

Fellows



Gitta Honegger
IFK_Senior Fellow

Duration of fellowship
01. October 2007 bis 31. January 2008

Gitta Honegger

PROJECT TITLE

Frau Brecht: The life and career of Helene Weigel

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

While Helene Weigel (1900–1971) is remembered primarily for her prominent role in East Germany, albeit in the shadow of her husband Bertolt Brecht – as his definitive "Mother Courage" and co-founder/*Intendantin* of the Berliner Ensemble, the impact of her Viennese roots on her social commitment, her personal, professional and political choices is generally overlooked. The analysis of Weigel's growing years will be the first of three parts of Gitta Honegger's book: "Frau Brecht: The Life and Career of Helene Weigel" (Yale University Press).

It will focus on Weigel's Viennese/Czech-Jewish background, her parents' economic migration from Moravia to Vienna and her formative years during the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. Most importantly, Honegger will examine her education at the Schwarzwald school. Weigel's lasting friendships with Eugenie Schwarzwald and some of the outstanding women in her circle, among them provocative writers and accomplished actresses provided not only a challenging professional environment, they were essential for the survival of the Brecht family in exile. Moreover, they were an important support group for Weigel in her complicated marriage.

Schwarzwald's pedagogical accomplishments and social activism, though the stuff of local lore and anecdote, have been largely ignored by international scholarship. Similarly, Weigel has been iconized as an actress and demonized as both a loyal Communist and a shrewd financial manager of the Brecht estate in the West. Her marital stamina and dealings with Brecht's lifelong mistresses continue to be the stuff of gossip and awe, but there is no in-depth critical evaluation of her work. Gitta Honegger's examination of Weigel's life and career grounded in the Schwarzwald experience will offer a concrete example of the far-reaching impact of the educator's methods, social activism and cultural networking. They provided the foundation for Weigel's endurance of Brecht, his other women and children, of exile, loss of family in the Holocaust and her steely commitment to family and state.

CV

Professor of Theatre at Arizona State University

Publications

Among others: Thomas Bernhard: *The Making of an Austrian*, New Haven 2001; Thomas Bernhard: *Was ist das für ein Narr?* München 2003; Translations of plays by Elfriede Jelinek, Thomas Bernhard, Elias Canetti among others.

Works in Progress: *Frau Brecht*; Elfriede Jelinek: *How To Get the Nobel Prize without Really Trying*; Translation of Elfriede Jelinek's "Die Kinder der Toten" (all Yale U. Press).

