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*Fritz Bennewitz in India: Intercultural Theatre with Brecht
and Shakespeare* by Joerg Esleben, Rolf Rohmer, David G. John
(review)

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well-researched and skillfully argued study, Creech undertakes the critical intervention of rescuing East German women's films from the dustbin of history.

Georgia State University

—Faye Stewart

Fritz Bennewitz in India: Intercultural Theatre with Brecht and Shakespeare.

By Joerg Esleben with Rolf Rohmer and David G. John. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. xv + 365 pages + 24 b/w illustrations. \$70.00.

I begin by applauding Joerg Esleben and his collaborators on the painstaking compiling, translating, and editing that this book must have entailed. Thus, in *Fritz Bennewitz in India*, we have not only a meticulous archiving of the legacy of one man—a thespian from Germany who spent his life working in the structures and institutions that comprise the Modern Indian Theatre; in a larger sense, this book is equally a history of Modern Indian Theatre itself. Contextually, Bennewitz's legacy far predates his arrival and immediate historical presence in India. It represents a historical *longue durée* that frames the *histoire événementielle* chronicled in letters to his friends and colleagues—bookended, but not exhausted, by the two playwrights mentioned in the book's title.

The bulk of the book comprises letters Bennewitz penned over nearly three decades, documenting his early work with the National School of Drama (NSD) in New Delhi on productions of Brecht's plays in the 1970s, proceeding chronologically to letters from his time in Lucknow and then Dhaka in Bangladesh in the 1980s, and finally his last years in Mumbai working with Vijaya Mehta on a production of *Faust I* in Hindi in the late 1990s. These letters document his interactions with luminaries in Modern Indian Theatre like Ebrahim Alkazi, M.S. Sathya, Shama Zaidi, Vijaya Mehta, Badal Sircar, Utpal Dutt, Habib Tanvir, Shambhu Mitra, and many more. As a director, he worked with and trained artists like Pankaj Kapoor and Naseeruddin Shah—respected veteran actors in Indian theatre and cinema today. Correspondences compiled in this volume document not only Bennewitz's growth as a dramaturge, but also his deepening appreciation of interculturality in the practice of theatre and the evolution of a new dramatic lexicon. His reflections on working in India can be understood on two levels. First, on the level of personal and evental chronicling, they present a thespian's *Bildungsroman*, or more specifically an artist's *Künstlerroman*—Bennewitz's ruminations on his own artistry in confrontation with a variety of foreign performative traditions and theatrical styles. These encounters would prompt him to re-evaluate and reconfigure his own notions of theatricality, performativity, and the dramatic arts, in moving towards an understanding of "Intercultural Theatre." They are also illuminating on a second level of history, historiography, and metahistory. Bennewitz's presence in India coincides with a crucial juncture in the history of the Modern Indian Theatre. It is to the understanding of such historical processes that Bennewitz provides a fresh pair of eyes. He was first invited to the NSD, through diplomatic relations India shared with the then German Democratic Republic, for his acclaimed work on Brecht. The NSD was instrumental in experiments with Brechtian dramaturgy in India and furthering the training of future generations of theatre and cinema actors, directors, and scriptwriters since its foundation in 1959 by the efforts of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the National Academy for Music, Dance, and Drama,

itself a nascent body established in 1952. The Akademi was founded under the auspices of the Indian Ministry of Culture to promote development and research in Indian performative traditions and fine arts.

The NSD, through its close ties with the Akademi, worked towards the creation of a holistically national theatre against the historical backdrop of a recently independent Indian Republic. To that end, attempts were made to bridge gaps between a dominant colonially Western-influenced “Urban Theatre” scene and the diverse indigenous performative traditions extant across the sub-continent—an approach, as Habib Tanvir points out, initiated by the Indian Peoples’ Theatre Association (IPTA) in the 1940s (Habib Tanvir, “Theatre is in the Villages,” *Social Scientist*, Vol. 2, No. 10 [May 1974]: 32–41). The IPTA, like the Progressive Writers’ Association (PWA), was a collective comprising leftist thinkers, writers, and artists in pre-independence and pre-partition British India that functioned on agendas of anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, social change, and community development and empowerment. In the interest of realizing a radical mass-awakening, the IPTA turned to popular indigenous performance forms and performative traditions for maximum exposure and wide dissemination of their ideological premises. After independence and the partition of India, the IPTA ceased to exist as a centrally unified body, primarily due to opposition from the Indian National Congress to radical leftist politics. However, its former members continued to work in a similar vein—as Tanvir indicates in his observations on the move towards a new Indian Theatre (*ibid.*). His own independent theatre company called *Naya Theatre* produced political plays inspired in part by his admiration for Brecht’s works and techniques from his time at the Berliner Ensemble. However, while staging even Brecht’s plays in India, Tanvir would turn to indigenous performative traditions, like *Naacha* from the Chhattisgarh region of Central Eastern India. In transposing their Brechtian inspirations into an Indian context, thespians like Tanvir, Alkazi, Sircar, Dutt, etc., focussed particularly on the value Brecht accorded the idea of the *Volk* in his vision of dramaturgy, and therefore turned to “living” “folk” performative traditions from across the subcontinent (*ibid.* 37).

Imagining nationhood in a multilingual and pluricultural context like India, theatrically or otherwise, becomes a rather mind-boggling endeavour. Added to the already inherent pluralities and diversities, “modernity” in India is further problematized by both colonial and post-colonial contacts with European modernities. The performative interculturality of an emerging Modern Indian Theatre became a fertile testing-ground for Bennewitz’s idea of a dialectically intercultural theatre, realized ultimately through his work with institutions like the NSD and various theatre ensembles across the subcontinent. In his letters, we see how Bennewitz’s own ideas regarding the practice and function of theatre evolve into a dynamic understanding of dialectic interculturality—quite literally making the correspondences curated herein an epistolary *Künstlerroman*. This is not to say, however, that his journey towards such a constantly shifting telos was smooth. Especially in his earlier letters we see Bennewitz struggling to adapt to alien languages and unfamiliar performance styles. He struggles with reconciling his appreciation of Shakespeare and Brecht in the originals with what he perceives as uneven translations, erroneous interpretations, and sometimes unrefined acting techniques. Nonetheless, his sensitivity and compassion as an artist and a political theatre activist shine through in the end, especially in appreciating the role of political theatres across India during crises like the Union

Carbide Factory gas-leak catastrophe in Bhopal, 2–3 December 1984. Bennewitz was in Bhopal at the time working with the Rangamandal ensemble on a production of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

The concluding section of the book compiles essays, articles, and interviews about Bennewitz's time and legacy in India. Entries by K.V. Subbanna, Rolf Rohmer, David G. John and interviews with Amal Allana, Samik Bandyopadhyay, Akshara K.V., Prasanna, and Anuradha Kapoor, offer the reader salient aspects of Bennewitz's work in India, while also helping to further elucidate Bennewitz's view of intercultural theatre contextualized within his experiences in India. The introduction and the concluding section together help the reader to historically locate the wealth of information contained in Bennewitz's correspondences. In true Brechtian fashion, Bennewitz's letters provide a new and under-explored perspective for the scholarly researcher in Modern Indian Theatre while captivating the curiosity of a more general readership with equal ease.

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—S. Satish Kumar

Bisse ins Sacktuch. Zur mehrfachkodierten Intertextualität bei W.G. Sebald.

Von Espen Ingebrigtsen. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2016. 203 Seiten. €30,00.

"Intertextuality is the last major field of Sebald research," claimed J.J. Long ten years ago, and it is now hard to think of a critical study of Sebald that does not, in some way, engage with intertextuality (J.J. Long. *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity*, New York 2007 [ed. note: see review article in *Monatshefte* 101.1, Spring 2009, 88–105]). Susanne Schedel's survey "*Wer weiß, wie es vor Zeiten wirklich gewesen ist?*" *Textbeziehungen als Mittel der Geschichtsdarstellung bei W.G. Sebald* provided a robust typology of the functions and modes of intertextuality in Sebald's writings (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004). Espen Ingebrigtsen's new publication, *Bisse ins Sacktuch. Zur mehrfachkodierten Intertextualität bei W.G. Sebald*, although it would thus seem to address a well-worn topic, nonetheless comes as a welcome surprise for its originality and rigour. Ingebrigtsen clearly lays out his points of departure from Schedel's work. Rather than depending on her typology, which orders intertextual references according to the degree and way in which they are 'marked' in Sebald's text, his intention is to develop a more differentiated and critical approach to Sebald's intertextuality.

For Ingebrigtsen, a study of Sebald's intertextual methodology reveals the ways in which intertextual references not only support his overarching critique of historical violence, as Schedel argued, but also serve as a form of ethical restitution. Further, Sebald's choice of intertextual references reveals his aesthetic tastes and biographical sympathies. Central to Ingebrigtsen's project is the assertion that it is essential to pay attention to how and why each intertextual reference functions in the way that it does. Not all figures on loan have a uniform symbolism; not all textual citations, no matter how they are marked, carry the same poetic weight. Ingebrigtsen is not afraid to point out ethical problems, questionable citation practices and downright inaccuracies in Sebald's work, while drawing on his own research in Sebald's *Arbeitsbibliothek* to produce some new and intriguing insights into Sebald's texts.