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### **Title: The Pleasure of Philosophising in Bertolt Brecht's Pedagogical Theatre**

In this article, I will explore Bertolt Brecht's philosophy of education with particular reference to his notion of epic theatre. I will start with Brecht's writing on actor training - to discover his anti-Aristotelian stance regarding the pedagogical relationship between pleasure and theatrical activity. Like Aristotle, Brecht regards theatrical mimesis, and the evoking of the sensation of pleasure, as being at the heart of epic theatre's production- and reception-related activities. But Brecht rejects Aristotle's notion of the nature of this pleasure, and the ways it is to be brought forth through the craft of theatre. Aristotle is preoccupied with the arousal of pity and fear through an immersive dramatic plot structure. Brecht rejects the audience's and actor's full identification with the events and characters shown on stage, hoping to forestall the Aristotelian relief of tragic emotions. It is in this suspension of catharsis and the re-claiming of theatre's estranged, double mimetic activity, that artists and audiences alike are to be educated into a joyful, philosophising attitude. Brecht's philosophy of education pivots around the artistic and pedagogical acknowledgement: that theatre portrays *actions of previous actions* - rather than the *actual* events.

### **Brecht Scholarship in the Anglophone World**

Bertolt Brecht's reception and influence in the Anglophone world is vast (and too vast to detail), likely because Brecht's own sources of influence on his artistic practice and theoretical musings were fascinatingly diverse and eclectic. He was receptive of Vsevolod Meyerhold's stylised, physical theatre experiments; Erwin Piscator's technological innovations of the stage apparatus; the acting styles of the cabaret and silent film comedies; the dramaturgy of Japanese Noh theatre and the Peking Opera; Karl Korsch's 'dissident' philosophical Marxism; ideas and imagery from Chinese and Japanese (Buddhist, Confucianist, Daoist, Mozi-ist) philosophy (and this list is by no means complete). As a result, Brecht scholarship in English spans a wide variety of fields: theatre, film studies and cultural studies (including German) and philosophy. In Education Studies scholarship (in Germany in particular), discussion of Brechtian Theatre in/as Education (e.g. Vaßen, 2014; Massalongo, Vaßen and Ruping, 2016; Koch, 2019) can be found in the multilayered field of aesthetic education, that has been part of the wider discourse around the meaning and purpose of Bildung, since the term first appeared in Schiller's (2000) *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* in 1793. Aesthetic education encompasses the reception- and production-oriented elements of aesthetic practice (including those relevant to the theatre); the subsequent reflection on theatrical processes and representations, as well as more general, arts/theatre- and culture-related knowledge (Zirfas and Klepacki, 2013, p. 9). From an anthropological perspective, aesthetic education is understood as a form of cognitive, moral-practical – as well as a general, basic – education. It pertains to processes of human, sensory-reflective, as well as action-oriented, performative praxis (ibid). In the Anglophone literature, discussion of Bertolt Brecht, as part of aesthetic education's production/performance and reception-oriented engagement with the meaning and purpose of theatre as/in education/(self-)formation, can be mostly found in the applied

theatre scholarship. It has explored in particular Brecht's influence on the politics and pedagogy of British drama education (in schools and higher education), community and theatre-for-development contexts (Abah, 1996; Muir, 1996; Franks and Jones, 1999; Winston, 2006; Hughes, 2011; Nicholson, 2011; Fleming, 2018).

In philosophy of education journals in the Anglophone world, discussion of Bertolt Brecht's notion of epic theatre can be found here and there: in Alan Scott's (2013) work, who takes his own personal reception experience of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as a starting point to explore the educational implications of Beckett's 'making the familiar strange' - in comparison to Bertolt Brecht's notion of estrangement. Elizabeth Russo (2003) writes about Brecht's use of magistral and Socratic dialogue as a model for progressive education. But more generally, there is only passing reference of Brecht in Anglophone philosophy of education. These mostly concern a nod to the *Verfremdungseffekt* (estrangement effect), but usually as a side aspect in wider, (often) philosophy of arts-education related discussions. For example: Yun (2021) refers to Brecht in a short paragraph in relation to Rancière's critique of epic theatre's relationship between emancipation and pedagogy. This is however part of a larger discussion of the political aspects of public arts (monuments) education in Korea. D'Olimpio (2014) mentions Brecht in relation to the famous disagreement on his aesthetic's critical versus vulgarising function in Adorno's and Benjamin's argument about the educational role of film. Kellner (2021) draws on Brecht's and Benjamin's film theory and practice, as part of a wider discussion of the Frankfurt School's influence on the development of British cultural studies. Kline (2016) works with Brecht (and Eisenstein's) film theory to support a Baudrillardian examination of the limits of critical media literacy. And Harouni (2021) gives a quick nod to Brecht's V-effekt to draw comparisons to the 'estranging' performative pedagogical practice in higher education's Covid-induced move to online teaching.

In light of the relative absence of a sustained discussion with Bertolt Brecht as a pedagogue and philosopher of education in the Anglophone world, my aim for this article is to explore Brecht's theatre and educational philosophy – with a view to its moral-practical and performative dimension in particular. Let us start this investigation then by looking at Brecht's writings on the actor's rehearsal practice – and work our way 'outwards' towards Brecht's (self-declared) Anti-Aristotelian ideas as to theatre's educational function.

### **The Art of Acting reconsidered**

Given Brecht's and his collaborators' (assistants' and actors') many statements denouncing excessive theoretical discussion (especially of the estrangement effect) during rehearsals, our practical starting point seems appropriately Brechtian. In light of Brecht's prolific theoretical writings about the epic theatre however, two curious questions immediately pose themselves. What *was* the actual function of Brecht's theatre theory for his pedagogical-artistic practice (in rehearsal, during performance). And what was their relationship for his educational philosophy? We can perhaps start with the assumption that, in his later years (the early 1950's), 'Brecht was only too aware of the [his] theory's lacunae', as John Willet (1978, p. 245) reminds us in an editorial note to the practice-focused publication *Theaterarbeit* (Theatre Work, 1952). Willet (the first one to translate Brecht into English in 1964) draws our attention to an unsigned fragment that follows the introduction to *Theaterarbeit*. Here, Brecht places acting's practical-moral

dimension, over any finite theorisations about its purpose, at the heart of the theatrical craft.

‘In the theatre people ‘act’. One can expect any account of this acting to be reasonably serious, as it matters to society. It should not, however be thought that it is being treated flippantly if the account and the accompanying technical explanations are not immediately crammed with big words. If this acting is to be artistic it must involve seriousness, fire, jollity, love of truth, inquisitiveness, sense of responsibility. But does one hear real scholars talking about love of truth or real revolutionaries about feelings for justice. They take that sort of thing for granted.’ (Brecht, 1978, p. 246)

Perhaps, Brecht recognised [Willet suggests as a sign of his apparent mellowing in later years] that he himself had fallen into the trap of the scholar, who had taken for granted theatre’s (and especially acting’s) practical, moral-aesthetic dimension. Theoretical propositions that claim an all-encompassing explanatory power about the nature of the art of (epic) theatre, Brecht might have realised, can lose sight of the fact that, as a craft, it is ultimately pedagogically bound up in the actor’s self-guided commitment to hone her craft - within the particularities and processes of practice. In other words, the actor’s art is dependent on a certain personal, practical, moral-aesthetic disposition to guide her work; one that is open to experimentation with the meaning of theory for her practice. This of course includes an inquiring stance into how ‘big words’ like ‘love of truth’ and ‘sense of responsibility’ might manifest in her training. But how is the actor meant to develop this ‘conduct’, which is stressed by Brecht as being so essential to the theatrical craft? And secondly, how does Brecht intend to communicate this practical dimension of artistic practice for the epic theatre - without ‘taking it for granted’ in his theoretical writings? In his later years, weary of the antagonism that he felt had resulted from the many mis-readings of his theory, Brecht saw the need to document his Berliner Ensemble’s rehearsals and performances (the BE is the theatre that Brecht founded after returning to the GDR in 1949). He wished to ‘fill in a missing dimension both in the theoretical writings and in the printed plays’ (Willet, 1978, p. 245). Keen to bring to life in writing the pedagogical processes involved in developing concrete artistic practices, the *Theaterarbeit* publication aimed to show how Brecht’s ideas unfolded in, and mapped onto, practice. It is a unique publication, because it documents the production of the Berliner Ensemble’s plays between 1949-1951 (*Puntilla, The Mother, Mother Courage*, among others) through extensive stage photography and production notes on rehearsals and performances. As John Willet (1978) explains in his editorial commentary in *Brecht on Theatre: Theaterarbeit* constitutes ‘an exceedingly mixed bag of essays, notes and fragments by many hands [four other members of the Berliner Ensemble Theatre], grouped as to form a section dealing with each play (...)’ (p. 239).

One of these short essays is *Five Notes on Acting*, from which I will quote in a moment. It details the nature of the *new* actor’s (pedagogical) conduct: towards herself, her fellow actors and her artistic practice – and critiques the ossified formalism of post-WWII acting styles. One of Brecht’s earlier essays – a polemic from 1926 entitled *Emphasis on Sport*, already foreshadows his increasing dissatisfaction with the state of the bourgeois theatre. He considers it a ‘sausage-machine’ (1978, p. 8); a theatre which manages to turn any fun that is to be had in storytelling into tedious stage shows. Theatre’s purposelessness, Brecht claims in *Emphasis on Sport*, is intimately linked to its lack of fun. The theatre, he polemicizes, does not only produce a bored and demoralised audience, but also that

‘overworked, misused, panic-driven, artificially whipped-up band of actors’ (p.7); who, albeit talented, struggle to engage the public with their imitations of life. As a result, Brecht deplures, actors fall back into pathos and unbridled emotionality. They lose the very elegance, grace and lightness required for the development of engaging, modern stage shows. The main reason for theatre’s demoralised state and lack of pleasure, according to Brecht, is its loss of pedagogical purpose. This is combined with its refusal to entertain a public whose tastes lead them into the football stadium and the boxing ring - but to shun the theatre. ‘The reason why the theatre has at present no contact with the audience is that it has no idea what is wanted of it.’ (p. 6). Brecht’s early critique echoes his later, more instructional essay *Five Notes on Acting*, as well as leading theatre critic's Herbert Ihering's assessment of the post-WWII stage. The most common trap that theatre practitioners, particularly actors, fell into, Ihering notes in his book *Junge Schauspieler/Young Actors* (1948, p. 110), was that of the 'heroic manner'. The 'illusion of the period', he writes, was the trope of 'unproblematic heroism' (ibid). This was a way of acting, writing and staging plays that brimmed over with pathos, rhetorical devices and heavy symbolism, but lacked what Aristotle (as well as Brecht) would have regarded the key function of drama: *mimesis* – the imitation of (plausible) actions; even if Aristotle and Brecht would have disagreed as to what ‘plausible’ meant here exactly. Not unlike Aristotle then, Brecht re-affirms theatre’s mimetic purpose. He writes in his *Short Organum for the Theatre* (1948): ‘Theatre consists in this: in making live representations of reported or invented happenings between human beings [or between human beings and gods] so with a view to entertainment’ (Brecht, 1978, p. 180). In contrast to the post-WWII stage’s neglect in portraying ‘plausible’ imitations of life as entertainment, the new theatre is to connect to a public that prefers the interactivity and participatory nature of mass sporting events. Accordingly, Brecht's new modern actor, in *Five Notes on Acting*, is called to: control her stage temperament; refine the ability to pay attention to, and respond dialogically, to her stage partner’s tone so that ‘rhythm and cadences develop which run through entire scenes’ (Brecht, 2014, p. 233). She is to learn how to drop ossified stage diction. Further, the actor is to hone her ability to portray actions and speech ‘realistically’ - that is in a way that is recognisable, and plausible, to a modern public. The actor is to ‘look ordinary people in the mouth’ (ibid). And, lastly, she is meant to reclaim the fun and purpose that might result from this new pedagogical mode – because (as Brecht contends): ‘a man [or woman] who strains himself [herself] on stage is bound, if he [she] is any good, to strain all the people sitting in the stalls’ (Brecht, 1978, p. 8).

### **The Ethnographic Actor: a new pedagogical mode**

‘Nobody who fails to get fun out of his activities can expect them to be fun for anybody else’ (p. 7), Brecht reprimands the (old) acting profession. He proposes in turn that the new actor’s pedagogical mode towards her craft should be marked by a certain practical ease and joyfulness. Brecht instructs his actors in *Five Notes on Acting*:

‘If you want to master something difficult, you have to make it easy for yourself. Irrespective of whether the actors on stage are supposed to lose themselves or hold themselves in check, they must know how to make the acting easy for themselves. First an actor must conquer the stage: that is to say, he must acquaint himself with it as the blind acquaint themselves with their surroundings. He must divide up his part, modulate it and thoroughly savour it until it suits him. Whatever they are meant to express, he must ‘arrange’ his movements so that he enjoys even their rhythm and substance.

These are all tasks for the senses, and an actor's training is of a physical kind. If the actors don't make it easy for themselves, they don't make it easy for the audience either.' (Brecht, 2014, p. 232)

The lightness of acting practice (aimed for in any modern acting style, Brecht argues) can only result from the actor's willingness to let go of any preconceived, formalistic ways of 'acting well' on stage. Instead, the actor is called to use her senses. She is to self-actively explore the physical space, her part and even her own physical responses. This includes a practical experimentation with the performative possibilities of her role. And it involves a paying attention to her intuition, as to the 'feel' of the various arrangements of her modulating voice, and her movements' nature and rhythm. This pedagogical mode of self-observation is hereby not simply a means to build up her character for performance in a believable manner. These explorations are also meant to be driven by (and for) the actor's own 'rejoicing' in her own body's movements and rhythm. And, one might add, the actor is also to take pleasure in the act of observation itself. She is to curiously observe people's (local) language performances ('looking ordinary people in the mouth'), as well as their everyday practical, material conduct and comportment in the (modern) world. The actor is to go out into the bustling streets and shops, smoky cafés, work environments and sports arenas. She is to observe (with 'joyful' curiosity) people's actions, their way of holding themselves, keeping proximity and distance. And she is to pay attention to the movements and gestures that people perform when reacting to, and handling, everyday objects and situations in these different sites. In Brecht's descriptive poem *Everyday Theatre* (written around 1930), he urges his actors to take on what one might consider the stance of a curious 'street-ethnographer'; who observes and takes great care in paying close attention to people's unfolding everyday behaviours and conduct within their social environments. In fact, the art of acting (Brecht concludes) – albeit any subsequent artistic refinement – is sought to never get too far removed from these observations of the everyday 'social theatre'. He writes in the *Everyday Theatre* poem:

'You artists who perform plays  
In great houses under electric suns  
Before the hushed crowd, pay a visit some time  
To that theatre whose setting is the street.  
The everyday, thousandfold, fameless  
But vivid, earthy theatre fed by the daily human contact  
Which takes place in the street (...)  
(Brecht, 1987, p. 176-179)

In his three-page long poem, Brecht captures the vividness, and often contradictory nature, of this human contact in everyday interactions, which constitutes the 'human theatre'. He sketches in detail the various postures, gestures, ways of speaking and accompanying emotional stance - that are at work in the various (model) incidents that one might encounter on the street. One of these key model events in the poem is Brecht's famous *street scene*. It details the imitative behaviour of a man at a street corner who re-tells/mimes an accident to a group of bystanders. Brecht focuses on a vivid, poetic description of the conduct of the man at the street corner. The complexities and minutia of the way that he relates to his audience (the bystanders), and approaches his task of telling the truth as to what happened, serves as a pedagogical model for his actors:

'(...)

Note also  
 His earnestness and the accuracy of his imitation. He  
 Knows that much depends on his exactness: whether the  
 innocent man  
 Escapes ruin, whether the injured man  
 Is compensated. Watch him  
 Repeat now what he did just before. Hesitantly  
 Calling on his memory for help, uncertain  
 Whether his demonstration is good, interrupting himself  
 And asking someone else to  
 Correct him on a detail. This  
 Observe with reverence!  
 And with surprise (...)  
 (Brecht, 1987, p. 177)

The man's imitative work on the street acts as a model for Brecht's actors, because his presentation has a social function: the man on the street corner wants to serve justice. He can however also not be entirely certain as to what exactly constitutes the right imitative behaviour given this aim (how does one serve the truth?). The man is earnest in his portrayal, and focused on showing the observed actions accurately, but is not bothered to fully transform himself into the imitated (ibid). The man at the street corner seeks to imitate what 'really' happened, so that 'truth can be served'. But he is also aware of the partiality of his viewpoint. His interruption of himself, his act of jogging his own memory, his asking the crowd for correction on any details he might have missed, illustrates that his 'search for truth' is also dependent on the observations of others. His imitations are (partial) interpretations of reality. The imitator at the street corner delivers the driver to the verdict of the crowd, by showing them how the accident happened. He illustrates how the driver sat behind the wheel; and how the other, older man, was run over. But he is shown to only demonstrate as much to the crowd as is necessary to make the accident intelligible, and the concerned persons' actions understandable. An overly artistic representation would draw attention to itself, Brecht argues. In other words, the man does not lose himself in his acting. His demonstrations are described as being simple but effective in their pedagogical aim to intervene practically and socially. There is no pathos and no enforced empathy with the driver or victim, as this would not aid the search for 'reality'. The imitator, in Brecht's poem, does not want to convince the audience of the unavoidability of a fateful event that exists outside of the involved parties' control and responsibility. He does in fact integrate a dialectical dimension into his demonstration, in order to show the kind of actions that *could have* prevented the incident in the first place (ibid).

'(...)The accident  
 Becomes in this way intelligible, yet not intelligible for  
 Both of them [man and crowd]  
 Could have moved quite otherwise; (...)  
 (Brecht, 1987, p. 177)

His presentation does not settle the issues as to what happened, or how the accident could have been avoided once and for all. The purpose of his imitation is to open out the event for inquiry. And no matter how much the man wants to get to the truth of things (so that justice can be served), the demonstrator always stays a demonstrator. He never transforms

himself into the man he is imitating in his actions. The man at the street corner does in fact not know much, of course, about the inner life of the people he is representing. He is imitating their actions, the results of their actions, and even shows how the accident might have (perhaps) been avoided through *other* actions. The imitated people, however, always stay the other. ‘The demonstrator stands and gives us the stranger next door’ (p. 178). This ‘realistic way’ (as Brecht called it) of narrating an incident indirectly - of keeping a critical distance to the character and the events shown - has later been theorised, more elaborately, as a basic (and key) pedagogical model for his epic theatre. The *street scene* reappears in a longer essay from around 1938-1940, where it is claimed as being the key to the ‘estranged’ mimetic style, and educative function, of Brecht’s epic (and what he would later rename the dialectical) theatre. In this longer *street scene* essay (Brecht, 1978, p. 120-129), Brecht makes more explicit the link between the man’s observable actions, as sketched in the poem’s street incident, and the key pedagogical premises of his new theatre: its anti-illusionism, changed artistic practice and aim to make the familiar striking and strange, in service of theatre’s new pedagogical function. Epic theatre seeks to arouse the audience’s (and artists’) curiosity and practical philosophizing. This is not only in view of the reality of the portrayed actions, but as to their changeability: could these people (e.g. those involved in the accident) have acted differently, and if so, how – and, given their different actions, would it have changed the course and outcome of the incident? In the *street scene* essay, Brecht focuses on the anti-illusionistic style of the man on the street, who is not afraid to move between direct imitation and an indirect narration of the event’s details, in order to clarify what he has seen (e.g. if events are too difficult to mime directly). He does not wish to transform himself into the imitated, or transport the audience emotionally to a higher realm of immersion (like Aristotle would have sought relevant). His imitations stay partial and imperfect. In other words, the imitator is aware that his demonstrations are a repetition of events that have already taken place. He does not take great care to pretend that they are the *actual* event. As a basic artistic and social principle for the epic theatre then, the street scene model describes its shift of artistic focus. Epic theatre moves away from naturalistic efforts to carry the audience away through great emotions, direct dramatic speech and faithful (to life) stage design and costumes. Naturalism took great artistic pains to fully immerse the audience into the characters and events on stage, as if they were the *actual* events. The epic theatre in turn welcomes the break in identification and its forestalling of catharsis. And with that, theatre’s double mimetic activity, that is its ‘repetitive’ portrayal of actions that have already taken place – is re-considered by Brecht as a pedagogical and artistic opportunity. He subverts the Aristotelian premise that the specific pleasure of drama (or, for Aristotle, more specifically tragedy) lies in its arousal of the tragic emotions of pity and fear, and their physical relief (Poetics, 53b10f; 49b27f). Although Brecht opposes Aristotelian catharsis, and is keen to (artistically and pedagogically) (re)claim theatre’s double mimetic activity, Brecht also welcomes Aristotle’s emphasis on theatre’s mimetic function, and its status as the craft of storytelling (Poetics, 50b27-51a29). In fact, Brecht affirms: ‘And according to Aristotle – and we agree here – narrative is the soul of drama. We are more and more disturbed to see how crudely and carelessly men’s life together is represented (...)’ (Brecht, 1978, p. 183).

## Theatre’s (dialectical) Pleasures

As is already evident, it is not that Brecht rejects pleasure as a pedagogical premise for the theatre. On the contrary, the portrayal of believable actions, and the arousal of pleasure, is still deemed as the core of epic theatrical activity. Brecht indeed agrees with Aristotle that ‘tragedy [drama] is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life’ (Poetics, 50a16f). Drama is an imitation of events of how people deal with each other in the world. And as such, actions are more essential for a good drama than characterisation on its own. ‘Well-being and ill-being reside in action, and the goal of life is an activity, not a quality (...)’(50a24i). Flourishing, according to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, can only be achieved in action; and such actions, as to how one flourishes (or perishes) in life and death, are the stuff of theatrical mimesis. In other words, the dramatic hero has to *do* things, take risks, get involved, make decisions in life; only when they act, and experience the outcome of their actions, can they flourish or perish. Aristotle’s main premise is of course that it is only the audience’s empathy with the protagonist’s actions ‘gone wrong’ (Aristotle focuses on tragedy) - and not their good or bad character as such, which will give birth to pity and fear, and their release, in catharsis. For Aristotle, this is where the specific pleasure that pertains to ‘good’ tragedy resides. And it is here where Brecht disagrees with him. Although he sides with Aristotle on the playwright’s need to portray plausible actions (Poetics, 51b30-31), so that men's life together is not represented ‘carelessly and crudely’ (Brecht, 1978, p. 183), he disagrees with Aristotle as to the nature of the ensuing sensation of pleasure. And he differs also as to how this specific pleasure of drama is to be brought forth *in* the craft of theatre-making. The pleasure of theatre, for Brecht, does not lie in its immersive and textual quality first. It is not defined by its capacity to arouse tragic emotions, and their relief, in the audience through a well-constructed plot (Poetics, 52a1-3). The pleasure of epic theatre, for Brecht, is instead bound up in an aesthetic that is able to instigate a pedagogical act: an inquiry into the nature of ‘human being’ itself (as a verb and a noun). The sensation of pleasure is to result from theatre’s openly double mimetic (estranged), artistic-pedagogical act. This involves not only the breaking of identification, but also the turning of actors and audience into active spectators of, and commentators on, the actions and characters presented on stage. Brecht maintains that there is joy to be had from being challenged (as a playwright, actor and audience member alike) to master the understanding of the complex, and often contradictory nature of the social reality one inhabits. ‘The theatre of the scientific age is in a position to make dialectics into a source of enjoyment. The unexpectedness of logically progressive or zigzag development, the instability of circumstances, the joke of contradiction and so forth (...)’ (Brecht, 1978, p. 277). The specific sensation of pleasure that pertains to epic theatre is thought to coincide with its pedagogical function. The act of educating audience and actors into a practical philosophical disposition is tantamount to the joyful stance of observing carefully, and judging with care, the (likely unexpected) nature of ‘human being’ in specific social situations. Human being has become the object of inquiry. ‘The demoralisation of our theatre audiences [Brecht had argued in 1926] springs from the fact that neither theatre nor audience has any idea what is supposed to go on there (...)’ (p. 6) In other words, epic theatre’s demonstrations are to reclaim theatre’s social, pedagogical function, whose loss Brecht lamented as being at the heart of bourgeois theatre’s demoralised state. He writes in the *Short Organum* (1948):

‘(...) Our representations must take second place to what is represented, men’s life together in society; and the pleasure felt in their [the representations’] perfection must be converted into the higher pleasure felt when the rules emerging from this life in society are treated as imperfect and



provisional. In this way the theatre leaves its spectators productively disposed even after the spectacle is over (...)' (Brecht 1978, p. 205)

Theatrical mimesis (and this involves all artistic elements – playwriting, acting, stage design, music etc.) is assigned the task to portray people's actions plausibly; but not as an unavoidable consequence of natural (fixed) character traits, within a world defined by fate (as Aristotle would have thought relevant for good drama). Like the man on the street corner, epic theatre is to focus on a realistic portrayal of the (necessarily contradictory) actions and relationships that constitute social reality. A person's character might be, partially at least, of course concluded from their actions. It cannot however be fully fixed and defined, without considering how wider social and material relationships might help, or hinder, a person's capacity to be 'good' in the first place (p. 124). As a result, even the demonstrator - and with that, the actor and artist - are to be shown as speaking from a social and partial point of view. Antony Tatlow reminds us in his editorial comment on Brecht's *Me-ti* texts: 'Brecht disliked any (artistic) practice without space to question its aesthetic intentions. In such a world you either manipulate or are manipulated. To provoke such questions was, of course the purpose of the so-called estrangement effect' (Brecht, 2016, p. 53). In the *street scene*, the imitator might then, as Brecht exemplifies, be shown to acknowledge the fact that the driver complained at being overworked and underpaid (and thereby falling asleep at the wheel). But the man is also shown to blame the driver for doing too little to reduce his hours (for example by joining a union) (p. 124). In other words, the imitated must remain a stranger to the imitator [actor/artist] and the spectator. And as a result, their 'strange' (and with that striking) actions arouse curiosity and a need for explanation. Audience and artist are educated into a philosophising attitude, which is rendered the prerequisite for any mindful course of action towards social change. And finally, and most importantly, Brecht maintains, the development of such practical philosophising attitude (by anyone involved in the theatrical process) will enhance one's capacity for life. Here, Brecht is indeed not too far removed from the Aristotelian premise that mimesis allows us to exercise our capacity for recognition and understanding – an activity, which is naturally pleasurable to humans (Poetics, 48b12-17). 'All these [dialectical representations] are ways of enjoying the liveliness of men, things and processes, and they heighten both our capacity for life and our pleasure in it (...)' (Brecht, 1978, p. 277).

### **The Joyfully Philosophical Theatre**

Theory, as exemplified in the street scene essay, Brecht (2014) contends, is indeed hoped to give an insight into the practical, sensory techniques and pedagogical aims of his epic theatre (and its contribution to heighten our capacity for life). But theory can also lead to misapprehension, when it is read as synonymous with, or entirely independent of, practice. The 'mis-readings' (by those antagonistic to his theatre), Brecht admits however, are his own fault. In a conversation with Peter Palitzsch (assistant at the Berliner Ensemble), which opens the production notes on his 'Katzgraben' production (from 1953), he states:

'B.: It's my own fault. These accounts, and much of the hostility too, apply not to the theatre I practise but to the theatre my critics read into my theoretical writing. I can't resist letting readers and spectators in on my techniques and my aims, and that takes its toll.' (Brecht, 2014, p. 251)

Brecht acknowledges the need to communicate the aims of his theatre and artistic techniques theoretically. But he is equally aware of the misconceptions that can result from the assumption that theory *can* actually fully disclose the pedagogical nature of artistic practice in the first place. It is not only that of course any interpretation and understanding of theory is bound up in the unpredictability of the encounter between text (and the world it speaks of) and the reader's self – and the fusion of their respective horizons. This can result in conflicting readings 'that can take its toll' (ibid), for example (as Brecht would have claimed), in the (mis-)interpretation of his theoretical positions. More importantly, artistic practice also discloses its own horizon of meaning, which calls for encounter and interpretation towards a hermeneutic experience of truth (Gadamer, 2013). Brecht's *Everyday Theatre* poem and *Theaterarbeit* publication might be considered an example of such (poetic-material) engagement with the human theatre and its horizon of meaning (disclosed on the street, in rehearsal, on stage). They are an attempt to inhabit, through his writing, the very philosophical, inquiring disposition towards artistic practice, which Brecht hoped to bring forth in his actors and spectators.

'Where theory is concerned, I offend against the iron law (one of my favourite laws, as it happens) that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. My theatre – and this can hardly be held against me, in and of itself – is a philosophical one, if the term is understood in a naive sense. I take it to imply an interest in people's behaviour and opinions.' (Brecht, 2014, p. 251)

Brecht deems his theatre philosophical, because it renders striking and strange (taken-for-granted) human social behaviours. It opens up 'human being' as an object of inquiry on stage/in the rehearsal room. This form of knowledge that makes up epic theatre's theatrical imitations calls for the audience's and actors' encounter with its unique (estranged) structure and form – towards a hermeneutic experience of truth (Gadamer, 2013). The proof of the pudding is in the eating (one of Brecht's favourite sayings), because the truth of this practical philosophical theatre unfolds in the audience's and actors' encounter with the social world (of actions, including one's own), of which it speaks in its artistic imitations. But, as Brecht himself suggests in his *street scene*, the hermeneutical consequence of this interpretation of the human theatre's horizon of meaning (on the street, in rehearsal, during performance), is that it necessarily constitutes an unfinished event. It cannot be fully controlled by the artist. As such, the theatrical encounter cannot guarantee a (scientific) proof that either presents a finite (and closed) answer as to the *nature* of social reality – or an exact instruction as to how one might go about changing social conditions. Gadamer sums up the nature of this utopian dimension of interpretation, which also pertains to the encounter with epic theatre's (estranged) double-mimetic, artistic practice. 'The undecidedness of the future permits such a superfluity of expectations that reality necessarily lags behind them' (ibid, p. 117). The craft of mimesis - the double (pedagogical-artistic) work of portraying actions of previous actions - is to open a 'horizon of yet undecided future possibilities' (ibid). The theatrical encounter can indeed arouse utopian impulses (as Brecht of course wished), but also bring forth mutually exclusive expectations. In other words, mimesis is connected to the pleasure of a philosophising stance about human, social reality, whose future is not yet decided, and about whose realisation the theatre can ultimately not directly instruct; but (only) leave its spectators and actors 'productively disposed' towards (Brecht 1978, p. 205).

‘Not even instruction can be demanded of it [the theatre]: at any rate, no more utilitarian lesson than how to move pleurably, whether in the physical [aesthetic] or the spiritual [moral] sphere. The theatre must remain something entirely superfluous, though this indeed means that it is the superfluous for which we live. Nothing needs less justification than pleasure.’ (Brecht, 1978, 180-181)

Theatre is to be without a measurable, externally set value, which can be fully captured in theoretical propositions. This is because it is exactly those activities that go *beyond* being ‘just’ measurably useful or necessary; those that are without an entirely predictable, practical application, which are the most valuable to us as human beings personally. Theory needs to be connected to the (messy) experience of practice, because an image of the world (e.g. that of epic theatre) that is too complete and systematic cannot only *not* include the whole world (of epic theatre), but also runs the danger of hardening into (pre-established) theoretical constructs; those that then seek to order the world in their own image. As Brecht’s teacher Met-i suggests:

(...)It takes the whole world to come up with an image but the image does not include the whole world. It is better to connect judgements with experiences than with other judgements, if the point of the judgements is to control things. Me-ti was against constructing too complete images of the world. (Brecht, 2016, p. 50)

We love to go to the theatre for the experience of ‘moving pleurably’, and that, for Brecht, is a good starting point. And in the process of paying attention to, and reclaiming, the experience of joy in the careful observation and imitation of the human theatre (as playwrights, actors and audiences), we might even glimpse the nature of theatre’s pedagogical, perhaps even its utopian function: ‘to contribute to the greatest art of all – the art of living’ (Brecht, 1978, p. 277). For Brecht, the educational value of theatre lies in the creation of a public space, in which we gather to appear to ourselves as *other*. Here, as actors and audiences, we give space, and open out for consideration, what seems most mundane about human being: our thoughts; our words and our everyday dealings with each other. Through the practice of mimesis, and the creation of (Brechtian) theatre’s estranged imitations and metaphors about how we live together, we are invited to become observers of the coming-into-meaning of our ‘theories’ and ‘values’. And we are invited to philosophise: as to what kind of actions and what kind of theory/theorising (and vice versa) might nourish, or stifle, or human capacity to live a flourishing life together, in the human theatre.

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