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Title: The Tyranny of Truth and the Preservation of Human Happiness (à la Bertolt Brecht and Paul Feyerabend)

Author: Katja Frimberger

Abstract

In this chapter, I explore the influence of German theatre maker Bertolt Brecht on philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend's conception of human (scientific) inquiry. Looking at Brecht's and Feyerabend's shared Anti-Aristotelian viewpoint, I will show how Brecht's theatre/theory of estrangement and Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism both question the ideal of the role of myth (including drama and science) to reproduce specific metaphysical theories, in order to preserve the cultural unity of a closed society. Instead, Brecht and Feyerabend entertain a more practical ideal as to the role of artistic and scientific story-telling in a modern, pluralistic society. Rather than re-producing *specific* norms and values, it is to sustain the more practical ideal of nourishing individual *human productivity* in its manifoldness. In short: Theatre and science are to preserve human happiness (and life, more generally). They are to embrace, and bring forth, the pleasure that resides in people's (individual) acts of knowledge production (in the arts and sciences) - as producers, speculators and critics.

Introduction

My aim for this chapter is to show how Paul Feyerabend, the philosopher of science, borrowed features from German theatre maker Bertolt Brecht's theatre theory and theatrical methods for his own conception of scientific theorising and practice. A curious question poses itself immediately of course. Is such endeavour plausible, even possible? Are the theatre/the arts and science not two different beasts? As I will show, both Feyerabend and

Brecht were indeed convinced that the arts and the sciences had a lot in common; that they could even learn from each other. In their view, art and science share many similarities – even if they are not exactly the same thing of course.

Feyerabend, the man of science, looked towards the arts – and Brecht, the man of the theatre, looked towards science for the formulation of their theories and their resulting practice. Feyerabend's openness to the arts and his affinity with Brechtian theory and practice in particular is hereby no mere cultural coincidence, although Brecht (1898-1956) was German/Bavarian, Feyerabend (1924-1994) was Austrian. Both lived through the turmoils of WWII, even if in very different circumstances (young Feyerabend fought on the French and Polish frontline on the German side; the “communist” Brecht resided abroad in exile from the Nazis). Both were also immersed in the post-WWII (East German) theatre scene. They were influenced by, and partook in, movements for theatrical reform. Calling out the ideological nature of dramatic storytelling under the Nazis (and in post-WWII theatre more generally), both were concerned with the (practical and theoretical) questions regarding theatre's post-war mimetic purpose and practice.

In short, both Feyerabend and Brecht pondered how this *new* theatre could raise to the social and aesthetic challenge of a post-war world. Would the *new* theatre be able to fulfil its mimetic purpose (of imitating human actions truthfully and plausibly), whilst still drawing on the *old* dramatic and narrative structures? And most importantly perhaps, both men just loved the world of the stage – as producers/practitioners, philosopher-speculators and critics. To this effect, Feyerabend even tells his readers in *Against Method* (1993, p. 252ff) and in his autobiography *Killing Time* (1995, p. 54ff), that it was in this post-WWII East German theatre scene of 1946, where the key ethical and epistemological questions; those that would shape his scientific ethos, were first sparked.

“The problem of knowledge and education in a free society struck me during my tenure of a state fellowship at the Weimar Institute zur Methodologischen Erneuerung des Theaters [Weimar institute for the methodological renewal/reform of the theatre], which was a continuation of the Deutsches Theater Moskau under the directorship of Maxim Vallentin” (1993, p. 252).

Through the Marxist philosopher Walter Hollitscher, Feyerabend first encounters Brecht (1978, p. 113ff) when the German theatre maker rehearses his play *Die Mutter* [The Mother] at the Burgtheater in Vienna (Austria). And it so happened, that Feyerabend was invited by Brecht to become his artistic assistant at the *Berliner Ensemble* in East Berlin. Interestingly, in *Science in a Free Society* (1978), Feyerabend implies that his decision to *not* follow Brecht's call to become a man of the theatre and apprentice at the Berliner Ensemble was perhaps one of the biggest mistakes in his life.

“Enriching and changing knowledge, emotions, attitudes through the arts now seems to me a much more fruitful enterprise and also much more humane than the attempt to influence minds (and nothing else) by words (and nothing else). If today only about 10% of my talents are developed then this is due to a wrong decision at the age of 25” (p. 114).

It must however also be mentioned that a later Feyerabend, in his biography *Killing Time* (1995), qualifies this regret of not working under Brecht in East Berlin. Here, he concedes that he would have been indeed rather keen to “learn about the theatre, and from such an extraordinary man” (p. 73). That is, he would have liked to receive training in how to communicate and enrich an audience's knowledge, emotions and attitudes through the full artistic repertoire of the theatre. At the same time however, Feyerabend reflects that his “almost instinctive aversion to group thinking” (p. 73) would have likely led him to detest the cult-like nature of the “partly fearful, partly dedicated, and certainly pushy and closely knit” Brecht circle and its “collective [moral] pressure” (p. 73) to realise the playwright's idea(l)s.

Considering his own righteous (moral) indignation as a young man regarding the needs for post-WWII theatrical reform (hinted at at the beginning of this chapter), Feyerabend (1978) is however also aware of his own early tendency towards “ideological purity”. Concomitantly, his own rejection of the idea that the playwright *should* in fact act as a moral force, took him some time to come to - given his youthful affinities for scientific formalism and “ruthless” agit prop approaches, when applied for the “right cause” of course (p. 108). Having sketched out Feyerabend's and Brecht's biographical overlaps, their shared interest in post WWII-theatrical reform and curiosity about the relationship between theatre's (production) aesthetics, its ethics and epistemology – I will now turn to outline the chapter's structure.

Chapter structure

This chapter starts off with some more biographical scene setting that builds on my short introductory section. My aim here is to further contextualise the Feyerabend-Brecht biographical connection, before moving to detail their theoretical affinities.

The main part of the chapter is then laid out in two sections. Section 1 establishes Bertolt Brecht's "scientific theatre" theory. Section 2 maps Feyerabend's Brechtian theatre-influenced scientific theorising and practice.

The Brecht section 1 is organised into two sub-points. Here, I firstly explore Brecht's view on the relationship between the arts and science, which hinges on the role that pleasure is to play in the creation of knowledge. Secondly, I look at Brecht's self-styled *Anti-Aristotelianism*.

In the second section, I explore how Feyerabend's *epistemological anarchism* maps onto Brecht's (so called) "Anti-Aristotelian" view - in theory and practice. In three further sub-points, I firstly show how Feyerabend, like Brecht, questions the ideal of the role of myth (including drama and science) to reproduce specific metaphysical theories (to ensure the coherence of a closed society). In my second point, I demonstrate how Feyerabend, like Brecht, entertained a more practical ideal as to the role of artistic and scientific story-telling in a modern, pluralistic society. Rather than re-producing *specific* norms and values, it is to sustain the more practical aim of nourishing individual *human productivity* in its manifoldness. Theatre and science are to preserve human happiness (and life, more generally) – by embracing, and bringing forth, the pleasure and joy that resides in people's acts of knowledge production (in the arts and sciences). Feyerabend's resulting Brechtian scientific practice, as I explain in point 3, can be observed in his rejection of scientific formalism in favour of an experimental, participatory (and popular) science and his embrace of a historicised science that does not disregard archaic metaphysical theories - as is e.g. shown in his call for *estrangement* through counter-induction.

Biographical Scene Setting

Let us start then with grounding our inquiry into Brecht's intellectual influence on Feyerabend in some further biographical scene-setting. This will allow the reader to get a better idea of Feyerabend's personal connection to, and intellectual interest in, the arts and also prepare us for section 1, which establishes Brechtian theory and practice in more detail. Drawing on Feyerabend's autobiography *Killing Time* (1995), it is however important to be aware that we are dealing with a highly polished piece of (partly tongue-in-cheek) self-mythologising; one in which *Herr Direktor* Feyerabend indeed stylises himself as a man of

the theatre - and leftist intellectual at that. *Killing Time* then not only gives us an insight into Feyerabend's personal and intellectual curiousness about the theatre, but also a sense of his own aesthetic of self-presentation and staging of (auto-biographical) knowledge.

Herr Direktor Feyerabend

Drafted into the German army at 16, Paul Feyerabend was seriously wounded when serving as an officer on the Eastern Front during Nazi Germany's retreat from the Russian Army in 1945. Admitted to the hospital of Apolda, a town about 15 km from the city of Weimar in the federal state of Thuringia, Feyerabend slowly recovers from his war injuries. Searching for employment at the same time, he is unexpectedly helped into a job by the town's mayor. Despite his former involvement as an officer in the very government, which had expelled the mayor - a worker and anti-fascist - from his office, he is entrusted with leading the local council's education section (1995, p. 57). Although still healing from his war wounds, he throws himself into his new responsibility to entertain. Feyerabend writes speeches, dialogues and sketches for various events. He creates children's plays and even composes larger parts for actors at the Weimar national theatre. He practices performances with actors and supervises the staging of plays. But his physical constitution is not suited to the strenuous rehearsal process. He reminisces in *Killing Time* (1995) about his time as a budding director: "I might have become a good director, perhaps a great one; I enjoyed what I was doing and was much too ignorant to have scruples or be nervous" (p. 57).

After his full recovery, Feyerabend pursues his interest in the arts, even if he does not, in the end, become a man of the stage. He receives a scholarship to attend the Weimar music academy and theatre institute. There, he studies his beloved opera singing, takes acting classes and regularly visits theatre performances in various East German cities. Whilst discussing both classical and new plays with actors, audiences and fellow students from the Weimar music and theatre academy, Feyerabend publicly ponders the connection between theatre's production aesthetic and its (moral) function as (public) *knowledge*. He notes that the new post-war, anti-fascist plays, those that depict the fight of the German resistance against Nazism, seem to draw on the same aesthetic devices as some of the old plays staged under the Nazi regime.

It is here then (Feyerabend implies), in the smoky theatre's of post-1945 Weimar, where his curiosity about the connection between the arts, ethics and (scientific) human inquiry was first sparked. Let us then look a bit closer at the details of Feyerabend's observations within the broader context of cultural criticism of the WWII German stage, and the more general question that, naturally, emerges. What exactly is to constitute "good drama" in a post-Nazi world?

Aesthetics, Ethics, Knowledge

Although the new plays wish to champion a *new* politics and a *new* anti-fascist morality, Feyerabend observes an eerie structural similarity to the Nazi's "new German plays" (Gadberry, 2000), which had celebrated the heroism of Nazi underground operations abroad. Both old (fascist) and the new (anti-fascist) plays, Feyerabend recounts (1995, p. 60; 1993, p. 253), indulged in the so-called *hero trope*. They both told the monomyth of the classic hero's journey (Campbell, 2004) as an archetypal story of good versus evil. There were clear-cut heroes and villains and undecided individuals (usually male – Feyerabend informs us) embarking on a journey of adventure and soul-searching. Nudged by a virtuous good person (usually a *good woman* – he recounts), the hero's journey – on both sides of the political spectrum - always concluded with the protagonist being moved towards the *right kind* of moral decision (within the framework of the respective ideology). Glen Gadberry (2000) in his analysis of the Third Reich's "historical plays", points to a similar issue with dramatic structure *during* the Nazi period. Despite the Nazi's ideologically cemented view of a conflict-ridden world of racial hierarchies, clashes of cultures and ideological weaponry (from Christianity to Capitalism, Communism and Democracy), the newly written Nazi history plays themselves dramatised these supposedly *epic* historical struggles in ideologically adjusted, but flat historical stories.

In other words, heroes, and the overcoming Volk, were depicted as victorious indeed. Their enemies were however regularly defeated without much dramatic toil. There were recurring rhetorical devices, heavy symbolism and of course rituals conjuring up Volk, Vaterland, blood and soil and so on. With the play's dramatic structure guided by a predictable *ideological/political correctness*, it was however left bereft of any essential dramatic conflict at its centre (p. 123). Gadberry points out that "the ironic and recurring complaint about the history plays of Nazi Germany, even from their most sympathetic critics, was that they were constructed without essential conflict (...) and without conflict, there was no drama,

according to the prevailing dramaturgic wisdom of the time; only rhetoric, bathos; zealotry or petulance” (...) (p. 123). In other words, the Nazi’s deterministic worldview (predicated on certain pre-determined historical and moral constellations), did not lend itself to the writing of plays with believable antagonists, which made their actions seem plausible (we will explore the question of dramatic structure in section 1). In summary, both old and new plays prioritised the portrayal of *good and bad character* for the purpose of instruction into a specific worldview. Feyerabend critiques in *Killing Time*: “But isn’t it absurd to base the fight of good versus evil on mere names, and isn’t it rather obscene to use the same form, even the same type of story, to describe it” (1995, p. 60)?

In other words - Can a play's *new* moral content be framed in the same, old aesthetic structures? Can fascists *just* become communists? Can good be simply *exchanged* for evil; can villains and heroes be *switched around* just like that? Can allusions to Hitler in a speech simply be *substituted* by references to Marx and Lenin – with the aesthetic, narrative structure staying the same, without losing its claim to morality? Both kind of (new and old) plays’ formulaic nature - driving the plot and its characters towards a pre-determined moral conclusion - seemed to Feyerabend bereft of artistic quality, with their “ideological speeches, outburst of sincerity and dangerous situations in the cops and robbers tradition” (1995, p. 60; 1993, p. 253). He ponders in *Against Methods* (1993) as to the difficulty of theatre’s mimetic work in this new (post-Nazi) world and asks: “How should a play be structured, so that one recognizes it as presenting the ‘good side’”? What has to be added to the action to make the struggle of the resistance fighter seem more morally superior to the struggle of an illegal Nazi in Austria in 1938?” (p. 253).

Having established Feyerabend’s personal connection to - and his intellectual interest in - the arts (esp. the theatre), we will now transition to section 1. Here, I explore Bertolt Brecht’s own investment (as theatre practitioner and theorist) in exploring the relationship between drama (and its structure), knowledge and ethics. We will then come back to Feyerabend in section 2 to see how Brecht’s theatre theory maps on his epistemology and scientific practice. Let us start the section then with Brecht’s (1978) most well-known piece of theatre theory in the Anglophone world – *the Short Organum*. My aim is to clarify Brecht’s view on the relationship between science and *good drama* – and its function as *knowledge*.

Section 1: Brecht's scientific theatre of estrangement

The role of pleasure in the creation of knowledge

The *Short Organum for the Theatre* (written in 1947/8) was produced at the tail end of Brecht's WWII exile years, just before he settled in (post-WWII) East Berlin. The curious title *Organum* (meaning *a body of principles*), written in 78 aphorisms - short pithy statements in prose – refers, in form and title, to renaissance scientist Francis Bacon's 1620 book *Novum Organum* (2019). Brecht was likely attracted to making the link with Bacon and his empiricist natural philosophy, as a way of giving aesthetic expression to his own (implied) anti-Aristotelian *scientific* position in the theatre (Brecht, 1978, p. 205). Bacon's *interpretation naturae* is considered the ground work for what we now think of as the scientific method. With its emphasis on empirical and rational observation, and methodical, inductive reasoning, it was composed as an ideological refutation of Aristotelian deductive logic as *anticipation naturae* in his *Organon* (2017).

Brecht indeed shared Bacon's concern regarding the authoritative finality of concept-making that can (potentially) result from a *purely* anticipatory approach (e.g. Aristotle's syllogism, 2017). This danger of ideological imposition, for Brecht, was however not eradicated by simply substituting an idealist speculation with a (purely) empirical observation of a strictly materially determined world *out there* (e.g. Lenin, 1970). As Brecht's exchanges with *dissident* Marxist philosopher and life-long teacher Karl Korsch (2012), and his *Me-ti* texts (which were likely inspired by their discussions), reveal, Brecht struggled with Marxist-Leninist's false idealist/materialist distinction. Dialectical determinism turned materialism into a "doctrine equated with Being, which consciousness simply reflects, but does not shape or question" (Brecht, 2016, p. 25).

And Brecht experienced of course the disastrous results of its politics. Many of his collaborators (e.g. the actress Carola Neher and director Asja Lācis), communists who had moved to the Soviet Union after the revolution were, under Stalin, branded Trozkyist spies and part of a literary opposition. Seen to undermine the higher purpose of (Soviet realist) art for the direct illustration of Marx's class laws (Paškevica, 2006, p.118f), they were

imprisoned and forced into labour camps (Gulags). As Reinhold Grimm (1979) aptly summarises Brecht's (necessarily 'tragic') political position:

'The Marxist Brecht was faced with a terrible decision. In service of the final humanising of human beings, in which he believed, he either had to demand their total de-humanisation and objectification ... or to question – even to negate - this ideology, his life's and work's prime value.' (p. 100)

It might be argued then that Brecht reveals, in his pedagogical and aesthetic ideas, what we shall call a certain (social-) anarchist tendency (likely inspired by Korsch, 2012). In other words, he can be said to share anarchism's pedagogical "faith in the idea that human beings already possess most of the attributes and virtues necessary to create and sustain such a different society, so do not need to either undergo any radical transformation or to do away with an 'inauthentic consciousness'" (Suissa, 2010, p. 149). In fact, in *Me-ti*, Brecht comments on Marx's observation that consciousness is shaped by being or *life*, e.g. the way we make a living. For him, this interdependency does not prove people's in-capacity for reasoning or joy in life. Brecht simply points to the undeniable dependency between our ideas about the world and how we engage with it materially.

He admits that Marx's observation sounds rather depressing, but suggests pragmatically that "the simple realisation that all great works were nevertheless created in this dependency and that conceding this dependency doesn't make them any less great, settles the matter" (Brecht, 2016, 76). Brecht also argues that Marx's principle of the dependency of thought won't seem so depressing, when dependency on the economy won't be felt as so oppressive anymore by people. Brecht's unorthodox Marxist, perhaps anarchist, proclivity (although he himself would have likely rejected the label), then takes shape in his pedagogical position. He believes in the *capacity to reason* of his theatre-going audience and emphasises theatre's role to contribute to human happiness.

Brecht refuses to (fully) instrumentalise theatre for an abstract, *higher cause* when it is disconnected from people's conscious experience of their own valued lives. And he believes that too much (moral, political, social) governance stifles people's capacity to be good, and live a flourishing life (e.g. Brecht, 2016, p. 50). A certain anti-teleological notion is equally articulated in his belief that the artist cannot control the pedagogical/political outcome of his artistic work. In other words, the *exact* pedagogical outcome between what is presented to an

audience in the materiality of theatre, and the way that the audience interprets and acts (or not) on the insights thus gained, must remain unpredictable.

“Not even instruction can be demanded of it [the theatre]: at any rate, no more utilitarian lesson than how to move pleasurably, 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)

The conditions for change can be created, and the effects of this (indirect) education can be of course hoped for. But it is firstly in the careful attending to the productive conditions particular to the theatre – e.g. when (co)-creating the aesthetic imitations of theatre’s ultimately *superfluous* and necessarily *playful* metaphors - that the artist can hope to influence his audiences. In other words, Brecht draws attention to what it means for an artist to partake in the (indirect) creation of conditions (e.g. in the theatre) for the purpose of “social virtues and human propensities to flourish” (Suissa, *ibid*) – in a way that does not deny the relation between theory and practice.

Me-ti editor Antony Tatlow (Brecht, 2016) reminds us (p. 53) hereby of the very purpose of the *Verfremdungseffekt*. It is to not only invite inquiry into the productive relationship between theory and practice in *other* acts of cultural production. The V-effekt is to render possible the questioning of Brechtian theatre’s own artistic and pedagogical ways and means of presenting the world on stage. The audience is to be invited to read and judge: do theatre’s metaphors still move *pleasurably* and *superflously*? - or have they hardened into a *Weltanschauung*? Are the images disconnected from the particularity of their emergence in (everyday life) practice, and the question of people’s flourishing therein? Do they seek to organise and govern the world in their own image? Do they create the conditions for social virtues to flourish?

If Brecht himself honoured, or failed, his own principles has of course been discussed (see e.g. Arendt, 1948; Feyerabend, 1993; Bloch et al., 1977). What can perhaps be stated for the purpose of this chapter, is Brecht’s intention. Tatlow gets to its heart in his editorial footnote to *Me-ti*: “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 inquiry was of course the purpose of the so-called estrangement effect” (Brecht/Tatlow, 2016,

p. 53). For our chapter, the question poses itself of course how Brecht conceived of his *estranged* theatrical mimesis? *What* are theatre's imitations to show (of the world) and *how*?

Brecht's anti-Aristotelianism

As part of Brecht's (self-styled) anti-Aristotelianism (as shown in his reference to Bacon for example), he firstly critiques a way of making modern art that represents a static and unchangeable world. That is to say, Brecht critiques a theatrical presentation of world that is either determined by invisible metaphysical forces or by individual motive forces alone - especially when these are represented as the result of (an already) fully formed moral character in-action (Brecht, 1987, p. 70) - or *specific* metaphysical theories. Concomitantly, Brecht rejects certain modern poet's overreliance on individual feeling and individual artistic intuition, when it is devoid of the commitment to investigate the complicated workings of those cultural productions that mark the (modern) world and its idea(l)s (including scientific innovations). These modern phenomena, for Brecht, also include the individual politician's "lust to power", embedded in the very *workings* of politics; as much as the *coming into being* of a (Nazi) propaganda newspaper (like the *Völkische Beobachter*); the workings of global capitalist business (his example is Standard Oil); as well as the complicated moral discourse around war-profiteering (p. 73).

But Brecht's self-professed anti-Aristotelianism must also be considered as part of Brecht's own *theatricalisation of ideas*. Like Feyerabend, Brecht was at times prone to certain exaggerated rhetorical flourishes and presentation of ideas, in order to draw attention to both the argument that he was trying to make – as well as his own playful (he would have named this dialectical) *testing* of his theories (against rival ones). What I wish to emphasise in relation to Aristotle is that he was by no means simply an *ideological opponent* for Brecht, even if his famous juxtaposition of the dramatic (theatre of illusion) versus epic theatre (of estrangement) (1978, p. 70) of course take a clear stance against the (empathy- and catharsis inducing Aristotelian drama - as laid out in the Poetics, 1996). We must however keep in mind that Brecht in fact accords with Aristotle's key emphasis on *theatre's (eudemonistic) mimetic function*. "Tragedy [drama] is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life" (Poetics, 50a16f).

The portrayal of character is seen by Aristotle as necessarily embedded in what people *do* - their actions - that is in the way they make decisions and act within the various (tricky and

difficult) events they encounter in life (or the life of the story). People, for the Greek patriarch Aristotle, however indeed possessed certain *definite* qualities in accordance with their character (i.e. a “good” woman displays certain qualities appropriate to a good woman, 50a24i). But it is the way that characters *act in life* (and thus in *plausible* stories) that ultimately decides their happiness – their “well-being and ill-being” (50a24i). In short: People’s *active involvement in life*, according to Aristotle, and not people’s character as such, decides their success, happiness and failure in the end: “the goal of life is an activity, and not a quality” (50a24i).

When presented correctly then (by imitating actions not characters), fiction – according to Aristotle - has a more profoundly exemplary function and universal character than historiography, presenting, as it does, actions of *particular* people in particular situations; ones that *could* however, potentially, pertain to everybody. For him, the universal aspect and educative potential of storytelling therefore consists, somewhat paradoxically, in the fact that one would indeed act like a particular character in a particular play if one *was* the character in the very circumstances of the story. According to Aristotle then, the philosophical potential of theatre (and tragedy in particular), and its educative function, is neither dependent on the *real-ness* of the event, the poet's allegiance to the truth of what *really* happened, nor his direct concern with portraying virtuous characters (e.g. the Gods). In the Poetics, drama’s educational potential is discussed in relation to the quality of its compositions in poetic verse drama first; the quality of tragedy is linked to the poet's mastery of the craft of plot-writing as a *tekhnê* (usually translated as *craft, skill, art*) and his ability to imitate actions plausibly. The word drama in Greek means action, deriving from the word *draō* (*to do*). “This is the reason - some say - for the term 'drama': i.e. that the poet imitate people *doing* things” (Poetics, 48a12).

The nature and purpose of theatrical pleasure

Flourishing - and with that the *good life* - for *both* Brecht and Aristotle, can then only be achieved in human action and *living* (as an activity). And the imitation of such life-in-action is the stuff of (both their) theatrical mimesis. In other words, both are concerned with the playwright’s *tekhnê* to plausibly imitate people acting and interacting in the world. And as already laid out at the beginning of section 1, Brecht hereby also affirms Aristotle’s emphasis on the *pleasure and entertainment function* of drama as a form of (eudemonistic) knowledge

creation. “Thus what the ancients, following Aristotle, demanded of tragedy is nothing higher or lower than that it should entertain people (...)” (Brecht, 1978, p.181).

That said however, Brecht also refuses Aristotle’s position on poetry’s “philosophical potential” regarding its role to express *universals* (Poetics, 5.5, 9-51b). And he importantly differs with him too with regards to the nature and purpose of *theatrical pleasure* - and as to the kind of aesthetics that is to constitute a *plausible* theatrical imitation of life’s actions. According to Aristotle, the well-constructed tragedy is to indeed bring forth a *pleasurable experience* in the audience. This pleasure (unique to good drama) however consists in evoking *empathy/identification* with the ultimate fate of the (flawed) hero and the arousal of the *tragic emotions* of fear and pity, as well as their subsequent physical relief as catharsis (Poetics, 53b10f; 49b27f).

In contrast, for Brecht, the pleasure of recognition evoked by drama’s plausible imitations of life’s actions, does neither derive from the audience’s *full dramatic immersion* and identification with (a flawed, but likeable) hero. Nor is the purpose of drama constituted in the arousal of tragic emotions and their shedding in catharsis. Accordingly, Brecht refuses these quintessentially Aristotelian dramatic features:

“This [Brecht’s] dramaturgy does not make use of the “identification” of the spectator with the play, as does the aristotelian, and has a different point of view also towards other psychological effects a play may have on an audience, as, for example, towards the “catharsis”. Catharsis is not the main object of this [Brecht’s] dramaturgy. It does not make the hero the victim of an inevitable fate, nor does it wish to make the spectator the victim, so to speak, of a hypnotic experience in the theatre” (Brecht, 1978, p. 78).

The pleasure of recognition (of the plausibility of human actions in the theatre), according to Brecht, does not reside in a theatrical mimesis that stimulates tragic emotions and their cathartic release, because (as Aristotle would have it) it allows us to see (recognise) the world *as it is* (e.g. in relation to an inescapable metaphysical order of the world; and/or people’s essential character, which is revealed in people’s actions). In contrast, the pleasure of the poetic element, for Brecht, emerges from theatrical imitations of human actions, which do *not* instruct the viewer into a specific metaphysical world view (as Feyerabend had observed in the Nazi and post WWII plays). That is, Brecht instead hopes to delight (give pleasure to) the

audience's intellect and their senses by presenting them with a form of mimesis – whose point of view is opened out for both social and aesthetic scrutiny.

Brecht wishes to encourage a non-Aristotelian reception. Here, human actions, social circumstances, the characters' desires and decision-making - as presented on stage - are not merely read as "revealing" an essential character (and/or specific metaphysical framing). Instead, the audience is to examine the protagonist's *process of formation* of their character in view of the (materially/ideologically - shaped) world they find themselves in. In Brecht's theatrical imitations then - "individuals remain individual, but become a social phenomenon; their passions and also their fates become a social concern. The individual's position in society loses its God-given quality and become the centre of attention" (Brecht, 1978, p. 104). In other words, theatre is tasked by Brecht with not only making a metaphysical reality *recognisable* in the theatre ("as does the Aristotelian", *ibid*), but with opening out for consideration to an audience the productive, aesthetic and social processes that *a*) produce the imitated *reality* we encounter on stage [aesthetic] and *b*) bring forth the (only seemingly static) nature of our everyday (esp. material/ideological) reality and human behaviour [social].

Through a theatrical mimesis that is to appeal to people's reason and their senses pleurably (so that they find entertainment in this *movement* of their intellect, intuition and feelings), Brecht aims to educate his audience into a habit of a certain practical (critical) curiosity. The (aesthetic) gesture of showing/pointing to (and with that revealing) theatre's own mimetic efforts to *produce reality* – whilst also (necessarily) presenting a certain point of view (or several) on human action - is hereby at the heart of Brecht's famous *Verfremdungseffekt* (estrangement effect) aesthetic. Having established Brecht's theory of estrangement, I will now turn to section 2, in which I will show how Feyerabend's scientific theorising and practice maps onto Brecht's. Let us start this section by looking at Feyerabend's own non-Aristotelian viewpoint.

Section II Paul Feyerabend

Scientific myth-making in modern society

In an early 1968 essay entitled *Science, Freedom and the Good Life*, Feyerabend maintains the essential similarity between the arts and sciences. Both are, ultimately, a form of knowledge production through *story-telling* (myth-making). Like Brecht, Feyerabend draws on Aristotelian tragedy to elaborate on the purpose of myth-making in modern vis-à-vis ancient Greek society. In antiquity, so his argument goes, storytelling served as a pedagogy of inducting a populace into a specific metaphysical theory – with the purpose to reproduce the forms of life in a *closed society*. The intention to educate people into an (infallible) myth – in order to ensure cultural unity - hereby presumed a notion of the student who was a passive receptacle, and whose (tabula-rasa) soul was either to be *imprinted* with ideas – or led towards the uncovering of certain *innate* (and eternal) truths. Feyerabend argues that the psychological effects of Aristotelian *catharsis* (as described in the *Poetics*, 1996) - when understood as the *shedding* of the dramatically induced emotions of fear, pity and horror – hereby built on – and reinforced - the psychological mechanisms inherent in the structure of certain ancient initiation rituals.

“There is a psychological mechanism in man which secures that if he is taught something after being subjected to a traumatic situation, it will be almost impossible for him ever to eradicate or to criticise what has just been taught (...)” (Feyerabend 1968, p. 128).

The metaphysical theories underpinning Aristotle’s conception of mimesis (e.g. regarding the *essential* qualities of human beings, i.e. *good women*) – as well his dramatic movement’s psychological effects - aimed to cohere people around a *specific view of the world*; one that was to ensure the cultural coherence, direction, unity and reproduction of *specific forms of life* (including of course specific social institutions) in a closed society.

“The cultural unity of the closed society has disintegrated; yet, in parts, developing independently of each other, live on. Only now these parts seem a little more unreasonable. Therefore it seems that certain scientific and artistic doctrines today, though much more developed, are in one sense much less reasonable than they were when they belonged to the closed society” (p. 129)

Despite the (more or less) disintegration of culturally closed societies, Feyerabend contends that certain ways of scientific theorising in the contemporary, pluralistic society – indeed still

rely on certain *cathartic features* to induce a *psychological* acceptance of its metaphors. At the same time however, scientific storytelling has not only severed its kinship with the arts, but also given up any broader cultural ideals, which it might have once occupied. With the aim to merely promote dogmatic (abstract) arguments, and ensure the (professional) status of *certain* methods and methodologies, scientific story-telling in the pluralistic society, Feyerabend insists, neglects to give consideration to the question of general human happiness – i.e. as to (various) forms our (e.g. intercultural) lives and living in the pluralistic society could/should take.

“What provided coherence and direction in a primitive society was an ideal – the conservation of society and the form of life it stood for. Similarly, what we should do under present circumstances is to look for a different ideal (...)” (p. 130).

But what kind of ideal can give direction and justification to our methods, when modern, pluralistic society – and its cultural expressions – just *cannot act* as provider of norms and laws that can gather people around a stable and shared meaning - to give direction for action (Baumann 2000). The “autonomous society” (p. 212), Baumann famously suggested, is marked by its very *cultural liquidity* and the fact that there are *no* assured meanings anymore. Its freedom, Baumann argued, can only be assured when we acknowledge society’s *radical liquidity* – when we admit that “it lives on the surface of chaos, that it itself is a chaos seeking a form, but a form that is never fixed once and for all” (p. 212-213).

The pleasures of knowledge production?

The higher enlightenment ideals that are put forward by science to ensure its status (e.g. as Truth and Reason) – Feyerabend maintains, obscure science’s lack of broader (social, cultural) ideals; ones that could ensure not a mere abstract claim to truth, but the (practical) happiness of human beings in a pluralistic society.

“Once we have found a new ideal which can provide direction, then of course, we will have found proper justification for procedures in every domain. Moreover, we might have to change these procedures relative to the new ideal. This new ideal should be simply to make people more pleasant and more interesting, to make life happier, to make the world better, to make the beer better and so on” (1968, p. 130).

Resulting from his critique, Feyerabend (1968) entertains a rather Brechtian ideal as to the role of artistic and scientific story-telling in a modern, pluralistic society. Rather than reproducing *specific* norms and values as in the closed society (but without an – even if flawed – ideal of cultural unity), it is to rather sustain more *practical ideals* - aimed at nourishing individual human productivity in its manifoldness. Theatre and science are to preserve human happiness in the broadest sense (and the plurality of life, more generally) – by embracing, and bringing forth, the pleasure that resides in the audience’s acts of knowledge production (in the arts and sciences) - as producers, speculators and critics. In his essay *Let’s Make More Movies* (1975), Feyerabend echoes Brecht’s Anti-Aristotelian theatre’s aim (as shown in section 1). Here, Feyerabend argues that plays, rather than serving to instruct people into a *Weltanschauung*, can potentially mobilise a more holistic and pleasurable kind of reasoning; one that draws on the audience’s intellect and their senses, so that they can consider (for themselves) the productive and material conditions that have given rise to certain (seemingly universal) arguments and ideas.

“Having been trained by our teachers, by the pressure of professions, and by the general climate of a liberal-scientific age to ‘listen to reason’, we quite automatically abstract from ‘external circumstances’ and concentrate on the logic of a demonstration. A good play, on the other hand, does not permit us to overlook faces, gestures - or what one might call the physiognomy of an argument. A good play uses the physical manifestations of reason to irritate our senses and disturb our feelings so that they get in the way of a smooth and ‘objective’ appraisal. It tempts us to judge an event by the interplay of all the agencies that cause its occurrence” (Feyerabend, 1975, p. 201).

Feyerabend inscribes the theatre (of estrangement) with the pedagogical potential to irritate our senses and our intellect. This is not in order to traumatise us, e.g. by means of a *cathartic effect*, so as to instruct the audience into specific ideas, and resulting values and practices. In other words, the *irritation* brought forth by theatrical estrangement is not aimed to excite and harmonise our psychological state – but to appeal to our intellect, senses and ability to self-govern. Aesthetic estrangement (in the arts and science) is to show that it shows. Doing so, it is to *estrangle* the logic of abstract argumentations - and draw our attention to the very

productive processes (social interplay, aesthetic presentation), which bring forth an idea(l) in the first place.

Theatre's potential to free us from a mechanically lived life, saturated in unquestioned ideological assumptions (and perhaps psychological manipulation), then lies, for Feyerabend, in its capacity to make *striking and strange* what seems indeed most familiar out us. Or as he puts it in rather forthright terms: theatre is to “bludgeon us into detachment from our daily lives, our habits and mental laziness, which conceal from us the strangeness of the world (...)” (2008, p. 302).

As can be seen, despite Feyerabend’s reservations (in hindsight) about the cult-like Brecht circle and its moral-aesthetic pressures, Brecht’s theatre of estrangement, seems a key reference point in Feyerabend’s own thinking as to the nature (and moral function) of the dynamic and integrative relationship between the arts, science and knowledge. In *Let’s Make More Movies* (1975), Feyerabend further emphasises the role of *estrangement*, as a form of general public reasoning (i.e. as a key component of human inquiry/life more generally). Here, our everyday and expert acts of *thinking* about, *acting* in, and (re)*making* the world, are not kept apart in separate disciplines and spheres of status. In another act of productive estrangement, various (artistic, scientific, practical and theoretical) knowledge(s) are to be brought into (public) conversation. Rejecting the universal (even if harmonising) value of a mere abstract knowledge/ truth (usually promoted by experts), Feyerabend emphasises the pedagogical potential of estrangement - to move us towards a more integrated ideal: of living a life of human inquiry as a creative and enjoyable endeavour.

“What is needed to proceed since the further [the ‘artificial’ separation of subjects, that began with the enlightenment, roughly] is not the return to harmony and stability as so many critics of the status quo, Marxists included, seem to think, but a form of life in which the constituents of older myths-theories, books, images, emotions, sounds, institutions enter as interacting but antagonistic elements. Brecht's theatre was an attempt to create such a form of life” (1975, p. 209).

Feyerabend cites Brechtian theatre as an example of such pedagogy of (public) reasoning. Here, estrangement is to catalyse a form of life, in which people’s proliferating acts of encountering, contemplating, weighing up and testing *the emergence* of their ideas, values and practices (scientific, artistic etc.), is not simply a means to an end to an abstract (a-priori)

ideal of truth-seeking. A public pedagogy of estrangement is to be instead part of the more practical ideal of *preserving human life and happiness* more generally; one in which people's irritation of their intellect, senses and intuition – and the inquiry into the “physiognomy of an argument” (Feyerabend, 1975, p. 201) is (hoped) to be enjoyed for its own sake.

In *his Tyranny of Science* lectures, Feyerabend (2011) further draws our attention to this important (aka life-affirming) interaction between our abstract theory/knowledge and our concrete practices of life in the here and now - and the potentially “inhumane consequences of a society that succumbs to the seduction of the theoretical”, as editor Eric Oberheim formulates it in his introduction (xii). Here, in a playful, and somewhat sardonic Brechtian (1978; 2014) style, Feyerabend critiques philosophers (and sociologists for that matter) who “give the impression they understand the deep reasons behind troublesome affairs” (p. 154). Confident they can capture some underlying (permanent) structures in “big words, simple concepts and trite explanations” (ibid), these philosophers, Feyerabend teases, do not take into account the *historicised nature of all* knowledge (be it theatrical or scientific), bound up in the particularities of human actions and idea(l)s at a specific point in history (which could also be otherwise). Feyerabend then (1991) concludes that there is a danger to a conception of truth (scientific, philosophical, and artistic) that (even if inadvertently) merely reproduces specific metaphysical theories, and does not recognise its own ideals' embeddedness in history, as well as in the life practices of a specific group of experts (e.g. scientists, professional academics/philosophers of the time).

Feyerabend (1978) insists that the *value of knowledge* cannot be answered in a universal way (e.g. by references to enlightenment truth and reason). As such, the question of knowledge's value requires to be mapped onto the concrete ways that people can not only *use* such knowledge, but are enabled to critically weigh up the offered theories in the context of their own conscious experience of a valued life's (everyday and expert) theories and practices. In other words, people's *specific ways of life* – their individual human interactions with the material and ideal features of their world, might not always benefit from the kind of knowledge that science (or philosophy, or art) declares as *being* universally valuable. Editor Eric Oberheim (2011), in his introduction to the *Tyranny of Science* lectures, summarises Feyerabend's key concern:

“He [Feyerabend] argues that far from solving the pressing problems of our age, such as war and poverty, scientific theorising glorifies ephemeral generalities instead of

confronting the real particulars that make life worth living (...). Theoreticians, as opposed to practitioners, tend to oppose tyranny through the concepts they use, which abstract away from the subjective experiences that make life meaningful” (xi).

Feyerabend, not unlike Bertolt Brecht, then wishes to connect the question of epistemological value to knowledge’s practical benefit to context-specific, subjective human experiences and practices; especially those that people have developed to make themselves *at home* in the world. How do certain types of knowledge (abstract, object-directed) serve (or hinder) people’s capacity to flourish within the *particular* lives and practices that they have developed to live a happy life? What happens when philosophers and/or scientists (or artists for that matter) seek to import ways of *justifying, gathering and presenting* knowledge (methodologies; methods) that assume a universal validity that functions devoid of such concrete contexts?

Knowledge can end up freezing ideas and practices into an ideological prison, Feyerabend warns in *Three Dialogues* (1991, p. 151). Quoting the playwright Eugène Ionesco (2008), he also states that theatre (even artistic practice in general) is of course not exempt from such potentially totalising practice: even an “ideological play can be no more than the vulgarisation of an ideology” (p. 308). In short, even a well-meaning intention (e.g. for social change), when too willingly burdened by a theatre claiming a *higher status*, can too easily obscure that it is in the business of metaphor-creation. And as such, it can slide into normative impositions as to how people *should think and act*. Feyerabend indeed even accused Brecht at times for betraying his own principles of estrangement. Feyerabend (1991) lauded Brecht’s anti-ideological, dialectical approach to presenting knowledge in poetry (e.g. in his 1939 poem *To those who follow in our wake*). He praised Brecht’s poetry for the way it “enlarges faults and lets different incommensurable jargons run side by side” (Feyerabend, 1991, p. 95), without harmonising different aspects into a more systematic account. But he also accused Brecht (in some of his plays in particular) of humourless, Marxist intellectualism and, indeed, of “moralising” from the stage (p. 81; 143).

In the same way that a mimetic theory and practice in the theatre can refuse to take into account the subjective experience and freedom (and with that self-governing power) of the individual moral agent – scientific rationalism can attempt to conceptually subjugate and dominate the individual’s conscious experience of their own valued lives (Feyerabend 1991, p. 82). This act of ideological freezing, Feyerabend implies, can also apply to a (so-called)

liberal relativism when it presumes a closed system of varying ideas, cultures and traditions. Here, in the liberal knowledge economy, knowledge systems are imagined to exist rather neatly side by side. Without causing any *epistemological discord*, they however lack the productive estrangement (the productive and antagonistic interplay), which Feyerabend (as well as Brecht) would have ascribed a key moral-aesthetic/educational function in a free society.

The act of knowledge creation in theatre and science is then not to be an act of purveying universal truths, but to create (pedagogical) *models* and *examples* – without obscuring the *aspect of play* that accompanies the creation of concepts and metaphors. These representations are indeed to delight and move people's intellect and their senses of course, but not in order to imprint the empty canvas of their soul and intellect – but to enable their own *pleasurable acts of knowledge creation* (their own images and ideals) in turn.

The philosopher-educator (according to Feyerabend) is hereby to act as a creator of conditions, in which these pedagogical models can be weighed up by students, who are encouraged to draw on their experience, instinct and self-governing reasoning power. As such, they are both to scrutinise the offered ideas, and the productive/aesthetic processes that brought forth the model in the first place. In summary, big words like reason, freedom and science should not be used to deny people's capacity to reason and govern themselves, as to what constitutes knowledge that is of value (to particular forms of common and individual life). Feyerabend suggests in fact that he can only think of himself as a philosopher if the individual's capability to self-govern is placed at the heart of the philosophising activities.

‘(...) Well, if you think a philosopher is a universal dilettante who tries to see things in perspective and tries to stop people from forcing others into their beliefs, be it now by arguments or by other means of coercion, then certainly I am a philosopher – but so are journalists and playwrights (...)’ (1991, p. 153).

In my final section, I will consider the implications of this Feyerabendian embrace of aesthetic of estrangement in relation to his notion of scientific progress demonstrated in the history of thought.

An example of aesthetic of estrangement: Counter-induction

In *Science, Freedom and the Good Life* (1968), Feyerabend gives us an example of what an aesthetic of estrangement might consist of, when we do not only consider the established

logic and principles for scientific reasoning, but look more closely at how science has been practiced (and progressed) throughout the history of thought. Feyerabend points us towards Sir Isaac Newton's (1846) famous "Rules of Reasoning in Philosophy" (particularly rule four) in book three of his *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (p. 384-385). Providing a methodology as to how to handle the explanation of unknown natural phenomena, rule four (Feyerabend states) is although never explicitly stated, and even more rarely debated, nevertheless accepted as an obvious (more or less unquestionable) scientific truth (Feyerabend 1968, p. 130).

"RULE IV. In experimental philosophy we are to look upon propositions collected by general induction from, phenomena as accurately or very nearly true, *notwithstanding any contrary hypotheses that may be imagined, till such time as other phenomena occur, by which they may either be made more accurate, or liable to exceptions.* This rule we must follow, that the argument of induction may not be evaded by hypotheses" (Newton, 1846, p. 385).

Despite this (albeit unstated) dogma regarding the procedure of scientific reasoning – "never introduce an assumption inconsistent with highly confirmed physical laws/observed facts" (Feyerabend, 1968, p. 130) – Feyerabend argues that the history of science is in fact littered with examples of (rather *successful*) violations of this principle. In other words, the scientific practice of a more estranging (and epistemologically proliferating) *counter-induction* – having contradictory realities run side-by-side - did not only *not* impede, but made *possible* the enhancement of scientific theorising. Additionally, such experimental approach (i.e. taking into account counter-induction and the acceptance of alternative, even archaic hypotheses and theories – and with that also a plurality of methods), Feyerabend (1968, p. 131) insists, preserves the *pleasure* and playfulness, which reside at the heart of our human acts of knowledge creation (esp. when these draw on our *manifold* productive capabilities – including the use of our imagination and intuition).

As such, it is not enough to critically test a theory by looking at (new) empirical evidence; the scientist must be able to intuit and imagine alternative *theories* – given not all scientists ever agree on the accuracy of observations, their results and accompanying theories anyway. Feyerabend quotes many examples of such *epistemological anarchism* from the history of science: from the Copernican Revolution to Bohr's model of the atom. He proposes that e.g.

Einstein in fact only arrived at his *atomic theory* and Special Theory of Relativity through *counter-induction*, i.e. by holding on to a theory, which in the 19th century was thought to be *inconsistent* with the then highly confirmed thermodynamic theories.

(...)” had it been entirely given up in accordance with the principle under attack (never introduce a theory inconsistent with highly confirmed theories), we might not have any atomic physics today. And so we can cite one case after another where progress in the sciences coincides with violation of the [rule four] principle. So the principle *has not* been followed in period of decisive progress.” (p. 131).

In other words, Feyerabend argues that a strict empiricist attitude (one that denies intuition and imagination for example) denies the actual development, which has taken place in the *history* of science and scientific progress. Instead of holding on to the dogmatism that marked the closed society, Feyerabend concludes, we should focus on recapturing its unity of purpose. Embracing the epistemological discord of an *estranged scientific reasoning* – in service of the more integrated ideal of preserving human life, productivity (in a holistic sense) and happiness – we might not only make public life (and people) more pleasant and interesting, but also preserve – perhaps restore - science (and human inquiry more generally) as the *creative endeavour* that it is.

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