

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 26A – Modern Languages		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Engaging contemporary audiences and addressing social injustice by translating Bertolt Brecht's works		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> Jan 2005–Dec 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Professor Tom Kuhn	Professor of Twentieth Century German Literature	Oct 1987–Present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> August 2013–October 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Kuhn specialises in English-language creative engagement with Bertolt Brecht. Through the 'Writing Brecht' project, based on his editions and translations into English, he has made texts from a century ago speak to contemporary audiences. Kuhn has engaged internationally with diverse audiences, and collaborated with theatre practitioners and artistic communities in the UK and abroad. The performances, posters, and poems inspired by Kuhn's work on Brecht have shown translation's transforming power, revived Brecht's English-speaking reception, and demonstrated literature's relevance for addressing social injustice in today's society.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Kuhn's research on Brecht's poetry and plays, and his work as General Editor of the Methuen Drama Brecht List since 2002 have re-invigorated the study and performance of Brecht plays in the English-speaking world and beyond. From 2013 to 2019 the 'Writing Brecht' project generated 46 outputs (from academic publications to programme notes and posters) and established an international network of colleagues working together academically and creatively. Collaboration is an academic principle for Kuhn, and his leadership of co-authored volumes resulting from creative interchange with colleagues Marc Silberman (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and Steve Giles (University of Nottingham) have played a major role in emphasising the importance of translation and editorial work as a form of research. Kuhn's three-volume edition of Brecht's theoretical writings ('Brecht on Art and Politics', 'Brecht on Theatre', and 'Brecht on Performance' [R1]) develops the principles underlying his work with theatre practitioners and general audiences and has heralded a renaissance in engagement with Brecht internationally, including in the German-speaking world. Kuhn's innovative approach of re-inserting performative practice into texts traditionally read as discursive has produced new academic readings, but simultaneously engaged well-known practitioners such as the theatre director Di Trevis [R1].</p> <p>The AHRC-funded major project 'Brecht into English' (2013–2017) establishes translation as a form of research, as set out by Kuhn in a series of earlier publications, e.g. 'Brecht's poems in English' [R2]. The introductions to the Methuen Brecht volumes [R3], condensing extensive scholarly work into succinct form, have played a major role in reaching new audiences for Brecht's texts. Here, the act of translation is both grounded in detailed research in the context of the work's genesis and reveals that research in the readings that translation generates. (An exemplary instance is discussed in an article on 'The mask of the angry one' [R3].)</p> <p>Kuhn's work on Brecht's engagement with the visual arts has been published in leading journals [e.g. R4], and has also initiated dialogue with other disciplines, e.g. an influential article on poetry and photography was reprinted in <i>War Primer 2</i>, an art book by Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin [R5]. More recently, Kuhn's research on Brecht's dramatic</p>		

fragments and unfinished projects [R6] has drawn attention to the processual and collaborative nature of Brecht's writing, provoking contemporary English and German theatre-makers to a dynamic engagement with hitherto little-known material, generating workshops (*Fleischhacker*, dir. Phoebe von Held, The Writer's Workshop, London, 2019) and productions (*Fatzer*, dir. Di Trevis, Northwall Arts Centre, Oxford, 2016; and dir. Jürgen Kuttner and Tom Kühnel, Deutsches Theater, Berlin, 2016).

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1.** [Scholarly Edition (3 volumes), available on request] Tom Kuhn et al. (eds), *Brecht's theoretical writings: Brecht on Art and Politics*, London (2005) ISBN 9780413773531; Tom Kuhn et al. (eds), *Brecht on Performance: Messingkauf and Modelbooks*, London (2014) ISBN 9781408159507; Tom Kuhn & al. (eds), *Brecht on Theatre*, third edition, London (2015) ISBN 9781350068919.
- R2.** [Journal Article] Tom Kuhn, 'Brecht's Poems in English: the old and the new', *German Life & Letters* 67:1 (January 2014), 58–70. DOI: [10.1111/glal.12031](https://doi.org/10.1111/glal.12031)
- R3.** [Translation, listed in REF2] Tom Kuhn and David Constantine (eds & transl.), *The Collected Poems of Bertolt Brecht*, New York (2018). ISBN 9780871407672.
- R4.** [Journal Article] Tom Kuhn, 'Brecht reads Bruegel: Verfremdung, gestic realism and the second phase of Brechtian theory', *Monatshefte* 105: 1 (Spring 2013), 101–122. DOI: [10.1353/mon.2013.0022](https://doi.org/10.1353/mon.2013.0022)
- R5.** [Chapter, available on request] Tom Kuhn, 'Poetry and Photography: Mastering reality in the *Kriegsfiabel*', in *Bertolt Brecht: A Reassessment of his Work and Legacy*, ed. Robert Gillet and Godela Weiss-Sussex, Amsterdam (2008), 169–189. ISBN 9789042024328.
- R6.** [Edited book, available on request] Tom Kuhn and Charlotte Ryland (Oxford) (eds), *Brecht and the Writer's Workshop: Fatzer and Other Dramatic Projects*, London (2019). ISBN 9781474273305.

### Research Grants

Kuhn, T. (PI) AHRC Research Grant 2013-2017 *Brecht into English: theoretical and applied approaches to cultural transmission* AH/K000578/1 GBP420,128

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

'Writing Brecht' (2013–2019) opened up new forms of collaboration, generating 85 events including the Donmar Warehouse production of *Arturo Ui* (Kuhn advised cast and crew; April–June 2017: total audience 12,800), pre- and post-performance talks (Birmingham Rep, March 2014; National Theatre, June 2016; Donmar Warehouse, June 2017), school and teacher workshops, and radio programmes (BBC Radio 3's 'Sunday Features' and 'The Verb'; average: 53,000 live listeners). Through translations and engagement activities, Kuhn enhanced the use, accessibility and understanding of Brecht's writings, inspiring new artistic works and reviving political discourse. Their contemporary resonance means Kuhn's Brecht translations reach widely across media and contexts, and have been quoted e.g. in ecological and historical publications, in a brochure of the new Humboldt Forum (Berlin), a celebration of the International Brigades, a concert of cabaret songs, and a study of Canadian men's health [S1]. Following the 2019 UK election, the editor of *AndOtherStories* shared one of Kuhn's translations with subscribers, because 'it expresses the ambiguity of our ability as individuals to change everything and nothing'. He also acknowledged 'More than fifty people got back to me to say... the poem had spoken to them and given them hope' [S1.ii].

Kuhn's work has increased performer and audience understanding of Brecht's contemporary resonances. For the Head of the Brecht Archive (Berlin), Kuhn's activities 'have reached

beyond the world of literature, theatre, philosophy, and politics insofar as they refer to culture, applied geography, society, and communication between people and countries' [S2]. Reaching large audiences in-person (200 at the Goethe Institute in October 2019 [S4]) and online (talk on *Arturo Ui* over 4,200 views in October 2013 [S6]; interview with Tony Kushner (1,850 in June 2016) [S5], Kuhn's translations have enabled English-speaking publics to access, understand and participate in discussions of Brecht.

### **Partnered with creative practitioners and charities to enhance self-confidence and agency among the vulnerably housed**

Kuhn's work has profoundly benefitted those on the margins who are not normally given a voice. His collaboration with homelessness charity Crisis Skylight in 2018 enabled people with lived experience of homelessness to create a performance piece in response to Brecht's poetry. Workshops delivered by Kuhn and the Sphinx Theatre Company for Crisis clients resulted in attendees composing poetry and revealed the contemporary relevance of previously untranslated poems. The process culminated in two live public performances, with the first half created and performed by Crisis Skylight members, followed by a Sphinx Theatre Cabaret show inspired by Brecht and his contemporaries.

Having their creative responses published (by Hurst St Press) proved a significant step for participants. Crisis Skylight's Arts Coordinator explains that the project was pivotal for Client A, 'now employed by Arts at the Old Fire Station' and 'working on his own poetry with a view to creating a live performance to be tested at our bi-annual Theatre Scratch Night [S7]. Also 'now securely housed', Client D 'is currently discussing a possible collaboration with a local theatre company, where he would produce a script for performance through a collaborative devising process' [S7]. Client M, 'now stably housed', has assisted 'in the planning and delivering of workshops at Marmalade [...] an inclusive platform for social change' [S7]. The Arts Coordinator reports that 'participants have continued to enjoy artistic work and develop their practice following the project', having 'gained a genuine enthusiasm for and enjoyment of Brecht's work specifically and poetry more widely' [S7].

### **Impacts on practitioners and delivery of professional services: enhanced performance and ethical practice**

The collaborative nature of Brecht's writing revealed in Kuhn's research has influenced theatre professionals and organisations in their working methods and shaped best practice. The Arts Coordinator at Crisis Skylight, Kuhn's partner in developing a performance piece, describes the effect of 'Writing Brecht' on her professional practice: 'following on from editing the book and project-managing its publication, I have gone on to write, direct and perform a solo show. [...] my success in these areas, and my confidence as a writer has certainly been informed by this practice. I found the project inspirational and that the experience of working with such eminent writers and academics, coupled with the success of the performance and publication, spurred me on to strive for excellence in my own work' [S7].

A playwright who led workshops for the vulnerably housed in partnership with Crisis Skylight, states: 'This project pushed me to interrogate my own research and writing practice and acutely informed our understanding and presentation of the period songs in our Sphinx Theatre Berlin Kabaret. [...] the whole 'Words as Weapons' partnership gave me insight into best practice that I have now gone on to apply in these settings' [S8]. Kuhn's research collaboration allowed this playwright to apply his experience elsewhere: 'As a direct result of the concept and partnerships involved within the Words as Weapons Brecht project I have gone on to use similar techniques and lead work in two more multi-partnership settings that have real social value outcomes'. The playwright developed and produced film projects with Cheshire Young Carers Charity and the West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission [S8]. Kuhn's project facilitated a deeper understanding for the playwright: 'I'd been professionally engaged with Brecht for 40 years but this [poetry] is completely new territory for me, these poems I didn't even know existed. The knowledge exchange between the professionals involved in theatre and academic world was quite extraordinary' [S8].

### **Facilitated creative expression for people with disabilities**

Kuhn's publications on visual art in Brecht's work established contact with graphic artists at the Akademie der Künste (Berlin), generating new visual art creations through collaborating with disabled artists working for skills training foundation Blumenfisch. Participants were presented with Brecht's poems in Kuhn's translation and freely chose content to convert into posters and postcards, exhibited in Berlin, Augsburg, Leipzig and Oxford [S9]. According to Blumenfisch's Head of Communication, 'Kuhn's request to graphically translate Brecht poems was a stroke of luck for us. Our employees were able to become experts in a concrete, exciting topic [...] to choose content that inspired them' [S10]. She explains that 'another crucial aspect of our collaboration was the feeling of appreciation. All designs were taken seriously. [...] The finished posters and postcards were presented internationally and received positive feedback' [S10].

The most popular poem – relatively unknown in German – was a tender love poem about 'that not-to-be-forgotten night' turned into contemporary art in its English form. Blumenfisch's Head of Communication comments: 'The designs were as different as the employees [themselves]. Each [individual] had their own access to the works and their own take on the topic and graphic language. The result was a surprisingly multi-faceted poster exhibition...' [S10]. Participants commented that 'Brecht's time was incisive and fascinating' and that 'the Brecht project was one of the highlights [of working] in the department' [S10]. Kuhn's skill in communicating his insights into Brecht's writing process empowered the whole group of vulnerable people to communicate their anxiety, hopes, and creativity to a wide audience – the Oxford exhibition attracted over 1,000 visitors from January-March 2019 [S3].

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S1.** Selection of Kuhn's Translations Used Across Media.
- i. Several Poems translated by Tom Kuhn used for the cabaret evening Dublin's National Concert Hall, 14-15 Sept 2019, with performances by Blixa Bargeld, Camille O'Sullivan, Ute Lemper and others.
  - ii. Statement from the Editor of AndOtherStories, 14 December 2019.
  - iii. 'Modern Legend' published in Anthology of War Literature by the IWM.
  - iv. 'To those born after' used as quote on the back cover of a book on climate change.[available on request]
  - v. 'Little changes' quoted in 'Perpetuating the utopia of health behaviourism: A case study of the Canadian Men's Health Foundation's *Don't Change Much* initiative'. Kirkland, Rachel and Raphael, Dennis. *Social Theory & Health*, 16(1), 1-19, 2018. Published 19 June 2017 <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41285-017-0040-7>
- S2.** Statement from Head of the Bertolt Brecht Archive at the Academy of Arts, Berlin, 5 August 2019.
- S3.** Listing of a selection of events, URLs and screenshots where available
- i. 'Writing Brecht' poster exhibition of designs with quotations from Brecht poems, St Hugh's College Library, Oxford, Jan–March 2019, over 1,000 visitors.
  - ii. Radio appearances on BBC Radio 3 (15 Dec 2013 & 30 Jan 2015) and Newcastle Poetry Festival podcast, May 2019.
  - iii. List of performances influenced by Kuhn's research and publications 2013-July 2020
  - iv. List of public lectures and seminars by Kuhn with audience figures, 2013-October 2020
  - v. List of workshops by Kuhn with attendance figures, May 2014-October 2020.
- S4.** Website for event - 'Translating Brecht, a Poet for our Times', International Translation Day, Goethe Institute, London, 1 Oct 2019, audience of 200 (sold out).
- S5.** In conversation with Tony Kushner, North Wall Theatre, Oxford, 25 June 2016, audience of 150; 1,850 views [24 Oct 2020]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BI8EfR7XK98&t=6s> (accessed 12 Feb 2021)
- S6.** Talk with Tom Attenborough on *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, St Hugh's College, Oxford, 22 October 2013, audience of 20; 4,243 views (correct on 24 Oct 2020). Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koaYIAqUwJw> (accessed 12 Feb 2021)

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- S7.** Letter from Arts Coordinator for Crisis Skylight Oxford, 25 Oct 2020.
- S8.** Interview with and statement from Sphinx Theatre Company playwright following "Words as Weapons" performance at the Old Fire Station (2018). Transcript of interview provided.
- S9.** Postcards designed by Blumenfisch charitable organisation, Berlin. Available at: <https://brecht.mml.ox.ac.uk/blumenfisch-posters-brecht-poems> (accessed 12 Feb 2021)
- S10.** Statement from the Head of Communications at Blumenfisch, Berlin, 13 Oct 2020.