

ought sooner or later to break with their favourite habit of having a bad theatre.

['Eine Abrechnung.' From 'Augsburger Theaterkritiken' in *Sinn und Form*, Zweites Sonderheft Bertolt Brecht, Potsdam, 1957]

NOTE: Between October 1919 and January 1921 Brecht wrote some two dozen theatre criticisms for the USPD (left-wing Socialist) paper *Die Augsburger Volkswille*, of which this, originally published on 14 May 1920, is perhaps the most far-reaching. The producer mentioned was Friedrich Merz. Since 1903 the theatre had been directed by Carl Häusler (see Hecht, pp. 11-12). Three years after Brecht's attack it turned over entirely to opera, relying on visiting Munich companies to perform plays.

Brecht left the university in the summer of 1921 and settled in Munich, where three of his first four plays had their premières. He published nothing more about the theatre until after he had moved to Berlin in 1924 and established himself as a freelance writer.

BRECHT MATERIALS

3 · Emphasis on Sport

We pin our hopes to the sporting public.

Make no bones about it, we have our eye on those huge concrete pans, filled with 15,000 men and women of every variety of class and physiognomy, the fairest and shrewdest audience in the world. There you will find 15,000 persons paying high prices, and working things out on the basis of a sensible weighing of supply and demand. You cannot expect to get fair conduct on a sinking ship. The demoralization of our theatre audiences springs from the fact that neither theatre nor audience has any idea what is supposed to go on there. When people in sporting establishments buy their tickets they know exactly what is going to take place; and that is exactly what does take place once they are in their seats: viz. highly trained persons developing their peculiar powers in the way most suited to them, with the greatest sense of responsibility yet in such a way as to make one feel that they are doing it primarily for their own fun. Against that the traditional theatre is nowadays quite lacking in character.

There seems to be nothing to stop the theatre having its own form of 'sport'. If only someone could take those buildings designed for theatrical purposes which are now standing eating their heads off in interest, and treat them as more or less empty spaces for the successful pursuit of 'sport', then they would be used in a way that might mean something to a contemporary

public that earns real contemporary money and eats real contemporary beef.

It may be objected that there is also a section of the public that wants to see something other than 'sport' in the theatre. But we have never seen a single piece of evidence to prove that the public at present filling the theatres *wants* anything at all. The public's well-padded resistance to any attempt to make it give up those two old stalls which it inherited from grandpa should not be misinterpreted as a brand-new assertion of its will.

People are always telling us that we mustn't simply produce what the public demands. But I believe that an artist, even if he sits in strictest seclusion in the traditional garret working for future generations, is unlikely to produce anything without some wind in his sails. And this wind has to be the wind prevailing in his own period, and not some future wind. There is nothing to say that this wind must be used for travel in any particular direction (once one has a wind one can naturally sail against it; the only impossibility is to sail with no wind at all or with tomorrow's wind), and no doubt an artist will fall far short of achieving his maximum effectiveness today if he sails with today's wind. It would be quite wrong to judge a play's relevance or lack of relevance by its current effectiveness. Theatres don't work that way.

A theatre which makes no contact with the public is a nonsense. Our theatre is accordingly a nonsense. The reason why the theatre has at present no contact with the public is that it has no idea what is wanted of it. It can no longer do what it once could, and if it could do it it would no longer wish to. But it stubbornly goes on doing what it no longer can do and what is no longer wanted. All those establishments with their excellent heating systems, their pretty lighting, their appetite for large sums of money, their imposing exteriors, together with the entire business that goes on inside them; all this doesn't contain five pennyworth of fun. There is no theatre today that could invite one or two of those persons who are alleged to find fun in writing plays to one of its performances and expect them to feel an urge to write a play for it. They can see at a glance that there is no possible way of getting any fun out of this. No wind will go into anyone's sails here. There is no 'sport'.

Take the actors, for instance. I wouldn't like to say that we are worse off for talent than other periods seem to have been, but I doubt if there has ever been such an overworked, misused, panic-driven, artificially whipped-up band of actors as ours. *And nobody who fails to get fun out of his activities can expect them to be fun for anybody else.*

The people at the top naturally blame the people at the bottom, and the favourite scapegoat is the harmless garret. The people's wrath is directed

against the garret; the plays are no good. To that it must be said that so long as they have been fun to write they are bound to be better than the theatre that puts them on and the public that goes to see them. A play is simply unrecognizable once it has passed through this sausage-machine. If we come along and say that both we and the public had imagined things differently – that we are in favour, for instance, of elegance, lightness, dryness, objectivity – then the theatre replies innocently: Those passions which you have singled out, my dear sir, do not beat beneath any dinner-jacket's manly chest. As if even a play like *Vatermord* could not be performed in a simple, elegant and, as it were, classically rounded way!

Behind a feigned intensity you are offered a naked struggle in lieu of real competence. They no longer know how to stage anything remarkable, and therefore worth seeing. In his obscure anxiety not to let the audience get away the actor is immediately so steamed up that he makes it seem the most natural thing in the world to insult one's father. At the same time it can be seen that acting takes a tremendous lot out of him. *And a man who strains himself on the stage is bound, if he is any good, to strain all the people sitting in the stalls.*

I cannot agree with those who complain of no longer being in a position to prevent the imminent decline of the west. I believe that there is such a wealth of subjects worth seeing, characters worth admiring and lessons worth learning that once a good sporting spirit sets in one would have to build theatres if they did not already exist. The most hopeful element, however, in the present-day theatre is the people who pour out of both ends of the building after the performance. They are dissatisfied.

['Mehr guten Sport.' From *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 6 February 1926]

NOTE: This article appeared eight days before the Berlin production of Brecht's first play *Baal*, which he staged himself in collaboration with Oscar Homolka. His friend Arnolt Bronnen's *Vatermord*, referred to in the article, had been the object of his first attempt at production in 1922, but was taken over by another producer because of the actors' resistance to Brecht's conception of the play.

About the same time, Brecht was insisting on the need for what he called a 'smokers' theatre', where the audience would puff away at its cigars as if watching a boxing match, and would develop a more detached and critical outlook than was possible in the ordinary German theatre, where smoking was not allowed. 'I even think,' says a fragment (*Schriften zum Theater 1*, p. 165),

that in a Shakespearean production one man in the stalls with a cigar could bring about the downfall of Western art. He might as well light a bomb as light his cigar. I would be delighted to see our public allowed to smoke

during performances. And I'd be delighted mainly for the actors' sake. In my view it is quite impossible for the actor to play unnatural, cramped and old-fashioned theatre to a man smoking in the stalls.

A notebook entry of 10 February 1922 (*Schriften zum Theater 2*, p. 31) gives a much earlier statement of the same idea:

I hope in *Baal* and *Dickicht* I've avoided one common artistic bloomer, that of trying to carry people away. Instinctively, I've kept my distance and ensured that the realization of my (poetical and philosophical) effects remains within bounds. The spectator's 'splendid isolation' is left intact; it is not *sua res quae agitur*; he is not fobbed off with an invitation to feel sympathetically, to fuse with the hero and seem significant and indestructible as he watches himself in two simultaneous versions. A higher type of interest can be got from making comparisons, from whatever is different, amazing, impossible to take in as a whole.

Such opinions must be set against the pretentious German classical stage of that time. A brief essay, evidently dating from Brecht's first years in Berlin, and entitled 'Less Plaster' ('Weniger Gips!!!' *Schriften zum Theater 1*, p. 84ff.), begins thus:

We Germans are uncommonly good at putting up with boredom and are thoroughly hardened to the unfunny. Naturally a specific instinct for mediocrity suits the German theatre very well. A theatre is a business that sells evening entertainment. But nobody here is really satisfied with that. All kinds of things rank higher than entertainment. So far as our theatre goes, the unpretentious entertainment supplied by it is thoroughly decent and adequate; the middle grade is most in demand; but what we take really seriously is entertainment in monumental form. Today in any town of more than 50,000 inhabitants you can buy plenty of monumentalities for five marks.

The idea of 'fun' (Spaß) occurs again and again in Brecht's writings: 'If Brecht gets no fun out of what he has created,' wrote Elisabeth Hauptmann, his secretary and lifelong collaborator, in her diary a day after 'Emphasis on Sport' appeared in print, 'he immediately goes and changes it. . . . He says that Shakespeare was undoubtedly the best member of his own audience, and wrote things primarily that he and his friends got fun out of.'

The theatre section of the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* was then under the direction of Herbert Ihering, who had been responsible for awarding the Kleist Prize to Brecht's *Trommeln in der Nacht* in 1922. Many of these early essays, answers to questionnaires, etc. appeared there, and an apparently unpublished note (Brecht-Archive 331/104) shows that Brecht already saw some danger of their being interpreted as a kind of gospel:

Bertolt Brecht has written a small series of essays for the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* which give a rough picture of his views about the present-day theatre. These remarks . . . are not intended to supply an aesthetic; they are meant rather to give a portrait of this generation and show its attitude to the stage. We will keep space for answers.

vidual shares in the music, thus obeying the principle that doing is better than feeling, by following the music with his eyes as printed, and contributing the parts and places reserved for him by singing them for himself or in conjunction with others (school class).'

Der Flug der Lindberghs is not intended to be of use to the present-day radio but to alter it. The increasing concentration of mechanical means and the increasingly specialized training – tendencies that should be accelerated – call for a kind of resistance by the listener, and for his mobilization and redrafting as a producer.

The employment of *Der Flug der Lindberghs* and the use of radio in its changed form was shown by a demonstration at the Baden-Baden radio experiment Baden music festival of 1929. On the left of the platform the radio orchestra was placed with its apparatus and singers, on the right the listener, who performed the Flier's part, i.e. the paedagogical part, with a score in front of him. He read the sections to be spoken without identifying his own feelings with those contained in the text, pausing at the end of each line; in other words, in the spirit of an *exercise*. At the back of the platform stood the theory being demonstrated in this way.

This exercise is an aid to discipline, which is the basis of freedom. The individual will reach spontaneously for a means to pleasure, but not for an object of instruction that offers him neither profit nor social advantages. Such exercises only serve the individual in so far as they serve the State, and they only serve a State that wishes to serve all men equally. Thus *Der Flug der Lindberghs* has no aesthetic and no revolutionary value independently of its application, and only the State can organize this. Its proper application, however, makes it so 'revolutionary' that the present-day State has no interest in sponsoring such exercises.

Here is an example of the effect of this application on the text: the figure of a public hero in *Der Flug der Lindberghs* might be used to induce the listener at a *concert* to identify himself with the hero and thus cut himself off from the masses. In a concert performance (consequently a false one) at least the Flier's part must be sung by a *chorus* if the sense of the entire work is not to be ruined. Only *concerted I-singing* (I am so-and-so, I am starting forth, I am not tired, etc.) can save something of the paedagogical effect.

[From *Versuche 1*, Berlin 1930. Signed 'Brecht, Suhrkamp'.]

NOTE: The music to *Der Flug der Lindberghs* was by Kurt Weill and Paul Hindemith. Brecht subsequently changed its title to *Der Ozeanflug*, as which it now figures in the reprint of the *Versuche*. Peter Suhrkamp, his collaborator on the notes, became his West German publisher after 1948.

The principle underlying the *Lehrstück* form – which began as a kind of didactic cantata, with solos, choruses and scraps of acting – was the notion that moral and political lessons could best be taught by participation in an actual performance. 'When performing a *Lehrstück*,' says a note (*Schriften zum Theater 2*, p. 128), you must act like pupils. The pupil will use a particularly clear manner of speaking in order to run over a difficult passage again and again so as to get at its meaning or fix it in the memory. His gestures too are clear and help towards clarification. Then there are other passages which have to be quickly and fleetingly delivered as if they were frequently practised ritual actions. These are the passages which correspond to sections of a speech conveying particular items of information needed for the understanding of the more important item that follows. Such passages are wholly useful to the overall process and must be delivered as performances. Then there are parts that demand acting ability of very much the old kind. E.g. when a typical way of behaving has to be shown. For there is a certain practical human way of behaving which may bring about situations that demand or facilitate new ways. To show the typical gestures and manners of speech of a man trying to convince somebody, one has to apply the art of acting.

The next few essays were published and almost certainly written subsequently to the switchover to 'paedagogics', even though the plays to which they relate were written earlier. They should be read in the light of the political and economic crisis which developed in Germany during the second half of 1929, making revolutionary change seem not only desirable but imminent. This was the period of Brecht's most sharply Communist works.

13 · The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre

(Notes to the opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*)

OPERA – WITH INNOVATIONS!

For some time past there has been a move to renovate the opera. Opera is to have its form modernized and its content brought up to date, but without its culinary character being changed. Since it is precisely for its backwardness that the opera-going public adores opera, an influx of new types of listener with new appetites has to be reckoned with; and so it is. The intention is to democratize but not to alter democracy's character, which consists in giving the people new rights, but no chance to appreciate them. Ultimately it is all the same to the waiter whom he serves, so long as he serves the

food. Thus the *avant-garde* are demanding or supporting innovations which are supposedly going to lead to a renovation of opera; but nobody demands a fundamental discussion of opera (i.e. of its function), and probably such a discussion would not find much support.

The modesty of the *avant-garde*'s demands has economic grounds of whose existence they themselves are only partly aware. Great apparatus like the opera, the stage, the press, etc., impose their views as it were incognito. For a long time now they have taken the handiwork (music, writing, criticism, etc.) of intellectuals who share in their profits – that is, of men who are economically committed to the prevailing system but are socially near-proletarian – and processed it to make fodder for their public entertainment machine, judging it by their own standards and guiding it into their own channels; meanwhile the intellectuals themselves have gone on supposing that the whole business is concerned only with the presentation of their work, is a secondary process which has no influence over their work but merely wins influence for it. This muddled thinking which overtakes musicians, writers and critics as soon as they consider their own situation has tremendous consequences to which far too little attention is paid. For by imagining that they have got hold of an apparatus which in fact has got hold of them they are supporting an apparatus which is out of their control, which is no longer (as they believe) a means of furthering output but has become an obstacle to output, and specifically to their own output as soon as it follows a new and original course which the apparatus finds awkward or opposed to its own aims. Their output then becomes a matter of delivering the goods. Values evolve which are based on the fodder principle. And this leads to a general habit of judging works of art by their suitability for the apparatus without ever judging the apparatus by its suitability for the work. People say, this or that is a good work; and they mean (but do not say) good for the apparatus. Yet this apparatus is conditioned by the society of the day and only accepts what can keep it going in that society. We are free to discuss any innovation which doesn't threaten its social function – that of providing an evening's entertainment. We are not free to discuss those which threaten to change its function, possibly by fusing it with the educational system or with the organs of mass communication. Society absorbs via the apparatus whatever it needs in order to reproduce itself. This means that an innovation will pass if it is calculated to rejuvenate existing society, but not if it is going to change it – irrespective whether the form of the society in question is good or bad.

The *avant-garde* don't think of changing the apparatus, because they fancy that they have at their disposal an apparatus which will serve up

whatever they freely invent, transforming itself spontaneously to match their ideas. But they are not in fact free inventors; the apparatus goes on fulfilling its function with or without them; the theatres play every night; the papers come out so many times a day; and they absorb what they need; and all they need is a given amount of stuff.¹

You might think that to show up this situation (the creative artist's utter dependence on the apparatus) would be to condemn it. Its concealment is such a disgrace.

And yet to restrict the individual's freedom of invention is in itself a progressive act. The individual becomes increasingly drawn into enormous events that are going to change the world. No longer can he simply 'express himself'. He is brought up short and put into a position where he can fulfil more general tasks. The trouble, however, is that at present the apparatus do not work for the general good; the means of production do not belong to the producer; and as a result his work amounts to so much merchandise, and is governed by the normal laws of mercantile trade. Art is merchandise, only to be manufactured by the means of production (apparatus). An opera can only be written for the opera. (One can't just think up an opera like one of Böcklin's fantastic sea-beasts, then hope to exhibit it publicly after having seized power – let alone try to smuggle it into our dear old zoo. . . .)

OPERA –

Even if one wanted to start a discussion of the opera as such (i.e. of its function), an opera would have to be written.

Our existing opera is a culinary opera. It was a means of pleasure long before it turned into merchandise. It furthers pleasure even where it requires, or promotes, a certain degree of education, for the education in question is an education of taste. To every object it adopts a hedonistic approach. It 'experiences', and it ranks as an 'experience'.

Why is *Mahagonny* an opera? Because its basic attitude is that of an opera: that is to say, culinary. Does *Mahagonny* adopt a hedonistic approach? It does. Is *Mahagonny* an experience? It is an experience. For . . . *Mahagonny* is a piece of fun.

The opera *Mahagonny* pays conscious tribute to the senselessness of the operatic form. The irrationality of opera lies in the fact that rational elements are employed, solid reality is aimed at, but at the same time it is all washed out by the music. A dying man is real. If at the same time he sings

¹ The intellectuals, however, are completely dependent on the apparatus, both socially and economically; it is the only channel for the realization of their work. The output of writers, composers and critics comes more and more to resemble raw material. The finished article is produced by the apparatus.

we are translated to the sphere of the irrational. (If the audience sang at the sight of him the case would be different.) The more unreal and unclear the music can make the reality – though there is of course a third, highly complex and in itself quite real element which can have quite real effects but is utterly remote from the reality of which it treats – the more pleasurable the whole process becomes: the pleasure grows in proportion to the degree of unreality.

The term 'opera' – far be it from us to profane it – leads, in *Mahagonny's* case, to all the rest. The intention was that a certain unreality, irrationality and lack of seriousness should be introduced at the right moment, and so strike with a double meaning.¹

The irrationality which makes its appearance in this way only fits the occasion on which it appears.

It is a purely hedonistic approach.

As for the content of this opera, *its content is pleasure*. Fun, in other words, not only as form but as subject-matter. At least, enjoyment was meant to be the object of the inquiry even if the inquiry was intended to be an object of enjoyment. Enjoyment here appears in its current historical role: as merchandise.²

It is undeniable that at present this content must have a provocative effect. In the thirteenth section, for example, where the glutton stuffs himself to death; because hunger is the rule. We never even hinted that others were going hungry while he stuffed, but the effect was provocative all the same. It is not everyone who is in a position to stuff himself full that dies of it, yet many are dying of hunger because this man stuffs himself to death. His pleasure provokes, because it implies so much.³

In contexts like these the use of opera as a means of pleasure must have provocative effects today. Though not of course on the handful of operagoers. Its power to provoke introduces reality once more. *Mahagonny* may not taste particularly agreeable; it may even (thanks to guilty conscience)

¹ This limited aim did not stop us from introducing an element of instruction, and from basing everything on the gest. The eye which looks for the gest in everything is the moral sense. In other words, a moral tableau. A subjective one, though ...

Jetzt trinken wir noch eins
Dann gehen wir nicht nach Hause
Dann trinken wir noch eins
Dann machen wir mal eine Pause.

- The people who sing this are subjective moralists. They are describing themselves.

² Romanticism is merchandise here too. It appears only as content, not as form.

³ 'A dignified gentleman with an empurpled face had fished out a bunch of keys and was making a piercing demonstration against the Epic Theatre. His wife didn't desert him in this decisive moment. She had stuck two fingers in her mouth, screwed up her eyes and blown out her cheeks. The whistle was louder than the key of the safe.' (Alfred Polgar on the first production of *Mahagonny* in Leipzig.)

make a point of not doing so. But it is culinary through and through. *Mahagonny* is nothing more or less than an opera.

- WITH INNOVATIONS!

Opera had to be brought up to the technical level of the modern theatre. The modern theatre is the epic theatre. The following table shows certain changes of emphasis as between the dramatic and the epic theatre:¹

DRAMATIC THEATRE

plot
implicates the spectator in a stage situation
wears down his capacity for action
provides him with sensations
experience
the spectator is involved in something
suggestion
instinctive feelings are preserved
the spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience
the human being is taken for granted
he is unalterable
eyes on the finish
one scene makes another
growth
linear development
evolutionary determinism
man as a fixed point
thought determines being
feeling

EPIC THEATRE

narrative
turns the spectator into an observer,
but
arouses his capacity for action
forces him to take decisions
picture of the world
he is made to face something
argument
brought to the point of recognition
the spectator stands outside, studies
the human being is the object of the inquiry
he is alterable and able to alter eyes on the course
each scene for itself
montage
in curves
jumps
man as a process
social being determines thought
reason

When the epic theatre's methods begin to penetrate the opera the first result is a radical *separation of the elements*. The great struggle for supremacy between words, music and production – which always brings up the question 'which is the pretext for what?': is the music the pretext for the events on the stage, or are these the pretext for the music? etc. – can simply be by-passed by radically separating the elements. So long as the expression 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (or 'integrated work of art') means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be 'fused' together, the various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will

¹ This table does not show absolute antitheses but mere shifts of accent. In a communication of fact, for instance, we may choose whether to stress the element of emotional suggestion or that of plain rational argument.

act as a mere 'feed' to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has got to be given up.

Words, music and setting must become more independent of one another.

(a) Music

For the music, the change of emphasis proved to be as follows:

DRAMATIC OPERA

The music dishes up music which heightens the text music which proclaims the text music which illustrates music which paints the psychological situation

EPIC OPERA

The music communicates music which sets forth the text music which takes the text for granted which takes up a position which gives the attitude

Music plays the chief part in our thesis¹

(b) Text

We had to make something straightforward and instructive of our fun, if it was not to be irrational and nothing more. The form employed was that of the moral tableau. The tableau is performed by the characters in the play.

The text had to be neither moralizing nor sentimental, but to put morals and sentimentality on view. Equally important was the spoken word and the written word (of the titles). Reading seems to encourage the audience to adopt the most natural attitude towards the work.²

(c) Setting

Showing independent works of art as part of a theatrical performance is a new departure. Neher's projections adopt an attitude towards the events on the stage; as when the real glutton sits in front of the glutton whom Neher has drawn. In the same way the stage unreels the events that are fixed on the screen. These projections of Neher's are quite as much an independent component of the opera as are Weill's music and the text. They provide its visual aids.

¹ The large number of craftsmen in the average opera orchestra allows of nothing but associative music (one barrage of sound breeding another); and so the orchestral apparatus needs to be cut down to thirty specialists or less. The singer becomes a reporter, whose private feelings must remain a private affair.

² The significance of the titles is explained in the 'Notes to the Threepenny Opera' [see page 43], and in note 1 to the 'Dreigroschenfilm' [in Brecht's *Versuche* 3].

Of course such innovations also demand a new attitude on the part of the audiences who frequent opera houses.

EFFECT OF THE INNOVATIONS: A THREAT TO OPERA?

It is true that the audience had certain desires which were easily satisfied by the old opera but are no longer taken into account by the new. What is the audience's attitude during an opera; and is there any chance that it will change?

Bursting out of the underground stations, eager to become as wax in the magicians' hands, grown-up men, their resolution proved in the struggle for existence, rush to the box office. They hand in their hat at the cloakroom, and with it they hand their normal behaviour: the attitudes of 'everyday life'. Once out of the cloakroom they take their seats with the bearing of kings. How can we blame them? You may think a grocer's bearing better than a king's and still find this ridiculous. For the attitude that these people adopt in the opera is unworthy of them. Is there any possibility that they may change it? Can we persuade them to get out their cigars?

Once the content becomes, technically speaking, an independent component, to which text, music and setting 'adopt attitudes'; once illusion is sacrificed to free discussion, and once the spectator, instead of being enabled to have an experience, is forced as it were to cast his vote; then a change has been launched which goes far beyond formal matters and begins for the first time to affect the theatre's social function.

In the old operas all discussion of the content is rigidly excluded. If a member of the audience had happened to see a particular set of circumstances portrayed and had taken up a position *vis-à-vis* them, then the old opera would have lost its battle: the 'spell would have been broken'. Of course there were elements in the old opera which were not purely culinary; one has to distinguish between the period of its development and that of its decline. *The Magic Flute*, *Fidelio*, *Figaro* all included elements that were philosophical, dynamic. And yet the element of philosophy, almost of daring, in these operas was so subordinated to the culinary principle that their *sense* was in effect tottering and was soon absorbed in sensual satisfaction. Once its original 'sense' had died away the opera was by no means left bereft of sense, but had simply acquired another one - a sense *qua* opera. The content had been smothered in the opera. Our Wagnerites are now pleased to remember that the original Wagnerites posited a sense of which they were presumably aware. Those composers who stem from Wagner still insist on posing as philosophers. A philosophy which is of no use to man or beast, and can only be disposed of as a means of sensual satisfaction.

(*Elektra*, *Jonny spielt auf*.) We still maintain the whole highly-developed technique which made this pose possible: the vulgarian strikes a philosophical attitude from which to conduct his hackneyed ruminations. It is only from this point, from the death of the sense (and it is understood that this sense *could die*), that we can start to understand the further innovations which are now plaguing opera: to see them as desperate attempts to supply this art with a posthumous sense, a 'new' sense, by which the sense comes ultimately to lie in the music itself, so that the sequence of musical forms acquires a sense simply *qua* sequence, and certain proportions, changes, etc. from being a means are promoted to become an end. Progress which has neither roots nor result; which does not spring from new requirements but satisfies the old ones with new titillations, thus furthering a purely conservative aim. New material is absorbed which is unfamiliar 'in this context', because at the time when 'this context' was evolved it was not known in any context at all. (Railway engines, factories, aeroplanes, bathrooms, etc. act as a diversion. Better composers choose instead to deny all content by performing - or rather smothering - it in the Latin tongue.) This sort of progress only indicates that something has been left behind. It is achieved without the overall function being changed; or rather, with a view to stopping any such change from taking place. And what about *Gebrauchsmusik*?

At the very moment when neo-classicism, in other words stark Art for Art's sake, took the field (it came as a reaction against the emotional element in musical impressionism) the idea of utilitarian music, or *Gebrauchsmusik*, emerged like Venus from the waves: music was to make use of the amateur. The amateur was used as a woman is 'used'. Innovation upon innovation. The punch-drunk listener suddenly wants to play. The struggle against idle listening turned into a struggle for keen listening, then for keen playing. The cellist in the orchestra, father of a numerous family, now began to play not from philosophical conviction but for pleasure. The culinary principle was saved.¹

What is the point, we wonder, of chasing one's own tail like this? Why this obstinate clinging to the pleasure element? This addiction to drugs?

¹ Innovations of this sort must be criticized so long as they are helping to renovate institutions that have outlived their usefulness. They represent progress as soon as we set out to effect radical changes in the institutions' function. Then they become quantitative improvements, purges, cleansing operations which are given meaning only by the functional change which has been or is to be made.

True progress consists not in being progressive but in progressing. True progress is what enables or compels us to progress. And on a broad front, at that, so that neighbouring spheres are set in motion too. True progress has its cause in the impossibility of an actual situation, and its result is that situation's change.

Why so little concern with one's own interests as soon as one steps outside one's own home? Why this refusal to discuss? Answer: nothing can come of discussion. To discuss the present form of our society, or even of one of its least important parts, would lead inevitably and at once to an outright threat to our society's form as such.

We have seen that opera is sold as evening entertainment, and that this puts definite bounds to all attempts to transform it. We see that this entertainment has to be devoted to illusion, and must be of a ceremonial kind. Why?

In our present society the old opera cannot be just 'wished away'. Its illusions have an important social function. The drug is irreplaceable; it cannot be done without.¹

Only in the opera does the human being have a chance to be human. His entire mental capacities have long since been ground down to a timid mistrustfulness, an envy of others, a selfish calculation. The old opera survives not just because it is old, but chiefly because the situation which it is able to meet is still the old one. This is not wholly so. And here lies the hope for the new opera. Today we can begin to ask whether opera hasn't come to such a pass that further innovations, instead of leading to the renovation of this whole form, will bring about its destruction.²

Perhaps *Mahagonny* is as culinary as ever - just as culinary as an opera ought to be - but one of its functions is to change society; it brings the culinary principle under discussion, it attacks the society that needs operas of such a sort; it still perches happily on the old bough, perhaps, but at least it has started (out of absent-mindedness or bad conscience) to saw it through. . . . And here you have the effect of the innovations and the song they sing.

Real innovations attack the roots.

FOR INNOVATIONS - AGAINST RENOVATION!

The opera *Mahagonny* was written three years ago, in 1927. In subsequent

¹ The life imposed on us is too hard; it brings us too many agonies, disappointments, impossible tasks. In order to stand it we have to have some kind of palliative. There seem to be three classes of these: overpowering distractions, which allow us to find our sufferings unimportant, pseudo-satisfactions which reduce them and drugs which make us insensitive to them. The pseudo-satisfactions offered by art are illusions if compared with reality, but are none the less psychologically effective for that, thanks to the part played by the imagination in our inner life. (Freud: *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, page 22.) Such drugs are sometimes responsible for the wastage of great stores of energy which might have been applied to bettering the human lot. (Ibid., page 28.)

² Such, in the opera *Mahagonny*, are those innovations which allow the theatre to present moral tableaux (showing up the commercial character both of the entertainment and of the person entertained) and which put the spectator in a moralizing frame of mind.

works attempts were made to emphasize the didactic more and more at the expense of the culinary element. And so to develop the means of pleasure into an object of instruction, and to convert certain institutions from places of entertainment into organs of mass communication.

[From *Versuche* 2, Berlin 1930. Signed 'Brecht. Suhrkamp']

NOTE: This essay, under the title 'Notes on the Opera', followed the published text of Brecht's opera with Weill, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. First performed in an embryo version as a 'Songspiel' in July 1927, the full opera was given in Leipzig on 9 March 1930; i.e. after Brecht had begun writing his 'Lehrstücke', the 'subsequent works' referred to in the last paragraph. Caspar Neher, the scene designer for both productions, was a childhood friend and life-long collaborator of Brecht's. There are frequent references to him in what follows.

Besides being the first full statement of Brecht's ideas about the 'epic theatre', this essay introduces the important term '*gestisch*'. '*Gestus*,' of which '*gestisch*' is the adjective, means both gist and gesture; an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude, expressible in words or actions. Lessing used the term in his *Hamburger Dramaturgie* as something distinct from '*Geste*', or gesture proper (entry for 12 May 1767); and Weill himself seems to have preceded Brecht in its use, publishing an article 'Über den gestischen Charakter der Musik' in *Die Musik* (p. 419) in March 1929.

Weill introduces the term thus: Music, he says, is particularly important for the theatre because 'it can reproduce the *gestus* that illustrates the incident on the stage; it can even create a kind of basic *gestus* (*Grundgestus*), forcing the action into a particular attitude that excludes all doubt and misunderstanding about the incident in question.' The translator has chosen the obsolete English word 'gest', meaning 'bearing, carriage, mien' (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*) as the nearest manageable equivalent, together with its adjective 'gestic'.

Of the operas referred to, *Jonny spielt auf* was Ernst Křenek's opera about a Negro violinist, which included a scene in a railway station and was first performed on 11 February 1927. A factory is shown in Max Brand's *Maschinist Hopkins* (13 April 1929). The work in Latin was presumably Cocteau's and Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* (Berlin State Opera production in February 1928).

'Gebrauchsmusik' was a doctrine that music should perform a utilitarian function. Brecht is confusing it with its companion doctrine of 'Gemeinschaftsmusik', or amateur music played for the sake of the social virtue of playing together. Both were particularly associated with Paul Hindemith, with whom Brecht had fallen out after their collaboration on the first two Lehrstücke.

14 · The Literarization of the Theatre

(Notes to the *Threepenny Opera*)

THE READING OF PLAYS

There is no reason why John Gay's motto for his *Beggar's Opera* – nos haec novimus esse nihil – should be changed for the *Threepenny Opera*. Its publication represents little more than the prompt-book of a play wholly surrendered to theatres, and thus is directed at the expert rather than at the consumer. This doesn't mean that the conversion of the maximum number of readers or spectators into experts is not thoroughly desirable; indeed it is under way.

The *Threepenny Opera* is concerned with bourgeois conceptions not only as content, by representing them, but also through the manner in which it does so. It is a kind of report on life as any member of the audience would like to see it. Since at the same time, however, he sees a good deal that he has no wish to see; since therefore he sees his wishes not merely fulfilled but also criticized (sees himself not as the subject but as the object), he is theoretically in a position to appoint a new function for the theatre. But the theatre itself resists any alteration of its function, and so it seems desirable that the spectator should read plays whose aim is not merely to be performed in the theatre but to change it: out of mistrust of the theatre. Today we see the theatre being given absolute priority over the actual plays. The theatre apparatus's priority is a priority of means of production. This apparatus resists all conversion to other purposes, by taking any play which it encounters and immediately changing it so that it no longer represents a foreign body within the apparatus – except at those points where it neutralizes itself. The necessity to stage the new drama correctly – which matters more for the theatre's sake than for the drama's – is modified by the fact that the theatre can stage anything: it theatres it all down. Of course this priority has economic reasons.

Use of realistic everything

TITLES AND SCREENS

The screens on which the titles of each scene are projected are a primitive attempt at literarizing the theatre. This literarization of the theatre needs to be developed to the utmost degree, as in general does the literarizing of all public occasions.

Literarizing entails punctuating 'representation' with 'formulation'; gives the theatre the possibility of making contact with other institutions

for intellectual activities; but is bound to remain one-sided so long as the audience is taking no part in it and using it as a means of obtaining access to 'higher things'.

The orthodox playwright's objection to the titles is that the dramatist ought to say everything that has to be said in the action, that the text must express everything within its own confines. The corresponding attitude for the spectator is that he should not think about a subject, but within the confines of the subject. But this way of subordinating everything to a single idea, this passion for propelling the spectator along a single track where he can look neither right nor left, up nor down, is something that the new school of play-writing must reject. Footnotes, and the habit of turning back in order to check a point, need to be introduced into play-writing too.

Some exercise in complex seeing is needed – though it is perhaps more important to be able to think above the stream than to think in the stream. Moreover the use of screens imposes and facilitates a new style of acting. This style is the *epic style*. As he reads the projections on the screen the spectator adopts an attitude of smoking-and-watching. Such an attitude on his part at once compels a better and clearer performance as it is hopeless to try to 'carry away' any man who is smoking and accordingly pretty well occupied with himself. By these means one would soon have a theatre full of experts, just as one has sporting arenas full of experts. No chance of the actors having the effrontery to offer such people those few miserable scraps of imitation which they at present cook up in a few rehearsals 'any old how' and without the least thought! No question of their material being taken from them in so unfinished and unworked a state. The actor would have to find a quite different way of drawing attention to those incidents which had been previously announced by the titles and so deprived of any intrinsic element of surprise.

Unfortunately it is to be feared that titles and permission to smoke are not of themselves enough to lead the audience to a more fruitful use of the theatre.

ABOUT THE SINGING OF THE SONGS

When an actor sings he undergoes a change of function. Nothing is more revolting than when the actor pretends not to notice that he has left the level of plain speech and started to sing. The three levels – plain speech, heightened speech and singing – must always remain distinct, and in no case should heightened speech represent an intensification of plain speech, or singing of heightened speech. In no case therefore should singing take place where words are prevented by excess of feeling. The actor must not



1. Frank Wedekind and his wife Tilly near the Deutsches Theater, Berlin, about 1908-12.



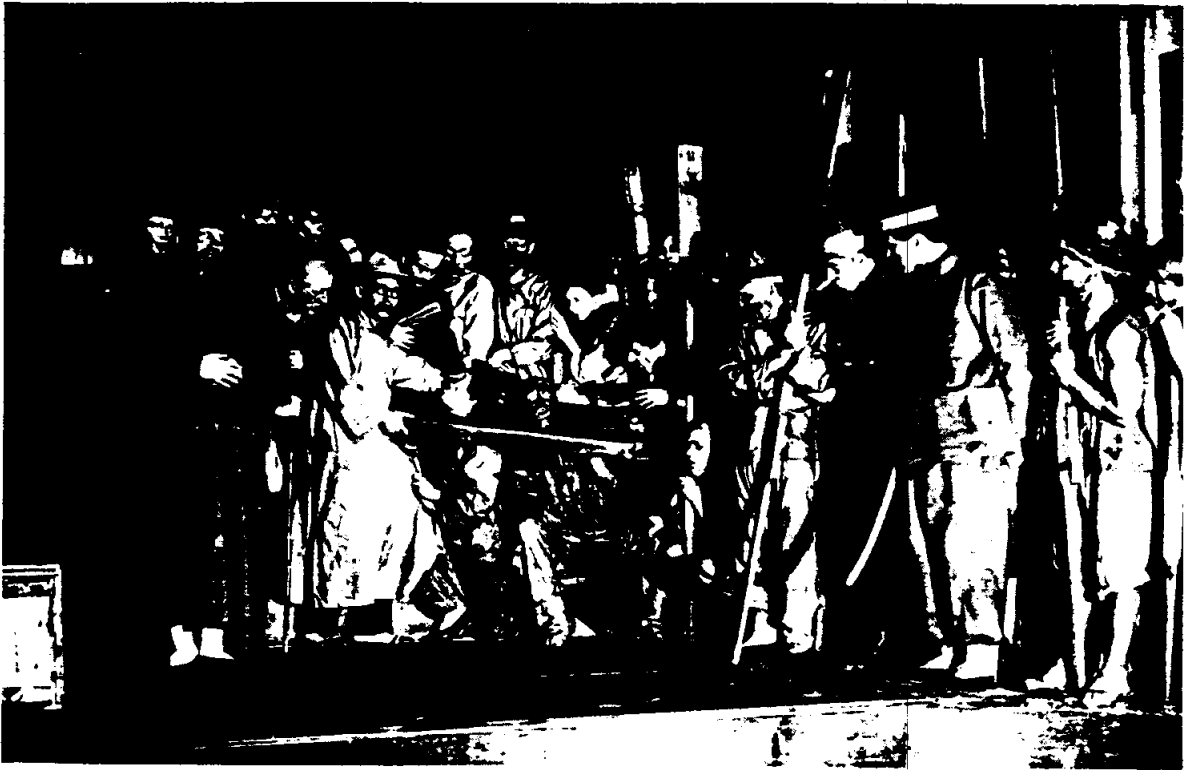
2. Brecht with Samson-Körner, the boxer, at work on the latter's memoirs, about 1926.



3. Fritz Kortner, 1928.



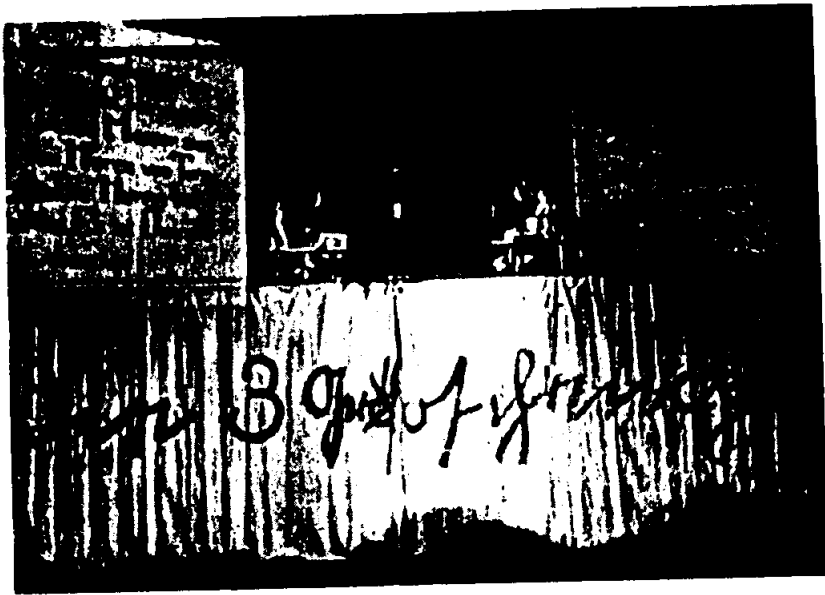
4. Reinhardt's production of *Saint Joan*, 1924, with Elisabeth Bergner (Joan), Rudolf Forster (Dauphin, at back), and Paul Hartman (Dubois).



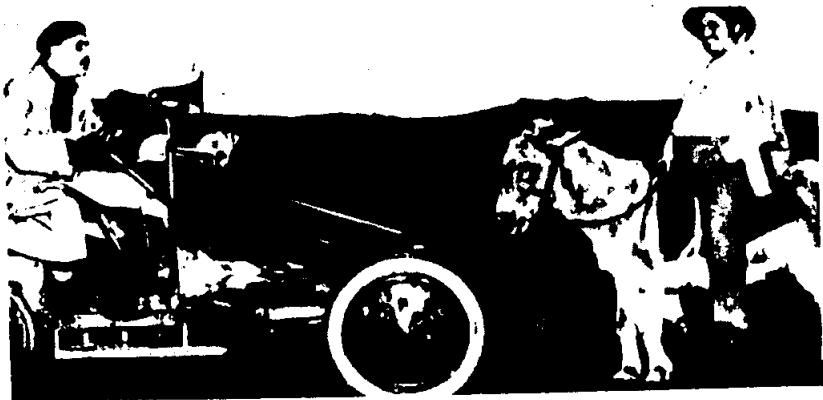
5. Tretiakov's *Roar China* in Meyerhold's production, 1926.



6. Erich Engel's production of *Mann ist Mann* at the Berlin Volksbühne, December 31, 1927, with Heinrich George (front) as Galy Gay, and Viktor Schwannecke, Peter Ihle, and Friedrich Gnas as the three soldiers.



7. Curtain and screens for *The Threepenny Opera*, 1928-29.



8. Scene from *Konjunktur* by Leo Lania, staged by Piscator at the Theater am Nollendorfplatz, Berlin, 1928.



9. *Der Flug der Lindberghs* at the Baden-Baden music festival, 1929. Brecht is standing on the right.

Sophocles' „Oedipus“



10. Caricature of Leopold Jessner's production of *Oedipus* at the Staats-theater, 1929. Left to right: Weigel, Granach, Roland, Kortner, and Franck.

THE LITERARIZATION OF THE THEATRE

only sing but show a man singing. His aim is not so much to bring out the emotional content of his song (has one the right to offer others a dish that one has already eaten oneself?) but to show gestures that are so to speak the habits and usage of the body. To this end he would be best advised not to use the actual words of the text when rehearsing, but common everyday phrases which express the same thing in the crude language of ordinary life. As for the melody, he must not follow it blindly: there is a kind of speaking-against-the-music which can have strong effects, the results of a stubborn, incorruptible sobriety which is independent of music and rhythm. If he drops into the melody it must be an event; the actor can emphasize it by plainly showing the pleasure which the melody gives him. It helps the actor if the musicians are visible during his performance and also if he is allowed to make visible preparation for it (by straightening a chair perhaps or making himself up, etc.). Particularly in the songs it is important that 'he who is showing should himself be shown'.

WHY DOES MACHEATH HAVE TO BE ARRESTED TWICE OVER?

From the pseudo-classical German point of view the first prison scene is a diversion, but to us it is an example of rudimentary epic form. It is a diversion if, like this purely dynamic form of drama, one gives priority to the idea and makes the spectator desire an increasingly definite objective – in this case the hero's death; if one as it were creates a growing demand for the supply and, purely to allow the spectator's strong emotional participation (for emotions will only venture on to completely secure ground, and cannot survive disappointment of any sort), needs a single inevitable chain of events. The epic drama, with its materialistic standpoint and its lack of interest in any investment of its spectators' emotions, knows no objective but only a finishing point, and is familiar with a different kind of chain, whose course need not be a straight one but may quite well be in curves or even in leaps. The dynamic, idealistically-orientated kind of drama, with its interest in the individual, was in all decisive respects more radical when it began life (under the Elizabethans) than in the German pseudo-classicism of two hundred years later, which confuses dynamics of representation with the dynamics of what has to be represented, and has already put its individual 'in his place'. (The present-day successors of these successors are indescribable: dynamics of representation have changed into an ingenious and empirically-based arrangement of a jumble of effects, while the individual, now in a state of complete dissolution, still goes on being developed within his own limits, but only as parts for actors – whereas the late bourgeois novel at least considers that it has a science of psychology which has

been worked out to help it analyse the individual – as though the individual had not simply collapsed long ago.) But this great kind of drama was far less radical in its purging of the material. Here the structural form didn't rule out all the individual's deviations from the straight course, as brought about by 'just life' (a part is always played here by outside relationships, with other circumstances that 'don't take place'; a far wider cross-section is taken), but used such deviations as a motive force of the play's dynamics. This friction penetrates right inside the individual, to be overcome within him. The whole weight of this kind of drama comes from the piling up of resistances. The material is not yet arranged in accordance with any wish for an easy ideal formula. Something of Baconian materialism still survives here, and the individual himself still has flesh and bones and resists the formula's demands. But whenever one comes across materialism epic forms arise in the drama, and most markedly and frequently in comedy, whose 'tone' is always 'lower' and more materialistic. Today, when the human being has to be seen as 'the sum of all social circumstances' the epic form is the only one that can embrace those processes which serve the drama as matter for a comprehensive picture of the world. Similarly man, flesh and blood man, can only be embraced through those processes by which and in course of which he exists. The new school of play-writing must systematically see to it that its form includes 'experiment'. It must be free to use connections on every side; it needs equilibrium and has a tension which governs its component parts and 'loads' them against one another. (Thus this form is anything but a revue-like sequence of sketches.)

[From *Versuche* 3, Berlin 1931. Omitting sections 'Die Hauptpersonen', 'Winke für Schauspieler' and 'Warum muss der reitende Bote reiten?']

NOTE: These notes, here cut so as to exclude three sections of less general relevance, were written subsequently to the play and published some three years after its first performance. Like the two preceding items, they form part of a series of notes and essays labelled 'On a non-aristotelian drama' which is scattered through Brecht's grey paperbound *Versuche*, starting in 1930. As Helge Hultberg points out (*Die ästhetischen Anschauungen Bertolt Brechts*, p. 100) this series was originally announced at the back of the first *Versuche* volume under the title 'On a Dialectical Drama'. The group of handwritten notes printed as 'The dialectical drama' on p. 243ff. of *Schriften zum Theater 1* is so close in theme and style to the *Mahagonny* and *Threepenny Opera* notes as to make it indeed seem possible that Brecht had a major theoretical work in mind.

The term 'dialectical' went into cold storage, to be taken out again in a somewhat different context at the end of Brecht's life (see p. 281). 'Non-aristotelian'

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 1* (Methuen, 1950) and by Eric Bentley in *From the Modern Repertoire 1* (University of Denver Press, 1949).

15 · The Film, the Novel and Epic Theatre

(From *The Threepenny Lawsuit*)

Contradictions are our hope!

SOME PRECONCEPTIONS EXAMINED

I · '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.

The 'German Satires' were written for the German Freedom Radio. It was a matter of projecting single sentences to a distant, artificially scattered audience. They had to be cut down to the most concise possible form and to be reasonably invulnerable to interruptions (by jamming). Rhyme seemed to me to be unsuitable, as it easily makes a poem seem self-contained, lets it glide past the ear. Regular rhythms with their even cadence fail in the same way to cut deep enough, and they impose circumlocutions; a lot of everyday expressions won't fit them; what was needed was the tone of direct and spontaneous speech. I thought rhymeless verse with irregular rhythms seemed suitable.

['Über reimlose Lyrik mit unregelmässigen Rhythmen' from *Das Wort*, Moscow, 1939, No. 3]

NOTE: This essay appeared in the final number of *Das Wort*. The verse examples have been turned into English wherever a translation can still carry Brecht's point. The 'German Satires' appeared in the *Svendborger Gedichte* (London 1939), now incorporated in *Gedichte 3* (Frankfurt, 1961). The anti-Nazi Freedom Radio operated from Czechoslovakia in the later 1930s.

Brecht's first book of poems was *Die Hauspostille* (Berlin 1927; Frankfurt 1951). He adapted *Edward II* from Marlowe in collaboration with Feuchtwanger; the lines quoted are from Gaveston's speech just before his capture, and bear little relation to Marlowe's 'Yet, lusty lords, I have escaped your hands', etc. Rothe is the modern translator whose versions were used by Reinhardt; his book *Shakespeare als Provokation* appeared in 1962. Thälmann was Communist candidate for the presidency in 1932. The Kaufhaus des Westens is a big Berlin store.

This indication that Brecht approved of the anti-Formalist campaign of the 1930s, given his own interpretation of 'Formalism', is the only indication that he approved of it at all.

The great majority of the *Svendborger Gedichte* are written in the style described, as well as the whole of *Lucullus* (on which he was working at this time), *Antigone* (1947) and many verse sections of other plays. For the connection between Brecht's poems and their musical settings see also pp. 4, 85 and 104-5.

29 · The Street Scene

A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre

In the decade and a half that followed the World War a comparatively new way of acting was tried out in a number of German theatres. Its qualities of clear description and reporting and its use of choruses and projections as a means of commentary earned it the name of 'epic'. The actor used a somewhat complex technique to detach himself from the character portrayed; he forced the spectator to look at the play's situations from such an angle that they necessarily became subject to his criticism. Supporters of this epic theatre argued that the new subject-matter, the highly involved incidents of the class war in its acutest and most terrible stage, would be mastered more easily by such a method, since it would thereby become possible to portray social processes as seen in their causal relationships. But the result of these experiments was that aesthetics found itself up against a whole series of substantial difficulties.

It is comparatively easy to set up a basic model for epic theatre. For practical experiments I usually picked as my example of completely simple, 'natural' epic theatre an incident such as can be seen at any street corner: an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place. The bystanders may not have observed what happened, or they may simply not agree with him, may 'see things a different way'; the point is that the demonstrator acts the behaviour of driver or victim or both in such a way that the bystanders are able to form an opinion about the accident.

Such an example of the most primitive type of epic theatre seems easy to understand. Yet experience has shown that it presents astounding difficulties to the reader or listener as soon as he is asked to see the implications of treating this kind of street corner demonstration as a basic form of major theatre, theatre for a scientific age. What this means of course is that the epic theatre may appear richer, more intricate and complex in every particular, yet to be major theatre it need at bottom only contain the same elements as a street-corner demonstration of this sort; nor could it any longer be termed epic theatre if any of the main elements of the street-corner demonstration were lacking. Until this is understood it is impossible really to understand what follows. Until one understands the novelty, unfamiliarity and direct challenge to the critical faculties of the suggestion that street-corner demonstration of this sort can serve as a satisfactory basic model of major theatre one cannot really understand what follows.

Consider: the incident is clearly very far from what we mean by an

artistic one. The demonstrator need not be an artist. The capacities he needs to achieve his aim are in effect universal. Suppose he cannot carry out some particular movement as quickly as the victim he is imitating; all he need do is to explain that *he* moves three times as fast, and the demonstration neither suffers in essentials nor loses its point. On the contrary it is important that he should not be too perfect. His demonstration would be spoiled if the bystanders' attention were drawn to his powers of transformation. He has to avoid presenting himself in such a way that someone calls out 'What a lifelike portrayal of a chauffeur!' He must not 'cast a spell' over anyone. He should not transport people from normality to 'higher realms'. He need not dispose of any special powers of suggestion.

It is most important that one of the main features of the ordinary theatre should be excluded from our street scene: the engendering of illusion. The street demonstrator's performance is essentially repetitive. The event has taken place; what you are seeing now is a repeat. If the scene in the theatre follows the street scene in this respect then the theatre will stop pretending not to be theatre, just as the street-corner demonstration admits it is a demonstration (and does not pretend to be the actual event). The element of rehearsal in the acting and of learning by heart in the text, the whole machinery and the whole process of preparation: it all becomes plainly apparent. What room is left for experience? Is the reality portrayed still experienced in any sense?

The street scene determines what kind of experience is to be prepared for the spectator. There is no question but that the street-corner demonstrator has been through an 'experience', but he is not out to make his demonstration serve as an 'experience' for the audience. Even the experience of the driver and the victim is only partially communicated by him, and he by no means tries to turn it into an enjoyable experience for the spectator, however lifelike he may make his demonstration. The demonstration would become no less valid if he did not reproduce the fear caused by the accident; on the contrary it would lose validity if he did. He is not interested in creating pure emotions. It is important to understand that a theatre which follows his lead in this respect undergoes a positive change of function.

One essential element of the street scene must also be present in the theatrical scene if this is to qualify as epic, namely that the demonstration should have a socially practical significance. Whether our street demonstrator is out to show that one attitude on the part of driver or pedestrian makes an accident inevitable where another would not, or whether he is demonstrating with a view to fixing the responsibility, his demonstration has a practical purpose, intervenes socially.

The demonstrator's purpose determines how thoroughly he has to imitate. Our demonstrator need not imitate every aspect of his characters' behaviour, but only so much as gives a picture. Generally the theatre scene will give much fuller pictures, corresponding to its more extensive range of interest. How do street scene and theatre scene link up here? To take a point of detail, the victim's voice may have played no immediate part in the accident. Eye-witnesses may disagree as to whether a cry they heard ('Look out!') came from the victim or from someone else, and this may give our demonstrator a motive for imitating the voice. The question can be settled by demonstrating whether the voice was an old man's or a woman's, or merely whether it was high or low. Again, the answer may depend on whether it was that of an educated person or not. Loud or soft may play a great part, as the driver could be correspondingly more or less guilty. A whole series of characteristics of the victim ask to be portrayed. Was he absent-minded? Was his attention distracted? If so, by what? What, on the evidence of his behaviour, could have made him liable to be distracted by just that circumstance and no other? Etc., etc. It can be seen that our street-corner demonstration provides opportunities for a pretty rich and varied portrayal of human types. Yet a theatre which tries to restrict its essential elements to those provided by our street scene will have to acknowledge certain limits to imitation. It must be able to justify any outlay in terms of its purpose.¹

The demonstration may for instance be dominated by the question of compensation for the victim, etc. The driver risks being sacked from his job, losing his licence, going to prison; the victim risks a heavy hospital bill, loss of job, permanent disfigurement, possibly unfitness for work.

¹ We often come across demonstrations of an everyday sort which are more thorough imitations than our street-corner accident demands. Generally they are comic ones. Our next-door neighbour may decide to 'take off' the rapacious behaviour of our common landlord. Such an imitation is often rich and full of variety. Closer examination will show however that even so apparently complex an imitation concentrates on one specific side of the landlord's behaviour. The imitation is summary or selective, deliberately leaving out those occasions where the landlord strikes our neighbour as 'perfectly sensible', though such occasions of course occur. He is far from giving a rounded picture; for that would have no comic impact at all. The street scene, perforce adopting a wider angle of vision, at this point lands in difficulties which must not be underestimated. It has to be just as successful in promoting criticism, but the incidents in question are far more complex. It must promote positive as well as negative criticism, and as part of a single process. You have to understand what is involved in winning the audience's approval by means of a critical approach. Here again we have a precedent in our street scene, i.e. in any demonstration of an everyday sort. Next-door neighbour and street demonstrator can reproduce their subject's 'sensible' or his 'senseless' behaviour alike, by submitting it for an opinion. When it crops up in the course of events, however (when a man switches from being sensible to being senseless, or the other way round), then they usually need some form of commentary in order to change the angle of their portrayal. Hence, as already mentioned, certain difficulties for the theatre scene. These cannot be dealt with here.

This is the area within which the demonstrator builds up his characters. The victim may have had a companion; the driver may have had his girl sitting alongside him. That would bring out the social element better and allow the characters to be more fully drawn.

Another essential element in the street scene is that the demonstrator should derive his characters entirely from their actions. He imitates their actions and so allows conclusions to be drawn about them. A theatre that follows him in this will be largely breaking with the orthodox theatre's habit of basing the actions on the characters and having the former exempted from criticism by presenting them as an unavoidable consequence deriving by natural law from the characters who perform them. To the street demonstrator the character of the man being demonstrated remains a quantity that need not be completely defined. Within certain limits he may be like this or like that; it doesn't matter. What the demonstrator is concerned with are his accident-prone and accident-proof qualities.¹ The theatrical scene may show more fully-defined individuals. But it must then be in a position to treat their individuality as a special case and outline the field within which, once more, its most socially relevant effects are produced. Our street demonstrator's possibilities of demonstration are narrowly restricted (indeed, we chose this model so that the limits should be as narrow as possible). If the essential elements of the theatrical scene are limited to those of the street scene then its greater richness must be an enrichment only. The question of border-line cases becomes acute.

Let us take a specific detail. Can our street demonstrator, say, ever become entitled to use an excited tone of voice in repeating the driver's statement that he has been exhausted by too long a spell of work? (In theory this is no more possible than for a returning messenger to start telling his fellow-countrymen of his talk with the king with the words 'I saw the bearded king'.) It can only be possible, let alone unavoidable, if one imagines a street-corner situation where such excitement, specifically about this aspect of the affair, plays a particular part. (In the instance above this would be so if the king had sworn never to cut his beard off until . . . etc.) We have to find a point of view for our demonstrator that allows him to submit this excitement to criticism. Only if he adopts a quite definite point of view can he be entitled to imitate the driver's excited voice; e.g. if he blames drivers as such for doing too little to reduce their hours of work. ('Look at him. Doesn't even belong to a union, but gets worked up soon enough when an accident happens. "Ten hours I've been at the wheel."')

¹ The same situation will be produced by all those people whose characters fulfil the conditions laid down by him and show the features that he imitates.

Before it can get as far as this, i.e. be able to suggest a point of view to the actor, the theatre needs to take a number of steps. By widening its field of vision and showing the driver in other situations besides that of the accident the theatre in no way exceeds its model; it merely creates a further situation on the same pattern. One can imagine a scene of the same kind as the street scene which provides a well-argued demonstration showing how such emotions as the driver's develop, or another which involves making comparisons between tones of voice. In order not to exceed the model scene the theatre only has to develop a technique for submitting emotions to the spectator's criticism. Of course this does not mean that the spectator must be barred on principle from sharing certain emotions that are put before him; none the less to communicate emotions is only one particular form (phase, consequence) of criticism. The theatre's demonstrator, the actor, must apply a technique which will let him reproduce the tone of the subject demonstrated with a certain reserve, with detachment (so that the spectator can say: 'He's getting excited - in vain, too late, at last. . . .') etc.). In short, the actor must remain a demonstrator; he must present the person demonstrated as a stranger, he must not suppress the '*he* did that, *he* said that' element in his performance. He must not go so far as to be wholly transformed into the person demonstrated.

One essential element of the street scene lies in the natural attitude adopted by the demonstrator, which is two-fold; he is always taking two situations into account. He behaves naturally as a demonstrator, and he lets the subject of the demonstration behave naturally too. He never forgets, nor does he allow it to be forgotten, that he is not the subject but the demonstrator. That is to say, what the audience sees is not a fusion between demonstrator and subject, not some third, independent, uncontradictory entity with isolated features of (a) demonstrator and (b) subject, such as the orthodox theatre puts before us in its productions.¹ The feelings and opinions of demonstrator and demonstrated are not merged into one.

We now come to one of those elements that are peculiar to the epic theatre, the so-called A-effect (alienation effect). What is involved here is, briefly, a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labelling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this 'effect' is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view. Can we show that this A-effect is significant for our street demonstrator?

We can picture what happens if he fails to make use of it. The following situation could occur. One of the spectators might say: 'But if the victim

¹ Most clearly worked out by Stanislavsky.

stepped off the kerb with his right foot, as you showed him doing. . . ? The demonstrator might interrupt saying: 'I showed him stepping off with his left foot.' By arguing which foot he really stepped off with in his demonstration, and, even more, how the victim himself acted, the demonstration can be so transformed that the A-effect occurs. The demonstrator achieves it by paying exact attention this time to his movements, executing them carefully, probably in slow motion; in this way he alienates the little sub-incident, emphasizes its importance, makes it worthy of notice. And so the epic theatre's alienation effect proves to have its uses for our street demonstrator too; in other words it is also to be found in this small everyday scene of natural street-corner theatre, which has little to do with art. The direct changeover from representation to commentary that is so characteristic of the epic theatre is still more easily recognized as one element of any street demonstration. Wherever he feels he can the demonstrator breaks off his imitation in order to give explanations. The epic theatre's choruses and documentary projections, the direct addressing of the audience by its actors, are at bottom just this.

It will have been observed, not without astonishment I hope, that I have not named any strictly artistic elements as characterizing our street scene and, with it, that of the epic theatre. The street demonstrator can carry out a successful demonstration with no greater abilities than, in effect, anybody has. What about the epic theatre's value as art?

The epic theatre wants to establish its basic model at the street corner, i.e. to return to the very simplest 'natural' theatre, a social enterprise whose origins, means and ends are practical and earthly. The model works without any need of programmatic theatrical phrases like 'the urge to self-expression', 'making a part one's own', 'spiritual experience', 'the play instinct', 'the story-teller's art', etc. Does that mean that the epic theatre isn't concerned with art?

It might be as well to begin by putting the question differently, thus: can we make use of artistic abilities for the purposes of our street scene? Obviously yes. Even the street-corner demonstration includes artistic elements. Artistic abilities in some small degree are to be found in any man. It does no harm to remember this when one is confronted with great art. Undoubtedly what we call artistic abilities can be exercised at any time within the limits imposed by our street scene model. They will function as artistic abilities even though they do not exceed these limits (for instance, when there is meant to be no complete transformation of demonstrator into subject). And true enough, the epic theatre is an extremely artistic affair, hardly thinkable without artists and virtuosity, imagination, humour and

fellow-feeling; it cannot be practised without all these and much else too. It has got to be entertaining, it has got to be instructive. How then can art be developed out of the elements of the street scene, without adding any or leaving any out? How does it evolve into the theatrical scene with its fabricated story, its trained actors, its lofty style of speaking, its make-up, its team performance by a number of players? Do we need to add to our elements in order to move on from the 'natural' demonstration to the 'artificial'?

Is it not true that the additions which we must make to our model in order to arrive at epic theatre are of a fundamental kind? A brief examination will show that they are not. Take the *story*. There was nothing fabricated about our street accident. Nor does the orthodox theatre deal only in fabrications; think for instance of the historical play. None the less a story can be performed at the street corner too. Our demonstrator may at any time be in a position to say: 'The driver was guilty, because it all happened the way I showed you. He wouldn't be guilty if it had happened the way I'm going to show you now.' And he can fabricate an incident and demonstrate it. Or take the fact that the text is learnt by heart. As a witness in a court case the demonstrator may have written down the subject's exact words, learnt them by heart and rehearsed them; in that case he too is performing a text he has learned. Or take a rehearsed programme by several players: it doesn't always have to be artistic purposes that bring about a demonstration of this sort; one need only think of the French police technique of making the chief figures in any criminal case re-enact certain crucial situations before a police audience. Or take making-up. Minor changes in appearance – ruffling one's hair, for instance – can occur at any time within the framework of the non-artistic type of demonstration. Nor is make-up itself used solely for theatrical purposes. In the street scene the driver's moustache may be particularly significant. It may have influenced the testimony of the possible girl companion suggested earlier. This can be represented by our demonstrator making the driver stroke an imaginary moustache when prompting his companion's evidence. In this way the demonstrator can do a good deal to discredit her as a witness. Moving on to the use of a real moustache in the theatre, however, is not an entirely easy transition, and the same difficulty occurs with respect to *costume*. Our demonstrator may under given circumstances put on the driver's cap – for instance if he wants to show that he was drunk: (he had it on crooked) – but he can only do so conditionally, under these circumstances; (see what was said about borderline cases earlier). However, where there is a demonstration by several demonstrators of the kind referred to

above we can have costume so that the various characters can be distinguished. This again is only a limited use of costume. There must be no question of creating an illusion that the demonstrators really are these characters. (The epic theatre can counteract this illusion by especially exaggerated costume or by garments that are somehow marked out as objects for display.) Moreover we can suggest another model as a substitute for ours on this point: the kind of street demonstration given by hawkers. To sell their neckties these people will portray a badly-dressed and a well-dressed man; with a few props and technical tricks they can perform significant little scenes where they submit essentially to the same restrictions as apply to the demonstrator in our street scene: (they will pick up tie, hat, stick, gloves and give certain significant imitations of a man of the world, and the whole time they will refer to him as 'he'!) With hawkers we also find *verse* being used within the same framework as that of our basic model. They use firm irregular rhythms to sell braces and newspapers alike.

Reflecting along these lines we see that our basic model will work. The elements of natural and of artificial epic theatre are the same. Our street-corner theatre is primitive; origins, aims and methods of its performance are close to home. But there is no doubt that it is a meaningful phenomenon with a clear social function that dominates all its elements. The performance's origins lie in an incident that can be judged one way or another, that may repeat itself in different forms and is not finished but is bound to have consequences, so that this judgment has some significance. The object of the performance is to make it easier to give an opinion on the incident. Its means correspond to that. The epic theatre is a highly skilled theatre with complex contents and far-reaching social objectives. In setting up the street scene as a basic model for it we pass on the clear social function and give the epic theatre criteria by which to decide whether an incident is meaningful or not. The basic model has a practical significance. As producer and actors work to build up a performance involving many difficult questions - technical problems, social ones - it allows them to check whether the social function of the whole apparatus is still clearly intact.

['Die Strassenszene, Grundmodell eines epischen Theaters', from *Versuche* 10, 1950]

NOTE: Originally stated to have been written in 1940, but now ascribed by Werner Hecht to June 1938. This is an elaboration of a poem 'Über alltägliches Theater' which is supposed to have been written in 1930 and is included as one of the 'Gedichte aus dem Messingkauf' in *Theaterarbeit, Versuche 14* and *Gedichte 3*. The notion of the man at the street-corner miming an accident is already

developed at length there, and it also occurs in the following undated scheme (*Schriften zum Theater* 4, pp. 51-2):

EXERCISES FOR ACTING SCHOOLS

- (a) Conjuring tricks, including attitude of spectators.
- (b) For women: folding and putting away linen. Same for men.
- (c) For men: varying attitudes of smokers. Same for women.
- (d) Cat playing with a hank of thread.
- (e) Exercises in observation.
- (f) Exercises in imitation.
- (g) How to take notes. Noting of gestures, tones of voice.
- (h) Exercises in imagination. Three men throwing dice for their life. One loses. Then: they all lose.
- (i) Dramatizing an epic. Passages from the Bible.
- (k) For everybody: repeated exercises in production. Essential to show one's colleagues.
- (l) Exercises in temperament. Situation: two women calmly folding linen. They feign a wild and jealous quarrel for the benefit of their husbands; the husbands are in the next room.
- (m) They come to blows as they fold their linen in silence.
- (n) Game (l) turns serious.
- (o) Quick-change competition. Behind a screen; open.
- (p) Modifying an imitation, simply described so that others can put it into effect.
- (q) Rhythmical (verse-) speaking with tap-dance.
- (r) Eating with outsize knife and fork. Very small knife and fork.
- (s) Dialogue with gramophone: recorded sentences, free answers.
- (t) Search for 'nodal points'.
- (u) Characterization of a fellow-actor.
- (v) Improvisation of incidents. Running through scenes in the style of a report, no text.
- (w) The street accident. Laying down limits of justifiable imitation.
- (x) Variations: a dog went into the kitchen. [A traditional song]
- (y) Memorizing first impressions of a part.

Werner Hecht suggests that these exercises, like those cited on p. 147, may relate to lessons given by Helene Weigel at a Finnish theatre school.

It helps to formulate the incident for society, and to put it across in such a way that society is given the key, if titles are thought up for the scenes. These titles must have a historical quality.

This brings us to a crucial technical device: historicization.

The actor must play the incidents as historical ones. Historical incidents are unique, transitory incidents associated with particular periods. The conduct of the persons involved in them is not fixed and 'universally human'; it includes elements that have been or may be overtaken by the course of history, and is subject to criticism from the immediately following period's point of view. The conduct of those born before us is alienated¹ from us by an incessant evolution.

It is up to the actor to treat present-day events and modes of behaviour with the same detachment as the historian adopts with regard to those of the past. He must alienate these characters and incidents from us.

Characters and incidents from ordinary life, from our immediate surroundings, being familiar, strike us as more or less natural. Alienating them helps to make them seem remarkable to us. Science has carefully developed a technique of getting irritated with the everyday, 'self-evident', universally accepted occurrence, and there is no reason why this infinitely useful attitude should not be taken over by art (17). It is an attitude which arose in science as a result of the growth in human productive powers. In art the same motive applies.

As for the emotions, the experimental use of the A-effect in the epic theatre's German productions indicated that this way of acting too can stimulate them, though possibly a different class of emotion is involved from those of the orthodox theatre (18). A critical attitude on the audience's part is a thoroughly artistic one (19). Nor does the actual practice of the A-effect seem anything like so unnatural as its description. Of course it is a way of acting that has nothing to do with stylization as commonly practised. The main advantage of the epic theatre with its A-effect, intended purely to show the world in such a way that it becomes manageable, is precisely its quality of being natural and earthly, its humour and its renunciation of all the mystical elements that have stuck to the orthodox theatre from the old days.

¹ *Entfremdet*.

Appendix

[selected notes]

1. *Edward II* after Marlowe (Munich Kammerspiele).
Trommeln in der Nacht (Deutsches Theater, Berlin).
The Threepenny Opera (Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, Berlin).
Die Pioniere von Ingolstadt (Theater am Schiffbauerdamm).
Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, opera (Aufricht's Kurfürstendammtheater, Berlin).
Mann ist Mann (Staatstheater, Berlin).
Die Massnahme (Grosses Schauspielhaus, Berlin).
The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik (Piscator's Theater am Nollendorfsplatz, Berlin).
Die Plattköpfe und die Spitzköpfe (Riddersalen, Copenhagen).
Señora Carrar's Rifles (Copenhagen, Paris).
Furcht und Flend des Dritten Reiches (Paris).
3. E.g. such mechanical means as very brilliant illumination of the stage (since a half-lit stage plus a completely darkened auditorium makes the spectator less level-headed by preventing him from observing his neighbour and in turn hiding him from his neighbour's eyes) and also *making visible the sources of light*.

MAKING VISIBLE THE SOURCES OF LIGHT

There is a point in showing the lighting apparatus openly, as it is one of the means of preventing an unwanted element of illusion; it scarcely disturbs the necessary concentration. If we light the actors and their performance in such a way that the lights themselves are within the spectator's field of vision we destroy part of his illusion of being present at a spontaneous, transitory, authentic, unrehearsed event. He sees that arrangements have been made to show something; something is being repeated here under special conditions, for instance in a very brilliant light. Displaying the actual lights is meant to be a counter to the old-fashioned theatre's efforts to hide them. No one would expect the lighting to be hidden at a sporting event, a boxing match for instance. Whatever the points of difference between the modern theatre's presentations and those of a sporting promoter, they do not include the same concealment of the sources of light as the old theatre found necessary.

(Brecht: 'Der Bühnenbau des epischen Theaters')

5. Cf. these remarks by Poul Reumert, the best-known Danish actor: