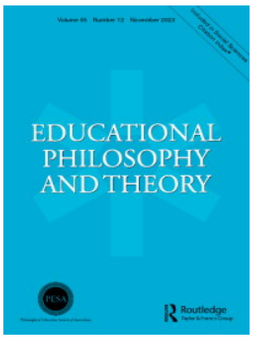

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The craft of acting as a pedagogical model for living a flourishing life in a world of tensions and contradictions

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I explore German playwright Bertolt Brecht's conception of the art of acting, and his views on the new actor's conduct towards their craft, as a pedagogical model for Brechts' broader view on how we should live our lives. Drawing on his key writings – most importantly, his famous street scene essay – I will show that Brecht's conception of the theory-practice connection in his approach to actor training/acting bears some deeper insight into Brecht's conception of the art of living a flourishing life. The new actor is called to develop a conduct of careful observation and imitation of human action, one that is marked by the pleasure and lightness of exploring the contradictory workings of the social world. By placing the actor's craft at the heart of his educational philosophy, Brecht invites us (the audience) into the theatre as a pedagogical space. Here, not unlike Brecht's actors, we are summoned to hone our ability to boldly engage with a complex world of human actions and ideas. Brecht maintains that there resides an intellectual as well as sensual delight in being challenged to not simply accept theatre's presentations as 'truth'; instead, we are to learn to 'weigh up', 'test', and 'improvise' joyfully with theatre's proposed ideas and practices—so that we may find out if they serve, or hinder, the creation of a larger flourishing life (beyond the theatre): a life in which we can move together, pleasurably.

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Brecht scholarship in the Anglophone world

German playwright Bertolt Brecht's (1898–1956) reception and influence in the Anglophone world is vast (perhaps too vast to detail here), likely because Brecht's own sources of influence on his artistic practice and theoretical musings were fascinatingly diverse and eclectic. He was receptive of Vsvelolod Meyerhold's stylised, physical theatre experiments (Lācis, 1971); of Erwin Piscator's technological innovations of the stage apparatus (Kerz, 1968); of the acting styles of the cabaret and silent film comedies (Mumford, 2009); of the dramaturgy of Japanese Noh theatre as well as the Peking Opera (Bye, 2002); of Karl Korsch's 'dissident' philosophical Marxism (Korsch, 2012); and ideas and imagery from East-Asian—Buddhist, Confucianist, Daoist and Mohist—philosophy (Wessendorf, 2016). This list of influences is by no means complete. It is

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however to show that Brecht scholarship in English spans a wide variety of fields: theatre, film studies, cultural studies and philosophy.

In education/theatre studies scholarship, discussion of Brechtian theatre in/as education (e.g. Vaßen, 2014; Massalongo et al., 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 Friedrich Schiller's (2000) *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* in 1793. Aesthetic education in this *Bildung* tradition encompasses the reception- and production-oriented elements of aesthetic practice, including those relevant to the theatre. It involves the subsequent (philosophical) reflection on theatrical processes and representations and their relationship to arts/theatre's educational ideals, as well as more general cultural knowledge (Zirfas & Klepacki, 2013, p. 9).

In the Anglophone exegesis, 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 Brecht's influence on the politics and pedagogy of British drama education, community and theatre-for-development contexts (Abah, 1996; Fleming, 2018; Franks & Jones, 1999; Hughes, 2011; Muir, 1996; Nicholson, 2011; Winston 1996). In philosophy of education journals, discussion of Brecht's notion of epic theatre can be found occasionally: in Alan Scott's (2013) work, who takes his own personal reception experience of Samuel Beckett' *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. Otty (1995) connects Brecht's *Lehrstücktheorie* to Freire's *conscientization* and Boal's theatre of the oppressed; and my own publications explore Brecht's philosophising theatre pedagogy through the art of gestic acting (Frimberger, 2022), its role in language and intercultural education research (2009; 2016) and as a 'philosophical ethnography' in an ontologically turned social science research (2017, 2018).

But more generally, there are solely casual references to 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. Kellner (2021) draws on Brecht's and Benjamin's film theory and practice, as part of a wider argument around the Frankfurt School's influence on the development of British cultural studies. And Kline (2016) works with Brecht and Enzensberger's film theory to support a Baudrillardian examination of the limits of critical media literacy.

In light of the relative absence of a sustained discussion on Bertolt Brecht as a pedagogue and philosopher of education in the Anglophone world, the goal of this paper is to explore Brecht's educational philosophy—with a view towards its moral-practical dimension in Brecht's approach to actor training. What can we learn about Brecht's educational theatre philosophy by looking at what Brecht had to say about the art of actor training? I will argue in this paper that Brecht's insistence on the embodied craft of acting—which defies full theoretical capture—serves as a broader pedagogical model for how Brecht thought life should be lived: in-between theory and practice. The art of living, for Brecht, is embodied in an everyday human conduct of joyful, practical philosophising, which draws on all the senses. Here, we are not to shy away from, but take pleasure in figuring out the contradictory social reality that we find ourselves in (Frimberger, 2022). My argument is that Brecht, in his key writings on actor training (Brecht & Kuhn, 2014; Brecht & Willet, 1965, 1978) considers the art of acting as a key pedagogical model to guide us towards such philosophising everyday life conduct.

In order to clarify my endeavor, I proceed in four steps. Firstly, I will set the stage for my discussion by reflecting on the general educational intention that Brecht communicates in his

poem *I Need No Gravestone*. Moving then on to explore the meaning of theory for the actor's practice, I will particularly look at Brecht's notion of pleasure inherent in the actor's work. Claiming the pleasure and lightness of acting as a key method reviving the 'old' theatre, Brecht diagnoses that the old (post-WWII) acting profession, and the theatre more generally, has not only lost its sense of fun, but also its sense of purpose. In a second step, I will show how the actor's mode of joyful self- and other observation models the relaxed mode of joyful spectating—and critical attitude—that the audience is supposed to take on in Brecht's theatre. *Drawing on Brecht's Everyday Theatre* poem and his *Street Scene* essay, I detail the actor's stance of the curious street ethnographer. Here, the imitative behavior of an ordinary man at a street corner, who retells an accident to a group of bystanders, becomes a key pedagogical model for Brecht's way of presenting events in his theatre's 'realistic' style. In a third step, I will home in on the pedagogical purpose of Brecht's focus on the actor's poetic-material engagement with the world. The actors' theatrical imitations should appeal to the audience's senses, intuition and intellect—and with that, develop their capacity for a broad practical reasoning employable beyond the theatrical presentation. In the conclusion as my fourth step, I summarise Brecht's educational philosophy. With Brecht's actors' conduct of joyful exploration as a pedagogical model, we (as audience) are guided to learn how to weigh up and test in thought and action, which ideas and what practices might serve a flourishing life—in theatre and beyond.

What does Brecht want?

In order to set the stage for the discussion, I will start with a short reflection on Brecht's *I Need No Gravestone* poem (Brecht & Willet, 1987, p. 78) for an initial impression of his educational philosophy. How does Brecht envision people's engagement with his theatre's 'lessons'?

He writes:

I need no gravestone, but
If you need one for me
I would like it to bear these words:
He made suggestions. We
Carried them out.
Such an inscription would
Honor us all.

Brecht's proposition that future generations should 'carry out' his ideas seems of course problematic. Are we urged towards a direct and perhaps anachronistic translation and application of Brecht's ideas and aesthetic methods to our contemporary (social, political, artistic) contexts? A closer look at the poem's lines *He made suggestions. We carried them out*. in German complicates this initial picture. The two lines translate as follows:

Er hat Vorschläge gemacht. Wir
Haben sie angenommen.

The German word 'annehmen' and the English word 'carry out' have a slightly different emphasis. The English expression 'to carry out' implies a somewhat smooth transition from theory to practice; one that moves rather rapidly from the act of Brecht's 'making suggestions' to the implementation and realisation of these suggestions in outward *action*. The German 'annehmen' does not bridge this gap between theory and (external) practice so easily. The word's meaning can range from 'acceptance' to the 'embracing', 'expecting' and 'imagining' of an idea. Although 'annehmen' lingers linguistically on the act of 'taking on' of an idea, this *taking* is not necessarily a 'tight grasping' or a 'final seizing', but leaves (linguistically) more open the nature of the movement from the moment of contemplating and exploring an idea, towards its being carried/acted out in external action. After all, 'Vorschläge'/'suggestions' are not

instructions to be followed and carried out without consideration. Instead, they call to be taken, looked at, explored, imagined and thought through further. We are to consider their meaning, effect and relationship to existing ideas and pratices, so that *Vorschläge* might ripen into changed ideas, actions, or indeed non-actions. In other words, Brecht, despite 'giving suggestions', expects his audience (the readers of his poetry as much as the theatre-going audience) to deliberate the 'usefulness' of his proposed ideas and practices. As we learn later, such acts of everyday reasoning are not just an intellectual process for him. The audience is to draw on all their senses, including their intuition, in order to interrogate the 'truth' of the images and ideas presented on stage. The actor's conduct towards the craft of acting serves hereby as a key pedagogical model for the critical attitude that Brecht wishes to refine in his audiences.

The relationship between theory and practice in acting

Given Brecht's and his collaborators' many statements denouncing excessive theoretical discussion, especially of the estrangement effect, during rehearsals, my practical starting point seems appropriately Brechtian. In light of Brecht's prolific theoretical writings about the epic theatre/acting though, two curious questions immediately arise. What *was* the actual function of Brecht's theatre theory for his pedagogical-artistic practice, both during rehearsals and during performances? And what is their relationship with his educational philosophy?

I can perhaps start with the assumption that, in his later years (the early 1950s), 'Brecht was only too aware of [his] theory's lacunae', editor John Willet (Brecht & Willet, 1978, p. 245) reminds us in an editorial note to the practice-focused publication *Theaterarbeit* [theatre work] (Berlau et al., 1952). Willet, who was the first 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 at the heart of the theatrical craft and over any finite theorisations about its purpose.

> '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 & Willet, 1978, p. 246)

Willet suggests that as a sign of Brecht's apparent mellowing in later years, he recognised 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 seemed to realise, 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 one's craft within the particularities and processes of the acting practice. In other words, the actor's art is dependent on a certain personal, practical, moral-aesthetic disposition to guide one's own work; one that is open to experimentation with the meaning of theory *for* practice, and curious about the relationship between theory and practice more generally. This of course includes an inquiring, exploratory stance into how 'big words' like 'love of truth' and 'sense of responsibility' might manifest in one's own training process.

But how is the actor supposed to develop this 'conduct of embodied inquiry', which Brecht emphasizes as being so essential to the theatrical craft? And secondly, how does Brecht intend to communicate this 'moral' yet practical and embodied 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 misreadings 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 German Democratic Republic/GDR in 1949). He hoped to 'fill in a missing dimension both in the theoretical writings and in the printed plays' (Brecht & Willet, 1978, p. 245). Keen to bring to life in writing the pedagogical processes involved in developing theatrical productions, the Theaterarbeit publication aims at showing how Brecht's ideas unfolded in, and mapped onto, practice (including the actors' embodied art). It is a unique publication, because it documents the production of the Berliner Ensemble's plays between 1949-1951 (*Puntila, The Mother, Mother Courage,* among others) through extensive stage photography and production notes on rehearsals and performances. As Brecht and Willet (1978) explains in his editorial commentary in *Brecht on Theatre*: The *Theaterarbeit* publication constitutes 'an exceedingly mixed bag of essays, notes and fragments by many hands, grouped as to form a section dealing with each play (p. 239).

The pleasure of acting as a pedagogical model for theatre

One of the short essays included in *Theaterarbeit* is *Five Notes on Acting,* from which I quote shortly. It details the nature of the *new* actor's (pedagogical) conduct: towards oneself, one's fellow actors and artistic practice—criticising the ossified formalism of post-WWII acting styles. One of Brecht's earlier essays—a polemic from 1926 *Emphasis on Sport*, had already foreshadowed his increasing dissatisfaction with the state of the bourgeois theatre. He considers it a 'sausage-machine' (1978, p. 8) 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 polemicises, 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 deplores, 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 theatre's 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],* (Ihering, 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 'heroic' acting, writing and staging plays that brimmed over with pathos, rhetorical devices and heavy symbolism. At the same time, it lacked what Aristotle (1996), as well as Brecht, would have regarded drama's key function: *mimesis*—the imitation of (plausible) actions. It must be however noted that Aristotle and Brecht would have also disagreed as to what 'plausible' meant here exactly (Frimberger, 2022). Not unlike Aristotle then, Brecht re-affirms theatre's mimetic purpose. He writes in his *Short Organum for the Theatre*: 'Theatre consists of this: in making live representations of reported or invented happenings between human beings [or between human beings and gods] with a view to entertainment' (Brecht & Willet, 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 one's stage temperament; refine the ability to pay attention to, and respond dialogically, to one's stage partner's tone so that 'rhythm and cadences develop which run through entire scenes' (Brecht & Kuhn, 2014, p. 233). The actor has to learn how to drop ossified stage diction. Furthermore, the actor is to hone

one's 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, the actor 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 & Willet, 1978, p. 8).

The ethnographic actor

'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/his 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 & Kuhn, 2014, p. 232)

The lightness of modern acting practice can only result from the actor's willingness to let go of any preconceived, formalistic ways of 'acting well' on stage. Instead, the performer is called to use her/his senses. The actor must proactively explore the physical space, her/his part and even her/his own physical responses. This includes a practical experimentation with the performative possibilities of her/his role. Ultimately, it involves a paying attention to one's own intuition, to the 'feel' of the various arrangements of one's modulating voice, and one's movements' nature and rhythm. This pedagogical mode of self-observation is hereby not simply a means to build up her/his character for performance in a believable manner. These explorations are also meant to be driven by (and for) the actor's own 'rejoicing' in one's own body's movements and rhythm. Aditionally, one might add, the actor is also to take pleasure in the act of observation itself. She/He 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/He is to observe (with 'joyful' curiosity) people's actions, their way of holding themselves, keeping proximity and distance. Eventually, the actor has to pay attention to the movements and gestures that people perform when reacting to, and handling, everyday objects and situations in these different sites.

The everyday theatre

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 quotidian behaviours and activities within their social environments. In fact, the art of acting, Brecht concludes—albeit any subsequent artistic refinement—is sought to never strive too far 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 & Willet, 1987, p. 176–179)

In this three-page long poem, Brecht captures the vividness, and often contradictory nature, of the human contact in everyday interactions, which constitutes the 'human theatre'. He sketches in detail the various postures, gestures, ways of speaking and accompanying attitudes and emotional stance that are at work in the various (model) incidents that one might encounter on a city 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 man's conduct of narrating the incident. The complexities and minutia of the way 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 et al., 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. Despite his good intention, he can hereby not entirely rely on his sole judgment of the situation. The question as to what *exactly* constitutes an appropriate imitation of this social incident in light of such univeral aim (to serve justice/truth) cannot be answered easily. Guided by his aim, the observer-imitator is of course earnest in his portrayal, and focused on showing the observed actions accurately, but he is also not bothered to *fully transform* himself into the imitated persons (ibid). In short: the man at the street corner seeks to imitate what 'really' happened, so that 'truth can be served'. But given his social and material embeddedness in the world, he is also aware of the limitation and partiality of his viewpoint. And with that, his search for truth is necessarily dependent on the observations of others and their mutual exchange and deliberations. As a result, the imitator of the accident interrupts himself and jogs his memory by asking the crowd for correction on any details he might have missed. Accordingly, his resulting imitation is only a limited interpretation of reality, i.e. a partial truth of how the crash came to be. As such, the imitator at the street corner delivers the driver to the verdict of the crowd, 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 by Brecht to only demonstrate as much to the crowd as is necessary to make the accident intelligible, and the concerned persons' actions understandable. Brecht argues that an overly 'complete' artistic representation would here draw attention to itself, ultimately distract from the actor's social concern and falsely

pretend that the artist can indeed inhabit an Archimedean point of view; one unbound by history, sociality and materiality. In other words, the imitator must not lose himself in his acting if he wants to serve 'the truth'. His demonstrations are described by Brecht as being simple but effective in their pedagogical aim to intervene practically and socially – even if guided by a 'big word' like truth. There is no pathos and no enforced empathy with the driver or victim, as this would not aid the search for a 'reality', which can ultimately only be (partially) known. In other words, it is only through the cultivation of practical dialogic strategies that involve all the senses that the actor can hone a craft that requires "seriousness, fire, jollity, love of truth, inquisitiveness and sense of responsibility" (Brecht & Willet, 1978, p. 246). The imitator in Brecht's poem does not seek to convert the audience to his viewpoint. He is comfortable with – even enjoys – the social process of engaging with the contradictory observations and ideas that necessarily arise from this search for truth. The man on the street does not propose that the accident was unavoidable, that it was an act of fate located outside of the involved parties' personal control and social responsibility. Instead, the observer integrates a dialectical dimension into his demonstration, aiming to show a range of alternative actions that *might 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 et al., 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. Although the man desires to get to the truth of things so that justice can be served, the demonstrator importantly always stays a demonstrator. He never transforms himself into the man he is imitating in his actions. Concomitantly, the observer at the street corner does not know much about the inner life and motivations of the people he is representing. He is first and foremost imitating their *actions*, their ensuing practical consequences, as well as some alternative scenarios, which might have avoided the crash. The imitated people, however, always stay *the other*. 'The demonstrator stands and gives us the stranger next door' (p. 178). In summary, the imitator narrates indirectly, keeping a critical distance to the inner life of the character and the events shown. This 'realistic way' of narrating an incident indirectly has later been theorised by Brecht, more elaborately, as a basic (and key) pedagogical model for his theatre of estrangement.

Consequently, 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 theatre. In this longer *street scene* essay (Brecht & Willet, 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.

As hinted above, this practical philosophising does not merely serve the search for the 'ultimate reality' of the portrayed actions, yet also hopes to find out how practices may be changed for the better (a "better" that is of course also bound to the social and material world). Could these people (e.g. those involved in the accident) have acted differently, and if so, how? And given their different actions, would they have changed the course, consequence and outcome of the incident? In the street scene essay, Brecht focuses on the anti-illusionistic style of the man on the street. He is not afraid to move between direct imitation and an indirect narration of the event's details, when he needs to clarify what he has seen and events are too difficult to mime directly. The demonstrator does not wish to 'act well', that is to transform

himself into the imitated, or transport the audience to a higher realm of immersion and emotional truth. His imitations stay partial and imperfect and decidedly bound to his social and material positioning. In other words, the imitator is aware that his demonstrations are a repetition of events that have already taken place in the social world. And as such, he does not take great care to pretend that they are the *actual* event.

The art of practical reasoning

Theory, as exemplified in the street scene essay, Brecht et al. (2014) contends, is indeed hoped to give an insight into the practical, sensory techniques and pedagogical aims of his epic theatre. At the same time, theory can also lead to misapprehension, when it is read as synonymous with, or entirely independent of, practice. The 'misreadings' 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 et al., 2014, p. 251)

Brecht acknowledges the need to communicate the aims of his theatre and artistic techniques theoretically. Concurrently, he is 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 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. The act of 'letting people in on aims and techniques' can also result in conflicting readings and potential (mis-)interpretations of his theoretical positions, as Brecht was only too aware of. More importantly, artistic practice also discloses its *own* horizon of meaning, calling for encounter and interpretation towards a hermeneutic experience of truth (Gadamer, 2013); one that stays bounded to – and in continous interaction with - the history and sociality of ideas and practices and (key to the actor's craft of course) our material embodiment in the world. 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 as disclosed – in all its tensions and contradictions - on the street, in rehearsal and on stage. They are an attempt to inhabit, through his writing, the very philosophical, inquiring disposition towards artistic practice and theory, which Brecht hoped to cultivate 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 et al., 2014, p. 251)

Theatrical imitations of reality are to appeal to actors' and audiences' capacity to take pleasure in the act of reasoning, but in a broad and practical sense. We are to use and develop our intellect and our senses in the theatre—we are to feel, to intuit, to observe and to use our common sense and reasoning power, whilst figuring out the 'truth' and 'value' of the behaviours and actions presented to us. The dramaturge (a literary editor on the staff of a German-speaking theatre) and the philosopher figures in Brecht's Messingkauf Dialogues (1965) further explain the nature of this practical 'reasoning power'. The artist is summoned to stimulate the audience's intellect and senses by planting curiously contradictory ideas, motives and behaviours on stage. The conversation between these two people working in the theatre unfolds as follows:

> **'THE DRAMATURG:** (…) I don't agree with the view that artists have less reasoning power than other people (though it's arguable), but they have more faculties to work with than just their reason. If you are only prepared to pass what they have registered and docketed in their brains not much is going to reach the stage.
>
> **THE PHILOSOPHER:** There is something in what you say. People do a lot that is reasonable, which has never been subjected to their reason; it would be wrong for us to renounce that. There's the question of instinct and also all those types of action which represent an indecipherable tangle of highly varied and contradictory efforts and motives. I see no risk in planting a ladleful of them on stage. The one thing that matters is that they should be presented in such a way that they can be weighed up, and that there should be something complex and instinctive about the weighing. There are other ways of planting things, as you know.' (p. 50)

The artist is encouraged to draw on the whole repertoire of theatrical methods available, so she/he can boldly put on display the strangeness of human actions and ideas on stage. The playwright, like the actor, is to create a social-aesthetic stimulus that allows the audience to get moving, but not along the single track of an idea, where the audience can neither look left nor right, nor up and down, as Brecht writes in his 1931 Notes on the *Threepenny Opera* (Brecht & Willet, 1978, p. 44). Instead, the playwright is asked to introduce estranging aesthetic footnotes, cultivating the audience's habit of dis-identification from the characters and events on stage. Most importantly however, Brecht asserts in his writing on actor training: the theatrical work must be conducted in a spirit of lightness. As such, the pleasure of exploring the contradictory nature of our theorising about and acting in the world, is to be at the heart of a theatrical craft that seeks to cultivate "seriousness, fire, jollity, love of truth, inquisitiveness and sense of responsibility" (Brecht & Willet, 1978, p. 246).

> '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 & Willet, 1978, 180–181)

Theatre is to defy a fully measurable, externally set value, which can be held in theoretical propositions. This is because it is exactly those activities of the senses and the intellect, which evade exact measurement (like loving somebody, feeling happy, getting one's head around something …), that give our lives meaning. These experiences always exceed linguistic description and ultimately deny any complete systematisation and theoretical predictability. According to Brecht, theory – including "big words" like truth and justice – need to be connected to this (messy) experience of our everyday life's practice. This is 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). An overly systematic image of the world can run the danger of hardening into pre-established theoretical constructs, which then seek to order the world in their own image. Brecht's wise teacher figure *Met-i* sums it up rather poetically:

> '(…) 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 & Tatlow, 2016, p. 50)

Conclusion: How should we live?

We love to go to the theatre for the experience of moving our intellect and our senses pleasurably, and that, for Brecht, is a good starting point. It is in the process of paying attention to, and reclaiming, the experience of joy in the careful observation and imitation of the human theatre, that 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 & Willet,

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 playwrights, actors and audiences, we give space, and open out for consideration, what seems most mundane about human being: our thoughts, our words and our strange everyday dealings with each other. Here, we are given a rehearsal space to hone an attitude and conduct of 'artful' living. In the pedagogical space of the theatre, we are to learn how to boldly take pleasure in using our senses, intuition, emotions *and* intellect, figuring out how our everyday theories, values and practices relate to and contradict each other. In summary: we are encouraged to not be afraid of the tensions and contradictions that we encounter in our engagement with the curious human world of ideas and practices. With Brecht's new actors as a pedagogical model, we (the audience) are to delight in cultivating our ability to use our intellect, our senses and our body in theatre and life. We are to observe, feel, intuit, and with that deliberate, 'test' and 'improvise' the workings and meaning of our ideas and practices and their inter-relation. Honing such craft of practical living in-between theory and practice, Brecht suggests, we might even find out what practices and what ideas serve or hinder the creation of a flourishing life in a human theatre, in which we can all move together, pleasurably.

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