pulp fiction, it formulated its political lesson from the authoritarian vantage point of the Soviet Revolution, which made it unpopular amongst audiences with an insatiable appetite for entertainment. Unlike elite culture, which is by definition hostile to popular culture, Fischer's revolutionary pulp fiction aspired toward collectivist and, moreover, universalist public reach. Yet it achieved the opposite of what it intended, thus missing both the elites and the masses.

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Notes

1 All translations from German are mine.

2 This sort of Realpolitik parallels what is today dubbed 'capitalist realism', i. e. strategies of capitalism which divest literary production from system-changing potential (see Fisher 2009; Schuller 2021; Perica 2021).

3 In the play, Lenin is murdered by Leonid Kannegiser, a student who in reality shot the people's commissar Moisei Uritsky. Lenin, in contrast, was shot by Dora Kaplan, a member of Socialist Revolutionary Party which was banned after the Bolsheviks seized power as it disagreed with them over a number of issues, most prominently over the Brest-Litovsk Treaty.

4 To illustrate, see the following commentary by Manfred Lauermann: "The same structure every time: workers demonstrate, the state executes its monopoly on the use of force. And: Socialists on both sides, because the state power was represented by social democrats. This was the reality that Schmitt reflected after expanding his conception in 1932. War, like civil war, executes a friend-foe relationship." (Lauermann 1998: 52)

5 This problem has been similarly addressed by Sandra Fluhrer who selects Heiner Müller and Antonin Artaud as examples of an "anti-representational theater thinking" (Fluhrer 2022: n.p.). Fluhrer historicizes the inability of political learning in theater back to the replacement of the Greek logic of substitution (aided by pathos) by the Roman paradigm of representation, mediated through thinking. She elaborates, the Roman paradigm "exchanges representation for substitution, dematerializes the thinking about community, and also abstracts the relationship to the aesthetic form in which that thinking is reflected and transmitted. Pathic experience and the aesthetic form are torn apart, and aesthetics becomes a show of representation, thus distancing itself from the experience of presence." (Ibid.)

6 The original reads "[a] part of that force which, always willing evil, always produces good" (Goethe 2014: 36, v. 1335–1336).

7 It was Fischer himself who was soon to become a heretic for the second time. After Khrushchev's 1956 speech 'The Personality Cult and its Consequences' and the revelation of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, his heresy was diagnosed from the standpoint of nonreformed socialism, in this case, GDR (see Richter et al. 1968).

Abstract

In her contribution, Ivana Perica shows that Vienna of the 1920s and 1950s had a particular way of dealing with 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' (Clement Greenberg): certainly, kitsch forms go hand in hand with reactionary political forces. But what was progressive art supposed to be an organ for when there was a complete lack of revolutionary consciousness? It is this diagnosis the study of Ernst Fischer's theatre works *Lenin* (1928) and *Der große Verrat* (*The Great Treason*, 1950) starts with, demonstrating the failure of revolutionary 'pulp fiction' in the 1920s and 1950s Vienna: It neither reached the elites nor the masses.

Keywords: Ernst Fischer, Lenin, Der große Verrat, revolutionary theatre, Cold War, pulp

Zusammenfassung

Wie Ivana Perica in ihrem Beitrag ausführt, war der Umgang mit ‚Avant-Garde und Kitsch' (Clement Greenberg) im Wien der 1920er und 1950er Jahre ein besonderer: zweifellos gehen Kitschformen mit den reaktionären politischen Kräften Hand in Hand. Aber wofür sollte progressive Kunst ein Sprachrohr gewesen sein, wenn es gänzlich an revolutionärem Bewusstsein in der Bevölkerung fehlte? An dieser Feststellung setzt die Untersuchung über Ernst Fischers Stücke *Lenin* (1928) und *Der große Verrat* (1950) an und zeigt das Scheitern revolutionärer ‚Pulp Fiction' im Wien der 1920er und 1950er Jahre auf: Sie verfehlte sowohl die Eliten als auch die Massen.

Schlagwörter: Ernst Fischer, Lenin, Der große Verrat, Revolutionstheater, Kalter Krieg, Pulp

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