was a better description of his theatre at this stage, referring as it does above all to the elimination of empathy and imitation (or mimesis). At the same time it recalls the distinction made by the *Poetics* (though never explicitly by Brecht) between a tragedy, which has to observe the unities of time and place, and an epic, which need not.

There is a full translation of the *Threepenny Opera* notes by Desmond Vesey in Brecht: *Plays I* (Methuen, 1950) and by Eric Bentley in *From the Modern Repertoire I* (University of Denver Press, 1949).

15 · The Film, the Novel and Epic Theatre

(From *The Threepenny Lawsuit*)

Contradictions are our hope!

SOME PRECONCEPTIONS EXAMINED

1 · 'ART CAN DO WITHOUT THE CINEMA'

We have often been told (and the court expressed the same opinion) that when we sold our work to the film industry we gave up all our rights; the buyers even purchased the right to destroy what they had bought; all further claim was covered by the money. These people felt that in agreeing to deal with the film industry we put ourselves in the position of a man who lets his laundry be washed in a dirty gutter and then complains that it has been ruined. Anybody who advises us not to make use of such new apparatus just confirms the apparatus's right to do bad work; he forgets himself out of sheer open-mindedness, for he is thus proclaiming his willingness to have nothing but dirt produced for him. At the same time he deprives us in advance of the apparatus which we need in order to produce, since this way of producing is likely more and more to supersede the present one, forcing us to speak through increasingly complex media and to express what we have to say by increasingly inadequate means. For the old forms of communication are not unaffected by the development of new ones, nor do they survive alongside them. The filmgoer develops a different way of reading stories. But the man who writes the stories is a filmgoer too. The mechanization of literary production cannot be thrown into reverse. Once instruments are used even the novelist who makes no use of them is led to wish that he could do what the instruments can: to include what they show (or could show) as part of that reality which constitutes his subject-matter; and above all, when he writes, to assume the attitude of somebody using an instrument.

For instance it makes a great difference whether the writer approaches things as if using instruments, or produces them 'from within himself'. What the film itself does, that is to say how far it makes its individuality prevail against 'art', is not unimportant in this connection. It is conceivable that other kinds of writer, such as playwrights or novelists, may for the moment be able to work in a more cinematic way than the film people. Up to a point they depend less on means of production. But they still depend on the film, its progress or regress; and the film's means of production are wholly capitalist. Today the bourgeois novel still depicts 'a world'. It does so in a purely idealistic way from within a given *Weltanschauung*: the more or less private, but in any case personal outlook of its 'creator'. Inside this world every detail of course fits exactly, though if it were taken out of its context it would not seem authentic for a minute by comparison with the 'details' of reality. What we find out about the real world is just as much as we find out about the author responsible for the unreal one; in other words we find out something about the author and nothing about the world.

The film cannot depict any world (the 'setting' in which it deals is something quite different) and lets nobody express himself (and nothing else) in a work, and no work express any person. What it provides (or could provide) is applicable conclusions about human actions in detail. Its splendid inductive method, which at any rate it facilitates, could be of infinite significance to the novel, in so far as novels still signify anything. To the playwright what is interesting is its attitude to the person performing the action. It gives life to its people, whom it classes purely according to function, simply using available types that occur in given situations and are able to adopt given attitudes in them. Character is never used as a source of motivation; these people's inner life is never the principal cause of the action and seldom its principal result; the individual is seen from outside. Literature needs the film not only indirectly but also directly. That decisive extension of its social duties which follows from the transformation of art into a paedagogical discipline entails the multiplying or the repeated changing of the means of representation. (Not to mention the Lehrstück proper, which entails supplying film apparatus to all those taking part.) This apparatus can be used better than almost anything else to supersede the old kind of untechnical, anti-technical 'glowing' art, with its religious links. The socialization of these means of production is vital for art. . . .

To understand the position we must get away from the common idea that these battles for the new institutions and apparatus only have to do with one part of art. In this view there is a part of art, its central part, which remains wholly untouched by the new possibilities of communication (radio, film,

book clubs, etc.) and goes on using the old ones (printed books, freely marketed; the stage, etc.). Quite different from the other, technically-influenced part where it is a matter of creation by the apparatus itself: a wholly new business, owing its existence in the first place to certain financial calculations and thereby bound to them for ever. If works of the former sort are handed over to the apparatus they are turned into goods without further ado. This idea, leading as it does to utter fatalism, is wrong because it shuts off so-called 'sacrosanct works of art' from every process and influence of our time, treating them as sacrosanct purely because they are impervious to any development in communication. In fact, of course, the whole of art without any exception is placed in this new situation; it is as a whole, not split into parts, that it has to cope with it; it is as a whole that it turns into goods or not. The changes wrought by time leave nothing untouched, but always embrace the whole. In short, the common preconception discussed here is pernicious.

2 · A FILM MUST HAVE SOME 'HUMAN INTEREST'

This preconception is equivalent to the notion that films have got to be vulgar. Such an eminently rational view (rational because nobody is going to make any other kind of film, or look at it once made) owes its relevance to the inexorable way in which the metaphysicians of the press, with their insistence on 'art', call for profundity. It is they who want to see the 'element of fate' emphasized in all dealings between people. Fate, which used (once) to be among the great concepts, has long since become a vulgar one, where the desired 'transfiguration' and 'illumination' are achieved by reconciling oneself to circumstances – and a purely class-warfare one, where one class fixes the fate of another. As usual, our metaphysicians' demands are not hard to fulfil. It is simple to imagine everything that they reject presented in such a way that they would accept it with enthusiasm. Obviously if one were to trace certain love stories back to Romeo and Juliet, or crime stories to Macbeth, in other words to famous plays that need contain nothing else (need show no other kind of human behaviour, use no other kind of energy to govern the world's movements), then they would at once exclaim that vulgarity is determined by How and not What. But this 'it all depends how' is itself vulgar.

This beloved 'human interest' of theirs, this How (usually qualified by the word 'eternal', like some indelible dye) as applied to Othello (my wife is my property), Hamlet (better sleep on it), Macbeth (I'm destined for higher things) and co., now seems like vulgarity and nothing more when

measured on a massive scale. If one insists on having it, this is the only form in which it can be had; simply to insist is vulgar. What once determined the grandeur of such passions, their non-vulgarity, was the part they had to play in society, which was a revolutionary one. Even the impact which *Potemkin* made on such people springs from the sense of outrage which they would feel if their wives were to try to serve bad meat to them (I won't stand it, I tell you!), while Chaplin is perfectly aware that he must be 'human', i.e. vulgar, if he is to achieve anything more, and to this end will alter his style in a pretty unscrupulous way (viz. the famous close-up of the doggy look which concludes *City Lights*).

What the film really demands is external action and not introspective psychology. Capitalism operates in this way by taking given needs on a massive scale, exorcizing them, organizing them and mechanizing them so as to revolutionize everything. Great areas of ideology are destroyed when capitalism concentrates on external action, dissolves everything into processes, abandons the hero as the vehicle for everything and mankind as the measure, and thereby smashes the introspective psychology of the bourgeois novel. The external viewpoint suits the film and gives it importance. For the film the principles of non-aristotelian drama (a type of drama not depending on empathy, mimesis) are immediately acceptable. Non-aristotelian effects can be seen in the Russian film *The Road to Life*, above all because the theme (re-education of neglected children by specific socialist methods) leads the spectator to establish causal relationships between the teacher's attitude and that of his pupils. Thanks to the key scenes this analysis of origins comes so to grip the spectator's interest that he 'instinctively' dismisses any motives for the children's neglect borrowed from the old empathy type of drama (unhappiness at home plus psychic trauma, rather than war or civil war). Even the use of work as a method of education arouses the spectator's scepticism, for the simple reason that it is never made clear that in the Soviet Union, in total contrast to all other countries, morality is in fact determined by work. As soon as the human being appears as an object the causal connections become decisive. Similarly in the great American comedies the human being is presented as an object, so that their audience could as well be entirely made up of Pavlovians. Behaviourism is a school of psychology that is based on the industrial producer's need to acquire means of influencing the customer; an active psychology therefore, progressive and revolutionary. Its limits are those proper to its function under capitalism (the reflexes are biological; only in certain of Chaplin's films are they social). Here again the road leads over capitalism's dead body; but here again this road is a good one.

[From *Versuche 3*, Berlin 1931. 'Der Dreigroschenprozess', Sections III (1) and (6), i.e. 'Die Kunst braucht den Film nicht' and 'Im Film muss das Menschliche eine Rolle spielen'.]

NOTE: The above are two sections from Brecht's long account of his lawsuit over the making of Pabst's film version of *The Threepenny Opera*, which was heard in Berlin on 17 and 20 October 1930. The suit failed and Brecht lost his claim to dictate the treatment of the story, which would have been along the lines of his draft 'Die Beule' (printed in the same volume). This draft became instead the basis of *The Threepenny Novel*, the only true novel that Brecht wrote.

The emphasis on 'contradictions' in the opening quotation is new, and will become increasingly important in Brecht's writings. In Marxist language this term means the conflicting elements in any person or situation.

Nikolai Ekk's *The Road to Life*, one of the first Soviet sound films, was released on 1 June 1930. Brecht had met Eisenstein on his Berlin visit of 1929; later he came to know Chaplin in Hollywood. An earlier unpublished note on *The Gold Rush* entitled 'Less Security' ('Weniger Sicherheit', *Schriften zum Theater 2*, p.220) calls Chaplin a 'document' and praises story and theme on the ground that the average theatre would at once reject anything so simple, crude and linear. 'The cinema has no responsibilities, it doesn't have to overstrain itself. Its dramaturgy has remained so simple because a film is a matter of a few miles of celluloid in a tin box. When a man bends a saw between his knees you don't expect a fugue.' Yet another early fragment (*Schriften zum Theater 1*, pp. 163–164) on 'The theatre of the big cities' concludes: 'The only kind of art produced by these cities so far has been *fun:* Charlie Chaplin's films and jazz. Jazz is all the theatre it contains, as far as I can see.'

In 1931 Brecht helped to make the (Communist) semi-documentary film *Kuhle Wampe*, which was directed by Slatan Dudow and banned in March of the following year. Probably this came closer to his ideas than any other film with which he was associated.

16 · The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication

In our society one can invent and perfect discoveries that still have to conquer their market and justify their existence; in other words discoveries that have not been called for. Thus there was a moment when technology was advanced enough to produce the radio and society was not yet advanced enough to accept it. The radio was then in its first phase of being a substitute: a substitute for theatre, opera, concerts, lectures, café music, local newspapers and so forth. This was the patient's period of halcyon youth. I am not sure if it is finished yet, but if so then this stripling who needed no certificate of competence to be born will have to start looking retrospec-

[From *Exstrabladet*, Copenhagen, 20 March 1934, quoted by Helge Hultberg in *Die ästhetischen Anschauungen Bertolt Brechts*, Copenhagen 1962]

NOTE: The interviewer here was Luth Otto and the words, translated into Danish and back into German, are hardly Brecht's. One or two evident misprints have been corrected, but mistakes like the identification of Meyerhold's theatre with the Moscow Art Theatre, the misnaming of Lania's *Konjunktur* and the reference to 'my' Theater am Schiffbauerdamm have been allowed to stand. Helge Hultberg also queries Brecht's claim to have been a producer 'long before any of my plays were staged', but this seems more an exaggeration than an inaccuracy. Brecht was in fact engaged practically in the theatre for at least a year before *Trommeln in der Nacht* was put on, taking part notably (if only temporarily) in the production of Bronnen's *Vatermord* for the Berlin 'Junge Bühne' in spring 1922.

At the time of the interview Brecht had settled in Denmark, where the writer Karin Michaelis had lent him a house. He remained there till 1939, presently moving to a house of his own at Skovsbostrand near Svendborg.

Poul Reumert, the Danish actor, is referred to again on p. 141. His book *Teatrets Kunst* was published in Copenhagen in 1963.

Plays staged at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm under E. J. Aufricht's management included *The Threepenny Opera* and *Happy End* and Marieluise Fleisser's *Die Pioniere von Ingolstadt*. §218 was by Carl Credé.

20 · Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction

A few years back, anybody talking about the modern theatre meant the theatre in Moscow, New York and Berlin. He might have thrown in a mention of one of Jouvet's productions in Paris or Cochran's in London, or *The Dybbuk* as given by the Habima (which is to all intents and purposes part of the Russian theatre, since Vakhtangov was its director). But broadly speaking there were only three capitals so far as modern theatre was concerned.

Russian, American and German theatres differed widely from one another, but were alike in being modern, that is to say in introducing technical and artistic innovations. In a sense they even achieved a certain stylistic resemblance, probably because technology is international (not just that part which is directly applied to the stage but also that which influences it, the film for instance), and because large progressive cities in large industrial countries are involved. Among the older capitalist countries it is the Berlin theatre that seemed of late to be in the lead. For a period all that is common to the modern theatre received its strongest and (so far) maturest expression there.

The Berlin theatre's last phase was the so-called epic theatre, and it showed the modern theatre's trend of development in its purest form. Whatever was labelled '*Zeitstück*' or '*Piscatorbühne*' or '*Lehrstück*' belongs to the epic theatre.

THE EPIC THEATRE

Many people imagine that the term 'epic theatre' is self-contradictory, as the epic and dramatic ways of narrating a story are held, following Aristotle, to be basically distinct. The difference between the two forms was never thought simply to lie in the fact that the one is performed by living beings while the other operates via the written word; epic works such as those of Homer and the medieval singers were at the same time theatrical performances, while dramas like Goethe's *Faust* and Byron's *Manfred* are agreed to have been more effective as books. Thus even by Aristotle's definition the difference between the dramatic and epic forms was attributed to their different methods of construction, whose laws were dealt with by two different branches of aesthetics. The method of construction depended on the different way of presenting the work to the public, sometimes via the stage, sometimes through a book; and independently of that there was the 'dramatic element' in epic works and the 'epic element' in dramatic. The bourgeois novel in the last century developed much that was 'dramatic', by which was meant the strong centralization of the story, a momentum that drew the separate parts into a common relationship. A particular passion of utterance, a certain emphasis on the clash of forces are hallmarks of the 'dramatic'. The epic writer Döblin provided an excellent criterion when he said that with an epic work, as opposed to a dramatic, one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life.

This is no place to explain how the opposition of epic and dramatic lost its rigidity after having long been held to be irreconcilable. Let us just point out that the technical advances alone were enough to permit the stage to incorporate an element of narrative in its dramatic productions. The possibility of projections, the greater adaptability of the stage due to mechanization, the film, all completed the theatre's equipment, and did so at a point where the most important transactions between people could no longer be shown simply by personifying the motive forces or subjecting the characters to invisible metaphysical powers.

To make these transactions intelligible the environment in which the people lived had to be brought to bear in a big and 'significant' way.

This environment had of course been shown in the existing drama, but

only as seen from the central figure's point of view, and not as an independent element. It was defined by the hero's reactions to it. It was seen as a storm can be seen when one sees the ships on a sheet of water unfolding their sails, and the sails filling out. In the epic theatre it was to appear standing on its own.

The stage began to tell a story. The narrator was no longer missing, along with the fourth wall. Not only did the background adopt an attitude to the events on the stage – by big screens recalling other simultaneous events elsewhere, by projecting documents which confirmed or contradicted what the characters said, by concrete and intelligible figures to accompany abstract conversations, by figures and sentences to support mimed transactions whose sense was unclear – but the actors too refrained from going over wholly into their role, remaining detached from the character they were playing and clearly inviting criticism of him.

The spectator was no longer in any way allowed to submit to an experience uncritically (and without practical consequences) by means of simple empathy with the characters in a play. The production took the subject-matter and the incidents shown and put them through a process of alienation: the alienation that is necessary to all understanding. When something seems 'the most obvious thing in the world' it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up.

What is 'natural' must have the force of what is startling. This is the only way to expose the laws of cause and effect. People's activity must simultaneously be so and be capable of being different.

It was all a great change.

The dramatic theatre's spectator says: Yes, I have felt like that too – Just like me – It's only natural – It'll never change – The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are inescapable – That's great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world – I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.

The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it – That's not the way – That's extraordinary, hardly believable – It's got to stop – The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary – That's great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh.

THE INSTRUCTIVE THEATRE

The stage began to be instructive.

Oil, inflation, war, social struggles, the family, religion, wheat, the meat market, all became subjects for theatrical representation. Choruses en-

lightened the spectator about facts unknown to him. Films showed a montage of events from all over the world. Projections added statistical material. And as the 'background' came to the front of the stage so people's activity was subjected to criticism. Right and wrong courses of action were shown. People were shown who knew what they were doing, and others who did not. The theatre became an affair for philosophers, but only for such philosophers as wished not just to explain the world but also to change it. So we had philosophy, and we had instruction. And where was the amusement in all that? Were they sending us back to school, teaching us to read and write? Were we supposed to pass exams, work for diplomas?

Generally there is felt to be a very sharp distinction between learning and amusing oneself. The first may be useful, but only the second is pleasant. So we have to defend the epic theatre against the suspicion that it is a highly disagreeable, humourless, indeed strenuous affair.

Well: all that can be said is that the contrast between learning and amusing oneself is not laid down by divine rule; it is not one that has always been and must continue to be.

Undoubtedly there is much that is tedious about the kind of learning familiar to us from school, from our professional training, etc. But it must be remembered under what conditions and to what end that takes place.

It is really a commercial transaction. Knowledge is just a commodity. It is acquired in order to be resold. All those who have grown out of going to school have to do their learning virtually in secret, for anyone who admits that he still has something to learn devalues himself as a man whose knowledge is inadequate. Moreover the usefulness of learning is very much limited by factors outside the learner's control. There is unemployment, for instance, against which no knowledge can protect one. There is the division of labour, which makes generalized knowledge unnecessary and impossible. Learning is often among the concerns of those whom no amount of concern will get any forwarder. There is not much knowledge that leads to power, but plenty of knowledge to which only power can lead.

Learning has a very different function for different social strata. There are strata who cannot imagine any improvement in conditions: they find the conditions good enough for them. Whatever happens to oil they will benefit from it. And: they feel the years beginning to tell. There can't be all that many years more. What is the point of learning a lot now? They have said their final word: a grunt. But there are also strata 'waiting their turn' who are discontented with conditions, have a vast interest in the practical side of learning, want at all costs to find out where they stand, and know that they are lost without learning; these are the best and keenest learners. Similar

differences apply to countries and peoples. Thus the pleasure of learning depends on all sorts of things; but none the less there is such a thing as pleasurable learning, cheerful and militant learning.

If there were not such amusement to be had from learning the theatre's whole structure would unfit it for teaching.

Theatre remains theatre even when it is instructive theatre, and in so far as it is good theatre it will amuse.

THEATRE AND KNOWLEDGE

But what has knowledge got to do with art? We know that knowledge can be amusing, but not everything that is amusing belongs in the theatre.

I have often been told, when pointing out the invaluable services that modern knowledge and science, if properly applied, can perform for art and specially for the theatre, that art and knowledge are two estimable but wholly distinct fields of human activity. This is a fearful truism, of course, and it is as well to agree quickly that, like most truisms, it is perfectly true. Art and science work in quite different ways: agreed. But, bad as it may sound, I have to admit that I cannot get along as an artist without the use of one or two sciences. This may well arouse serious doubts as to my artistic capacities. People are used to seeing poets as unique and slightly unnatural beings who reveal with a truly godlike assurance things that other people can only recognize after much sweat and toil. It is naturally distasteful to have to admit that one does not belong to this select band. All the same, it must be admitted. It must at the same time be made clear that the scientific occupations just confessed to are not pardonable side interests, pursued on days off after a good week's work. We all know how Goethe was interested in natural history, Schiller in history: as a kind of hobby, it is charitable to assume. I have no wish promptly to accuse these two of having needed these sciences for their poetic activity; I am not trying to shelter behind them; but I must say that I do need the sciences. I have to admit, however, that I look askance at all sorts of people who I know do not operate on the level of scientific understanding: that is to say, who sing as the birds sing, or as people imagine the birds to sing. I don't mean by that that I would reject a charming poem about the taste of fried fish or the delights of a boating party just because the writer had not studied gastronomy or navigation. But in my view the great and complicated things that go on in the world cannot be adequately recognized by people who do not use every possible aid to understanding.

Let us suppose that great passions or great events have to be shown which influence the fate of nations. The lust for power is nowadays held

to be such a passion. Given that a poet 'feels' this lust and wants to have someone strive for power, how is he to show the exceedingly complicated machinery within which the struggle for power nowadays takes place? If his hero is a politician, how do politics work? If he is a business man, how does business work? And yet there are writers who find business and politics nothing like so passionately interesting as the individual's lust for power. How are they to acquire the necessary knowledge? They are scarcely likely to learn enough by going round and keeping their eyes open, though even then it is more than they would get by just rolling their eyes in an exalted frenzy. The foundation of a paper like the *Völkischer Beobachter* or a business like Standard Oil is a pretty complicated affair, and such things cannot be conveyed just like that. One important field for the playwright is psychology. It is taken for granted that a poet, if not an ordinary man, must be able without further instruction to discover the motives that lead a man to commit murder; he must be able to give a picture of a murderer's mental state 'from within himself'. It is taken for granted that one only has to look inside oneself in such a case; and then there's always one's imagination. . . . There are various reasons why I can no longer surrender to this agreeable hope of getting a result quite so simply. I can no longer find in myself all those motives which the press or scientific reports show to have been observed in people. Like the average judge when pronouncing sentence, I cannot without further ado conjure up an adequate picture of a murderer's mental state. Modern psychology, from psychoanalysis to behaviourism, acquaints me with facts that lead me to judge the case quite differently, especially if I bear in mind the findings of sociology and do not overlook economics and history. You will say: but that's getting complicated. I have to answer that it *is* complicated. Even if you let yourself be convinced, and agree with me that a large slice of literature is exceedingly primitive, you may still ask with profound concern: won't an evening in such a theatre be a most alarming affair? The answer to that is: no.

Whatever knowledge is embodied in a piece of poetic writing has to be wholly transmuted into poetry. Its utilization fulfils the very pleasure that the poetic element provokes. If it does not at the same time fulfil that which is fulfilled by the scientific element, none the less in an age of great discoveries and inventions one must have a certain inclination to penetrate deeper into things – a desire to make the world controllable – if one is to to be sure of enjoying its poetry.

IS THE EPIC THEATRE SOME KIND OF 'MORAL INSTITUTION'?

According to Friedrich Schiller the theatre is supposed to be a moral

institution. In making this demand it hardly occurred to Schiller that by moralizing from the stage he might drive the audience out of the theatre. Audiences had no objection to moralizing in his day. It was only later that Friedrich Nietzsche attacked him for blowing a moral trumpet. To Nietzsche any concern with morality was a depressing affair; to Schiller it seemed thoroughly enjoyable. He knew of nothing that could give greater amusement and satisfaction than the propagation of ideas. The bourgeoisie was setting about forming the ideas of the nation.

Putting one's house in order, patting oneself on the back, submitting one's account, is something highly agreeable. But describing the collapse of one's house, having pains in the back, paying one's account, is indeed a depressing affair, and that was how Friedrich Nietzsche saw things a century later. He was poorly disposed towards morality, and thus towards the previous Friedrich too.

The epic theatre was likewise often objected to as moralizing too much. Yet in the epic theatre moral arguments only took second place. Its aim was less to moralize than to observe. That is to say it observed, and then the thick end of the wedge followed: the story's moral. Of course we cannot pretend that we started our observations out of a pure passion for observing and without any more practical motive, only to be completely staggered by their results. Undoubtedly there were some painful discrepancies in our environment, circumstances that were barely tolerable, and this not merely on account of moral considerations. It is not only moral considerations that make hunger, cold and oppression hard to bear. Similarly the object of our inquiries was not just to arouse moral objections to such circumstances (even though they could easily be felt – though not by all the audience alike; such objections were seldom for instance felt by those who profited by the circumstances in question) but to discover means for their elimination. We were not in fact speaking in the name of morality but in that of the victims. These truly are two distinct matters, for the victims are often told that they ought to be contented with their lot, for moral reasons. Moralists of this sort see man as existing for morality, not morality for man. At least it should be possible to gather from the above to what degree and in what sense the epic theatre is a moral institution.

CAN EPIC THEATRE BE PLAYED ANYWHERE?

Stylistically speaking, there is nothing all that new about the epic theatre. Its expository character and its emphasis on virtuosity bring it close to the old Asiatic theatre. Didactic tendencies are to be found in the medieval

mystery plays and the classical Spanish theatre, and also in the theatre of the Jesuits.

These theatrical forms corresponded to particular trends of their time, and vanished with them. Similarly the modern epic theatre is linked with certain trends. It cannot by any means be practised universally. Most of the great nations today are not disposed to use the theatre for ventilating their problems. London, Paris, Tokyo and Rome maintain their theatres for quite different purposes. Up to now favourable circumstances for an epic and didactic theatre have only been found in a few places and for a short period of time. In Berlin Fascism put a very definite stop to the development of such a theatre.

It demands not only a certain technological level but a powerful movement in society which is interested to see vital questions freely aired with a view to their solution, and can defend this interest against every contrary trend.

The epic theatre is the broadest and most far-reaching attempt at large-scale modern theatre, and it has all those immense difficulties to overcome that always confront the vital forces in the sphere of politics, philosophy, science and art.

['Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater?', from *Schriften zum Theater*, 1957]

NOTE: This essay was unpublished in Brecht's lifetime, and its exact date and purpose are unknown. Dr Unseld, editing it for *Schriften zum Theater*, suggested that it was written 'about 1936'. Brecht's bibliographer Mr Walter Nubel thinks that notes or drafts may have existed earlier. Unlike the items that follow, it bears no evidence of Brecht's visits to Moscow and New York during 1935, and it is tempting to think of it as having been prepared for one of these, for instance as a possible contribution to that conference of producers to which Piscator invited Brecht in Moscow: what he called (in a letter of 27 January 1935, in the Brecht-Archiv) 'collecting a few good people for a constructive discussion'.

This was to take place in April, and there are fragments of a 'Brecht-Piscator conversation' in the Brecht-Archiv (334/04–05) which evidently date from then. In these Piscator is seen referring to productions by Okhlopkhov (*Aristocrats* and Serafimovitch's *Iron Stream*) and Meyerhold (*La Dame aux Camélias* and a programme of one-act plays by Tchekov), while Brecht mentions the plans for a '*Total-Theater*' which Piscator had had drawn up by Walter Gropius before 1933. So far as the present essay goes, however, all that can really be said is that some of its arguments and actual words are also to be found in the next piece.

The term here translated as 'alienation' is *Entfremdung* as used by Hegel and Marx, and not the *Verfremdung* which Brecht himself was soon to coin and make famous. The former also occurs in a short note (*Schriften zum Theater 3*, pp. 196–7)

called 'Episches Theater, Entfremdung', which refers to the need for any situation to be 'alienated' if it is to be seen socially. Alfred Döblin, the friend of Brecht's referred to early in the essay, wrote *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun*, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and other novels which critics of the time likened to Joyce and Dos Passos. He too was interested in the theory of epic form. The *Völkischer Beobachter* was the chief Nazi daily paper.

21 · The German Drama: pre-Hitler

The years after the World War saw the German theatre in a period of a great flowering. We had more great actors than at any other time. There were quite a number of prominent régisseurs, or directors, such as Reinhardt, Jessner, Engel, and so on, who competed sharply and interestingly with one another. Almost all plays of world literature, from *Oedipus* to *Les Affaires sont les Affaires*, from the Chinese *Chalk Circle* to Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, could be played. And they were played.

Nevertheless, for us young people the theatre had one serious flaw. Neither its highly developed stage technique nor its dramaturgy permitted us to present on the stage the great themes of our times; as, for example, the building-up of a mammoth industry, the conflict of classes, war, the fight against disease, and so on. These things could not be presented, at least not in an adequate manner. Of course, a stock exchange could be, and was, shown on the stage, or trenches, or clinics. But they formed nothing but effective background for a sort of sentimental 'magazine story' that could have taken place at any other time, though in the great periods of the theatre they would not have been found worthy of being shown on the stage. The development of the theatre so that it could master the presentation of modern events and themes, and overcome the problems of showing them, was brought about only with great labour.

One thing that helped solve the problem was the 'electrification' of the mechanics of staging plays. Within a few years after this problem of developing the modern stage had made itself felt among us, Piscator, who without doubt is one of the most important theatre men of all times, began to transform its scenic potentialities. He introduced a number of far-reaching innovations.

One of them was his use of the film and of film projections as an integral part of the settings. The setting was thus awakened to life and began to play

24 · Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting

The following is intended to refer briefly to the use of the alienation effect in traditional Chinese acting. This method was most recently used in Germany for plays of a non-aristotelian (not dependent on empathy) type as part of the attempts[1] being made to evolve an epic theatre. The efforts in question were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious.

This effort to make the incidents represented appear strange to the public can be seen in a primitive form in the theatrical and pictorial displays at the old popular fairs. The way the clowns speak and the way the panoramas are painted both embody an act of alienation. The method of painting used to reproduce the picture of 'Charles the Bold's flight after the Battle of Murten', as shown at many German fairs, is certainly mediocre; yet the act of alienation which is achieved here (not by the original) is in no wise due to the mediocrity of the copyist. The fleeing commander, his horse, his retinue and the landscape are all quite consciously painted in such a way as to create the impression of an abnormal event, an astonishing disaster. In spite of his inadequacy the painter succeeds brilliantly in bringing out the unexpected. Amazement guides his brush.

Traditional Chinese acting also knows the alienation effect, and applies it most subtly. It is well known that the Chinese theatre uses a lot of symbols. Thus a general will carry little pennants on his shoulder, corresponding to the number of regiments under his command. Poverty is shown by patching the silken costumes with irregular shapes of different colours, likewise silken, to indicate that they have been mended. Characters are distinguished by particular masks, i.e. simply by painting. Certain gestures of the two hands signify the forcible opening of a door, etc. The stage itself remains the same, but articles of furniture are carried in during the action. All this has long been known, and cannot very well be exported.

It is not all that simple to break with the habit of assimilating a work of art as a whole. But this has to be done if just one of a large number of effects is to be singled out and studied. The alienation effect is achieved in the Chinese theatre in the following way.

Above all, the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall

[1] Brecht uses the word 'Versuche'.

besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched. This immediately removes one of the European stage's characteristic illusions. The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place. A whole elaborate European stage technique, which helps to conceal the fact that the scenes are so arranged that the audience can view them in the easiest way, is thereby made unnecessary. The actors openly choose those positions which will best show them off to the audience, just as if they were *acrobats*. A further means is that the artist observes himself. Thus if he is representing a cloud, perhaps, showing its unexpected appearance, its soft and strong growth, its rapid yet gradual transformation, he will occasionally look at the audience as if to say: isn't it just like that? At the same time he also observes his own arms and legs, adducing them, testing them and perhaps finally approving them. An obvious glance at the floor, so as to judge the space available to him for his act, does not strike him as liable to break the illusion. In this way the artist separates mime (showing observation) from gesture (showing a cloud), but without detracting from the latter, since the body's attitude is reflected in the face and is wholly responsible for its expression. At one moment the expression is of well-managed restraint; at another, of utter triumph. The artist has been using his countenance as a blank sheet, to be inscribed by the gest of the body.

The artist's object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. He achieves this by looking strangely at himself and his work. As a result everything put forward by him has a touch of the amazing. Everyday things are thereby raised above the level of the obvious and automatic. A young woman, a fisherman's wife, is shown paddling a boat. She stands steering a non-existent boat with a paddle that barely reaches to her knees. Now the current is swifter, and she is finding it harder to keep her balance; now she is in a pool and paddling more easily. Right: that is how one manages a boat. But this journey in the boat is apparently historic, celebrated in many songs, an exceptional journey about which everybody knows. Each of this famous girl's movements has probably been recorded in pictures; each bend in the river was a well-known adventure story, it is even known which particular bend it was. This feeling on the audience's part is induced by the artist's attitude; it is this that makes the journey famous. The scene reminded us of the march to Budejovice in Piscator's production of *The Good Soldier Schweik*. Schweik's three-day-and-night march to a front which he oddly enough never gets to was seen from a completely historic point of view, as no less noteworthy a phenomenon than, for instance, Napoleon's Russian expedition of 1812. The

performer's self-observation, an artful and artistic act of self-alienation, stopped the spectator from losing himself in the character completely, i.e. to the point of giving up his own identity, and lent a splendid remoteness to the events. Yet the spectator's empathy was not entirely rejected. The audience identifies itself with the actor as being an observer, and accordingly develops his attitude of observing or looking on.

The Chinese artist's performance often strikes the Western actor as cold. That does not mean that the Chinese theatre rejects all representation of feelings. The performer portrays incidents of utmost passion, but without his delivery becoming heated. At those points where the character portrayed is deeply excited the performer takes a lock of hair between his lips and chews it. But this is like a ritual, there is nothing eruptive about it. It is quite clearly somebody else's repetition of the incident: a representation, even though an artistic one. The performer shows that this man is not in control of himself, and he points to the outward signs. And so lack of control is decorously expressed, or if not decorously at any rate decorously for the stage. Among all the possible signs certain particular ones are picked out, with careful and visible consideration. Anger is naturally different from sulkiness, hatred from distaste, love from liking; but the corresponding fluctuations of feeling are portrayed economically. The coldness comes from the actor's holding himself remote from the character portrayed, along the lines described. He is careful not to make its sensations into those of the spectator. Nobody gets raped by the individual he portrays; this individual is not the spectator himself but his neighbour.

The Western actor does all he can to bring his spectator into the closest proximity to the events and the character he has to portray. To this end he persuades him to identify himself with him (the actor) and uses every energy to convert himself as completely as possible into a different type, that of the character in question. If this complete conversion succeeds then his art has been more or less expended. Once he has become the bank-clerk, doctor or general concerned he will need no more art than any of these people need 'in real life'.

This complete conversion operation is extremely exhausting. Stanislavsky puts forward a series of means – a complete system – by which what he calls 'creative mood' can repeatedly be manufactured afresh at every performance. For the actor cannot usually manage to feel for very long on end that he really is the other person; he soon gets exhausted and begins just to copy various superficialities of the other person's speech and hearing, whereupon the effect on the public drops off alarmingly. This is certainly due to the fact that the other person has been created by an 'intuitive' and

accordingly murky process which takes place in the subconscious. The subconscious is not at all responsive to guidance; it has as it were a bad memory.

These problems are unknown to the Chinese performer, for he rejects complete conversion. He limits himself from the start to simply quoting the character played. But with what art he does this! He only needs a minimum of illusion. What he has to show is worth seeing even for a man in his right mind. What Western actor of the old sort (apart from one or two comedians) could demonstrate the elements of his art like the Chinese actor Mei Lan-fang, without special lighting and wearing a dinner jacket in an ordinary room full of specialists? It would be like the magician at a fair giving away his tricks, so that nobody ever wanted to see the act again. He would just be showing how to disguise oneself; the hypnotism would vanish and all that would be left would be a few pounds of ill-blended imitation, a quickly-mixed product for selling in the dark to hurried customers. Of course no Western actor would stage such a demonstration. What about the sanctity of Art? The mysteries of metamorphosis? To the Westerner what matters is that his actions should be unconscious; otherwise they would be degraded. By comparison with Asiatic acting our own art still seems hopelessly parsonical. None the less it is becoming increasingly difficult for our actors to bring off the mystery of complete conversion; their subconscious's memory is getting weaker and weaker, and it is almost impossible to extract the truth from the uncensored intuitions of any member of our class society even when the man is a genius.

For the actor it is difficult and taxing to conjure up particular inner moods or emotions night after night; it is simpler to exhibit the outer signs which accompany these emotions and identify them. In this case, however, there is not the same automatic transfer of emotions to the spectator, the same emotional infection. The alienation effect intervenes, not in the form of absence of emotion, but in the form of emotions which need not correspond to those of the character portrayed. On seeing worry the spectator may feel a sensation of joy; on seeing anger, one of disgust. When we speak of exhibiting the outer signs of emotion we do not mean such an exhibition and such a choice of signs that the emotional transference does in fact take place because the actor has managed to infect himself with the emotions portrayed, by exhibiting the outer signs; thus, by letting his voice rise, holding his breath and tightening his neck muscles so that the blood shoots to his head, the actor can easily conjure up a rage. In such a case of course the effect does not occur. But it does occur if the actor at a particular point unexpectedly shows a completely white face, which he has produced

mechanically by holding his face in his hands with some white make-up on them. If the actor at the same time displays an apparently composed character, then his terror at this point (as a result of this message, or that discovery) will give rise to an alienation effect. Acting like this is healthier and in our view less unworthy of a thinking being; it demands a considerable knowledge of humanity and worldly wisdom, and a keen eye for what is socially important. In this case too there is of course a creative process at work; but it is a higher one, because it is raised to the concious level.

The alienation effect does not in any way demand an unnatural way of acting. It has nothing whatever to do with ordinary stylization. On the contrary, the achievement of an A-effect absolutely depends on lightness and naturalness of performance. But when the actor checks the truth of his performance (a necessary operation, which Stanislavsky is much concerned with in his system) he is not just thrown back on his 'natural sensibilities', but can always be corrected by a comparison with reality (is that how an angry man really speaks? is that how an offended man sits down?) and so from outside, by other people. He acts in such a way that nearly every sentence could be followed by a verdict of the audience and practically every gesture is submitted for the public's approval.

The Chinese performer is in no trance. He can be interrupted at any moment. He won't have to 'come round'. After an interruption he will go on with his exposition from that point. We are not disturbing him at the 'mystic moment of creation'; when he steps on to the stage before us the process of creation is already over. He does not mind if the setting is changed around him as he plays. Busy hands quite openly pass him what he needs for his performance. When Mei Lan-fang was playing a death scene a spectator sitting next me exclaimed with astonishment at one of his gestures. One or two people sitting in front of us turned round indignantly and sshhh'd. They behaved as if they were present at the real death of a real girl. Possibly their attitude would have been all right for a European production, but for a Chinese it was unspeakably ridiculous. In their case the A-effect had misfired.

It is not entirely easy to realize that the Chinese actor's A-effect is a transportable piece of technique: a conception that can be prised loose from the Chinese theatre. We see this theatre as uncommonly precious, its portrayal of human passions as schematized, its idea of society as rigid and wrong-headed; at first sight this superb art seems to offer nothing applicable to a realistic and revolutionary theatre. Against that, the motives and objects of the A-effect strike us as odd and suspicious.

When one sees the Chinese acting it is at first very hard to discount the

feeling of estrangement which they produce in us as Europeans. One has to be able to imagine them achieving an A-effect among their Chinese spectators too. What is still harder is that one must accept the fact that when the Chinese performer conjures up an impression of mystery he seems uninterested in disclosing a mystery to us. He makes his own mystery from the mysteries of nature (especially human nature): he allows nobody to examine how he produces the natural phenomenon, nor does nature allow him to understand as he produces it. We have here the artistic counterpart of a primitive technology, a rudimentary science. The Chinese performer gets his A-effect by association with magic. 'How it's done' remains hidden; knowledge is a matter of knowing the tricks and is in the hands of a few men who guard it jealously and profit from their secrets. And yet there is already an attempt here to interfere with the course of nature; the capacity to do so leads to questioning; and the future explorer, with his anxiety to make nature's course intelligible, controllable and down-to-earth, will always start by adopting a standpoint from which it seems mysterious, incomprehensible and beyond control. He will take up the attitude of somebody wondering, will apply the A-effect. Nobody can be a mathematician who takes it for granted that 'two and two makes four'; nor is anybody one who fails to understand it. The man who first looked with astonishment at a swinging lantern and instead of taking it for granted found it highly remarkable that it should swing, and swing in that particular way rather than any other, was brought close to understanding the phenomenon by this observation, and so to mastering it. Nor must it simply be exclaimed that the attitude here proposed is all right for science but not for art. Why shouldn't art try, by its *own* means of course, to further the great social task of mastering life?

In point of fact the only people who can profitably study a piece of technique like Chinese acting's A-effect are those who need such a technique for quite definite social purposes.

The experiments conducted by the modern German theatre led to a wholly independent development of the A-effect. So far Asiatic acting has exerted no influence.

The A-effect was achieved in the German epic theatre not only by the actor, but also by the music (choruses, songs) and the setting (placards, film etc.). It was principally designed to historicize the incidents portrayed. By this is meant the following:

The bourgeois theatre emphasized the timelessness of its objects. Its representation of people is bound by the alleged 'eternally human'. Its story is arranged in such a way as to create 'universal' situations that allow

Man with a capital M to express himself: man of every period and every colour. All its incidents are just one enormous cue, and this cue is followed by the 'eternal' response: the inevitable, usual, natural, purely human response. An example: a black man falls in love in the same way as a white man; the story forces him to react with the same expression as the white man (in theory this formula works as well the other way round); and with that the sphere of art is attained. The cue can take account of what is special, different; the response is shared, there is no element of difference in it. This notion may allow that such a thing as history exists, but it is none the less unhistorical. A few circumstances vary, the environments are altered, but Man remains unchanged. History applies to the environment, not to Man. The environment is remarkably unimportant, is treated simply as a pretext; it is a variable quantity and something remarkably inhuman; it exists in fact apart from Man, confronting him as a coherent whole, whereas he is a fixed quantity, eternally unchanged. The idea of man as a function of the environment and the environment as a function of man, i.e. the breaking up of the environment into relationships between men, corresponds to a new way of thinking, the historical way. Rather than be sidetracked into the philosophy of history, let us give an example. Suppose the following is to be shown on the stage: a girl leaves home in order to take a job in a fair-sized city (Piscator's *American Tragedy*). For the bourgeois theatre this is an insignificant affair, clearly the beginning of a story; it is what one has to have been told in order to understand what comes after, or to be keyed up for it. The actor's imagination will hardly be greatly fired by it. In a sense the incident is universal: girls take jobs (in the case in question one can be keyed up to see what in particular is going to happen to her). Only in one way is it particular: this girl goes away (if she had remained what comes after would not have happened). The fact that her family lets her go is not the object of the inquiry; it is understandable (the motives are understandable). But for the historicizing theatre everything is different. The theatre concentrates entirely on whatever in this perfectly everyday event is remarkable, particular and demanding inquiry. What! A family letting one of its members leave the nest to earn her future living independently and without help? Is she up to it? Will what she has learnt here as a member of the family help her to earn her living? Can't families keep a grip on their children any longer? Have they become (or remained) a burden? Is it like that with every family? Was it always like that? Is this the way of the world, something that can't be affected? The fruit falls off the tree when ripe: does this sentence apply here? Do children always make themselves independent? Did they do so in every age? If so, and if it's

something biological, does it always happen in the same way, for the same reasons and with the same results? These are the questions (or a few of them) that the actors must answer if they want to show the incident as a unique, historical one: if they want to demonstrate a custom which leads to conclusions about the entire structure of a society at a particular (transient) time. But how is such an incident to be represented if its historic character is to be brought out? How can the confusion of our unfortunate epoch be striking? When the mother, in between warnings and moral injunctions, packs her daughter's case – a very small one – how is the following to be shown: So many injunctions and so few clothes? Moral injunctions for a lifetime and bread for five hours? How is the actress to speak the mother's sentence as she hands over such a very small case – 'There, I guess that ought to do you' – in such way that it is understood as a historic dictum? This can only be achieved if the A-effect is brought out. The actress must not make the sentence her own affair, she must hand it over for criticism, she must help us to understand its causes and protest. The effect can only be got by long training. In the New York Yiddish Theatre, a highly progressive theatre, I saw a play by S. Ornitz showing the rise of an East Side boy to be a big crooked attorney. The theatre could not perform the play. And yet there were scenes like this in it: the young attorney sits in the street outside his house giving cheap legal advice. A young woman arrives and complains that her leg has been hurt in a traffic accident. But the case has been bungled and her compensation has not yet been paid. In desperation she points to her leg and says: 'It's started to heal up.' Working without the A-effect, the theatre was unable to make use of this exceptional scene to show the horror of a bloody epoch. Few people in the audience noticed it; hardly anyone who reads this will remember that cry. The actress spoke the cry as if it were something perfectly natural. But it is exactly this – the fact that this poor creature finds such a complaint natural – that she should have reported to the public like a horrified messenger returning from the lowest of all hells. To that end she would of course have needed a special technique which would have allowed her to underline the historical aspect of a specific social condition. Only the A-effect makes this possible. Without it all she can do is to observe how she is not forced to go over entirely into the character on the stage.

In setting up new artistic principles and working out new methods of representation we must start with the compelling demands of a changing epoch; the necessity and the possibility of remodelling society loom ahead. All incidents between men must be noted, and everything must be seen from a social point of view. Among other effects that a new theatre will

need for its social criticism and its historical reporting of completed transformations is the A-effect.

['Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst', from *Schriften zum Theater*, 1957]

NOTE: This essay, though unpublished in German till 1949, appeared (in Mr Eric White's translation) in *Life and Letters*, London, in the winter of 1936. A pencilled note on the typescript (Brecht-Archive 332/81) says: 'This essay arose out of a performance by Mei Lan-fang's company in Moscow in spring 1935.' Brecht had seen the performance that May, during his Moscow visit, though the essay itself cannot have been completed till after his return from New York.

Almost certainly this, rather than the following item (as I wrongly suggested in my book on Brecht), is the first mention in his writings of the term 'Verfremdungseffekt'. That Brecht had already been feeling his way towards some such formula can be seen from his use of the term 'Entfremdung' above (p. 76), while his almost instinctive predilection for strangeness can be seen very early on in the passages quoted on pp. 19–20. The formula itself is a translation of the Russian critic Viktor Shklovskij's phrase 'Priem Ostrannenija', or 'device for making strange', and it can hardly be a coincidence that it should have entered Brecht's vocabulary after his Moscow visit. So far as Mrs Hauptmann can remember he had not spoken of 'Verfremdung' earlier, even in conversation. It was indeed virtually a neologism, for Grimm's dictionary gives only two obscure early examples for the use of 'verfremden' as a transitive verb.

According to Professor Eric Bentley the play by Samuel Ornitz was called *Haunch, Paunch and Jowl* and was performed in 1935 by the Artef Players' collective. The incident with the leg seems to anticipate the water-carrier's injury in *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*.

Piscator's adaptation of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* was produced by the Group Theater in New York in 1936 under the title *The Case of Clyde Griffiths*, with Lee Strasberg directing. Harold Clurman wrote of it in *The Fervent Years* (London, 1946, p. 174) that 'It was schematic in a cold way that to my mind definitely went across the American grain. . . . It was nevertheless technically intriguing and capable of being fashioned into a novel type of stage production.'

26 · On Gestic Music

DEFINITION

'Gest' is not supposed to mean gesticulation: it is not a matter of explanatory or emphatic movements of the hands, but of overall attitudes. A language is gestic when it is grounded in a gest and conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men. The sentence 'pluck the eye that offends thee out' is less effective from the gestic point of view that 'if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out'. The latter starts by presenting the eye, and the first clause has the definite gest of making an assumption; the main clause then comes as a surprise, a piece of advice, and a relief.

AN ARTISTIC PRINCIPLE

The musician sees this initially as an artistic principle, and not a specially interesting one. It may perhaps help him to set his texts in a particularly lively and easily assimilated way. What is more important is the fact that this principle of looking to the gest can allow him to adopt his own political attitude while making music. For that it is essential that he should be setting a social gest.

WHAT IS A SOCIAL GEST?

Not all gests are social gests. The attitude of chasing away a fly is not yet a social gest, though the attitude of chasing away a dog may be one, for instance if it comes to represent a badly dressed man's continual battle against watchdogs. One's efforts to keep one's balance on a slippery surface result in a social gest as soon as falling down would mean 'losing face'; in other words, losing one's market value. The gest of working is definitely a social gest, because all human activity directed towards the mastery of nature is a social undertaking, an undertaking between men. On the other hand a gest of pain, as long as it is kept so abstract and generalized that it does not rise above a purely animal category, is not yet a social one. But this is precisely the common tendency of art: to remove the social element in any gest. The artist is not happy till he achieves 'the look of a hunted animal'. The man then becomes just Man; his gest is stripped of any social individuality; it is an empty one, not representing any undertaking or operation among men by this particular man. The 'look of a hunted animal' can become a social gest if it is shown that particular manoeuvres by men can degrade the individual man to the level of a beast; the social gest is the gest

relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances.

HOW CAN THE COMPOSER'S ATTITUDE TO THE TEXT REFLECT HIS ATTITUDE TO THE CLASS STRUGGLE?

Suppose that the musician composing a cantata on Lenin's death has to reproduce his own attitude to the class struggle. As far as the gest goes, there are a number of different ways in which the report of Lenin's death can be set. A certain dignity of presentation means little, since where death is involved this could also be held to be fitting in the case of an enemy. Anger at 'the blind workings of providence' cutting short the lives of the best members of the community would not be a communist gest; nor would a wise resignation to 'life's irony'; for the gest of communists mourning a communist is a very special one. The musician's attitude to his text, the spokesman's to his report, shows the extent of his political, and so of his human maturity. A man's stature is shown by what he mourns and in what way he mourns it. To raise mourning to a high plane, to make it into an element of social progress: that is an artistic task.

INHUMANITY OF SUBJECT-MATTER LEFT TO ITSELF

Every artist knows that subject-matter in itself is in a sense somewhat banal, featureless, empty, and self-sufficient. It is only the social gest – criticism, craftiness, irony, propaganda, etc. – that breathes humanity into it. The pomp of the Fascists, taken at its face value, has a hollow gest, the gest of mere pomp, a featureless phenomenon: men strutting instead of walking, a certain stiffness, a lot of colour, self-conscious sticking out of chests, etc. All this could be the gest of some popular festivity, quite harmless, purely factual and therefore to be accepted. Only when the strutting takes place over corpses do we get the social gest of Fascism. This means that the artist has to adopt a definite attitude towards the fact of pomp; he cannot let it just speak only for itself, simply expressing it as the fact dictates.

A CRITERION

A good way of judging a piece of music with a text is to try out the different attitudes or gests with which the performer ought to deliver the individual sections: politely or angrily, modestly or contemptuously, approvingly or argumentatively, craftily or without calculation. For this the most suitable gests are as common, vulgar and banal as possible. In this way one can judge the political value of the musical score.

['Über gestische Musik', from *Schriften zum Theater*, 1957]

NOTE: Unpublished until after Brecht's death, this essay can hardly have been written before the mid-1930s, though the note in *Schriften zum Theater* assigns it to 1932. The *Lenin Cantata* to Brecht's words was completed in 1937, according to Volume 3 of Hanns Eisler's collected *Lieder und Kantaten*, which prints the full score.

The definition of 'gestus' or gest given here is the clearest and fullest to be found in Brecht's writings. It can perhaps be illuminated further by a short unpublished fragment (Brecht-Archive 332/76) headed 'representation of sentences in a new encyclopaedia':

1. Who is the sentence of use to?
2. Who does it claim to be of use to?
3. What does it call for?
4. What practical action corresponds to it?
5. What sort of sentences result from it? What sort of sentences support it?
6. In what situation is it spoken? By whom?

See also the essay 'On Rhymeless Verse with Irregular Rhythms' below.

During 1937 Brecht propounded the idea of an international 'Diderot Society' which would circulate papers on 'theatrical science', and it is possible that some of his essays may have been written with this in mind. 'For centuries,' says his exploratory letter (*Schriften zum Theater 3*, pp. 106–10, translated in full by Mordecai Gorelik in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, April 1961),

> we have had international scientific societies whose business it is to organize the mutual exchange of problems and experiences. Science has its common standard, its common vocabulary, its continuity. The arts . . . have no such corresponding societies. This is because their structure is wholly individualistic.

He planned to approach some twenty-odd people connected with different branches of the theatre in the hope that they would agree to pool their methods, knowledge and experience in this way. How many he in fact wrote to is not clear, and so far as is known the scheme is never again mentioned in his papers. The names, however, are of interest as showing the people whose views he then thought compatible with his own. Those recorded on notes, letters or drafts are: W. H. Auden, E. F. Burian, Rupert Doone, Slatan Dudow, S. M. Eisenstein, Hanns Eisler, Mordecai Gorelik, Nordahl Grieg, Georg Hoellering, Christopher Isherwood, Per Knutzon, Karl Koch, Fritz Kortner, Per Lagerquist, Per Lindberg, Archibald Macleish, Léon Moussinac, Nikolai Okhlopkhov, Erwin Piscator, Jean Renoir, Sergei Tretiakov. Naturally Brecht would have left out members of his immediate entourage and friends like Neher who were still in Germany, but even so there are some notable omissions, both of former associates like Weill and of other prominent left-wing theatre people.

NOTE: The actress here described was Helene Weigel. Virtually the same account will be found in Brecht's tribute 'Über eine grosse Schauspielerin unserer Nation' printed in the album *Die Schauspielerin Helene Weigel*, Berlin, 1959. The references are to lines 1234 ff of *Oedipus Rex*, and if they do not correspond (e.g. the analogy of the 'beater') it is no doubt due to the German adaptation.

The dialogue includes Brecht's first reference to an 'audience of the scientific age', though a note 'Der Mann am Regiepult' in *Das Theater*, Berlin, 1928, No. 1 had spoken of the producer's duty 'to raise the theatre to the level of science, and present its repertoire to an audience that in *better* surroundings is used to seeing all attempts to involve it in illusions rejected'. It should perhaps be pointed out that 'Wissenschaft' in German is a broader term than the English 'science' and that Brecht certainly regarded it as embracing the Marxist view of history as well as the natural sciences.

11 · On Form and Subject-Matter

1. Difficulties are not mastered by keeping silent about them. Practice demands that one step should follow another; theory has to embrace the entire sequence. The new subject-matter constitutes the first stage; the sequence however goes further. The difficulty is that it is hard to work on the first stage (new subjects) when one is already thinking about the second (humanity's new mutual relationships). Establishing the function of helium is not much use in helping one to establish a vast picture of the world; yet there is no hope of establishing it if one has anything other than (or more than) helium in one's mind. The proper way to explore humanity's new mutual relationships is via the exploration of the new subject-matter. (Marriage, disease, money, war, etc.)
2. The first thing therefore is to comprehend the new subject-matter; the second to shape the new relations. The reason: art follows reality. An example: the extraction and refinement of petroleum spirit represents a new complex of subjects, and when one studies these carefully one becomes struck by quite new forms of human relationship. A particular mode of behaviour can be observed both in the individual and in the mass, and it is clearly peculiar to the petroleum complex. But it wasn't the new mode of behaviour that created this particular way of refining petrol. The petroleum complex came first, and the new relationships are secondary. The new relationships represent mankind's answers to questions of 'subject-matter'; these are the solutions. The subject-matter (the situation, as it were) develops according to definite rules, plain necessi-

ties, but petroleum creates new relationships. Once again, these are secondary.

3. Simply to comprehend the new areas of subject-matter imposes a new dramatic and theatrical form. Can we speak of money in the form of iambics? 'The Mark, first quoted yesterday at 50 dollars, now beyond 100, soon may rise, etc.' – how about that? Petroleum resists the five-act form; today's catastrophes do not progress in a straight line but in cyclical crises; the 'heroes' change with the different phases, are interchangeable, etc.; the graph of people's actions is complicated by abortive actions; fate is no longer a single coherent power; rather there are fields of force which can be seen radiating in opposite directions; the power groups themselves comprise movements not only against one another but within themselves, etc., etc. Even to dramatize a simple newspaper report one needs something much more than the dramatic technique of a Hebbel or an Ibsen. This is no boast but a sad statement of fact. It is impossible to explain a present-day character by features or a present-day action by motives that would have been adequate in our fathers' time. We allowed ourselves (provisionally) not to inspect motives at all (for instance: *Im Dickicht der Städte*, *Ostpolzug*) in order at least not to impute false ones, and showed actions as pure phenomena by assuming that we would have to show characters for some time without any features at all, this again provisionally.
4. All this, i.e. all these problems, only bears on serious attempts to write *major* plays: something that is at present very far from being properly distinguished from common or garden entertainment.
5. Once we have begun to find our way about the subject-matter we can move on to the relationships, which at present are immensely complicated and can only be simplified by *formal* means. The form in question can however only be achieved by a complete change of the theatre's purpose. Only a new purpose can lead to a new art. The new purpose is called paedagogics.

['Über Stoffe und Formen.' From *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 31 March 1929]

NOTE: The references to petroleum here probably relate to Leo Lania's play about oil interests, *Konjunktur*, which Brecht helped to adapt for Piscator's company in the spring of 1928, and to Lion Feuchtwanger's very Brecht-like play *Die Petroleuminseln* (produced at the Staatstheater on 28 November of the same year, with Lotte Lenya in the cast). Brecht's own attempts to embrace new areas of subject-matter continued with *St Joan of the Stockyards* and the fragment *Der Brotladen*, on both of which he was working about this time.

Ostpolzug by Arnolt Bronnen was produced by Jessner at the Staatstheater on 29 January 1926, with Fritz Kortner in the one and only part (Alexander the Great in modern dress). Brecht also refers to it in a fragmentary note (Brecht Archive 156/25) about Georg Kaiser, his senior by twenty years, which praises Kaiser for his intellectualism, then goes on to say:

> the first works of the younger playwrights – *Vatermord*, *Trommeln in der Nacht* – signified a reaction. Before that of course there had been a Battle of the Marne. The younger playwrights saw no chance of consolidating the positions that had been so dashingly and (alas) unthinkingly won. They tagged along. Then with *Mann ist Mann* and *Ostpolzug* there was a general counter-offensive – of two men – with a fresh weapon and a different objective.

The call for a change in the theatre's purpose was echoed in the same number of the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* by Emil Burri, one of Brecht's collaborators. In July the first two of Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, or purely didactic works, were performed at the Baden-Baden music festival: *Der Flug der Lindberghs* (for radio) and *Badener Lehrstück*.

12 · An Example of Paedagogics

(Notes to *Der Flug der Lindberghs*)

Der Flug der Lindberghs *for instruction, not for pleasure*

Der Flug der Lindberghs is valueless unless learned from. It has no value as art which would justify any performance not intended for learning. It is an *object of instruction* and falls into two parts. The first part (songs of the elements, choruses, sounds of water and motors, etc.) is meant to help the exercise, i.e. introduce it and interrupt it – which is best done by an apparatus. The other, *paedagogical* part (the Flier's part) is the text for the exercise: the participant listens to the one part and speaks the other. In this way a collaboration develops between participant and apparatus, in which expression is more important than accuracy. The text is to be spoken and sung mechanically; a break must be made at the end of each line of verse; the part listened to is to be mechanically followed.

'In obedience to the principle that the State shall be rich and man shall be poor, that the State shall be obliged to have many possibilities and man shall be allowed to have few possibilities, where music is concerned the State shall furnish whatever needs special apparatus and special abilities; the individual, however, shall furnish an exercise. Free-roaming feelings aroused by music, special thoughts such as may be entertained when listening to music, physical exhaustion such as easily arises just from listening to music, are all distractions from music. To avoid these distractions the indi-