

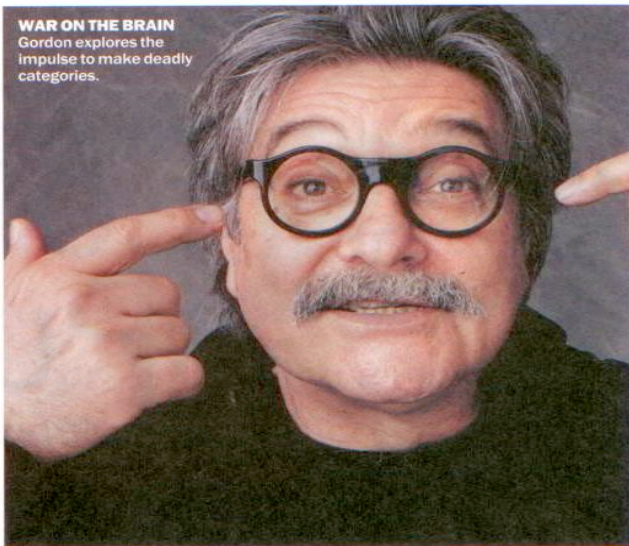
# TimeOut

## New York

December 13—26, 2007

### Head of the class

**WAR ON THE BRAIN**  
Gordon explores the impulse to make deadly categories.



Choreographer-director David Gordon raises the specter of Bertolt Brecht in *Uncivil Wars*. By **Eliza Bent**

"Anyone can be creative, it's rewriting other people that's a challenge," playwright and cigar aficionado Bertolt Brecht once remarked. No one is as keenly aware of this as the great experimental choreographer-director David Gordon, who laughs heartily when asked if he seconds Brecht's sentiment. Gordon, you see, is haunted. Not in a creepy, ghost-hunter sense, but rather by an awareness of who his predecessors are. Instead of deconstructing the greats, as some artists have been known to do, Gordon honors voices from the past and uses them to examine the present. His latest work, *Uncivil Wars: In Collaboration with Brecht & Eisler*, combines Brecht's 1932 allegory *The Roundheads and the Pointheads* with the music of German composer Hanns Eisler to cast a gaze over our current political mess.

Don't get him wrong, though: This isn't a simple war play. "It's about how we characterize people and who winds up—after everybody has killed everybody—back in charge," Gordon explains. The plot depicts a fictitious country that tries to solve a deficit by inventing a war between the "roundheads" and the "pointheads." Interestingly, Brecht's work is actually a reinterpretation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* which, Gordon points out, drew from

about 12 other works. There is something of the Hegelian dialect in Gordon's approach—thesis plus antithesis equals synthesis.

For this adaptation, Gordon has reduced the number of characters for a cast of eight who take on multiple roles. One performer, stage and screen legend Estelle Parsons, plays both the madame of a whorehouse and mother superior of a convent. "Both of these agencies employ women," Gordon notes, "and both are economically viable. The fact that the same actor takes off one hat and puts on another—I don't have to say anything else." Brecht and Eisler (whose beautiful, populist songs will be sung in both German and English) appear as characters onstage, talking to each other and other actors. "It's all very Brechtian," Gordon promises with a wink.

Writing about Gordon's *Aristophanes in Birdonia* last year, one critic noted that "many well-meaning artists are done in by their political inclinations." Gordon, the writer added, "is too clever...to go for polemics...his works slide nimbly between dance and theater, spinning seemingly playful moments into scathing social critiques." Listening to Gordon talk about his current project, one believes it. "When I started *Uncivil Wars* five years ago, I thought, Well, everything will get fixed and this will seem like last year's news," he muses. "Don't we feel like morons?"

*Uncivil Wars: In Collaboration with Brecht & Eisler* is at the Kitchen through Sat 22. See Off-Off Broadway.

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW ECCLES



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## Dance

**\* David Gordon's Pick-Up Performance Company** *The Kitchen*, 512 W 19th St between Tenth and Eleventh Aves (212-255-5793, ext 11). Subway: C, E to 23rd St. 8pm, \$15. David Gordon's new dance-theater work, *Uncivil Wars: Collaborating with Brecht and Eisler*, draws upon Bertolt Brecht's play *The Roundheads and the Pointheads* (as translated by Michael Feingold) and Hanns Eisler's music. Performers include John Kelly, Estelle Parsons and Valda Setterfield. See also Theater.

## Theater

**Uncivil Wars: Collaborating with Brecht and Eisler** *The Kitchen*, 512 W 19th St between Tenth and Eleventh Aves (212-255-5793). Subway: C, E to 23rd St. \$15. Wed–Sat 8pm. Thu 13–Sat 22. Director-choreographer David Gordon (*Dancing Henry V*) and adaptor Michael Feingold take their inspiration from Bertolt Brecht's parable *The Roundheads and the Pointheads* for this new physical and textual investigation into the means of cultural production.