

Bertolt Brecht

ON EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE



Edited by - Dr. Binny Deka

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Distributor

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Panbazar, Guwahati

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PREFACE

Bertolt Brecht, modern dramatist of the twentieth century has left an indelible impression on the history of European Theatre. He was a serious practitioner of theatre, convinced that the role ascribed to it was too limited and that it was capable of much more. He seemed to dislike contemporary, realistic and naturalistic theatre and devised his theory of what the theatre ought to be.

This book hopes to aid under-graduates in their study of the essay, ON EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE by BERTOLT BRECHT.

Suggestions for improvement will be incorporated in later editions.

I am indebted to Bookland Publishers for their wholehearted support.

Dr. BINNY DEKA
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CONTENTS

1. Life and Works: Bertolt Brecht	1-5
2. Chronology	6-7
3. Brecht's Theory of Drama	8-18
4. Text : On Experimental Theatre	19-26
5. Summary	27-33
6. Note	34-34
7. Annotation	35-39
8. Textual Questions	40-40
9. Bibliography	41-41

LIFE AND WORKS (1898-1956)

Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht was born in 1898 at Augsburg, Bavaria of Southern Germany into a respectable bourgeois family. His father, Berthold Brecht was a Catholic who worked in a paper mill and rose to become its Director. His mother Sophie, nee Berzing was a Protestant. They raised their son in Augsburg and Brecht received his schooling there where he met his friend Caspar Neher. He read The Bible as a child chiefly because of his mother's religious belief and it continued to influence him later in his life and works. When the First World War broke, Brecht was only sixteen. Though he was initially enthusiastic, he soon altered his view when he saw his friends being killed in the war. Instead, after his graduation in 1917 he managed to enroll for an additional medical course in Munich University. But in 1918 he was drafted into the Medical Military Service and posted at Augsburg where he continued till the end of the war. While at Munich University, Brecht had also studied drama with Arthur Kutsher who initiated him into the world of drama. However, in 1916 long before Brecht had met Kutsher he had begun contributing articles to newspapers under the name of Bert Brecht and his first theatre criticism appeared in 'Augsburg Volkswille' in 1919. Though he returned to his studies later on, he never received a degree and he devoted himself wholeheartedly to the theatre.

By this time Brecht had entered into a relationship with Paula Banholzer and a son whom they named Frank was born in 1919. Unfortunately, he died fighting in the Second World War. In 1920 his mother died. During this time Brecht got the opportunity to work in a small part in the famous Munich comedian, Karl Valentin's political cabaret. Valentin's performance influenced him to such

an extent that he began to watch his shows at various places and recorded his observations in his diaries. In 1918, Brecht wrote his first full-length play, *Baal* countering an argument forwarded by Kutsher in one of his drama seminars. This need to counter someone else's work or at times his own work became Brecht's compulsion which continued throughout his career. In 1919 his second play *Drums in the night* appeared. This play was reviewed enthusiastically by a theatre critic, Herbert Ihering in Munich who pointed out that Brecht had changed the German literary scene single-handedly. Though his third play, *In the Jungle* and *Baal* had not been performed, in 1922 Brecht was awarded the prestigious *Kleist Prize* for his first three dramas. The award had been especially instituted for unestablished writers and it remained one of Germany's coveted literary awards until it was discontinued in 1932.

In 1922 Brecht married Marianne Zoff, the well-known Viennese opera-singer, and in 1923 she gave birth to their daughter Hanne Hiob. In 1923 a film, *Mysteries of a Barbershop* was produced which was directed by Erich Engel and starred Karl Valentin. Brecht wrote its scenario but the film was not successful. However, since it contained several new innovative features it came to be regarded as one of the most important films in German film history. In the same year 1923, Erich Engel directed his third play *In the Jungle* which was called 'scandalous' and the actors on the stage were attacked by the Nazis with stink bombs. In 1924 Brecht made his first solo directorial debut with an adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward 11*. This was also his first attempt at collaborative writing and the first of many adaptations of classics. Brecht believed that his idea of the 'Epic Theatre' originated during the staging of this play. It proved to be a landmark in his development as a theatric and dramaturge. By the end of the same year, Brecht secured the job of Assistant Dramaturge at one of the best theatres of the world, Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater in Berlin. He relocated to Berlin where he met new people and made new friendships. His marriage to Zoff began to break down. He became involved with Elisabeth Hauptmann and Helene Weigel whom he married later in 1930. Prior to their marriage

a representation of past events. This meant that a given social system would be viewed from the point of view of the past or from another period. Historicizing was used as a technique to distance people from present conditions, to make it look strange suggesting the necessity of social change.

Brecht explains the difference between the two types of theatre in the following way, '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 the 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, laugh when they laugh.' But 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.' Brecht was influenced by Marxism in his concept of the epic theatre and said that human beings must be understood as the totality of social relationships; the individual could be understood only through the social environment for which and in which he lives. The individual with his inner life was of no consequence to Brecht unless it was related to the social condition of a particular time.

ALIENATION TECHNIQUE

Verfremdung or *V-Effekt* or Alienation Technique was a device used by Brecht with which he made the events depicted on the stage seem strange and unfamiliar. He wanted the audience to actively participate in the play instead of relating to the events on the stage and falling into a reverie. In 'Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction' Brecht writes, '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 that is necessary to all understanding'. Hence, according to Brecht nothing must be taken for granted; everything has to be seen in a new light and reconstructed.

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Actors in Brechtian theatre had to distance themselves from the characters they portrayed. Brecht maintained that if the actor believed that he was the depicted character, spectators also would believe in that character but he did not want this to occur. He feared that this would make the audience passive. Hence if the actor was required to portray a possessed character he did not have to act like a frenzied, disturbed man. The actor could not merge into the character; rather he had to appear normal and in full control of his emotions. He believed that the actor had a greater role to play than merely merging into the character that he acted. Brecht devised certain ways by which the actor would distance himself from the character. The character's actions would be accompanied by commentary and the actor would say whether they were wise or not and express his sympathy or disgust for them. The actor had to show the audience that his action was one among many possibilities and that the actor was aware of where the character's action was leading him. The actor showed the audience that he had chosen one course of action as opposed to others; hence, he had to be aware of his audience instead of forgetting them to the point of becoming totally involved in his character. Brechtian actors were not required to explore the inner life of the characters they portrayed. As Brecht wrote, 'he has merely to show the character, or better, not merely to experience it; but this does not mean that when he has to act passionate people he himself must remain cold. It is only that his feelings should not be fundamentally the same as those of his character, so that the feelings of his audience do not become fundamentally those of his character. The audience must have complete liberty here.' His theatre was not about characters as it was about the story. The characters were important because human relations could be portrayed through them. Characters, as individuals, with an inner life was considered important so long as they had some significance or effect on the outward action of the story. The story is important for it is made up of sequence of events which is Brecht's social experiment. The story allows the spectators to watch the influence of social forces at play so that the play's lesson becomes explicit.

Brecht used strong, harsh lights to illuminate the stage just as it is used in a boxing ring or a sports arena. He used a preparation of the actors and stage-hands on the stage before the curtain is raised. He used projections to announce or comment on the action. This screen recalled 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. The stage itself began to tell a story; the background adopted an attitude to the events on the stage. Mechanization offered greater adaptability of the stage and film also provided support when it was no longer possible to show simply by personifying motive forces or depicting metaphysical powers as a solution.

Brecht employed certain methods to grasp audience's attention which can be best explained with a number of examples from his plays. In *Edward II* soldiers appeared on stage with their faces painted white to make the audience understand their fear; In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* soldiers were made to wear masks with protruding eyeballs; In *The Horatii* a technician is made to carry the spotlight across the stage to signify the sun; In *Pantifa* a stack of chairs on the stage is made to represent a mountain. According to his belief such representations would keep the spectator from sinking into the false assumption that the drama is a reality. In other words, Brecht did not want the spectator to forget that he was watching a play and that it was removed from reality. His intention was to urge rational thought to bring change in the human situation instead of passive acceptance of a situation by identifying with it. Ronald D. Gray opines, 'In the twenties, Brecht was still concerned to avoid anything beautiful, lyrical, or directly moving. He denied emotion, as he denied beauty, as an indulgence that could not be afforded while suffering still existed.' In the later productions his use of the grotesque became somewhat less than his earlier ones.

In order to produce the effect or the attitude that he desired Brecht employed several methods. His famous recommendation to his actors was to adopt the attitude of a man who lays down his cigarette for a moment in order to act out the scene he is describing. For example in *'The Elephant Child'* the actor walked off the stage to have a drink at the bar of the auditorium. He wrote 'practice-texts' for his performers so that they developed an idea of what was required of them. In one such rehearsal the porter's wife laid the blame of her theft on another person in the same manner in which Lady Macbeth smeared the grooms with blood to make them guilty of murder. The actor who passes through such a rehearsal becomes aware of the despicability of the character of Lady Macbeth and is able to distance herself from the character she portrays. Brecht encouraged his actors to make their deliveries in the third person by adding the words 'he said'. They would perform by describing their own actions in the past tense. On the stage the actor was made to address the audience directly. He/She would then narrate events of the past. They would speak aloud their stage instructions, indicate the mood along with their own words and exchanged roles with each other. The effect of such acting was considerable as was seen in the acting of Eilif, Mother Courage's son. He was shown with a sabre in his hands held high above his head in a stance which depicts that he is engaged in fierce war, but his head is held at an angle with pursed lips to show his perplexity even though he feels that it was the correct thing to do at that moment. Thus the actor is successful at portraying the character as one who simultaneously believes that he is doing the right thing but has no liking for what he is doing. Brecht's theory is that the actor should narrate the actions of the character instead of imitating him. As such gestures, movements become important for character portrayal; the actor narrates only those actions which are necessary for telling his story. He may also imitate such physical gestures or movements which would assist character delineation.

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Brecht coined the term 'gestus' to refer to such physical gesture which suggested the attitude of the character. It was used as a device to show an aspect of a character. If the actor wanted to show that the character was frightened he would merely pop a lock of his hair into his mouth to communicate it to his audience. The actor remained controlled but his audience knew through that particular gesture that the character was scared. The example mentioned above was observed in Chinese theatre by Brecht and he was influenced by its effective method of alienation to incorporate it in his theatre. Brecht used the term to encompass human attitudes within a certain social set-up. For example, when Shen-Te becomes Shui-Ta in *'The Good Woman of Schezuan'*, 'she changes her body movement. So gestus had two functions : it revealed the motives and dealings of characters within the play and it was also used in the depiction of character by the actor.

SONGS

Songs were clearly gestic as they were used to express attitudes of fear, revolt or defeat; he also used it to interrupt the action so that the audience did not become emotionally involved in it. Brechtian theatre had choirs whose songs informed the audience about the basic attitude of the scene or of the play. They served as commentaries, often with irony implicit in them. They were supposed to make the action depicted on the stage appear strange. The ensuing friction, Brecht believed would make the spectators notice wrongdoings, generate discussions and compel them to bring about social changes. Brecht's *'The Threepenny Opera'* became very popular because of his songs and not for the reasons that he wanted.

EPISODIC DIVISIONS

The division of the play into several episodes followed from Brecht's idea of gestus. Each episode would convey an attitude which would help the spectator understand whatever it wanted to communicate. An illuminating example of this theory was the scene

depicted in *Mother Courage* where we are told that she is able to save her daughter and her covered wagon but not her honest son. The audience is shown that war has forced Mother Courage to acknowledge the importance of saving her means of livelihood even as her son lies dead. Captions were provided for each episode which informed the audience of the attitude which the playwright wanted to emphasize. They were constructed in such a way that each scene could be acted on its own even if they were not connected to the rest of the play.

NARRATIVE

The narrative of the play is important as every play embodies an attitude which Brecht refers to as *gestus*. In Brechtian theatre the events of a play are always prompted by socio-political considerations. The interaction of characters and the narration of character reflects the attitude which the playwright wants to show. In order to do so the playwright has to select or choose such events which is best suited for his purpose. He constructs a structure with which he exposes the events and happenings to reveal his ideas. Every play therefore encoded such attitudes. Brecht coined the term *Fabel* to refer to the technique with which the plot of a play is analysed or through which the play is decoded. Thus *Gestus* and *Fabel* are inter-related; a *Fabel* takes into account the sequence of gestic episodes which comprises the dramatic narrative. It considers the play from all aspects like acting, singing, music, visual effects and anything else which the spectator saw on stage since all these different aspects of a play would contribute to make the play convincing, entertaining and appealing. Brecht wanted a play to be presented in such a manner that if it were to be seen only without being heard it would still be understood by the audience. Hence every object, movement and happening on the stage had to reveal the *Fabel*. Every thing on the stage had to make sense. This was what the *Fabel* achieved. According to John Willett, Brecht taught his collaborators that the basic principle of a play was the *Fabel*, 'The chain of events must be clearly and strongly established not just in the production, but beforehand in

the actual play. Where it was not clear it was up to the "dramaturge" to alter the text, in order to cut unnecessary entanglements and come to the point.' The *Fabel* was clearly a technique with which Brecht sought to bring clarity for the producers as well as all those involved in the presentation of a play rather than the audience. However, ultimately, *Fabel* helped the audience in understanding the play.

Brecht wanted his epic theatre to become, 'an affair for philosophers, but only such philosophers as wished not just to explain the world but also to change it. So we had philosophers, and we had instruction.' He believed that theatre could be amusing even when theatre was instructive. It should use the entire gamut of knowledge which is at man's disposal. The findings of science, psychology, sociology, economics and history couldn't be overlooked for desire to penetrate deep into the core of things and to make the world controllable arose only with knowledge. Epic theatre was a 'moral institution' so far as it tried to discover means of eliminating certain circumstances which were objectionable. Morals were meant to help men but victims of morals were forced to suffer their lot as if they existed for morals and not the other way round. Brecht's epic theatre aimed at bringing change in society.

Though Brecht formulated his theories for the Epic theatre with the intention of following them, in practice he was unable to adhere to them as strictly as he would have liked to. The alienation techniques with which he hoped to stop audience's identification with characters were not as effective as he hoped. In fact it was noticed that paradoxically, since characters were presented as unemotionally as possible, audience became more emotionally attached to them. Later in life Brecht admitted like his collaborator Piscator that it was not always possible to follow theories in practice as minutely as one wished to.

DIALECTICAL THEATRE

During the last year of his life Brecht seemed to have felt that the term Epic Theatre was inadequate for his vision of the function

of theatre. He had always believed that the new age required 'a theatre fit for the scientific age' which would view the society from a scientific point of view as believed by Marx. But in the 'Appendix to the Short Organum for the Theatre', he felt the necessity to rename it as 'Dialectical Theatre'. John Willett writes that in 1956 he made a last collection of theoretical writings under the title 'Dialectics in the Theatre'. It opened with an introduction where he opined that the earlier term required 'exacter definition and must achieve more'; it was 'inflexible' and could not be turned into a 'scientific demonstration'. The term 'Theatre of The Scientific Age' too, even while it suggested dialectical materialism which unearthed society's laws of motion by treating social situations and human feelings, opinions and attitudes as processes where inconsistencies, change and disharmony exists; it was not 'not quite broad enough'. He believed that dialectics 'could be a source of enjoyment'. In the above mentioned introduction Brecht notes, 'Epic Theatre is a prerequisite for these contributions, but it does not of itself imply that productivity and mutability of society from which they derive their main element of pleasure.' He also notes that up till that moment 'no new one' could be put forward. Willett remarks that, 'Dialectics in the Theatre' was 'as near as Brecht got to launching the idea' which is outlined in the Appendix.

Ernst Shumacher writes in 'Dialectics of Galileo, in Brecht' that 'Brecht regarded *Galileo* as a play with 'restricted' alienation effects '... the narrative structure of *Galileo* is built in a clearly dialectical manner that is designed to make evident the contrary forces at work in Galileo's life 'to pose positive qualities against negative, public images against private, cerebral ideas against physical passions. These co-existing polarities are organized in a web of complex symmetry. Shumacher points out that this symmetry was clearly worked out by Brecht's preliminary notes for the play. Emphasis on symmetry suggests closure, a concern with wholeness' and 'unity' that is somewhat at odds with the open-ended theatrical forms of his earlier years.'

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depicted in *Mother Courage* where we are told that she is able to save her daughter and her covered wagon but not her honest son. The audience is shown that war has forced Mother Courage to acknowledge the importance of saving her means of livelihood even as her son lies dead. Captions were provided for each episode which informed the audience of the attitude which the playwright wanted to emphasize. They were constructed in such a way that each scene could be acted on its own even if they were not connected to the rest of the play.

NARRATIVE

The narrative of the play is important as every play embodies an attitude which Brecht refers to as *gestus*. In Brechtian theatre the events of a play are always prompted by socio-political considerations. The interaction of characters and the narration of character reflects the attitude which the playwright wants to show. In order to do so the playwright has to select or choose such events which is best suited for his purpose. He constructs a structure with which he exposes the events and happenings to reveal his ideas. Every play therefore encoded such attitudes. Brecht coined the term *Fabel* to refer to the technique with which the plot of a play is analysed or through which the play is decoded. Thus *Gestus* and *Fabel* are inter-related; a *Fabel* takes into account the sequence of gestic episodes which comprises the dramatic narrative. It considers the play from all aspects like acting, singing, music, visual effects and anything else which the spectator saw on stage since all these different aspects of a play would contribute to make the play convincing, entertaining and appealing. Brecht wanted a play to be presented in such a manner that if it were to be seen only without being heard it would still be understood by the audience. Hence every object, movement and happening on the stage had to reveal the *Fabel*. Every thing on the stage had to make sense. This was what the *Fabel* achieved. According to John Willett, Brecht taught his collaborators that the basic principle of a play was the *Fabel*, 'The chain of events must be clearly and *strongly established not just in the production, but beforehand in*

the actual play. Where it was not clear it was up to the "dramaturge" to alter the text, in order to cut unnecessary entanglements and come to the point.' The *Fabel* was clearly a technique with which Brecht sought to bring clarity for the producers as well as all those involved in the presentation of a play rather than the audience. However, ultimately, *Fabel* helped the audience in understanding the play.

Brecht wanted his epic theatre to become, 'an affair for philosophers, but only such philosophers as wished not just to explain the world but also to change it. So we had philosophers, and we had instruction.' He believed that theatre could be amusing even when theatre was instructive. It should use the entire gamut of knowledge which is at man's disposal. The findings of science, psychology, sociology, economics and history couldn't be overlooked for desire to penetrate deep into the core of things and to make the world controllable arose only with knowledge. Epic theatre was a 'moral institution' so far as it tried to discover means of eliminating certain circumstances which were objectionable. Morals were meant to help men but victims of morals were forced to suffer their lot as if they existed for morals and not the other way round. Brecht's epic theatre aimed at bringing change in society.

Though Brecht formulated his theories for the Epic theatre with the intention of following them, in practice he was unable to adhere to them as strictly as he would have liked to. The alienation techniques with which he hoped to stop audience's identification with characters were not as effective as he hoped. In fact it was noticed that paradoxically, since characters were presented as unemotionally as possible, audience became more emotionally attached to them. Later in life Brecht admitted like his collaborator Piscator that it was not always possible to follow theories in practice as minutely as one wished to.

DIALECTICAL THEATRE

During the last year of his life Brecht seemed to have felt that the term Epic Theatre was inadequate for his vision of the function

of theatre. He had always believed that the new age required 'a theatre fit for the scientific age' which would view the society from a scientific point of view as believed by Marx. But in the 'Appendix to the Short Organum for the Theatre', he felt the necessity to rename it as 'Dialectical Theatre'. John Willett writes that in 1956 he made a last collection of theoretical writings under the title 'Dialectics in the Theatre'. It opened with an introduction where he opined that the earlier term required 'exacter definition and must achieve more'; it was 'inflexible' and could not be turned into a 'scientific demonstration'. The term 'Theatre of The Scientific Age' too, even while it suggested dialectical materialism which unearthed society's laws of motion by treating social situations and human feelings, opinions and attitudes as processes where inconsistencies, change and disharmony exists; it was not 'not quite broad enough'. He believed that dialectics 'could be a source of enjoyment'. In the above mentioned introduction Brecht notes, 'Epic Theatre is a prerequisite for these contributions, but it does not of itself imply that productivity and mutability of society from which they derive their main element of pleasure.' He also notes that up till that moment 'no new one' could be put forward. Willett remarks that, 'Dialectics in the Theatre' was 'as near as Brecht got to launching the idea' which is outlined in the Appendix.

Ernst Shumacher writes in 'Dialectics of Galileo, in Brecht' that 'Brecht regarded *Galileo* as a play with 'restricted' alienation effects '... the narrative structure of *Galileo* is built in a clearly dialectical manner that is designed to make evident the contrary forces at work in *Galileo's* life 'to pose positive qualities against negative, public images against private, cerebral ideas against physical passions. These co-existing polarities are organized in a web of complex symmetry. Shumacher points out that this symmetry was clearly worked out by Brecht's preliminary notes for the play. Emphasis on symmetry suggests closure, a concern with wholeness' and 'unity' that is somewhat at odds with the open-ended theatrical forms of his earlier years.'

TEXT

ON EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE

For at least two generations the serious European drama has been passing through a period of experiment. So far the various experiments conducted have not led to any definite and clearly established result, nor is the period itself over. In my view these experiments were pursued along two lines which occasionally intersected but can none the less be followed separately. They are defined by the two functions of *entertainment and instruction*; that is to say that the theatre organized experiments to increase its ability to amuse, and others which were intended to raise its value as education. [Brecht then lists various experiments from Antoine on, designed to increase the theatre's capacity to entertain, and singles out Vakhtangov and the constructivist Meyerhold - who 'took over from the asiatic theatre certain dance-like forms and created a whole choreography for the drama' - Reinhardt, with his open-air productions of *Faust*, *Federmann* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and his seating of actors among the audience in Büchner's *Danton's Death*; Okhlopkov, and the elaboration of crowd scenes by Stanislavsky, Reinhardt and Jessner. But 'on the whole the theatre has not been brought up to modern technological standards'.

The second line he sees as pursued primarily by the playwrights, instancing Ibsen, Tolstoy, Strindberg, Gorki, Tchekov, Hauptmann, Shaw, Georg Kaiser and Eugene O'Neill, and mentioning his own *Threepenny Opera* as 'a parable type plus ideology-busting'. Piscator's theatre was 'the most radical' of all such attempts. 'I took part in all his experiments, and every single one was aimed to increase the theatre's value as education.']

These discoveries [he goes on] have not yet been taken up by the international theatre; this electrification of the stage has been virtually forgotten; the whole ingenious machinery is rusting up, and grass is growing over it. Why is that?

The breakdown of this eminently political theatre must be attributed to political causes. The increase in the theatre's value as political education clashed with the growth of political reaction. But for the moment we shall restrict ourselves to seeing how its crisis developed in aesthetic terms.

Piscator's experiments began by causing complete theatrical chaos. While they turned the stage into a machine-room, the auditorium became a public meeting. Piscator saw the theatre as a parliament, the audience as a legislative body. To this parliament were submitted in plastic form all the great public questions that needed an answer. Instead of a Deputy speaking about certain intolerable social conditions there was an artistic copy of these conditions. It was the stage's ambition to supply images, statistics, slogans which would enable its parliament, the audience, to reach political decisions. Piscator's stage was not indifferent to applause, but it preferred a discussion. It didn't want only to provide its spectator with an experience but also to squeeze from him a practical decision to intervene actively in life. Every means was justified which helped to secure this. The technical side of the stage became extremely complicated. Piscator's stage manager had before him a book that was as different from that of Reinhardt's stage manager as the score of a Stravinsky opera is from a lute-player's part. The mechanism on the stage weighed so much that the stage of the Nollendorftheater had to be reinforced with steel and concrete supports; so much machinery was hung from the dome that it began to give way. Aesthetic considerations were entirely subject to political. Away with painted scenery if a film could be shown that had been taken on the spot and had the stamp of documentary realism. Up with painted cartoons, if the artist (e.g. George Grosz) had something to say to the parliamentary audience. Piscator was even ready to do wholly without actors. When the former German Emperor had his

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Piscator's experiments broke nearly all the conventions. They intervened to transform the playwright's creative methods, the actor's style of representation, and the work of the stage designer. *They were striving towards an entirely new social function for the theatre.*

Bourgeois revolutionary aesthetics, founded by such great figures of the Enlightenment as *Diderot* and *Lessing*, defines the theatre as a place of entertainment and instruction. During the Enlightenment, a period which saw the start of a tremendous upsurge of the European theatre, there was no conflict between these two things. Pure amusement, provoked even by objects of tragedy, struck men like *Diderot* as utterly hollow and unworthy unless it added something to the spectators' knowledge, while elements of instruction, in artistic form of course, seemed in no wise to detract from the amusement; in these men's view they gave depth to it.

If we now look at the theatre of our day we shall find an increasingly marked conflict between the two elements which go to make it up, together with its plays - entertainment and instruction. Today there is an opposition here. That 'assimilation of art to science' which gave naturalism its social influence undoubtedly hamstrung some major artistic capacities, notably the imagination, the sense of play and the element of pure poetry. Its artistic aspects were clearly harmed by its instructive side. The expressionism of the postwar period showed the World as Will and Idea and led to a special kind of solipsism. It was the theatre's answer to the great crisis of society, just as the doctrines of *Mach* were philosophy's. It represented art's revolt against life: here the world existed purely as a vision, strangely distorted, a monster conjured up by perturbed souls.

Expressionism vastly enriched the theatre's means of expression and brought aesthetic gains that still have to be fully exploited, but it proved quite incapable of shedding light on the world as an object of human activity. The theatre's educative value collapsed.

In Piscator's productions or in *The Threepenny Opera* the educative elements were so to speak *built in*: they were not an organic consequence of the whole, but stood in contradiction to it; they broke up the flow of the play and its incidents, they prevented empathy, they acted as a cold douche for those whose sympathies were becoming involved. I hope that the moralizing parts of *The Threepenny Opera* and the educative songs are reasonably entertaining, but it is certain that the entertainment in question is different from what one gets from the more orthodox scenes. The play has a double nature. Instruction and entertainment conflict openly. With Piscator it was the actor and the machinery that openly conflicted.

This is quite apart from the fact that such productions split the audience into at least two mutually hostile social groups, and thus put a stop to any common experience of art. The fact is a political one. Enjoyment of learning depends on the class situation. Artistic appreciation depends on one's political attitude, which can accordingly be stimulated and adopted. But even if we restrict ourselves to the section of the audience which agreed politically we see the sharpening of the conflict between ability to entertain and educative value. Here is a new and quite specific kind of learning, and it can no longer be reconciled with a specific old kind of entertainment. At one (later) stage of the experiments the result of any fresh increase in educative value was an immediate decrease in ability to entertain. ('This isn't theatre, it's secondary-school stuff.') Conversely, emotional acting's effects on the nerves was a continual menace to the production's educative value. (It often helped the educational effect to have bad actors instead of good ones.) In other words, the greater the grip on the audience's nerves, the less chance there was of its learning. The more we induced the audience to identify its own experiences and feelings with the production, the less it learned; and the more there was to learn, the less the artistic enjoyment.

Here was a crisis: half a century's experiments, conducted in nearly every civilized country, had won the theatre brand-new fields of subject-matter and types of problem, and made it a factor of marked social importance. At the same time they had brought the theatre to a point where any further development of the intellectual, social (political) experience must wreck the artistic experience. And yet, without further development of the former, the latter occurred less and less often. A technical apparatus and a style of acting had been evolved which could do more to stimulate illusions than to give experiences, more to intoxicate than to elevate, more to deceive than to illumine.

What was the good of a constructivist stage if it was socially unconstructive; of the finest lighting equipment if it lit nothing but childish and twisted representations of the world; of a suggestive style of acting if it only served to tell us that A was B? What use was the whole box of tricks if all it could do was to offer artificial surrogates for real experience? Why this eternal ventilating of problems that were always left unsolved? This titillation not only of the nerves but of the brain? We couldn't leave it at that.

The development tended towards a fusion of the two functions, instruction and entertainment. If such preoccupations were to have any social meaning, then they must eventually enable the theatre to project a picture of the world by artistic means: models of men's life together such as could help the spectator to understand his social environment and both rationally and emotionally to master it.

[Brecht goes on, in terms that anticipate the Short Organum and perhaps reflect his work on the first version of *Galileo*, to lament man's failure to understand the laws governing his life in society. His knowledge of these has not kept pace with his scientific knowledge, so that 'nowadays nearly every new discovery is greeted with a shout of triumph which transforms itself into a shout of fear'. (Cf. the long speech in Scene 14 of *Galileo*.) But art ought to be able to give 'a workable picture of the world'.

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This all represented a continuation of previous experiments, in particular of Piscator's theatre. Already in his last experiments the logical development of the technical apparatus had at last allowed the machinery to be mastered and led to a beautiful simplicity of performance. The so-called *epic* style of production which we developed at the Schiffbauerdamm Theater proved its artistic merits relatively soon, and the *non-aristotelian school of playwrighting* tackled the large-scale treatment of large-scale social objects. There was some prospect of changing the choreographic and grouping aspects of Meyerhold's school from artifice into art, of transforming the Stanislavsky school's naturalistic elements into realism. Speech was related to gestic; both everyday language and verse speaking were shaped according to the so-called *gestic principle*. A complete revolution took place in stage design. By a free manipulation of Piscator's principles it became possible to design a setting that was both instructive and beautiful. Symbolism and illusion could be more or less dispensed with, and the *Neher principle* of building the set according to the requirements established at the actors' rehearsals allowed the designer to profit by the actors' performance and influence it in turn. The playwright could work out his experiments in uninterrupted collaboration with actor and stage designer; he could influence and be influenced. At the same time the painter and the composer regained their independence, and were able to express their view of the theme by their own artistic means. The integrated work of art (or 'Gesamtkunstwerk') appeared before the spectator as a bundle of separate elements.

From the start the *classical repertoire* supplied the basis of many of these experiments. The artistic means of alienation made possible a broad approach to the living works of dramatists of other periods. Thanks to them such valuable old plays could be performed without either jarring modernization or museum-like methods, and in an entertaining and instructive way.

It plainly has a particularly good effect on the contemporary amateur theatre (worker, student and child actors) when it is no longer forced to work by hypnosis. It seems conceivable that a line may be drawn between the playing of amateur actors and professionals without one of the theatre's basic functions having to be sacrificed. Such very different ways of acting as those of, say, the Vakhtangov or Okhlopkov companies and the workers' groups can be reconciled on this new foundation. The variegated experiments of half a century seem to have acquired a basis that allows them to be exploited.

None the less these experiments are not so easy to describe, and I am forced here simply to state our belief that we can indeed encourage artistic understanding on the basis of alienation. This is not very surprising, as the theatre of past periods also, technically speaking, achieved results with alienation effects - for instance the Chinese theatre, the Spanish classical theatre, the popular theatre of Brueghel's day and the Elizabethan theatre.

So is this new style of production *the* new style; is it a complete and comprehensible technique, the final result of every experiment? Answer: no. It is *a way*, the one that *we* have followed. The effort must be continued. The problem holds for all art, and it is a vast one. The solution here aimed at is only *one* of the conceivable solutions to the problem, which can be expressed so: How can the theatre be both instructive and entertaining? How can it be divorced from spiritual dope traffic and turned from a home of illusions to a home of experiences? How can the unfree, ignorant man of our century, with his thirst for freedom and his hunger for knowledge; how can the tortured and heroic, abused and ingenious, changeable

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ANNOTATIONS

Vakhtanghov: Yevgeny Bagrationovich Vakhtanghov (1883-1922).

Russian theatre actor and director who founded his own theatre in Moscow called Vakhtanghov Theatre. He used masks, music, dance, abstract costumes, detailed analysis of the texts of his plays and the psychological motivation of his characters; but lacked social insight and the instructive function of Brecht’s theatre. Died of cancer.

Constructivist: Russian philosophy which favours art as a practice for social purpose. It influenced twentieth century art movements.

Meyerhold: Vsevolod Emilevich Meyerhold (1874-1940) Russian theatre producer, director and actor. Internationally famous for his experiments in theatre of physical being and symbolism in an unconventional setting.

Reinhardt : Max Reinhardt (1873-1943) American citizen. Austrian by birth. Theatre director and actor. Manager of Deutsches Theatre from 1905 to 1930. He enriched German theatre with his powerful staging techniques, harmonising stage design, language, music and choreography.

Okhlopkov : Nikolay Pavlovich Okhlopkov (1900-1967) Russian theatre director and actor. He was tremendously influenced by Meyerhold. He was the first director to place the audience around the actors to impart a feeling of intimacy.

Stanislavsky : Constantin Sergeyevich Stanislavsky (1863- 1938) Russian theatre director and actor. Recognised as the first theatre Practitioner. He described his approach to theatre as ‘spiritual realism’. It was influenced by ideas and movements like Naturalism, Symbolism,

Meyerhold's Constructivism, Russian Formalism, Yoga, Pavlovian behavioural psychology, James-Lange psychophysiology and the aesthetics of Russian writers Pushkin, Gogol and Tolstoy.

- Jessner** : Leopold Jessner (1878-1945) Producer and Director of German Expressionist theatre and cinema. Of Jewish birth and a socialist he left Germany for America when Adolf Hitler came to power.
- Ibsen** : Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) Norwegian playwright, theatre director and poet. He is one of the founders of Modern Drama. Famous for his dramas *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Emperor and Galilean*, *Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and several others.
- Tolstoy** : Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1828-1910) Russian novelist and short story writer. Famous for his novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. He also wrote a number of plays and essays. Also recognised as a moral thinker and social reformer. He held views which turned him into a Christian anarchist and pacifist. His ideas on non-violence influenced Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.
- Strindberg** : Johan August Strindberg (1849-1912) Swedish playwright, novelist, painter and essayist. He experimented on a wide range of techniques including naturalistic tragedy, monodrama, expressionism and surrealism. His essays 'On Psychic Murder', 'On Modern Drama and Theatre' and the preface to 'Miss Julie' contain his theory on naturalism.
- Gorki** : Alexie Maximovich Gorky (1868-1936) Russian novelist, short story writer, essayist, autobiographer, one of the founders of socialist literary method, political activist. Famous novels include *The Mother*, *The Magnet*, *The Specter* among several others. Openly supported Marxist social-democratic movement.
- Tchekov** : Anton Pavlovich Tchekov (1860-1904) Russian

- dramatist, short story writer and a doctor by profession. Famous for his dramas *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *the Cherry Orchard* etc. Originator of the stream-of-consciousness technique later taken up by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and other modernists.
- Hauptmann** : Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946) German dramatist and novelist who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1912. He explored naturalism and symbolism in his work and is a recognised modern dramatist.
- Shaw** : George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) Irish by birth, English dramatist, literary critic, Journalist and a great socialist. Awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1925. Famous for his dramas like *Pygmalion*, *Man and Superman*, *Saint Joan*, *Arms and the Man* and several more (60 in all).
- Eugene O'Neill** : Eugene Gladstone O'Neill (1888-1953) American dramatist. Awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1936. Used dramatic technique of realism in his work like Chekhov, Ibsen and Strindberg.
- Piscator** : Erwin Friedrich Maximilian Piscator (1893-1966) German theatre producer and director. Recognised by many as the originator of the Epic style of theatre of which Bertolt Brecht was the foremost exponent.
- Aesthetic** : critical reflection on art culture and nature.
- George Grosz** : (1893-1959) German painter who became a naturalised citizen of America. He was a member of the Dada and New Objectivity group of Berlin. Famous for his caricatural paintings of Berlin in the 1920's, he was against Nazism.
- Diderot** : Denis Diderot (1713-1784) French philosopher, art critic and writer. One of the originators of the Age of Enlightenment and prominent encyclopedist. His writings against the political system of his day influenced the revolutionary movement in France.
- Lessing** : Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) German

philosopher, dramatist, writer, art critic and publicist. He was influenced by Diderot and his work contributed towards shaping German literature.

Enlightenment : The Age of Enlightenment or Age of Reason was an 18th century cultural movement based on the belief that the power of reason would bring peace and progress in society. Foremost advocates of this belief were Spinoza, Locke, Bayle and Sir Isaac Newton. Though France was the centre of this movement its ideas swept across countries and inspired the French and American wars of independence.

Naturalism : A philosophical belief according to which everything in this world is governed by laws of nature and that nothing exists beyond it. As a literary movement it held sway from the 1880's to 1940's. It tried to reproduce day to day reality in literature. It emphasized the importance of social environment and heredity as the underlying causes of character formation which guided all actions and beliefs.

Expressionism : Literary style which tries to portray the inner workings of a person's mind. It believes that man, the environment and the world in which he lives is defined by his mental state; the turmoil within the protagonist's mind is expressed in long monologues which is considered more real than the outer world. Originated in Germany during the beginning of the twentieth century. This style was used in social dramas of protest.

Solipsism : Philosophical idea that only one's own mind exists. Everything or knowledge beyond it, of the world and of other minds, cannot be known and does not exist.

Mach : Ernst Mach, Austrian physicist and philosopher (1838-1916)

Symbolism : Literary style of the late nineteenth century. Practitioners believed that art should represent absolute truths which could only be described indirectly. They

emphasized on dreams and ideals. Scenes of nature, human activities and other worldly phenomena were used as symbols to represent other ideals; there was use of symbolic imagery.

Illusion : a misapprehension of the real state of affairs. Great and ghastly century: the twentieth century

Brueghel's day : during the Renaissance. Brueghel here in all probability refers to the Dutch painter and printmaker Pieter Brueghel who was famous for his peasant scene paintings. He is also known as Peasant Brueghel which distinguishes him from other members of the Brueghel dynasty.

Elizabethan Theatre : English Renaissance plays during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. (1558-1642) as distinguished from Jacobean and Caroline theatre.

TEXTUAL QUESTIONS

1. Is the period of experimentation in theatre finally over? How were these experiments conducted?
2. Write a note on Piscator's experiments of theatre.
3. Describe Brecht's observations of the theatre of his day.
4. Describe Brecht's epic style of theatre production. [2010, 2007]
5. Examine Brecht's views on the role and function of the street scene as a basic model for the epic theatre. [2006]
6. Examine Brecht's defence of the Epic Theatre against the suspicion that "it is a highly disagreeable humourless, indeed strenuous affair". [2008]
7. What are Bertolt Brecht's views on the Epic Theatre as some kind of 'moral institution'. [2009]

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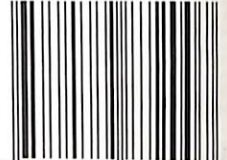
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