

Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic Study Guide

**Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic
by Bertolt Brecht**

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Plot Summary

This collection of essays and writings by twentieth century theatre innovator Bertolt Brecht chronicles the development of his theories and practices, specifically as related to his socio-political philosophy of socialist enlightenment. The writings were created over a period of almost forty years and cover a number of important transitions in both his life and work. In addition to examining the question of theatre's role on society, they also explore the questions of the relationship between theory and practice and the use of the actor as a primary means of theatrical communication.

The collection begins with an introduction from the editor, who briefly discusses the book's intention and the process by which Brecht's many writings were sorted and organized.

Part 1 of the collection proper dates from Brecht's years as an increasingly influential theatre creator in his native Germany. Here he traces some of the origins of his personal theatrical aesthetic, praising his predecessors and commenting on ways in which his own work takes inspiration from theirs. He draws connections between the way in which society in general is beginning to move towards a more socialistically enlightened perspective and explores how theatre can simultaneously function as both a mirror and a trigger of such change.

The writings in Part 2 are taken from the beginning of Brecht's period of exile from Germany, caused by the rise to power of Hitler and the Nazi party. In this period, Brecht begins to solidify his beliefs and practices into principles, developing specific and innovative terminology (epic theatre, the alienation effect) for the work he is doing, terminology that has over the years moved into common usage among theatre practitioners.

The very brief Part 3 is a single document, what Brecht calls an "organum". Here he essentially sums up the writings that have come before, refining his ideas even further and providing a clear example (in his narrative of the development of a specific "epic theatre" project) of how those ideas should be executed.

In Part 4, however, his ideas begin to take a slightly different direction. While he continues to write with barely concealed passion about what he believes to be socialistically true and necessary in both life and theatre, he appears to be somewhat softening his hard-line stance. For example, before he had contended there was little place for a wide range of human emotion in both plays and audience, to recognize the value of a somewhat broader range of experienced feeling. By the time the last piece of writing in the collection (a memo from Brecht to the members of his acting company) was put to paper, the reader sees that his once somewhat harsh aesthetic has evolved to the point where he is specifically suggesting that his style of presentation be modified to allow for increased audience appeal. In other words, his principles have shifted, from a place of rigid idealism and intellectualism into broader, more open emotionality.



Introduction

Introduction Summary and Analysis

The editor begins his introduction with a statement of the book's purpose. "This selection from Brecht's notes and theoretical writing," he writes, "is meant to give English-language readers the main texts and set these in chronological order so as to show how his ideas evolved, gradually forming into a quite personal aesthetic which applied to other spheres besides the theatre." He then discusses the various sources from which the material in the book was taken and edited. He also comments on the intent of the translation (from the original German) which, he says, was to try to "convey the flavor of Brecht's style as it too evolved, from the aggressiveness of the first essays to the slightly forced formality of some of his late pronouncements."

In any analysis of the work of any innovator (such as Brecht was), it's important to consider the context and ways in which ideas evolved, and not just the ideas themselves. Here the editor offers indications of how, in this case, that context has both been noted and preserved.



Part 1, 1918-1932 (Augsburg, Munich, Berlin), Section 1

Part 1, 1918-1932 (Augsburg, Munich, Berlin), Section 1 Summary and Analysis

Frank Wedekind - This essay, at times written quite poetically, is a tribute to the energy and spirit of once-renowned German playwright Frank Wedekind, noting the intensity of his work and personality.

A Reckoning - In writing a sharp-edged criticism of the general shabbiness of the theatre in Augsburg, Brecht contrasts it with the opera, comparing the two art forms in terms of their popularity with audiences, the money spent, and the quality of the performers brought in to perform, with opera (in his opinion) always coming out better.

Emphasis on Sport - Here Brecht contrasts theatre and sport, suggesting that the former is not as popular as the latter partly because audiences don't know what to expect from theatre and partly because theatre lacks the sense of fun and adventurousness that, he suggests, is inherent in sports. He proposes that theatre become fun and become more connected with what the public wants, rather than with what the theatre thinks the public needs.

Three Cheers for Shaw - In the first part of this essay, "Shaw as Terrorist", Brecht defines Shaw's terrorism. The second part of the essay is sub-headed "Shaw Defended against his own Glum Forebodings". Here Brecht comments on Shaw's belief that "in the future people would no longer go to the theatre in order to understand something", suggesting that as the new theatre evolves, audiences will be doing exactly that. The third part of the essay is titled "A Catching Infection: Fun", and here Brecht celebrates his belief that for Shaw, there is great joy and whole-body well being in his writing.

Conversation with Bert Brecht - A note at the conclusion of this essay suggests that this interview took place just before Brecht began to seriously study Marxism. In this interview, Brecht discusses the necessity of creating theatre that appeals to the intellect and/or reason of his audiences rather than to their feelings and/or empathy, describing his intent to write with pure objectivity about "what happens".

A Radio Speech - Here Brecht speaks of how old ways of thinking, feeling and acting are giving way to new ways, and of a new way of being human emerging. He then speaks of how his new play "Mann ist Mann" is a reflection of this theory, and how if audiences see the play and its outcomes differently, they're perfectly welcome to.

Shouldn't we Abolish Aesthetics? - In this letter to a prominent sociologist of the time, Brecht argues that the transformation in theatrical style and content he both advocates and practices is a necessary and appropriate manifestation of a transformation in



society, this being the movement from capitalist ways of thinking and being into a freer, more open way.

There is a significant ideological contrast between the first four essays in this section and the last three. Essentially, that contrast boils down to the sense that in the beginning of his exile from Germany, Brecht was able to recognize and value a sense of joy (read: emotion) in the relationship between theatre and its audience. In other words, he felt that it was possible to accommodate at least some degree of what he later dismisses (i.e. theatre as entertainment) into his philosophy. In the later essays, however, it seems clear that he's moving further into the purer ideology of theatre as education, a focus that serves as the primary core of almost all the later writings in the collection. The exception is the final few writings, in which his beliefs seem to have come full circle - by the time of the final essay, "Our London Season", he seems to have recognized a need for less austerity and more enjoyment in theatrical presentations.



1918-1932 (Augsburg, Munich, Berlin), Section 2

1918-1932 (Augsburg, Munich, Berlin), Section 2 Summary and Analysis

The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties - In this short essay, Brecht comments that the transformation of theatrical style (in terms of both writing and presentation) is a reflection of transformation in society as a whole. He repeats his belief that epic theatre "appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason ..." but then goes on to say "it would be quite wrong to ... deny emotion to this kind of theatre. It would be much the same thing as trying to deny emotion to modern science."

Last stage: Oedipus - Here Brecht comments on local productions of two Classical Greek plays based on the story of Oedipus. Brecht comments on how audiences for, and creators of, theatre are starting to look at theatre and its storytelling in a new way (reflecting immediacy and present reality) that rejects old forms (reflecting a sense of eternity and idealized reality).

A Dialogue about Acting - In this dialogue (in which there is no indication of the identity of the interviewer) Brecht discusses the challenges faced by an actor in the epic theatre; specifically, to break the habit of communicating feeling and reaction about an event and replace it with a habit of simply communicating the facts of that event.

On Form and Subject Matter - Here Brecht discusses how both the form and subject matter of theatre in general is in the midst of an uneasy process of evolution, a process of movement from emotional subjectivity to intellectual objectivity. He goes on to suggest that only a new purpose, in those who create art, can lead to new art, a purpose he calls "paedagogics"

An Example of Paedagogics - Brecht describes in detail how a musical production that he helped developed reflected the principles of paedagogics - specifically, the separation of intellectual material from the emotional, an exercise which he saw as "an aid to discipline, which is the basis of freedom". He goes on to suggest that participating in such a paedagogical "exercise" will serve a State (governing body) that "wishes to serve all men equally".

The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre - Brecht performs an in-depth analysis of opera in terms of story, intent, and musical expression. He suggests that "old" opera was essentially a "culinary" experience, defined by and interested in only sensual and/or emotional experiences. He also describes its history and traditions, like those of other long standing forms of art, as an outdated "apparatus". New opera, he contends, and by implication new theatre, attempts to "emphasize the didactic (educational) more and more".



There are several noteworthy elements in this section. The first is the number of Brecht's self-coined words/terms that apply to the kind of theatre he is doing and/or interested in promoting. These include "the epic theatre", "paedagogics", and "apparatus". Several other terms appear later in the collection, with the appearance of such terms indicating points in the development of his theories at which Brecht began to concretize and/or define them. The second noteworthy point here is the beginning of Brecht's analysis on the key role played by actors in fulfilling his intellectual and theatrical agenda. This is one of the book's central themes.

Finally, there is the reference to the story of Oedipus, a famous one in both Greek mythology and the history of the theatre. In terms of Brecht's interest in the story, it could be argued that Brecht sees contemporary capitalist society as living exactly that sort of Oedipal life. This, in turn, would make his mission and those of his fellow Socialist/Marxists that of fate (as portrayed in the myth and the plays), bringing the inevitable truth into the light and triggering the destruction of corrupt power. It's interesting in this context to note that the title of one of the plays based on the Oedipus myth is often translated from the original Greek as Oedipus Tyrannos (from the same root word as "tyrant").



1918-1932 (Augsburg, Munich, Berlin), Section 3

1918-1932 (Augsburg, Munich, Berlin), Section 3 Summary and Analysis

The Literarization of the Theatre - In this essay, Brecht details ways in which the evolving epic theatre is to be structured and presented differently than traditional theatre. He advocates the use of such techniques as titles projected on a screen, summing up and/or offering information about the action. These, he says, will function in the same way as footnotes in a novel. He again refers to the practice of creating theatre that presents events and situations objectively, training the audience to think about what it's watching rather than empathizing with it.

The Film, the Novel and Epic Theatre - This essay begins with commentary that film has become another "apparatus", but goes on to suggest that film can be as much of a vehicle for transformation as other forms of art. In the second part of the essay, he suggests that there is no necessity for "human interest" in films, given that the nature of films is such that its narrative perspective demands "external action and not introspective psychology".

The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication - In this essay, radio is described as another "apparatus", leading Brecht to advocate its transformation from an apparatus of distribution (of information) to one of communication, and offers the suggestions that such innovations must force other institutions to "surrender" to the new social order.

The Question of Criteria for Judging Acting - This essay was written in response to criticism of a performance of the actor Peter Lorre. That performance, the essay suggests, was criticized for being incomprehensible in terms of how the words were spoken and of its emotional context. Brecht comments that Lorre's performance was, in fact, an accurate and effective representation of the "epic" style of acting, in which the performance is calculated to make the audience use their imaginations to understand what was happening.

Indirect Impact of the Epic Theatre - This work, a note from the editor suggests, is a series of extracts from the notes to another of Brecht's plays, "Die Mutter". The ten short notes discuss techniques of set design and acting that, in Brecht's mind, help create a necessary, intellect-defined separation between audience and actor. These, he suggests, help create an indirect impact - as opposed to a direct one, in which the effect (impact) of a piece "flattens out all social and other distinctions between individuals". Epic theatre, he says, has to present to the audience an opportunity to understand its participation in its own fate.



In this section, the writings document the ways in which Brecht applied his theories to his work. In other words, they demonstrate the way in which he was a doer, as well as a thinker. Here, the descriptions of the practical applications of his work include discussions of acting, design, and staging.

At this point, the historical context of the collection shifts. The rise of Nazi Fascism in Germany in the early 1930s led to Brecht and his fellow innovators being prosecuted, with the result that in order to save both his physical and intellectual lives, Brecht had to leave. If looked at objectively, the reader can see this point of literary transition as a manifestation of a personal transition, from sense of enjoyable, almost relaxed theoretical and practical exploration into a period of hardening, of beliefs becoming more inflexible and more absolute. In other words, malleable and evolving ideas are simultaneously becoming tempered and entrenched.



1933-1947 (Exile: Scandinavia, USA), Section 1

1933-1947 (Exile: Scandinavia, USA), Section 1 Summary and Analysis

Interview with an Exile - In this essay, Brecht comments on how little the traditional forms of theatre mean anymore and recalls his struggles (and those of his colleagues) to reform both the act and the intention of theatre. He strongly suggests that theatre has to change with the times in order to connect and/or influence modern audiences. A note from the editor comments that Brecht was living in Denmark at the time the interview was conducted, and the phrasing (and some of the information) is "hardly Brecht's".

Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction - In this essay, Brecht argues that the epic theatre (which, he comments, is viewed by many as intense) and instructional theatre are equally valid forms as theatre for pleasure.

The German Drama: pre-Hitler - Brecht describes the intensely creative and transformational in Berlin before World War II, and lists several individuals, including Piscator, who played important roles in transforming it from theatre of entertainment to theatre of education. He says that most of these figures have scattered all over the world, and discusses again the difference between the traditional theatre and the theatre he and his colleagues were striving to create.

Criticism of the New York Production of die Mutter - Brecht comments on what he sees are the many ways in which the premiere American production of his play missed the purposes and techniques of the epic (educational) theatre.

On the Use of Music in an Epic Theatre - Brecht contends that music for the epic theatre must be considered and composed along the same lines of intent as the epic theatre in general - to illuminate the knowledge being presented, rather than awakening mere emotional responses.

Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting - In this essay, Brecht begins discussions of one of his most famous theories, that relating to The Alienation Effect. He discusses how Chinese theatre builds itself around presentation of emotion and event employing the effect, discusses how it affects an audience, and suggests that employing it (rather than the immersive, Stanislavski style of acting) is a sure way to communicate to an audience the truth, historical and individual, of an event.

Notes to Die Rundkopfe und Die Spitzkopfe - Brecht's notes on a Danish production of his latest play include references to how the acting, use of music, setting, and masks all contained elements which heightened the use and intensity of The Alienation Effect.



The most important element to note about this section of the collection is the introduction of Brecht's commentary on "The Alienation Effect", one of the most innovative and controversial (now as then) components of his theory and practice. Later in the collection, he refines his definition of what the Effect does and what it is intended to accomplish, but at this stage in the development of his aesthetic, his discussions suggest the effect is intended to develop increased intellectual objectivity in both theatre and its audience.

It's also important to note Brecht's integration of Chinese theatrical technique into his analysis and his practice. This suggests that his perspective was based on broader, more international foundations and traditions than his own ideologies. In other words, this essay indicates that he is not basing his work solely on what he thinks and/or wants - he is incorporating what works, and has worked for centuries, in other forms and contexts of theatrical expression.

At the same time, it's interesting to note the lingering glimpse of loneliness, both personal and intellectual, that Brecht allows into "The German Theatre..." There is the sense that while his passion for reforming theatre is sustaining him well, on some level he longs for the stimulation and sense of comradeship he had back in Germany when he was one of a group of artists striving to achieve the same artistic and social ends.



1933-1947 (Exile: Scandinavia, USA), Section 2

1933-1947 (Exile: Scandinavia, USA), Section 2 Summary and Analysis

On Gestic Music - This essay is more of an analysis/definition of the term "gest", which Brecht uses as a simile for emotional attitude. "A language is gestic", he writes, "when it ... conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men." Examples he offers suggest that in any communicative language, including music, the attitude is most effectively communicated before action.

The Popular and the Realistic - Brecht argues that realistic theatre as he defines it (true, uncluttered, unpretentious representations of what is) can and should be as popular as theatre that celebrates and indulges emotions. He describes how encountering and communicating with everyday workers convinced him that he was on the right track with his work, and argues that following the instincts for truth of those sorts of people will result in a theatre that is truly popular, a popularity which, he adds, is necessary.

On Rhymeless Verse with Irregular Rhythms - Brecht describes how he began to write poetry and how he began to need different, less formal (in terms of both rhyme and rhythm) means of writing poetically. He refers again to "gestic" styles of writing as a key to both truer (and more immediate) expression, and to finding ways that that expression can deepen understanding rather than hide it (as, he suggests, traditional ways of writing did, and do).

The Street Scene - In this lengthy essay, Brecht analyses the epic theatre in relation to what he describes as a "street scene" - a bystander describing an accident he just witnessed to other bystanders. He (Brecht) goes into considerable depth describing ways in which theatre, in order to be truly effective, should emulate that scene - in simplicity, in immediacy, in lack of concern for "becoming" the people involved rather than portraying them.

On Experimental Theatre - "For at least two generations," Brecht writes, "the serious European drama has been passing through a period of experiment." This, he suggests, is the process of moving from a theatre focused on entertainment and emotion into a theatre focused on entertainment and instruction. He credits Piscator and himself with being in the forefront of that transformation, and details ways in which the transformation has manifested and (at the time of writing) continues to manifest. He concludes by asserting that while this sort of theatre is not "the final result of every experiment", there seems to be no other theatrical way that will help man "master the world and himself".



Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect - Here, Brecht writes with analytical detail of how an actor can, and should, manifest the Alienation Effect, operating from the general principal that he is showing the audience a character, rather than "living" the character's life. "The attitude which he adopts", Brecht says, "is a socially critical one." In an appendix to this essay, Brecht delves further into the principle behind the Alienation Effect - its intent, he says, is to get people to look at things as though seeing them for the first time.

Two Essays on Unprofessional Acting - The first essay comments favorably on the simplicity of performances given by proletariat (working class) actors - they, Brecht suggests, have the best grasp on the importance of presenting truth onstage. The second essay comments, just as favorably, on certain aspects of amateur performances - the potential for portrayals of truth, he asserts, is just as present. A note from the editor points out that these two essays were most likely written at a time when Brecht was in exile in Sweden and his plays were only being performed by amateurs.

This collection-within-the collection contains among the clearest, least abstract examples of both principle and function of Brecht's various theories. His explanations of the basic nature of epic theatre (in "Street Scene"), of acting technique, and of "gest" all go a great distance towards the intent behind his work and the practical applications of that work. He supports both with his commentary in "The Popular and the Realistic" which argues, quite persuasively, that he and his comrades in theatrical innovation are on the right track. It could be argued that in presenting his rougher-edged, working-class theatre to a rougher-edged, working-class audience, he is essentially preaching to the converted - the people he's presenting to probably, at least to some degree, already agree with what he's trying to do and with the socialist politics his theatre espouses. In fact, the collection is notable for the lack of responses by the aristocracy (political, economic, social, artistic) that Brecht and his comrades seem so determined to overthrow. It would probably be safe to assume, though, that their responses would not be as supportive as those of the workers described in "The Popular and the Realistic".



1933-1947 (Exile: Scandinavia, USA), Section 3

1933-1947 (Exile: Scandinavia, USA), Section 3 Summary and Analysis

Notes on the Folk Play - After a brief paragraph describing the roughness and crudity of folk plays ("a mixture of earthy humour and sentimentality, homespun morality and cheap sex"), Brecht discusses how the form devolved into the "musical revue", a collection of incidents and songs without linear narrative. This, in turn, leads to the question of style (noble and stylized versus realistic and intimate), both of which, Brecht says, ultimately "whitewash" the truth that theatre should be aspiring to present.

Alienation Effects in the Narrative Pictures of the Elder Brueghel - This is a collection of notes, some in informal point form, made by Brecht in response to viewing paintings by the medieval Flemish painter Brueghel. The notes focus on ways in which the artist's apparent intent to make the viewers look at the events in his paintings in a new way was, to Brecht, the alienation effect at work.

A Little Private Tuition for my Friend Max Gorelik - In a series of eleven brief notes, Brecht (who, according to the editor, was at the time living in California close to Hollywood) discusses the way theatre and film focusing on creating and communicating illusion rather than genuine truth. "The modern theatre," he writes, "musn't be judged by its success in satisfying the audience's habits, but by its success in transforming them."

Building up a Part: Laughton's Galileo - Brecht summarizes the complicated process of translation, adaptation, design and rehearsal for a production of Brecht's "Life of Galileo". He focuses on details in the process of creating the translation, designing the costumes and casting the other parts, with an idea to pointing out how he and Laughton were focused on making the audience look at Galileo, his life, his death, and his beliefs, in a new way.

Der Messingkauf (Buying Brass): An editorial note - This section of the book is a comment by the editor on an unfinished Brecht play, Der Messingkauf. As he quotes (at some length) several excerpts from the play, he focuses on how they seem to manifest Brecht's opinions about theatre, actors and writing. He suggests that Brecht was working on the play during the last few months of his exile in the United States, during which time he also worked on screenplay treatments and other writing to pay the bills. When he returned to Europe in 1947, the editor says, Brecht "chose to recast all his views on the theatre in a rather more closely-argued form."

A key component in consideration of these essays is that they were written, for the most part, at a point in Brecht's life when, still in exile from Germany, he was living and working in the United States - specifically, in Hollywood. It could easily be argued there



was no other possible set of circumstances that, in intent and atmosphere, could be more opposite to Brecht's personal and artistic agenda. American capitalism, Hollywood's concern with style and entertainment over substance and intellectualism - one can only imagine how frustrating, infuriating and/or inspiring the situation must have been for an idealist like Brecht. And yet he took the money. He, as the editor comments, worked in Hollywood to pay the bills.

In the meantime, this section also contains one of the most detailed, and subtextually joyful, examples of how Brecht worked with a like-minded individual to produce a piece of theatre that was intellectually and artistically both correct and satisfying. This is his essay on the work he did with Charles Laughton on "Galileo", a project that seems, for both of them, to have been a multi-leveled fulfillment of a number of goals. The irony, of course, is that this experience of collaborative, theoretically pure artistic creation came into being in the capitalist, superficialist, atmosphere described above. Perhaps it was a necessity for both, an antidote to the more image-obsessed "art" being created all around them.



1947-1948 (Zurich)

1947-1948 (Zurich) Summary and Analysis

A Short Organum for the Theatre - In his prologue, Brecht comments that both the creators and the critics of the new (epic) theatre saw it as a rejection of theatre's entertainment value in favor of its potential for instruction. The prologue ends with his decision to do the opposite.

The essay itself consists of a series of seventy-six one-paragraph arguments, some longer than others, in which Brecht systematically analyzes the state of the theatre. He begins by referring to it as nothing more or less than pleasurable entertainment, and discussing it in terms of its relationship to the evolving scientific age. In analyzing how it can best fulfill that relationship, he develops his theories of *gest* and the Alienation Effect, discussing general ways in which actors of the epic theatre employ both in their performance. He also discusses the specific ways in which Charles Laughton employed them in his production of "Galileo". He concludes the essay with commentary on how epic theatre should be both presented and watched "with the eyes fully open".

The organum is, in many ways, the heart of both this collection and Brecht's work in general. It sets down terms of reference for both theory and practice, as defined by his ideas, and provides a vividly developed, concrete, concise example (the Laughton/Galileo section) of how both work. In other words, the Organum is something of a manifesto, a statement of creed and action that Brecht obviously believes can, and should, be followed by other theatre practitioners.



1948-1956 (Berlin), Section 1

1948-1956 (Berlin), Section 1 Summary and Analysis

Masterful Treatment of a Model - Brecht comments on how difficult it is and will continue to be to find the right balance between entertainment and information in the theatre presented in the period immediately following World War II, but suggests the balance must be found. He then suggests that one way forward might be to base productions of theatre on a specific model, the idea being not to reproduce the model slavishly but to use it as a springboard for individualization, and presents one such model (of his production of "Antigone") as an example.

From the Mother Courage Model - Here Brecht again examines the use of models in creating theatre, this time by offering excerpts from his model (defined in terms of music, stage design, elements and purposes of illusion) for productions of his play "Mother Courage and her Children". He concludes with commentary on what "a performance of Mother Courage ... primarily meant to show".

Does Use of the Model Restrict the Artist's Freedom? - This item is a transcript of a dialogue between Brecht and the producer of a modeled version of "Mother Courage ..." Brecht defends the use of the model, saying the principle of copying must no longer be thought of as "despicable" but as a form of art worthwhile on its own merits. He describes in some detail a moment from the original production of "Mother Courage" that he suggests is too powerful an evocation of human nature to not be included.

Formal Problems Arising from the Theatre's New Content - This is another transcript, this time of a dialogue between Brecht and another playwright. The dialogue initially focuses on Brecht's intention (in creating both the play and the model for its production) that the audience should become critical, but then evolves into a discussion of whether the play's central character should indicate having been changed by what she's experienced. Brecht clearly suggests that his intention is that she isn't - but, he adds, that doesn't mean that the AUDIENCE shouldn't.

Stage Design for the Epic Theatre - In this brief essay, Brecht discusses the necessity for the visual design of an epic play (set, props, furniture) support in every way the story and intellectual intent of the piece.

From a Letter to an Actor - Brecht writes (to, a note states, an unknown actor) about the necessity for clear speech, accurate representation of dialect or accent, and a certain emotional distance from the role. The same note referenced above also comments that in practice, Brecht modified and/or eased the extremity and rigidity of his theoretical principles.

Some of the Things that can be Learnt from Stanislavsky - The feeling for a play's poetry ... the sense of responsibility to society ... the stars' ensemble playing ...



importance of the broad conception and of details. Also truthfulness as a duty ... unity of naturalness and style ... representation of reality as full of contradictions ... the importance of man ... the significance of art's further development.

Throughout the book, there is an apparent contradiction between the main ideas given emphatic voice in this section of the collection - specifically, the idea of the model and the idea that the theories and practices of respected practitioners (like Stanislavski) should be at least seriously reconsidered, if not outright discarded. In other words, in what amounts to the same breath, Brecht is essentially saying "mine is the only way to work" at the same time as he's saying "on principle, don't respect people who say THEIRS is the only way to work". What has begun to creep into the writing is a deepening sense of self-righteousness. There has been an element of that in some of the writing to this point, but here it emerges more strongly. This is perhaps a result of his being back in his home city and country, surrounded by like-minded artistic colleagues and social revolutionaries. Yes, he recognizes that there is value in some of what Stanislavski teaches, but this is the exception. Repeatedly and insistently, he comments that set ways of working and people who advocate them are similar in status to the aristocrats the socialist revolutionary movement is determined to displace.

All that said, there is again in this section explorations of Brecht's theory and practices, as he revisits applications of his ideas on acting, staging, and design. Some of these (his comments on harmony of vision in "Stage Design ...", his comments on acting in "From a Letter") could arguably be applied to all forms of theatre, not just the epic.



1948-1956 (Berlin), Section 2

1948-1956 (Berlin), Section 2 Summary and Analysis

Theaterarbeit: an editorial note -The editor comments that Theaterarbeit was the newsletter of his Berliner Ensemble and that the following five writings were first published there. He also refers to how much of what Brecht says in the book's final five writings repeats what has been said before, although there is the addition of a detailed breakdown of the rehearsal process and commentary on casting. "All through," the editor writes, "the emphasis is strongly practical ... it is no longer a matter of elaborating new ideas but of making a body of ideas work..." He also comments on the continually emerging differences between Brecht's theories about acting and theatre and his actual practice. Alienation, he points out, "is not mentioned".

Notes on Erwin Strittmatter's Play 'Katzgraben' - The editor notes that this essay, and those that follow, while written in the form of dialogue with a specific individual, is in fact a self-edited version of several different conversations Brecht with different people on the same subject. In this particular conversation, he (Brecht) touches on the value of (and difficulty creating) true positive heroes in the theatre, the value of emotions and of form, and of learning from the theatre creators of the past.

Study of the First Scene of Shakespeare's "Coriolanus" - This lengthy essay is a detailed, complicated "conversation " (as defined in the "Notes" above) in which Brecht discusses, and tries to define the action of, the opening scene of Shakespeare's play "Coriolanus". Much of the discussion centers on the relationship between the Plebians in the play and the aristocrats who dominate socio-political life in the city (Rome) where they live.

Cultural Policy and Academy of Arts - In this essay, Brecht defends the proposals recently put forward by the Academy of Arts (the institution overseeing arts education in the now Communist East Berlin) for defining the function and increasing the popularity of art. He states that art has a definite and necessary role to play in the development and strengthening of socialist society

Conversation about being Forced into Empathy - In this "dialogue", Brecht refers to an audience's experience of emotion that results from an actor's experience of emotion as "barbaric", and insists that the truest way to move an audience is to simply present them with the facts of a circumstance and let them feel the arising feelings themselves.

Classical Status as an Inhibiting Factor - Brecht suggests that the reason so many productions of classical plays seem irrelevant is that said productions miss or ignore what made the classics so special in the first place - their sense of newness.

Can the Present-day World be Reproduced by Means of Theatre? - Brecht suggests that reproduction of the real world must, at least to some degree, take place in the



theatre. Although he says the epic theatre's efforts might not be the only solution to the situation, he says that one element of the epic theatre's philosophy (that the present day world is "capable of transformation") must hold true for all theatre.

Appendices to the Short Organum - This final essay in the collection adds notes and additional thoughts to the Short Organum. Among the notes is the suggestion that the term "epic theatre" was not specific or ambitious enough ...the comment that "every art contributes to the greatest art of all, the art of living" ... and the suggestion that for an actor, it is essential to study the story as well as the part.

Dialectics in the Theatre: an editorial note - The editor comments that at the end of his life, Brecht was consciously moving away from the ideas and principles of the epic theatre and towards a theatre based on dialectics.

Our London Season - The final item in the book is also the final note that Brecht gave to the members of the Berliner Ensemble, urging them to make their upcoming performances in London (where, he says, audiences assume that German theatre is going to be heavy and laborious) "quick, light [and] strong."

There are several noteworthy elements in this final section of the book. These include Brecht's commentary on classical theatre (as relevant to contemporary theatrical scholarship and practice as it was at the time) and the employment of dialectic philosophical technique, evident in "Conversation..." and "Study..."

Perhaps the most notable is the increased sense that Brecht is moving further away from his idealistic, somewhat hard-line theoretical positions and towards a broader, more relaxed, sense of both his ideas and how they ought to be applied. The editor himself comments on this movement in his opening note to this section, but it seems the most telling example of how Brecht has changed can be found in "Our London Season", in which he comes very close to explicitly telling his actors to change their style of performance to accommodate the tastes and expectations of the audience. This, given the tone and content of so much of his earlier writing, comes across as a major departure, significant almost to the point of being extreme. There is no clear sense of why the transformation took place - it was perhaps the result of age, perhaps the result of having been back home in Germany for some time, or perhaps for some other reason. In any case, Brecht the idealist has become something more approaching Brecht the humanist.

Further to that point, almost buried within the "Appendices..." is a very profound comment that, like many of Brecht's comments, can be seen as applying not only to theatre art but to art in general. This is his assertion that "every art contributes to the greatest art of all, the art of living", a statement that on first glance appears to be somewhat "new agey" and almost sentimental. It is, in fact, a statement of what has, it is now generally regarded, a universal truth about theatre and art - that they are, to all intents and purposes, guideline to understanding a little more about what it means to be a living human being.



Characters

Bertolt Brecht

Bertolt Brecht has, for several decades, been regarded by academics and theatre professionals alike as one of the most influential theatre practitioners and theorists not just of the twentieth century, but of history. His beliefs about what theatre is and can be, how it functions, and why it should exist at all were undeniably linked with his socialist political principles, but nevertheless transcended those principles and exhibited a profound understanding of theatre's essential purpose - to explore the nature of humanity.

Originally, and as documented throughout many of the writings in this collection, Brecht's ambition was to take that essential purpose one step further, into transforming humanity. His goal was to use theatre to shake citizens and communities out of a state of unquestioning loyalty to a market economy/society and into a more thoughtful, socially aware community of like-minded, empowered, equal individuals - in other words, from capitalism into socialism. Whether his plays contributed to the emergence of socialist power in Eastern Europe after World War II or were merely a manifestation of it is a subject for another discussion. What is undeniable, however, is that by pursuing social transformation he engineered an artistic one, fundamentally changing what had been a purely presentational art form into one that became much more about communication. This transformation has, over the decades since his theories first manifested onstage, transcended geographical and political boundaries and changed theatre around the world.

This collection of Brecht's writings on theatre chronicles not only the foundations of both principle and practice, but also ways in which both evolved to allow and recognize the value of the theatre which he had originally reviled.

George Bernard Shaw

Shaw was an Irish theatre critic and playwright whose plays were produced in England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and is widely regarded as the second greatest English-speaking playwright after Shakespeare. An outspoken socialist and intellectual, Shaw used the theatre as a forum for expressing ideas about the human condition in a way that challenged traditional ways of viewing both the individual and the society in which s/he lived. This, writings in this collection would suggest, made him powerfully influential on Brecht.

Kurt Weill

Weill was a German composer who collaborated with Brecht on several successful productions. While several of their collaborations were quite successful at the time of



their original productions, only one ("The Threepenny Opera") has achieved wide ranging and long lasting popularity over the decades.

Peter Lorre

Lorre was one of the most publicly prominent and stylistically loyal of Brecht's actors. He eventually went on to substantial Hollywood fame playing eccentric villains in films like "The Maltese Falcon" and "Casablanca".

Erwin Piscator

Piscator was a colleague and contemporary of Brecht's, producing theatre of a similar sort at roughly the same time and in the same part of the world. There is the sense throughout his writings that Brecht viewed him as something of a mentor.

Konstantin Stanislavski

A Russian acting teacher in the early part of the twentieth century, Stanislavski developed and defined an innovative style of acting and performance grounded deeply and thoroughly in realism. His teachings formed the basis of the American theory and practice of acting known as The Method. In a nutshell, Stanislavski taught that the life of a character must be lived on stage as though it was being lived in life, and that the actor must create that life by placing himself and his experiences into that of the character being portrayed. In other words, the actor became the character, a philosophy and technique diametrically opposed to that of Brecht, who taught that the actor presented the character.

Charles Laughton, Galileo

Laughton was a renowned, intense, eccentric British actor whose habit and intention of both immersing himself into a character and presenting both characters and plays within a social context made him an ideal collaborator for Brecht. Galileo, meanwhile, was an outspoken and innovative thinker whose beliefs about the nature of the universe got him condemned by the Catholic Church. This made him, in the minds of both Laughton and Brecht (both outspoken, both innovative, both condemned by the establishment) an ideal subject for the kind of play and presentation they were both interested in producing.

Oedipus and Antigone

In both the Ancient Greek myth and the Classical Greek dramas based on that myth, Oedipus was an ancient king, powerful and revered, who, in unconscious fulfillment of an even more ancient prophecy, killed his father and married his mother. When he



found out what he had done, he blinded himself and set to wandering in the wilderness. His story can be seen as a metaphoric dramatization of the dangers of hubris (believing oneself to be godlike) and living life in a state of unawareness.

Again in both myth and theatre, Antigone was Oedipus' daughter. With the long and complicated family history/destiny behind her, she faced down the government and authorities of her time by insisting upon giving her traitorous brother a full traditional burial. Her act of defiant moral justice in the face of a high-status oppressor, dramatized in several plays made her a perfect and ideal heroine for the kind of theatre Brecht advocated and produced.

The Audience (in theatre)

For Brecht, an audience in the theatre was essentially a collection of adult schoolchildren, the equivalent of the proletariat, working class individuals who needed (and ought to be) instructed in new and more enlightened ways of thinking and being, as opposed to just sitting back and being reactively entertained.

Actors

Actors were, for Brecht, tools of his trade, extensions and manifestations of his intention to awaken audiences, and by extension society, into his new socialist world. As discussed above, actors were to present characters, rather than live them, showing audiences new truths rather than awakening empathic responses to new and different feelings.

The Berliner Ensemble

The Berliner Ensemble was a group of like-minded actors and theatre practitioners formed by Brecht in Berlin following his return from exile after World War II. The company practiced and advocated socialism both in the way it was run and in the theatre it produced and presented. It became renowned throughout Europe and the West for its sharp, determined commitment.



Objects/Places

Theatre

Theatre has been in existence for thousands of years, ever since the pagan religious rituals of Ancient Greece evolved into theatrical presentations dramatizing humanity's relationship with the gods. Over time, theatre has evolved to explore other aspects of being human, but throughout the centuries, the core issue of the most effective theatre has, in one way or another, always been a variation on two basic questions. These could be summed up as "What does it mean to be a human being?" and "How do we function as human beings when faced by oppression - of the self, of sin, of the gods, of other human beings?"

The Epic Theatre

The "epic theatre" was the form of theatre espoused, developed and advocated by Brecht with the intent of awakening the audience's, and by extension humanity's, intellectual consciousness rather than its emotions. The epic theatre presented facts and circumstances, portrayed feelings and relationships as an extension of those facts and circumstances, and encouraged audiences to work towards changing the facts and circumstances around them.

In "The Street Scene", he describes an example from life of how the epic theatre should work. A bystander, he writes, describes an automobile accident not in terms of how he felt about what happened (which, Brecht asserts, is what non-epic theatre and non-epic acting does, focus on the feelings of the communicators and of the moment). Instead, Brecht suggests, the bystander communicates what happened in terms of what he saw. This, he asserts, will convey the truth of the moment and the incident more objectively, and thereby awaken a more intellectual understanding and/or perception of truth.

The Alienation Effect

The term "alienation effect" was coined by Brecht early in the development of his theory and practice. It summed up his belief that theatre, to function as a tool of education and enlightenment (as opposed to just entertainment) must trigger audiences to think about themselves, events, and their beliefs in a new and different way - in other words, in ways the audience does not usually expect. He likens the function and practice of the alienation effect to that of a person describing a car accident - the person doesn't relive the accident, he describes it, albeit in evocative, effective detail. He also proposes that in terms of acting technique, the alienation effect function as an attempt to "make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident." Finally, he writes that "the alienation effect intervenes in the form of emotions which need not correspond to those of the character portrayed. On seeing worry the spectator may feel a sensation of joy; on seeing anger, one of disgust."



Paedagogics

Paedagogics (based on the same root word as "pedagogy", the study of how to teach) was the term Brecht coined for the study and practice of separating the emotion from the intellect, particularly in terms of downplaying the former and emphasizing the latter in theatre writing and production.

Apparatus

Brecht uses this term somewhat disparagingly to refer to art forms and/or means of communication in society that merely function as tools, shallowly employed means to an unenlightened end.

Gest

Another of Brecht's self-coined terms, "gest" is essentially another term for attitude, or general, broad-strokes way in which individuals relate to one another. He also uses the term to refer to ways in which art in general, and theatrical art in particular, can communicate meaning - through general emotional and/or philosophical and/or intellectual attitude as much as detailed portrayal of action, reaction and experience.

Marxism and Socialism

Marxism is a socio-philosophical theory in which individuality is suppressed for the good of the community. It forms the basis for the socio-economic practice of socialism, in which the income and work of the whole benefits all (as opposed to capitalism, the economic equivalent of "the survival of the fittest", in which the work of the majority creates profits for a minority). Brecht was an ardent and committed socialist, whose work manifested (among other things) his socio-political beliefs.

The State

The state, in Marxism/Socialism, is seen and/or interpreted as the guiding force behind society, educated and enlightened, with a broader and objective perspective on what's good for society, and therefore the individual (as opposed to capitalism, which in general posits that what's good for the individual is automatically good for society).

The Proletariat and the Aristocracy

In Marxism/Socialism, the proletariat is the working class, kept from full social and/or self and/or intellectual awareness by the will of the aristocracy. It's important to note that, according to Marxism/Socialism, there are several types of aristocracy (intellectual,



social, the economic, political) all of whom, socialism contends, are motivated and defined by self-interest as opposed to the interest of humanity at large.

Opera

Opera is essentially theatre, sung through from beginning to end. Its drama is founded upon intensity of emotion, expressed through the music, with the intention of awakening emotions in the viewer. As such, it is essentially the opposite of Brecht's theatre, which was (is?) defined by an emphasis on intellect, both in performance intent and audience reaction.

Mann ist Mann, Mahagonny, The Threepenny Opera, Die Mutter,

These are various plays and musicals in which Brecht was involved, either as originating creator (Mann ist Mann, Die Mutter, Mother Courage) or collaborator (Mahagonny, The Threepenny Opera, Galileo). It must be noted that these are not the only examples of his work, just the ones referenced frequently and/or in-depth in this collection.

Coriolanus

Coriolanus is one of Shakespeare's later plays in which the aristocracy of Ancient Rome comes into conflict with the general citizenry. As such, it has themes and situations relevant to Brecht's socialist beliefs and practices.

Dialectics

Dialectics is a form of philosophical/intellectual analysis in which a truth is arrived at following a question-and-answer form of debate. It's important to note that this can take place in a written document created by a single individual - in other words, dialectics is not necessarily a dialogue between two people, but between two ideas.



Themes

The Relationship between Theatre and Social Change

Brecht's personal and artistic philosophies were entirely intertwined - the personal agenda / impulse was the artistic agenda / impulse, and vice versa. At the core of each of these beliefs was Marxism/Socialism. For Brecht, the personal and artistic goal was power and wisdom for the people, equality (economic, social, political) for all, and the overthrow of what he and like-minded socialists believed to be the elitist social and power structure of the time. In other words, he believed in the power and necessity of transformation, advocated for it, and saw his work as a theatre artist as a necessary component of that transformation. The question, of course, was whether his plays contributed to the emergence of socialist power or were merely a manifestation of it. The point is not made to suggest the two sides of the question are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, there is every likelihood the two fed each other - emergence of socialist power triggered more opportunity for/interest in his work, which triggered increased public dialogue, which triggered increased socialist power, and so on and so on. In any case, whatever the actual, historical, socially-relevant opportunities for and manifestations of his work, it cannot be argued that in the history of theatre history in the twentieth century, Brecht ranks with Shaw and Ibsen as one of the three most influential, theatrical inclined voices for social change in the world.

Theory vs. Practice

Brecht was both a theoretician (in that he thought through and carefully developed a set of beliefs and a process by which they could be manifested) and a practitioner (in that he actually applied his beliefs and theories to the work that he was doing). In other words, he practiced the socialism he preached, and urged others (theatre practitioners and general workers alike) to do the same. It's important to note, however, that the writings in this collection indicate quite clearly that his commitment to both evolved over the years. Specifically, his determination to define his practice strictly according to the dictates of his theory seems to have shifted, his initial apparent rigidity loosening somewhat, to the point where he felt able to allow, and even encourage, a somewhat more relaxed approach to theatrical presentation. A vivid example of this is the shift in his intention that presentations of the epic theatre should in no way seek to arouse emotions in the audience for their own sake. Any emotions triggered by an "epic" performance, if any, were in Brecht's mind ideally along the lines of anger at the corrupt social situation presented on the stage, or perhaps satisfaction that the situation in life was beginning to change. By the time the last piece in the collection was written, however, his perspective seems to have changed dramatically. In urging the members of the company (in this last piece of writing) to fuel their performances with a higher, more supposedly entertaining level of energy than they were accustomed to, Brecht is implying a concern with doing exactly what he has always said never to do. With this note, he is essentially telling his actors to create an emotion in the audience (comfort?



ease?) that has nothing to do with the socially relevant story being enacted before them. It seems that by the time of that writing, he has discovered the value of not only telling his audience to think, but allowing them to feel.

Acting as a Manifestation of Theory and Practice

It's interesting to note that while in these essays Brecht writes very little about the process of creating/writing his plays, he seems to be devoting much more energy and thought to the question of how they are to be acted, again in terms of both theory and practice. His considerations of this question range from the general ("A Dialogue about Acting", "An Indirect Impact ...", among others) to the specific ("The Question of Criteria", which examines the particular work of actor Peter Lorre, and "Building Up a Part", which focuses on the work of Charles Laughton). It's also interesting to speculate on possible reasons for this - did Brecht consider actors to be the more visible, and therefore the more important, of the various theatrical means at his disposal for making his ideological points? Did he consider his contributions as a writer of lesser value than his contributions as a leader and/or director and/or teacher? Both are possible. It's also possible that what's at work here is the editor's choice of which writings to include, since he himself says there is a large number of works he did not include. Whatever the reason, the emphasis of the collection suggests that for Brecht, while the message of his work was important, it was at the least as equally important that that message be delivered in what he believed to be the necessary, truest, clearest way, and felt it necessary that actors be thoroughly instructed in that way.

Style

Perspective

The author's background is that of a theorist and practitioner experienced and knowledgeable about both his message (Marxism / Socialism) and the medium (the theatre) through which that message is to be delivered. His expertise is of both the intellectual and actual sorts - he didn't just think about these theories, he applied them to his work and as a result, transformed those theories based on what he learned. In that sense, he was in some ways a social scientist. His reasons for writing were grounded in his socio-political beliefs. He strongly believed, and contended to others, that the aristocracy-defined, social and political environment of the times in which he lived and worked needed to be transformed. In other words, the works in this collection are all manifestations and/or reflections of that belief. His intended audience has what might be described as two facets. The first is that of his fellow theatre practitioners, actors and directors and writers who he (hopes? intends?) will join him in his socio-political crusade. In that sense, the works here can be seen as a form of encouragement, of cheering along the allies in a fight against "the oppressor". The second facet of Brecht's intended audience is the public at large, to whom he is explaining his theories in the hope/with the intent of welcoming them into his crusade for social justice. In both cases, there is the clear sense that he is preaching to the choir - that he is writing to, and for, people who for the most part already believe and practice as he does.

Tone

Because the book is a manifesto of sorts (a call to arms, an exhortation to awaken), there are several aspects to its tone that might be summarized by the term assertive. There are times when it becomes lecture-y, at times reflective, at times celebratory, at times condemnatory - but at no point, in any of the writings, does it become anything other than instructional, and often self-righteously so. In other words, the book is written from an entirely subjective tone that tries to present itself as objective but ultimately fails - the book, and presumably its writer, wants too much to convince the reader of the correctness of its socio-political perspective. There are three ways in which this tonal quality can/is likely to affect the reader, both depending upon the nature and/or identity of that reader.

Generally speaking, if the person reading the book is already of like mind, if that person is already a socialist/Marxist, then that person is likely to spend much of the book nodding his/her head in agreement. If the reader is not a socialist/Marxist, s/he is likely to feel pushed towards a way of thinking and/or believing that may not be either comfortable or a reflection of his/her personal beliefs. If the reader is someone solely interested in Brecht and his works in a theatrical, rather than socio-political, context, then s/he is likely to find, in the book, opportunities for insight into the mind and



motivations of this most outspoken of theatre revolutionaries, as well as for intriguing insight into the nature of theatre as an art form. The latter is less a function of tone than it is of content, but tone does have a role to play here. This is because Brecht, despite his theoretical resistance to emotion, displays considerable passion for his subject throughout these writings. This passion keeps the lecture-y aspects of the book from being too dry, deepens the reflective aspects with purpose, heightens the joy of celebration, and layers the condemnatory moments with fierceness.

Structure

The writings in this collection are presented in chronological order, spanning a period of thirty-eight years from 1918 (barely past World War II) to 1956 (six years into the American baby boom). This period also covers the years when Brecht was in exile from his native Germany (living in Scandinavia and America, among other places). The main benefit of this structure is that it enables the reader to clearly track the evolution of Brecht's theories - specifically, their movement from the more absolutist, hard-line beliefs in the purity of intention and practice into an increased flexibility, a shift in perspective that isn't necessarily more gentle, but somewhat less dictatorial in approach. In this context, it might be reasonable for the reader to wonder whether both structure and the changes in personal perspective indicated by that structure are a manifestation of age as much as of geographical proximity to home.

The only real negative about the editor's prioritizing the book's structure in chronological terms is that the line of potential comprehension tends to veer dangerously close to becoming incoherent, as the ideas explored by the various essays jump around from subject to subject, theory to study of practice and back again. Ultimately, however, in terms of both structure and overall impact of the work, the whole becomes much more than the sum of its parts.

Quotes

"...neither theatre nor audience has any idea of what is supposed to go on [in the theatre]. 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 ..." p. 6

"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." p. 8

"It was clear to [Shaw] that any decent man's working equipment had to include that vital piece of apparatus, his own trumpet." p. 10

"Shaw's terrorism consists in this: that he claims a right for every man to act in all circumstances with decency, logic and humour, and sees it as his duty to do so even when it creates opposition." p. 10

"I aim at an extremely classical, cold, highly intellectual style of performance. I'm not writing for the scum who want to have the cockles of their hearts warmed." p. 14

"I'm for the epic theatre! The production has got to bring out the material incidents in a perfectly sober and matter of fact way. Nowadays the play's meaning is usually blurred by the fact that the actor plays to the audience's hearts." p. 15

"A [human being] is an atom that perpetually breaks up and forms anew." p. 15

"It is my belief that [this new human type] will not let himself be changed by machines but will himself change the machine ..." p. 18

"The works now being written are coming more and more to lead towards that great epic theatre which corresponds to the sociological situation; neither their content nor their form can be understood except by the minority that understands this. They are not going to satisfy the old aesthetics; they are going to destroy [them]" pp. 21-22

"...it is precisely theatre, art and literature which have to form the 'ideological superstructure' for a solid, practical rearrangement of our age's way of life." p. 23

"Once the content becomes, technically speaking, an independent component ... 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 ... to affect the theatre's social function." p. 39

"... 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 ..." p. 43

"...it makes a great difference whether the writer approaches things as if using instruments, or produces them 'from within himself". p. 48.



Topics for Discussion

Do you agree with Brecht's contention that theatre should be focused on education and/or enlightenment rather than on pleasure and/or entertainment? Why or why not?

Do you believe that the two sorts of theatre painted as such ideological opposites by Brecht are mutually exclusive? Do you believe there is room for both? Explain your answer.

In what ways do you think Brecht's exile from his homeland (Germany) played a role in the development of his theatrical and/or intellectual philosophies?

Some would describe Brecht's choice to live and work in Hollywood as selling out to capitalism. Others would describe it as pragmatic and necessary - he did, after all and as the editor says, have to pay his bills. What do you think?

What is your experience of being moved in the theatre, or by a movie? What would you say was the trigger for your feelings, evident feeling in the actor's portrayal or a more matter-of-fact presentation of events and circumstances?

Consider this quote from p. 23. "...it is precisely theatre, art and literature which have to form the 'ideological superstructure' for a solid, practical rearrangement of our age's way of life." Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

Consider the quote from p. 107. Debate (perhaps in dialectical form) the question of whether this statement is as applicable to contemporary culture and society as it was in Brecht's time and circumstances.

Consider the quote from p. 275. Debate (perhaps in dialectical form) the question of whether this statement is as applicable to contemporary culture and society as it was in Brecht's time and circumstances.

Consider this quote from p. 277. "In times of upheaval, fearful and fruitful, the evenings of the doomed classes coincide with the dawns of those that are rising." What experience do you think Brecht is referring to here? In what ways can it be seen as a more general expression of the human experience?