

Amber Power

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Submission for Motherhood to motherhoods: Ideologies of 'The Feminine' Conference

Title:

Reimagining *The Mother*: Contemporary Intermedial Approaches to Brecht's 1931 'Learning Play'

Abstract:

Bertolt Brecht's 1931 play, *The Mother*, tells the story of an older, illiterate woman who, after witnessing the exploitation and violent oppression of her adult son and other factory workers in her small town, becomes radicalized and joins the Russian Revolution. Adapted from Maxim Gorky's 1906 novel of the same name and written in the style of a *lehrstücke*, or "learning play," Brecht's work encourages audience engagement with the themes of motherhood, class struggle, and revolutionary action.

This paper argues for the continuing relevance of Brecht's text through a comparative assessment of two recent productions of *The Mother* by experimental performance collectives, My Barbarian (in 2013) and The Wooster Group (in 2022). Through an analysis of the productions' respective intermedial performance strategies this paper also explores the ways in which both collectives use Brecht's hundred-year-old play as a means of addressing contemporary social and political injustice and privileging motherhood as a powerful mode of resistance.

Bio:

Amber Power completed her M.A. in Film Studies at Chapman University and her B.A. in Liberal Arts at The New School. She works as an educator, a freelance arts writer, and a contributing editor for BOMB Magazine, a Brooklyn-based, nonprofit contemporary arts publication. Ms. Power has written and edited numerous articles for BOMB's print and online editions—especially in the performing arts field where she has covered works by artists such as The Wooster Group, Becca Blackwell and Kaneza Schaal. Ms. Power's writing has also appeared in Frieze Magazine and Film Matters. Her research areas include feminist art, intermedial performance, and art activism. Ms. Power teaches courses in Art & Activism and Producing the Undergraduate Film Journal at Chapman University.