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# Bertolt Brecht

and the Theory of Media

Roswitha Mueller

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*For my daughter, Raquella Moea*

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## Preface

This book has a history all its own that I shall address by way of introduction. My first impulse to write about Brecht came as the need to clarify for myself and my students how far Brecht's literary genius could be separated from his political beliefs. I needed to know whether I could subscribe to the critical reception of Brecht prevalent in the United States, which hails his poetic talent while deploring his convictions and proceeds by carefully separating the two or, worse, indicts his writing altogether on the basis of his "wrong" ideas. The presumption of such critics has always reminded me of Brecht's aviator who pointed at a pigeon and exclaimed: "This bird flies incorrectly."

The conjunction of Brecht's literary production and his intellectual passion became clear to me early in this project. Epic theater without emancipatory intent makes as little sense as distancing without criticism or criticism without productivity. Brecht's politics were not party politics but the result of the close attention he paid to the movements around him and throughout the world. The ethical choices involved testify less to his "moral fiber" than to a hunch about the shape of things to come. Brecht was above all an optimist and a generous utopian thinker.

The next level of engagement in this project had to do with my interest in film and film theory and in particular the avant-garde in cinema and in theater. Brecht holds a crucial place with respect to both. What astonished me was Brecht's enormous importance for

film theory in the sixties and seventies, when his actual writings on film were negligible compared with the volumes of his theoretical discussions on all aspects of the theater. His polemics against illusionism in the theater and against spectator identification were often simply appropriated for the cinema without recognition of the difference between the two art forms. This presented a problem that I tried to grapple with by working with the few scattered remarks Brecht wrote on the specificity of cinema, to elaborate its relation to epic theory through the notion of the *gestus*.

Brecht's importance for the film theory that began in France in the sixties was mediated by a reinterpretation of his politics from the point of view of Althusserian structuralist Marxism. Although this was a great advance over the puzzled stalemate in the cold war reception of Brecht in Western countries and over the East's attempt to align Brecht with the official cultural policies of the Communist party, still the rigidity of structuralist Marxism, its devaluation of the subject in the historical process in particular, seemed unsuited to Brecht's relation to Marxist theory. At the other extreme were those Marxists close to the Frankfurt school, who continued a tradition of animosity against Brecht initiated by Theodor Adorno and who labeled him a mechanical Marxist and a Stalinist. It is in view of all these claims that I am stressing Brecht's relation to Karl Korsch, not in order to claim the "real" Brecht but to restore his heterodoxy with respect to Marxist theory.

This brings me to my most recent concern with Brechtian theory. I see the decline of Brecht's importance in the eighties as directly related to the postmodern reaction against a bipolar model of dialectics in favor of plurality and the proliferation of signification. As one of the main protagonists in structuralist film theory, Brecht was swept aside in this reaction. The irony is that Brecht is much less suited to fit the structuralist bill, when the entirety of his work is taken into consideration, than to any postmodern context. The Brecht who has always interested me and whom I believe to be most important is the Brecht who stands not just for the proliferation of signification but also for the expansion of discourses and experience—aesthetic and political, artistic and practical. I hope I have succeeded in some ways in freeing Brecht from the prisonhouse of categories.

Finally, I would like to express my regrets about limiting the discussion of Brecht's reception to France, England, and Germany. The obvious omissions—Ozu in Japan and Makavajev in Yugoslavia—can be explained only as a consequence of my lack of familiarity with the language and culture of those two excellent filmmakers.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to the librarians and friends at the Bertolt Brecht Archive in East Berlin for their untiring support of my research. My thanks go also to the mentors, colleagues, and friends who have helped and encouraged me by their willingness to read this text and discuss it with me: Bertrand Augst, Herbert Blau, Jost Hermand, Martin Jay, Anton Kaes, Tania Modleski, Robert Nelson, Patrice Petro, Gerhard Rauscher, Stephen Thaman, Jochen Schulte-Sasse, Kaja Silverman, Marc Silberman, and Jack Zipes. I want to give special credit to Robert Nelson for the term "theoretical films." Many thanks to him also and to Valie Export for their help with the film stills from *Kuhle Wampe*. The grainy texture of these stills is in keeping with Brecht's intentions, high-lighting gesture rather than mimicry. Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to Jamie Owen Daniel for her patient and most intelligent assistance in preparing this manuscript.

What might have entered history as the first decade in German democratic statehood became known instead as the decade between two world wars. Weimar and the twenties, notorious for economic and political crises as well as for short periods of stable prosperity, for political extremism and for apathy, nevertheless—or perhaps because of massive contradictions—gave rise to an astounding array of cultural impulses. In the forefront of these impulses stood the new technological media, film and radio, already facing in two directions: as means of mass communication and as means of artistic creation. As Rudolf Arnheim wrote, “Like the first German Republic, film was an experiment, whose success was to be ensured by setting the highest of goals.”<sup>1</sup> In the case of film, success was defined by many theoreticians and artists not only in terms of the acceptability of film as art, that is, its status within the fine arts, but also in terms of its effectiveness in giving expression to social and cultural thought. Béla Balázs, Hans Richter, Bertolt Brecht, Rudolf Arnheim, and Walter Benjamin are among those critics who saw the existence of film as a new art form tied to art’s role in shaping social processes and processes of communication, which meant by implication avoiding the commercialization of film.

Brecht’s caustic stance vis-à-vis the art status of film shows just how controversial that aspect of film had become in confronting the commercial exploitation of its technical possibilities. Brecht thought that the film had lost its vital potential once it was employed in the

fabrication of "art." By that he meant that cinematic technology had been placed in the service of a concept of art that dated back to the previous century. The aesthetic categories pertaining to this concept, such as narrative closure and the centrality of "the individual," were in Brecht's view tantamount to the foreclosure of film's potential to forge new avenues of communication and a wholly new concept of art.

In his book *Der Kampf um den Film* (The Struggle over Film), Hans Richter concretely outlined the sociological conditions that prepared the ground for this foreclosure. He described how, in the years immediately preceding and following the First World War, a shift along class lines occurred in the form, conditions, and subject matter of early films. The effort to woo the so-called better audiences into the movies transformed the nickelodeons into plush movie palaces. Broad slapstick and vaudeville entertainment gave way to sophisticated stage actors, and the depiction of the "little man's" struggle for existence was marginalized by the appearance of specifically bourgeois characters such as "the writer," "the priest," and "the doctor." The psychological treatment of the lives of these characters, seen as absolute individuals, ensured their status as "generally human."<sup>2</sup> Richter showed that the lower-class audiences that had made up the bulk of moviegoers remained the main consumers of the new art form even though they no longer determined the spirit of film production. Until the advent of television, film was the uncontested form of entertainment among those audiences.

For social thinkers and critics like Brecht, film was an attractive medium precisely because it was the art of the masses. His enthusiasm for Chaplin in the early films was in line with his antiliterary interest in "plebeian" traditions such as the poetry of François Villon, the commedia dell'arte style, and the humor of the Bavarian comic Karl Valentin. Brecht's association with the last resulted in a collaboration on a short film called *Mysterien eines Friseursalons* (Mysteries of a Beauty Parlor) in 1923. It is quite possible that Brecht and the stage director Erich Engel, who also collaborated on *Mysterien*, wrote subtitles for other Valentin comic shorts.

Evidence from letters and diaries shows that Brecht was a prolific film-script writer in the first few years of the twenties. Some exam-

ples of his scripts have survived. "Drei im Turm" (Three in the Tower), most likely written in 1921, is a morbidly grotesque love triangle story, very much in the expressionist tradition and somewhat reminiscent of Oskar Kokoschka's one-act play *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* (Murderer, Hope of Women). *Der Brillantenfresser* (The Diamond Eater) and *Das Mysterium der Jamaika-Bar* (The Mystery of the Jamaica Bar) are comic detective stories, featuring elopements, abductions, and small-time gangs à la *Dreigroschenoper* (Threepenny Opera). The tone and temperament of the last two scripts are distinctly related to the understated humor of Karl Valentin. Since the scripts were written for silent films, they read almost like short stories with only an occasional subtitle. The descriptive text reveals Brecht's power of filmic visualization. Following the detailed directions for each shot with respect to acting, costume, and setting, it becomes very easy not only to imagine the action but also to perceive an entire ambience and mood. As far as camera directions are concerned, Brecht contented himself with an occasional specification of high or low angles and fade-outs. Shortly before his first resounding theatrical success in the fall of 1922, Brecht, together with his friend the writer Arnold Bronnen, participated in a competition that film producer Richard Oswald and the magazine *Tagebuch* had launched. The film script the two writers submitted was entitled *Robinsonade auf Assuncion* (Robinson in Assuncion) and it won first prize.

It is a moot question whether it was the success Brecht had scored as a playwright with the Munich premiere of *Trommeln in der Nacht* (Drums in the Night) in September of 1922 that kept him from writing more film scripts or whether the theater had always been his first love; the fact is that after that year Brecht's development as an artist took a sharp turn toward the stage rather than the screen. Nevertheless, his encounter with the newer medium had been deep enough to impress upon him the aesthetic exigencies specific to film. As a consequence, Brecht the dramatist never competed against the technological media (film and radio) in an effort to formulate what is purely dramatic; instead he sought a discourse with them. "In the interest of this discourse," wrote Walter Benjamin in his essay "The Author as Producer," "Brecht returned to the most basic elements of the theater. He was content, so to speak, with a podium. He dis-

pensed with complicated plots. In this way he succeeded in changing the functional connection between the stage and the audience, the text and the performance, the director and the author."<sup>3</sup>

This process of stripping theater to its basic elements enabled Brecht to formulate a dramatic theory that, in spite of its concern with specific dramatic problems, contributes incisively to general media theory. Brecht himself suggested the applicability of his theories to forms of expression other than drama. In his "Speech on the Function of Radio" of 1923, he claimed that "the epic dramatic theory with its number-character, its separation of elements, of the image from the word and the words from the music, particularly, however, its pedagogical attitude, would provide a host of practical hints for radio."<sup>4</sup> Conversely, one could claim that if Brecht's dramatic theory is applicable to media theory in general, it is because film had first taught Brecht the dramatist a lesson. In any case, Brecht's insight into the interrelatedness and interdependence of all forms of artistic production, which was a consequence of his political and economic analysis of the structures of communication, would have prevented him from treating different genres and media in total isolation.

This insight went hand in hand with Brecht's "plebeian" and iconoclastic attitude toward traditional forms of art and literature (and that included not only the classics but impressionism and expressionism as well), which found fertile ground in the Berlin of the twenties. In 1925, one year after he had moved there from Munich, he joined a writers' league called *Gruppe 1925*, whose goal it was to safeguard the interests of young writers not represented in the literary committees and academies, which were largely run by established members of the previous generation. Some of the other members of *Gruppe 1925*, such as Johannes Becher, Alfred Döblin, Egon Kisch, Rudolf Leonhard, and Kurt Tucholsky, were already prominent writers and considered themselves part of the left-wing intelligentsia. Yet by far the most valuable contact for Brecht in those early years was Erwin Piscator. This contact was established at a time when Brecht's sympathies for the "little man" developed into a full-blown political analysis that was to include the theater as well as other media.

Piscator's theater collective synthesized and gave expression to a number of characteristics typical of the Berlin avant-garde of the twenties: the attack on established art, a gradual politicization of art, and the belief in the beneficial influence that technology and the technological media—film and radio—would exert on the transformation of social values. Piscator's views on the heritage and future of literature and art were formed by his close connection to a group of people in Berlin, most of whom belonged to the dada movement: the brothers Herzfelde (Heartfield), George Grosz, Walter Mehring, Richard Hülsenbeck, Franz Jung, and Raoul Hausmann, some of whom became part of the theater collective. In contrast to the expressionists' individualist-humanist sentiments, the Berlin dadaists emphasized a "cooling out" (*auskühlen*) or "freezing" (*einfrosten*) of feelings in art and a radical anarchical destruction of bourgeois art under the slogan "Kunst ist Scheisse,"<sup>5</sup> which was quite shocking at that time. After the 1919 *Spartacus* uprising in Berlin, dada took a turn toward greater political articulation. For example, the contributions to the magazine *Die Pleite*, published by George Grosz and John Heartfield, no longer placed themselves exclusively in relation to aesthetic questions; instead, direct political effectiveness moved more and more into the forefront of their consideration. It is in this context that Piscator conceived of theater and art as a political tool, a means of pedagogy and propaganda. A long tradition of political theater was at Piscator's disposal once he had embarked upon this course.

Political theater in Germany began in the wake of Bismarck's anti-Socialist laws (*Sozialistengesetz*) of 1878. A great number of illegal political discussion and reading clubs, camouflaged as bowling clubs and similar innocuous interest groups, sprang into existence. One of these clubs organized performances of plays that the censors suppressed for public theaters because of their criticism of social conditions. These performances were staged by an ensemble called *Freie Bühne* (Free Stage), which was the forerunner of the *Volksbühne* (People's Stage). By the time Piscator was called upon to direct at the *Volksbühne* in 1924, this theater had gone through many changes. It had survived splits, prohibitions, and reorganizations.

In 1915 the *Volksbühne* was placed under the direction of Max Reinhardt, to become the site of his spectacular productions. Rein-

hardt, whom the critic Herbert Ihering considered "the most colorful theater talent of all times,"<sup>6</sup> nevertheless represented the opposite of the *Volksbühne's* original goals. Under his direction the theater became a temple for the arts, a sacred place where all thoughts of struggle come to rest. This development was a consequence not only of the direction of Max Reinhardt—who, after all, never laid claim to anything but the most genial completion and apotheosis of the bourgeois concept of art—but also of the notions held by members and by the organizers of what art for the masses should be.

The political situation of the twenties in Germany was reflected on a micro-level in the internal conflicts of the *Volksbühne*. Most of the members had sunk into political apathy, hankering after representations of the "eternal" human condition, while the greater audience, mainly the younger generation of socialists, demanded more radical plays with a clear political point of view, the so-called *Tendenzstück*. When Piscator joined the *Volksbühne*, he opposed the unquestioning implantation of bourgeois drama into political theater. His production of Ehm Welk's play *Gewitter über Gottland* (Thunderstorm over Gottland) in 1927 brought the internal strife at the *Volksbühne* to a head. While the audience protested and demonstrated against the cuts the management imposed on Piscator's production, the managing committee of the *Volksbühne* in its turn voted to maintain a nonpartisan, impartial production policy. After that, Piscator's fate at the *Volksbühne* was sealed. Temporarily he moved to the *Theater am Nollendorfsplatz* while, thanks to generous financial sponsors, plans for his own theater took shape. Walter Gropius, director of the Bauhaus in Dessau, designed a new theater for Piscator and in collaboration with him. The execution of the design was to be in the hands of the Bauhaus.

Piscator's choice of architects was no coincidence. Like the Bauhaus theoreticians, he was deeply convinced that the purpose and function of a building should dictate its form: "The stage of our time bears the outdated form of absolutism, of the court theater. Its division into stalls, boxes, balconies and galleries reflects the social stratification of feudal society."<sup>7</sup> Piscator saw his own contribution to modern political theater not so much in the innovation of the dramatic aspects as in the technical updating of the theatrical apparatus.

Yet, insofar as he saw the technical innovations to be absolutely requisite for a new audience, a new purpose, and a new function of theater, a new dramatic theory—rudimentarily at least—also underlies his technical considerations. Both Piscator and Gropius had very clear ideas about the function of the new theater. All technical means, argued Piscator, are employed to abolish the bourgeois stage arrangement and replace it with a form that "no longer considers the audience a fictive concept, but includes it into the theater as a live force."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Gropius and his friends at the Bauhaus had long been interested in developing a technically advanced theater that would enable the audience to participate in the dramatic events.

Walter Gropius described his design for a "total theater" not in terms of technological devices but as a way to place the audience in the middle of scenic events, as part of the same space in which the performance is taking place. For this purpose stages were arranged not only to jut out from the proscenium into the center of the audience, as is common in most modern theaters, but to surround the spectators on all sides as well. In addition to the horizontal distribution of stage levels, a vertical spread of stage areas was made possible by movable staircases and scaffolds. Gropius further admitted that his special interest was directed at the various methods of light projection demanded by Piscator's genial *mise-en-scène*. These light projections meant both the creation of scenic-dramatic space—the building of a scene with light as replacement for props and sets—and also the projection of film and slides on as many surfaces as possible—walls, ceilings, and so on—in order to submerge the audience in the heightened illusion of being present at the actual site of scenic events. Gropius's dream of the *grosse Raummaschine* (great space machine),<sup>9</sup> so congenial to Piscator's idea of theatrical production, remained unfortunately just that—a dream or, rather, a number of architectural plans and models.

These theoretical explorations into the realm of architecture and technology did not detract Piscator from his desire to connect with the traditional political theater and also with the agit-prop stages, which were the workers' theater of his time. Both these forms of political theater remained closest to Piscator's interest. He was considered by many critics to be the link between the workers' theater

and the professional theater of the Left, represented by Brecht, Friedrich Wolf, and others. In his essay "Schöpferische Probleme des Agitproptheaters" (Creative Problems of the Agit-Prop Theater), Friedrich Wolf wrote in 1933: "The professional theater of the Left . . . is unthinkable without the pioneering work of the agit-prop stages and of Piscator."<sup>10</sup>

The agit-prop movement represented the apex of a process of merging and transformation begun in 1918 between the traditional form of amateur stages (*Laienbühnen*) and the new subject matter of the workers' theater. A short selective enumeration of the formal elements of the amateur stages will show how close, indeed, not only Piscator's but Brecht's theater is to these stages: simple and distinct fables, rich and eventful scenes, typing of characters, simple but beautiful and often costly decor, use of masks, use of placards and banners, division of the stage by colorful curtains, simultaneous scenes, the short scene and montage of scenes, predilection for songs, dance, and pantomime, and emphasis on rhythm, movement, and body language. Spoken language was not required to comply with the acceptable standard of stage language; instead, actors were encouraged to retain their dialects and individual characteristics as long as this did not obstruct comprehension. And finally, the cabaret style of the political amateur groups is the epic style par excellence, in that episodes, events, and "numbers" are only loosely strung together, an ideal structure to accommodate epic breadth and volume.

In the fall of 1927 Brecht worked with Piscator and other members of the collective on the adaptation of Tolstoi's play *Rasputin*, and in December of the same year he began work on an adaptation for the stage of Jaroslav Hasek's novel *The Good Soldier Schweik* (*Die Abenteuer des Braven Soldaten Schwejk*). Besides Piscator and Brecht, George Grosz, Felix Gasbarra, and Leo Lania also worked on this production. In both of these plays film inserts played a crucial role, but they did not represent the only inclusion of technology and media. Even though the *grosse Raummaschine* was never realized, Piscator's mise-en-scène was acknowledged even by his political opponents for its ambitiously innovative qualities. For the Schweik project in particular, Piscator had in mind an entirely mechanized environment. Not many critics could withhold their admiration, for example, for Pisca-

tor's ingenious solution to the problem of movement in Hasek's novel. The character of Schweik is seen in constant senseless motion of which he is not the originator but only the object. Moreover, for all his moving around he remains essentially passive and unchanging. Piscator had the brilliant idea of placing the Schweik actor Max Pallenberg on a conveyor belt built level with the stage floor to illustrate the character's stasis within motion.

Projections of film footage taken as tracking shots in the actual streets of Prague (Piscator called it *naturalistischer Film*) alternated with animation film of a political-satirical nature by George Grosz. Grosz also did backdrop drawings and designs (about three hundred pages) for masks and costumes (all of which resulted in a blasphemy trial against him and his publisher, Malik-Verlag). Inspired by the political, grotesque marionettes that Heartfield and Grosz had done earlier for dada, Piscator decided on a whole range of marionettes to surround Schweik, from totally artificial puppets to actors with masks or simply mechanical, robotlike acting. Grosz also credits Piscator with introducing photomontage into the framework of the stage<sup>11</sup> and claims that Piscator's theater—which nowadays would be called a multimedia spectacle, since Piscator also worked with slide shows, music, dance, and pantomime in addition to film and puppets—was an expression of his "Wagner yearnings,"<sup>12</sup> his never-ending search for the great *Gesamtkunstwerk* that would comprise all the individual arts. Grosz's remark is interesting especially in light of Brecht's later partial rejection of Piscator's efforts.

The examples of film for the Schweik production already mentioned, animation film and shots of the streets of Prague, functioned as political commentary in the first case and as sets in the latter. Piscator wrote that a final differentiation of film materials used in his productions occurred about 1927–28, and he completed the score by listing two additional types of film that found their way into his stage production. Narrative fiction film inserts were drawn on to comment on the action, predicting the future or reflecting on the past much like the chorus in Greek drama or any *dramatis personae* in the capacity of a narrator. And last, documentary film was used for informational purposes but also acted as commentary.

Brecht wrote along similar lines about the use of film in epic

theater. In Brecht's view film in theater could be looked at as a kind of "optical chorus"<sup>13</sup> that should engage in a clear dialectic with the scenes and events onstage. "Since film represents reality so abstractly, it is well suited to confront reality. . . . It can confirm or contradict, remind or prophesy. It is capable of taking on the role of the ghost without which no great drama could have existed in the centuries most propitious to drama."<sup>14</sup> Like the ghost of Hamlet's father, film onstage functions, as Brecht saw it, to bring out what is hidden to the eyes of mortals, the "naked reality." In terms of Piscator's theater, however, it is not the crime and sin of the mother that is revealed but "the good god of the revolution."<sup>15</sup>

In the case of the decorative use of film, depicting a specific social environment or milieu, Brecht insisted on artistic—that is, stylized—treatment. The film insert should concentrate on depicting the typical, drawing on animation if necessary. Everything depends on maintaining the pleasure in the dialectic between plasticity and two-dimensionality, Brecht argued, and he cautioned that a film insert depicting an actual location could upset this balance.

The impulses Brecht received during his association and collaboration with Piscator can hardly be overestimated. They not only were important for Brecht's formulation of epic theater but also bear relevance for the *Lehrstück* (learning play) theory and practice that Brecht worked on during the late twenties. Two features in particular, which can also be traced back to the agit-prop and political amateur stages, are crucial for the development of the *Lehrstück* theory. One is the insistence that every actor play as many roles as possible, in order to prevent hierarchies and the development of a star system. The other feature, the "speaking choruses," proved to be an excellent way of letting large masses of people participate directly in the learning plays.

Brecht has acknowledged Piscator's influence on his own experiments with drama in many of his writings. He was particularly enthusiastic about the possibilities of film in the theater. In his view film was, at least in this conjunction, at the service of drama: "Der Film macht dem Drama das Bett."<sup>16</sup> Since information, exposition, and circumstantial description can be handled by the film inserts, the actions of the characters and the spoken word attain greater signifi-

cance. Brecht also gave Piscator credit for having brought theater into the modern age and up to a technological standard that most other institutions had implemented long ago. At the same time, he saw the limitations of Piscator's approach. His criticism centered on Piscator's "Wagner yearnings," not so much on the notion of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (which Brecht certainly was fond of himself) as on the specific Wagnerian brand of it, the fact of its subsuming quality. Brecht argued that Piscator ultimately employed technology to create an illusion of reality onstage in order to absorb the audience, and that the engagement of the spectator in Piscator's theater was based on the complete involvement of the audience in the performance, brought about mainly through an ingenious total saturation of the spectators by means of technology. This final, significant difference between Brecht and Piscator was arrived at after many years of fruitful collaboration. It does not annul, however, the fundamental, lasting impact of Piscator's theater on Brecht.

A very similar constellation of influence and difference existed between Brecht and the Soviet artists Meyerhold, Mayakovsky, Eisenstein, and Tretyakov. Brecht had always acknowledged their decisive influence on his work.<sup>17</sup> His interest in the cultural development of the Soviet Union was inspired by his curiosity about the new ways Soviet artists could take active part in shaping new forms of artistic expression. Their manifestos reinforced Brecht's lack of interest in the bourgeois tradition of literature and theater, and he eagerly followed their aesthetic discussions as well as their concern with new thematics (as long as that was still possible in the twenties in the USSR). For his insights into the development of cultural politics in the Soviet Union, Brecht relied largely on information given to him by his personal friend Sergei Tretyakov. Tretyakov had published one of the first comprehensive articles on Brecht in the Soviet Union and later translated some of Brecht's plays and poems into Russian. He belonged to a group of young artists that called itself the "Left Front of Art" (LEF). Many of Russia's most accomplished artists belonged to this group and contributed to a style of the Revolution. Their aesthetic background was diverse and often remote from Marxist ideas. Constructivists, futurists, and proletkultists exerted the strongest influence within the LEF. Dziga Vertov, for example, was a

futurist poet before he was caught up by the wave of revolutionary enthusiasm. Ultimately it was their dedication to the revolutionary struggle that held these artists together. It was a time when every theater considered it its sacred duty to call itself an "experimental stage" or even a "laboratory." The filmmaker Leo Kuleshov characterized the atmosphere of artistic life in those days in the following way: "At certain periods in the development of civilization or art, certain moments arise when it is no longer possible to work in the old way; you have to work in a new way, you must say a new word. And this new word begins to float round in the air for everyone."<sup>18</sup>

The eagerness for the "new" manifested itself in two pronounced tendencies among LEF artists: the interest in technology, scientific exactitude, and factual material—things-as-they-are in themselves—on the one hand, and on the other, interest in the destruction of the cohesiveness of the traditional artistic statement, its fragmentation and juxtaposition in new and startling ways—in short, the principle of montage. In response to the needs of the Russian Revolution, young cameramen went on agit-trains through the continent to collect and record data, facts, and reproductions of the historic events on the front and distribute them to communities in distant parts of the country for educational purposes. Vertov was the editor for the footage of hundreds of young cameramen. The breadth and depth of expression in film, achieved through the montage of images, not necessarily consecutive in time and space, was unparalleled and lent itself to the overwhelming tasks set by the Revolution: "The unusual flexibility of the montage-construction permits any political, economic or other motifs to be brought into the cinema study."<sup>19</sup> Vertov and the Kinoka movement conceived of film as a tool of communication between peoples: "The basis of our program is not the production of entertainment and lucrative films but the cine-alliance between the people of the USSR and the entire world on the platform of communist decipherment of existing reality."<sup>20</sup> They shunned no hardships to bring the news of the revolutionary struggle from the front to the remotest parts of the country. Moreover, Vertov not only informed the spectators but tried to involve them in the filmmaking process itself: "Using a specially designed film car aboard the agit-train . . . , Vertov composed a continually changing travelogue, showing au-

diences newly edited films while shooting their reactions and their surroundings for insertion into the films they were watching."<sup>21</sup>

The Soviet artists' use of the new technological media served as a model in discursive practices for Brecht. Yet unlike Piscator, who was also influenced by the Soviet artists, Brecht understood that the difference in historical situation demanded a completely opposite approach with respect to the presentation of fictional or informational material. The Russian artists appealed to the emotions and enthusiasm of the people to draw them into the events of the Revolution, whereas Brecht, conscious of the rising phantom of fascist propaganda, emphasized a "cooled out" critical distance.

What Brecht was most fascinated with in the twenties was the possibility of a fundamental breakdown and change in the structure of communication and discourse.<sup>22</sup> No doubt to Brecht the experiments of the revolutionary Russian artists represented the promise of such a fundamental change, yet for all their forward-looking, positive utopian qualities, his writings in the mid- and late twenties, on the structure of communication in drama as well as in the media, ultimately were firmly anchored in an analysis of their present use in the Weimar Republic. At first Brecht believed that the technological media, radio and film specifically, lent themselves "naturally" to a more democratic use of the means of communication. Much of his theory at that time engaged in battle with the cultural institutions of the Weimar Republic to bring about truly democratic changes. In his theoretical struggles Brecht was supported by his friend, the critic Walter Benjamin, who shared with him an initial euphoria about the emancipatory power of technology.

In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin maintained that the mechanical reproduction of artworks has the effect of a "tremendous shattering of tradition."<sup>23</sup> By substituting a plurality of copies for a unique existence, the particular historical and spatial presence of the work of art is obliterated. This, Benjamin felt, represented the loss of the concept of authenticity and ultimately authority. Benjamin saw a significant connection between mechanical reproduction and contemporary mass movements. He wrote: "[The mass movement's] most powerful agent is the film. Its social significance, particularly in its most positive form,

is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage." As human sense perception changes through history, this new mode of perceiving things disconnected from the authority that comes with a unique, authentic place in history corresponds to an increased "sense of the universal equality of things." Just as the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, "the location of its original use value," the reproducible work of art finds its proper function in politics.<sup>24</sup>

✓ The necessary identification of the spectator with the point of view of the camera, in the case of photography and film, would automatically ensure, according to Benjamin, an approach to art that is more akin to the sociologists' testing and comparing than to the absorbed or merely bored reception of the average theatergoer. Brecht was quite in agreement with this analysis. He considered the technological aspects of film, for example, to be a great help in overcoming the "old, untechnical, antitechnical, 'radiant' art," which is tied to religion."<sup>25</sup> He often contrasted the traditional, reverent mode of reception with the more casual demeanor of sports fans. Among sports fans, the prevalent attitude of the spectators is that of an expert judge. Brecht would have welcomed expert judges in his theater, precisely because of their alert, "scientific" comparing stance.

Although these attributes were part and parcel of the European avant-garde movements of the twenties, in the early thirties they became embedded in the tissue of historical demands in the form of the struggle against fascism. As such they matched Brecht's "cooled out" attitude, fostering keen observation, fine-tuned differentiation, and sober evaluation in the face of an all-subsuming tide of mass enthusiasm. Later on, when fascism was no longer the direct point of reference—when, instead, his aversion to the commercial exploitation of the arts again became central in his dealings with Hollywood, as it had been with the Nero Film Company—these same attitudes could be mobilized in combating the steady narrowing down of aesthetic production and reception to clichés and stereotypes of the lowest common denominator.

Benjamin's expectation that the "distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character," and that the average citizen could be heard, published in print, or seen in films (as was already

practiced in Russia), dissolved in the face of the deepening commercialization of the technological media in Western countries.<sup>26</sup> While in the West modern man's legitimate claim to be reproduced was foreclosed, as Hans Richter has described it, as early as the time of the First World War, the efforts of the Soviet artists were finally thwarted by the institutionalization of socialist realist aesthetics under Stalin in the thirties. In the face of these developments, an analysis of the relations of artistic production was urgently needed, particularly since Brecht saw the relations of cultural and artistic production directly joined to the question "who speaks for whom?"—that is, the question of discursive power in the structure of communication. Brecht rose to the occasion in his numerous writings on a theory of radio, on the *Threepenny Opera* trial, on his *Lehrstück* theory, and finally in the learning plays themselves.

The concept of the apparatus is central in Brecht's political and economic critique of the distribution of power in discursive processes. Brecht used the term apparatus as a broad category to include every aspect of the means of cultural production, from the actual technological equipment to promotion agencies, as well as the class that is in possession of the means of production. Thus the terminology itself points up the connection between culture and politics. In this complex of usages, references to the political sense of the term usually denote the state apparatus in the context either of the capitalist states or of the Soviet Union. The apparatus in the context of the Soviet Union seems to refer to a body of high functionaries in opposition to the Party. Brecht spoke in this context, for example, of the "negation of the Party by the apparatus." This corresponds to his discussion of "the collective apparatus, which is not a democracy." Groups, he thought, have the function of mediating between individuals and the masses. Therefore the true collectivist "does not place the group apparatus in opposition to the masses but into the masses."<sup>27</sup> Whenever a group assumes power and control at the expense of the masses, it becomes a political "apparatus" in this negative sense.

Apparatus as the means of cultural production refers either to the entire cultural complex or to smaller organizational units within it, for example, the theater, the opera, radio, the press, and the film

companies. Finally, it also includes the technical units, the tools of production. The confluence of economics, politics, and culture in the hands of the same group, the economically powerful class, as Brecht has pointed out, has severe consequences for culture. The cultural apparatus in these circumstances functions, among other things, to stabilize the existing social relations both politically and economically. Brecht saw this in terms of a selection process: "By means of the (cultural) apparatus, society absorbs what it needs in order to reproduce itself."<sup>28</sup>

The overlap of authority and culture expresses itself in a structure of production and communication, in which the owners of the means of production and not the producers control the product. In the case of theater, the contradiction of apparatus versus playwright results in the inadequate production of new dramatic materials, that is, of the new drama, as Brecht called it. Brecht saw the greatest obstacle to the production of epic drama in the slow development of the enormous "material complexes"<sup>29</sup> of the theater. The reason for this is that the individual playwright can enter new territory with less of a risk than can the entire apparatus. The only intellectual struggle in the arts left in our epoch, Brecht said, exhibits an interesting overestimation of all means of production. "The businessman, in this case as everywhere, prevails over the worker, the owner of the means of production is *eo ipso* considered productive."<sup>30</sup> Critics and the press reinforce this situation. Quite unconsciously, the critics measure the new drama against the antiquated style of contemporary theater. Anything that does not fit into this style of performance falls by the wayside. If it does not fulfill the expectation of the audience and of the management, whose interest it is to sell theater as entertainment, the drama is rejected. In this way the apparatus maintains absolute primacy.

For Brecht this is also the condition under which the work of art or the cultural product is turned into a commodity and the cultural worker is proletarianized. Brecht wrote about the artists and intellectuals who believe in their independence: "Thinking that they are in possession of an apparatus, which in reality owns them, they defend an apparatus over which they no longer have any control." Brecht continued to describe the exact workings of this loss of control: "The

producers are completely dependent on the apparatus, economically and socially; it monopolizes their effect, and progressively the products of writers, composers, and critics take on the character of raw materials: the finished product is turned out by the apparatus."<sup>31</sup>

Brecht had firsthand experience of this predicament in his dealings with the film industry. When his *Threepenny Opera* turned out to be a box office success, Nero Film Company approached Brecht with plans for filming the play. In May 1930 Brecht agreed to a contract that reserved him the right to collaborate on the script. After the conclusion of the contract, Brecht wrote the film text *Die Beule*, which, as Brecht put it, differed from the play not so much with respect to the meaning but rather in a complete restructuring of the fable. "Filming elements of a play with only minor changes would be sheer nonsense,"<sup>32</sup> wrote Brecht in a footnote to this text. However, the changes do not seem to confine themselves to the adjustment of one medium to another—they do not "remain without influence on the meaning."<sup>33</sup> The film company's complaint that Brecht's film text intensified the political partisanship of the play was essentially correct. *Die Beule*, for example, explicitly identifies Macheath's bandits as members of the bourgeoisie. Whereas this connection is merely suggested in the play, particularly in the acting directions, which provide that Macheath should be played as a bourgeois, the film text turns this suggestion into the central motif for the entire film. No doubt the intensification of the world economic crisis in 1930 and Brecht's own political development were important factors in the changes he made in the film text. In the actual trial, however, the political reasons did not play a major role. The court carefully avoided making the greater emphasis on the political aspects of the play the object of the hearings, fearing that this would lead to an even more direct politicization of the trial.

When the film company realized that Brecht's film text was substantially different from his play, they refused to grant him the right to collaborate and proceeded to shoot the film without his consent. Brecht decided to sue and have the film confiscated. The legal situation was quite complicated, for although Brecht had secured for himself the right to collaborate on the script, he did not have the right to interfere with the film itself. While he was able to

demand changes in the script, he had at the same time agreed to preserve the style and content of the *Threepenny Opera* play. The film company's abrupt rejection of Brecht's collaboration on the script prompted the court's disapproval, yet ultimately the problem was not laid to the company's charge. On the contrary, the court upheld the film company's complaint that Brecht had delivered the outline for the script orally, thus ensuring his continued collaboration on the actual writing of the script. That his collaboration was guaranteed to the author in the contract itself did not influence the court's decision.

Brecht was fully prepared for this outcome. Apparently he did not take his case to court solely in the hope of winning, but did it for the eventual purpose of a sociological experiment. This experiment was planned to be a theoretical exposition of the relation between bourgeois ideology and bourgeois practice, tested on the concrete example of Brecht's involvement with the film industry, the press, and the judicial system as a consequence of the attempted transposition of his play into a film.

The purpose of the trial was to demonstrate publicly the impossibility of working with commercial film companies. Much like epic theater itself, the trial was to reconstruct social processes and make a statement about them. It was to provide instructive material for an interested audience. The rules of this game were to let things fall where they may without interfering in or manipulating the judicial process. The main point for Brecht was to conduct the trial as publicly and as intelligibly as possible. A clear exposition of the fact that the plaintiff was going against one million marks in his attempt to obtain his rights as author had to be given to the public. In this way the act of merely reacting against a particular injustice was turned into a planned project, whose object was a more general injustice. Similarly, to the degree that the specific legal case became less and less important to Brecht, the case concerning the judicial system itself became central in the experiment. Brecht apparently had been successful in his attempt to bring his case to the public's attention. The opening of the trial in October 1930 drew such a crowd that a passageway for the lawyers had to be cordoned off.

The major point to be demonstrated in this experiment was what Brecht called the "ideological schizophrenia" of the petite bourgeoisie. Brecht argued that each social phenomenon is invested with

at least two for the most part incompatible viewpoints. One is taken from the repertoire of great bourgeois ideologies, and the other has its origins in reality. The notion, for example, that the rights of the individual have to be protected, and more specifically that the immaterial rights of artists have to be protected, is constantly contradicted by social practices. Brecht questioned the status of individual rights if a judge can decide—as happened in his case—that a film is an adequate translation of a play without actually having seen the film. He concluded that "there is no right outside of production."<sup>34</sup> It follows that a mode of production that obliterates the contribution of individuals is incapable of guaranteeing their immaterial rights. In this case, Brecht saw the problem of authoritarian control over the cultural product directly in terms of the profit motive.

To illustrate his point beyond his own case, Brecht cited an example within an example. A court decision from 1923 clearly spells out how the immaterial rights of the individual cultural producer have to yield before the overruling economic interest of the apparatus. The case involved a writer's claim that the film company that had bought one of his scripts with the intent of making a film had, in fact, never used it for that purpose. The court's decision focused on a comparison of contracts involving the publication of books, the production of dramas, and the production of films. In the case of books the reproduction of the original presented no artistic problem, since the publisher's collaboration is purely mechanical. Neither drama nor film can be seen in terms of exact mechanical reproduction of a text. The difference between a dramatic production and the production of a film was seen in terms of the distance between text and final realization. For drama this gap is less crucial than for film. The transposition of a written script into the sequences of images of the silent movies constituted a much greater break than that between text and theater, where the reproduction of dialogue is possible.

The main distinction, however, was made with respect to the mechanical reproducibility of film as opposed to the reproductions of a play onstage, which are always contractually limited and defined in time and space. Film was described as a "mass commodity" and as such much more dependent on the taste of the audience, the competition on the world market, and the timeliness of its subject matter. As

a consequence, the courts decided against the scriptwriter's claims, explicitly stating that his understandable wish to present his intellectual product to an audience is outweighed by the interest of the producer, who, through the director, is co-creator of the work and carries the economic risk for the production and for its marketing.

With this example in hand Brecht was able to demonstrate that the pressure to create salable goods forces the film company to contradict "the great bourgeois ideology," which holds inviolate authors' immaterial rights to their intellectual products. Reality looks somewhat different: "The author is being engulfed in the technological process and the latter is seen as commodity production. The protection of the author's immaterial rights is denied because the producer 'is burdened with an exorbitant financial risk.' Intellectual interests may be protected as long as this protection does not cost too much."<sup>35</sup>

Subsequently Brecht asked what happened to ideologies once they have thus proved incorrect. They are by no means discarded, he argued; in the interest of this social system they must be maintained. Old ideas are tied together for better or worse; only if one idea is "totally compromised is it dropped after long hesitations and after having changed its name several times. . . . But at the cradle and at the coffin of every ideology sits practice."<sup>36</sup>

Although Brecht was interested in showing the discrepancy between bourgeois ideology and practice, he himself was not interested in protecting the bourgeois idea of intellectual property (his replies to the accusations of plagiarism launched against him are well known). Nor did he deplore the demise of the artist's status as individual creator. In his view, the method of cultural production by a group of people, rather than by the traditional "inspired genius," carried within itself the potential of a more progressive form of cultural production. Like Lenin, Brecht believed that the mode of production in late capitalist society—precisely in those aspects that contradict bourgeois ideology—foreshadows forms of socialist production. Brecht's reservations vis-à-vis these forms of production are slight: "If this artfully unified and efficient apparatus had intellectual immaterial interests as well, in short, if all this did not just amount to the protection of profit, we would have very few objections."<sup>37</sup> This statement stands in curious contrast to Brecht's earlier complaint

about the film company's mode of production, which he described as anything but efficient. It seems that here Brecht is giving in to the same theoretical fallacy that allowed the introduction of Taylorism in the Soviet Union under Lenin. Brecht's at least partial belief that advanced modes of capitalist production foreshadow socialist practice was supported by the avant-garde's love affair with technology and the latter's ability to intervene rationally in the mystification of social processes.

In other contexts, Brecht refused to discuss formal criteria separately from context. In the form/content debates that flourished in the twenties and continued into the thirties as the expressionism/realism debate, Brecht always took a firm stand in favor of new forms for new contents or, better, the inseparability of the two in the concept of function. In "The Author as Producer," Walter Benjamin elaborated on this crucial point in Brecht's aesthetics and proposed a dialectical solution to the fruitless splitting of correct political content, on the one hand, and formal quality, on the other, that determined much of the realism/formalism debates in the Soviet Union. The apparent dichotomy is mediated in the concept of technique, which provides the material basis for analysis of the work in question. Technique in this sense ensures a materialistic approach precisely because it is a dimension of function. And in turn, the function of a cultural product depends on its position in the conditions of artistic production in its time. It is ultimately tied to the question of control over the means of artistic production. The result of Brecht's political and economic analysis of the *Threepenny Opera* trial becomes encapsulated in his concept of "refunctionalization," which understands function as the pivot between artistic and social production. Yet there is an anticipatory if not utopian move involved in Brecht's concept of refunctionalization on which both his radio theory and his *Lehrstück* theory are based. Benjamin explained Brecht's concept of refunctionalization as the structural reorganization of the relationship between the stage, the author, and the audience—or in the case of radio, between the producer and the listener—in order to bring about a more democratic structure of communication. It is evident that these structural and functional changes entail political as well as formal differences. The political content, however, was anticipated.

## 2 The Lehrstück: Learning for a New Society



1. The Baden-Baden *Lehrstück*, 1929.  
Courtesy of the Bertolt Brecht Archive, East Berlin.

Brecht distinguished sharply between innovative art, which was designed to stimulate audiences' appetites for cultural consumption and to save the institutions (theaters, film studios, etc.), and genuine innovations, which aim at a transformation of the entire cultural apparatus "from places of entertainment into organs of publication."<sup>1</sup> Very early in his career as a playwright, Brecht coined the term "culinary" for both a particular form of art and an attitude of reception. In "culinary" art the understanding of how a play is put together, how it is produced and performed, yields to the mere savoring of the finished product. Brecht uses the term *Genuss* in opposition to *Vergnügen*. The latter term points to a productive attitude in the audience—it carries the connotation of expert understanding of the quality and hence the process of production of a play—whereas *Genuss* has overtones of passive consumption, the uncritical ingestion of cultural goods. Characteristically, *Genuss* does not generate knowledge, it requires taste: "Opera . . . serves pleasure [*Genuss*] even when it presupposes or provides education, for it simply presupposes or provides the education of taste."<sup>2</sup>

In his opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* (The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny), which was first performed in 1930 in Leipzig, Brecht characterized opera as the epitome of "culinary" art forms in bourgeois culture. To be sure, he acknowledged the social import of this genre in its early development, as in Mozart's *Magic Flute*. His rejection was directed at opera in its Wagnerian develop-

ment and in its present historical form as commodity. Writing an opera in order to repudiate opera as such was a bit like sawing away at the branch he was sitting on, he thought, yet the charm of *Mahagonny* is dependent upon this ironic distance.

For Brecht, the degree of the audience's pleasure (*Genuss*) is directly proportional to the degree of irreality achieved in the opera. And it is precisely the element of irreality, vagueness, and lack of meaning that turns reception into passive consumption. The latter functions to obstruct knowledge—knowledge of the material conditions of production of art specifically and, by inference, of the relations of production in general. Hence Brecht's claim that "in our society, the old opera is indispensable. Its illusions have socially important functions. Intoxication is essential; nothing can replace it."<sup>3</sup> He wrote that the irrationality of opera derives from its use of rational elements to achieve realism and plasticity while at the same time annulling this effort through music. The result is a third rather complex reality that nevertheless has very realistic effects. But this reality no longer has any connection with its object, the reality it departed from in the first place.<sup>4</sup>

With the advent of mass culture, film, radio, and television began to take over the function opera had formerly fulfilled. At the same time, the consumer attitude developed a double character. While passive consumption is, as Benjamin had pointed out, the attitude of the exploiter, the situation in the case of the mass media is more complex. Exploitation rebounds upon the audience itself. Brecht coined the term "inplotation" (*Einbeutung*)<sup>5</sup> for the spectator's position, ambivalently split into exploiter and exploited. Brecht sees the audience as the cause and as the victim of a system that divides production and pleasure. This state of affairs has repercussions for both terms—on the one hand, it marks work and productivity as devoid of pleasure, and on the other it keeps pleasure free of productivity for the sake of work.

Brecht's project of "refunctionalizing" the apparatus provides a totally new view of the social function of theater and media. Central to this view is the reunification of pleasure and productivity, of entertainment and information, of experience and knowledge. This cannot be achieved just on the level of the text or the performance but

involves a different attitude on the part of the audience as well. No longer a mass of consumers, the audience must be *literarisiert*,<sup>6</sup> that is, informed and trained especially for the theatrical event in order to be productive. What makes this project hard to realize is the primacy of the theater and the cultural apparatuses in general, whose aims are in conformity with the "old drama." Essential, therefore, to the "refunctionalization" of the theater is the appropriation of the apparatuses by the producers, to achieve control over their means of production. Although the *Threepenny Opera* trial had demonstrated the difficulties of such a project, Brecht urged artists and intellectuals not to resign themselves to the way things are, lest they might not be able to express themselves in any significant way in the future, when the network of media will become even more dense.

Brecht's essays on *Radiotheorie* were written at a time when the struggle over the politicization of radio was recent history. The official policy for radio programming in Weimar Germany adhered to the idea of nonpartisanship in political questions. The Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft (State Broadcasting Corporation), founded in 1926, had strong ties to the state, because 51 percent of its shares belonged to the State Department of the Post Office. In this way State Secretary Hans Bredow, whose jurisdiction was originally the Post Office, acquired the position of commissioner of the State Broadcasting Corporation. At that time the arguments for the political neutrality and nonpartisanship of radio were primarily directed against the attempts of DRADAG (Drahtloser Dienst AG für Buch und Presse), an organization that aimed at deepening democratic ideas, to make radio an integral instrument of the republic. Members of this organization were recruited from the various political parties, including a representative of the Ministry of the Interior as well as representatives of the government press agencies. Bredow, whose antidemocratic sentiments were well known, succeeded in frustrating DRADAG's political democratic conceptions by creating for radio and for himself a position that was immune to the control of government, parliament, or the various political parties. "Radio was constituted according to private property laws as a corporation and was run like a state enterprise in an authoritarian state."<sup>7</sup> Part of the guidelines for the radio policy publicized in 1926 read: "The radio does not serve any

party. Its entire news and lecture service must be kept strictly in a nonpartisan tone."<sup>8</sup>

The neutrality of the media seemed as much an illusion to Brecht as the state of transcendence of particular interests in Kantian aesthetics. It was not the neutrality of the media that should be defended, but the right of everyone to participate in the public sphere. Brecht had in mind a huge network of channels that would not only send but also receive program material; it would make the audience not only listen but also speak, and instead of isolating the listeners it would locate them in relation to each other. By changing the radio from an apparatus for distribution to an apparatus for communication, it would represent a truly democratic—as Brecht put it—utilization of the media.

In the face of the overwhelming odds against such a project, how could the individual cultural producers engage in a struggle against the interests of the apparatus? Brecht remained optimistic. While he maintained that the political apparatus dominates culture as a whole, there is a possibility of influencing the apparatus in turn. Brecht pointed out that culture was originally involved in the development of productive forces. Now that the conflict between these forces and the mode of production involves the cultural sector as well (reflected in the conflict between artists and intellectuals and the way their work is used by the apparatus), culture is once more a participant in the political arena. Naturally the individual producer or director is not able to achieve a real transformation of the cultural apparatus. Neither is it up to "Mr.'s Rockefeller and Ford to prevent the devastation by capitalism of all the intellectual areas." But, Brecht suggested, what can be done and "what the best among today's theater producers are doing is to try again and again to construct exceptions."<sup>9</sup>

An example of such an exception is the *Lehrstück* titled *Der Ozeanflug* (The Ocean Flight). It was performed at the Baden-Baden Music Festival in 1929. The play is an exercise in the use of radio as an apparatus for communication rather than for distribution. As such it is a model for a theory of the media. It has model character both in its form as *Lehrstück*, which radically alters the performance/audience (and by implication the sender/receiver) structure of the play, as well



2. *The Ocean Flight*, 1929.

Courtesy of the Bertolt Brecht Archive, East Berlin.

as in its context, which discusses the attitudes requisite for a future audience.

The stage set of the 1929 performance of *The Ocean Flight* demonstrated the split apparatus/listener. On the left side of the stage was the radio orchestra, its singers, and the technical apparatus; on the right side was the listener, who read and sang the part of the pilots. The rear wall of the stage served as background for the written explanation of the theory underlying the *The Ocean Flight*, which was originally called *Der Flug der Lindberghs*. (Brecht had changed the title because of Charles Lindbergh's support of the Nazi party in Germany.) The play is a celebration not only of the technological feat of the first crossing of the Atlantic by airplane, but also of the new technological media and their communicative potential. Radio New York is shown to be in touch with boats on the Atlantic in an effort to locate the plane. Newspapers and radios in America and Europe express their optimism as well as their pessimism about the success of

the flight. Finally, Radio Europe announces to masses of people the arrival of the plane at Bouget airport near Paris.

Beyond the glorification of this technological feat, which ends with a dedication to future exploits, "das noch nicht erreichte" ("what has not yet been achieved"), Brecht writes the main concern of the *Lehrstück* into the text itself—namely, the education of individuals to enable them to become members of a collective. Upon their arrival, the pilots announce:

My name is so and so. Please carry me  
to a dark shelter, so that  
no one may see my  
natural weakness.

But report to my comrades of  
the Ryan Company in San Diego  
that their work was good.  
Our motor has persisted.  
Their work was without flaw.<sup>10</sup>

A year after the Baden-Baden performance, Brecht suggested that the following experiment be conducted to point out how important and decisive the staging is for the text of *The Ocean Flight*. In this experiment, the part of the pilot was to be acted by a popular hero who would have separated the audience (in this case the play was to be performed before an audience in a concert situation, that is, as a traditional event split between performance and audience) from the masses by causing the audience to identify with him. Brecht concluded from this example that in a concert performance, which is possible but nonetheless the wrong type of performance, the part of the pilot must be sung by a choir in order not to destroy the sense of the whole play. What then is the correct performance? To answer this question we must take a closer look at the *Lehrstück* and the theory behind it.

The theoretical and practical purpose of Brecht's epic theater was to bring bourgeois ideology to bear upon its own presuppositions. It was designed to work with democratic ideals under the conditions of capitalist societies. The *Lehrstück*, on the other hand, marks a qualitative change in the structure of communication itself. The historical basis for the *Lehrstück* is a society in transition to socialism. In this situation the central concern is to find ways of learning that are

adequate for the new state. Lenin's question about how and what one should learn is the basic impulse for the theory of the *Lehrstück*. At the same time, themes are explored that are more likely to arise in a society in transition to socialism than in bourgeois democracy. The *Lehrstück* does not imply total discontinuity with epic techniques. Brecht emphasized that epic techniques are the basis for the *Lehrstück* but that many of the projected goals of the "new drama" can be realized to their full extent only within the context of a *Lehrstück*. The relationship of epic techniques to the "great pedagogy" (i.e., the *Lehrstück*) has its counterpoint in the relation between bourgeois democracy and the ideal of socialism. Brecht's own development as an artist must be considered with this precise historical specificity in mind. The degree of technical perfection of his plays, according to his own testimony, is not subject to the maturation process of the playwright, but depends on the specific social and historical moment of his creative efforts. Since technique, in Brecht's terms, is inseparable from social function, "only that measure of epic theater that is acceptable today"<sup>11</sup> can in fact be used. As a result the playwright found himself in the curious position of judging his later, "great" plays to be less advanced with respect to technique than plays he had written many years before. An entry dated February 25, 1939, in Brecht's *Arbeitsjournal* reads: "*The Life of Galileo* is technically a great step backward. . . . First the *Fatzer*- and *Brotladen* fragments should be studied. These two fragments are the highest standard technically."<sup>12</sup>

In the twenties, when Brecht was engaged in experiments with the *Lehrstück*, the proletariat represented a rapidly growing force in Germany. Communist workers' choirs, for example, which Brecht could draw on for his plays, had a membership of half a million people. This was the new audience Brecht meant when he wrote that the "new production" was interested not in conquering the old theater and its audience, but in making theater available to a different audience altogether. The new production, "which corresponds to the sociological situation, can be understood only with respect to its contents as well as its form by those who understand the situation."<sup>13</sup>

The second play of this kind, *Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis*, was an immediate success at the Baden-Baden Music Fes-



3. The Baden-Baden *Lehrstück*, 1929.  
Courtesy of the Bertolt Brecht Archive, East Berlin.

tival of 1929, where it was performed together with *The Ocean Flight*. Brecht was amazed and at the same time alarmed by this. It seemed to him that he had provided the tools for the "individual dogmatism and opinionatedness of the literati," since the formal aspects of the *Lehrstück* were accepted immediately. Without the teaching (*Lehre*), Brecht maintained, this form is "not especially exciting."<sup>14</sup> He also disagreed with Paul Hindemith, who had composed the music for this *Lehrstück*. In his instructions for the piano excerpt for the *Lehrstück*, Hindemith had written that since the purpose of the *Lehrstück* was simply to let everyone present participate and not primarily to create certain impressions, the form of the piano music should be adjusted to whatever purpose was at hand. Brecht explained the misunderstanding as a consequence of the purely experimental purpose of the Baden-Baden performance, and he added that this performance was meant to be a one-time "self-understanding."<sup>15</sup>

Invoking the traditional scenario of experimental drama, Brecht wrote, "The value of learning in this kind of musical exercise, when coupled with a contemplative text stimulating to the imagination of the student, would be negligible." And he continued: "Such an artificial and shallow harmony could never, even for a minute, be a counterbalance to the formation of collectives on the broadest and most vital basis which tear the people of our times apart with quite different forces."<sup>16</sup>

There are, however, a number of remarks by Brecht contradicting the importance of *Lehre*. The most notable one in this respect was recorded by Pierre Abraham following an interview with Brecht in 1956. In this interview Brecht explained that the *Lehrstück* should not be scrutinized for "proposition or counterproposition, arguments for or against certain opinions, pleadings or indictments that represent a personal point of view, but only physical exercises meant for the kind of athletes of the mind that good dialecticians should be. Well- or ill-founded judgments are a wholly different affair that bring into play elements that I have not introduced into these debates."<sup>17</sup>

This interview was cited by Reiner Steinweg in his comprehensive compilation of statements by Brecht relating to a theory of the *Lehrstück* that Brecht meant to write but never accomplished. Steinweg's analysis of the extant texts, with particular emphasis on Pierre Abraham's report, leads him to the conclusion that the *Lehre* is to be understood not as "recipes for political action," but as the teaching of dialectics as a method of thinking. Steinweg goes on to characterize the *Lehrstück* as an attempt to furnish a model for the "dialectical simultaneity, the mutual dependence, and the reciprocal positing and counterpositing of theory and practice of theoretical thought and practical behavior."<sup>18</sup>

While this is undeniably correct, it does not distinguish the *Lehrstück* sufficiently from the epic *Schaustück*. Epic theory aims at the unity of theory and practice in an attempt to change the spectators' attitude from a passive to a productive one. The critical ability of the audience is sharpened to recognize the contradictions in bourgeois society and to hold their own experience up to comparison with the way these contradictions are presented. Thus norms of behavior and action and the resulting social relations are no longer taken for

granted but are understood in their historicity. The *Lehrstück*, however, goes beyond the epic *Schaustück* in significant ways. Thematically as well as structurally, the *Lehrstück* bases itself on premises that are radically different from those of epic plays. Apart from *Die Ausnahme und die Regel* (The Exception and the Rule), which was originally planned as a *Schaustück*, none of the *Lehrstück* plays deal with the contradictions in bourgeois society. There is no Puntilla, no Shen Te/Shui Ta to be found in the *Lehrstück*, just as there is no fixed text or actor/audience separation. And most important, at least for the conditions and the space of the play itself, the central contradiction—that between producers and means of production—is completely erased.

The *Lehrstück*, Steinweg notes, does away entirely with the distinction between spectator and performer: "The great pedagogy changes the role of acting completely; it annuls the system actor/audience; it recognizes only actors who are at the same time students."<sup>19</sup> The audience either is completely dissolved as onlookers or is given an active role. Other *Lehrstück* plays demand preparation and exercise from the public before the performance. When there is a homogeneous group of people—for example, a school class or a workers' choir instead of an amorphous group that happens to congregate for a particular performance—it is advisable to drop the term audience altogether. In this case the audience is the producer. The performance/audience gap is entirely dissolved—one is identical with the other. Nevertheless, it is also possible to perform a *Lehrstück* for a traditional audience. Brecht even recommended this at various points when the purpose was to demonstrate the potential of the *Lehrstück*. The audience can still be used in many ways—for example, discussing the text or giving their point of view in a questionnaire, which is what Brecht requested after the first performance of *Die Massnahme* (The Measures Taken) in 1930. However, Brecht claimed that only the participants are involved in the learning process itself. Thus structurally as well as thematically, the *Lehrstück* has left bourgeois society behind.

The *Lehre* itself, learned in practical exercises, is concerned with the acquisition of a number of attitudes—not specific political decisions, to be sure—that are necessary for a strategy in the political



4. *The Measures Taken*, 1930.

Courtesy of the Bertolt Brecht Archive, East Berlin.

struggle for a socialist society. Learning how to think dialectically is only one such attitude. Another rather crucial attitude to be learned is the rejection of bourgeois individualism in favor of the qualities needed for the collectivist state. Unlike the thrust of the intention in the epic play, which aims at a critical, dialectical attitude in the spectators' dealings with bourgeois society, the *Lehrstück* has a definite project: it anticipates a future society. As such it has current political importance as well as utopian qualities. Brecht had plans for a *Lehrstück* that allowed people to work out their own conclusions about such basic emotions and attitudes as sexuality and fear of death, and he envisioned another *Lehrstück* for bureaucrats, in which this sector of the population was to be confronted with the notion of its own superfluity.

One of the direct influences on Brecht about the time of the formulation of the *Lehrstück* experiment was the Latvian actress Asja Lācis, who had organized and directed children's theater in Russia

immediately after the Revolution. Brecht met Asja Lacis in 1923 in Munich, where she subsequently worked with him as assistant director of his play *Leben Eduards des Zweiten von England* (Edward the Second). She gave Brecht exact information about the new Russian theater and about children's theater in particular. Walter Benjamin, whom Lacis introduced to Brecht in 1929, had written a theory of children's theater based on her practical experiments in Soviet Russia. The similarity of this document to Brecht's conception of the *Lehrstück* is unmistakable. It also illuminates the dramatic practice of the *Lehrstück*.

In his "Program for a Proletarian Children's Theater," Walter Benjamin designated the stage as the place where all life can appear in its unlimited fullness and at the same time be framed and circumscribed. Both aspects are necessary for a proletarian children's theater: "The education of a child requires that his total life be affected. Proletarian education requires that the child be educated in a circumscribed area."<sup>20</sup> The enormous importance of theater in the education of children is based on the insight that the stage provides a space that fuses reality and play or, as Brecht put it, a place where learning and entertainment are not separated. Further, the notion of *Lehrstück* is contained in Benjamin's description of proletarian children's theater, particularly with respect to the stress on the process of learning, while considering the performance itself an incidental event:

Here performances are incidental; one could say that they come about as an oversight, almost as a practical joke of the children who one day interrupt their studies in this way, studies which in principle are never completed. The director does not place much value on this interruption. The tensions are what concern him, and these are dissolved in such performances. The tensions, the excitements of collective work are themselves the educators.<sup>21</sup>

The performance, Benjamin argued, "stands opposed to the educational build-up of activity in the sections, as release does to tension."<sup>22</sup> He therefore divided the program into two parts, "the pattern of tension" and "the pattern of release." The educational training that falls under the pattern of tension is structurally a fairly self-directed process in which the children's experience becomes the sole arbiter of their learning selection. There is no direct moral

influence on the part of the director, only the mediated influence through the material, the lessons, the performance. The children themselves take collective responsibility for changes and corrections in the lessons. Asja Lacis expressed this point in her memoirs: "We demonstrated that it was correct for adult leaders to keep themselves entirely in the background. The children believed that they had done everything themselves—and they did it in play. Ideology was not forced upon them, nor was it drilled into them. They appropriated all that corresponded to their experience."<sup>23</sup>

Finally, the "Program" makes mention of the director's place in this learning situation. Observation is preferable to admonitions; in fact, it is the cornerstone of education: "To the observer, however (and this is where education first begins), every action and gesture of the child becomes a signal. These are not so much, as psychologists like to think, signals of the unconscious, of latent powers, repressions, or censors; instead, they proceed out of a world in which the child lives and gives commands."<sup>24</sup>

Thus every gesture of the child is considered a creative impulse, and the final performance is a synthesis of the gestures. Improvisation is a fundamental condition for this performance, for signaling gestures can arise only if there is complete lack of restraint. This latter point is peculiar to the children's theater; it is only mildly echoed in Brecht's *Lehrstück* theory in his encouragement of "personal invention."<sup>25</sup> By contrast, the main emphasis in the *Lehrstück* rests on straining to reach the highest possible awareness of the text and the corresponding critical ability to change it. Another difference between children's theater and the *Lehrstück* is their respective positions on the need for discipline: "The discipline which the bourgeois demands from its children is its stigma. The proletariat disciplines only the maturing proletarians; its ideological class education begins with puberty. Proletarian education proves its superiority by guaranteeing to children the fulfillment of their childhood."<sup>26</sup>

The admitted necessity for theoretical training and discipline after childhood is taken up by the *Lehrstück*. In connection with *The Ocean Flight* and its proper performance, Brecht wrote: "This exercise serves discipline, which is the basis of freedom. . . . such exercises will be useful to the individual only insofar as they are useful to the state, and

they are useful only to a state that intends to serve everybody in equal measure. *The Ocean Flight* therefore has neither aesthetic nor revolutionary value independent of its application."<sup>27</sup>

The *Lehrstück* can be seen in this sense as the correlative for adults of a pedagogy in the theater, which Benjamin had spelled out in collaboration with Asja Lacis in the "Program." The notable difference between the children's theater and the *Lehrstück*, the notion of discipline, at the same time raises questions about the *Lehrstück* as a possible instrument of indoctrination. It is possible, for example, to see structural similarities between *Lehrstück* performances in which the text is read by an announcer onstage and repeated by the audience-performers and Lenin's notion of a vanguard Party leading the masses. Similar observations could be made about the structural division of the *Lehrstück* into document and commentary (which roughly corresponds to a division into dramatic and reflective passages in the play, possibly also related to the "pattern of tension" and "pattern of release" described by Benjamin). According to Steinweg, the function of the commentary may be identical with that of the "ideological secretary" Brecht mentions in the draft of a play closely resembling a *Lehrstück*. The commentary can be read by a narrator or by characters in the document.

In the Baden-Baden *Lehrstück*, for example, the "reading of the commentary text" is performed by one of the members of the choir, simply called "the speaker." Steinweg establishes the relation between this teacher-narrator figure of the commentary and the Keuner figure in Brecht's *Geschichten vom Herrn Keuner*. The commentary introduces the elements of reflection into the document and at the same time is a model for new teacher-student relations. In a note to *Fatzer*, Brecht answers the question about the content of the commentary as follows: "Opinions (theories) which are necessary for the collectivist state and the road to it: the revolution." In the same context Brecht wrote: "The pupils should memorize those parts of the commentary the teachers consider difficult before they understand them."<sup>28</sup> The question is whether this leader/pupil distinction within the *Lehrstück* implies authoritarian rule and the simple transmission of a number of revolutionary slogans.

Steinweg defends the opposite view. Just as he rejects the impor-

tance of *Lehre*, he understands the "opinions" and "theories" to be a dialectical disposition that is appropriate in evaluating specific theories, that is, the ability to test specific teachings in material reality. However, it seems to me that this again is only partially correct. Steinweg bases his conclusion on a reference Brecht makes to the songs of the control chorus in *The Measures Taken* as being theories. Because Steinweg disregards the actual teaching content in the passages referred to, he once again proposes a purely abstract meaning of the concept of "theory." However, Brecht's notion of theory is closely related to Lenin's usage of this term and has to do with general statements about concrete political action and strategy, of which there are a great number in the text of the control chorus of *The Measures Taken*. In the song "Praise of the USSR," the chorus establishes the role of the Soviet Union as the teacher and leader of the "fate of the world";<sup>29</sup> the song "Praise of Illegal Work" represents an exhortation to engage in the class struggle specifically as an underground effort. To the workers of a paper mill, the chorus suggests going out on strike; it praises the subordination of every virtue to the virtue of fighting for communism; it further extols the Party as the vanguard of the masses. In short, the chorus incorporates the theoretical tenets of official Marxism-Leninism, which at that historical point represented the main revolutionary force for informing and assisting the struggle of the Chinese peasants.

At the same time, it should be stressed that the *Lehrstück* cannot be contained by Marxism-Leninism as a kind of dogmatic thesis play. It remains a genuinely utopian project. As far as the general goals of the *Lehrstück* are concerned, these theoretical tenets are not meant to tower over the play as eternal truths. While Brecht departed from and made use of current political theories, he approached them undogmatically. Aware of their faulty and time-bound character, he opened them up for discussion. Brecht expressly pointed out that the commentary may be changed at any time: "It is full of mistakes with respect to our time and its virtues, and it is unusable for other times."<sup>30</sup> In that sense the *Lehre* and the "opinions" or "theories" are a pre-text, a provisional statement summarizing the state of the arts and theory as a starting point for further development.

The structure of the *Lehrstück* is rigorous, as Brecht called it, but

only to make insertions and changes easier, adding or deleting passages. As mentioned above, one of the ways Brecht incorporated a traditional audience in the context of a *Lehrstück* was to hand out questionnaires after the performance so people could write their opinions. One of the questions asked after the performance of *The Measures Taken* reads: "Which of the pedagogical tendencies in *The Measures Taken* do you object to for political reasons?" The answers, according to Brecht's own testimony, were used in rewriting the play.<sup>31</sup>

The process of such rewriting is best documented in Brecht's two versions of the Japanese no play *Taniko*. His original play *Der Jasager* (He Who Says Yes), which follows *Taniko* very closely, met with strong criticism on the part of the actors/audience, a school class in this case. The central "attitude" to be learned in this play is quite similar to the final "lesson" in *The Measures Taken*: the subordination of the individual to the good of the community or the revolutionary cause. Just as the young comrade was "eliminated" in *The Measures Taken* to avoid jeopardizing the Revolution, the young boy who miscalculated his strength and enlisted in a difficult expedition to fetch medicine for his village was abandoned by his comrades and left to die. This decision was made in the interest of the efficient execution of the mission. The schoolchildren's reaction to this ending was negative enough for Brecht to rewrite the entire play with a new title, *Der Neinsager* (He Who Says No).

A comparison of the text shows that the new version is radically different. Brecht abandoned altogether the theme of individual subordination to the general cause; instead, he turned it into a discussion of the need to change "great old traditions." First of all, Brecht eliminated the purely private emotional reason for the boy's departure, the sickness of his own mother. Whereas in the original version the mother is in dire need of the medicine, in *He Who Says No* she is feeling better. Thus the intrusion of individual emotion into the affairs of the community, so fatal for the young comrade in *The Measures Taken*, is canceled in *He Who Says No* by a simple change of circumstances. That Brecht felt the need to change the boy's motive is an interesting illumination of his emphasis on *Lehre*, on the teaching of certain specific "attitudes," as opposed to an interest in a purely

abstract dialectical disposition, as Steinweg seems to think. Yet the specific dialectical "attitude" of renouncing old customs becomes the *Lehre* of *He Who Says No*.

The boy's final refusal to submit to the traditional self-sacrifice is set up in a number of ways. While in the first version there is no explicit reference to the need for the boy's total agreement with anything that might occur during the journey, in *He Who Says No* he is asked: "But would you be in agreement with everything that might happen to you on the journey?" The answer is "Yes." This is the prelude to the theme of "following the great tradition." Whereas in the first version the sick boy is simply abandoned and is thrown into the abyss only after he begs his fellow travelers to do this for him as a favor, since he is afraid to die alone, the second version presents the situation in an entirely different light. He who gets sick and becomes a burden to the party of explorers must, according to the "great tradition," be thrown into the abyss.

The important difference between the two versions lies not in abandonment versus outright killing but in the necessary yet reluctant sacrifice of individual life for the good of the greater community versus the compulsion to follow a "great tradition." In the face of this rather brutal custom, the boy's refusal is an instance of refreshing dialectical practice: "Your learning can wait, by all means. If there is anything to be learned over there, which I hope there is, it could only be that in our situation one must turn back. And as far as the great old custom is concerned, I cannot see any sense in it. I need a great new custom that we should introduce immediately, the custom of thinking anew in every situation."<sup>32</sup>

Brecht, then, was unwilling to scrap the attitude of self-sacrifice in its original context; instead, he shifted the emphasis in the whole play just enough to prepare for the notion that individual sacrifice can also be meaningless, that unreflected acquiescence is the opposite of the desired dialectical attitude.

Brecht considered the *Lehrstück* document—that is, the dramatic part of the play—almost as a scientific experiment, as an object of investigation. With reference to the *Fatzerdokument*, Brecht wrote: "The purpose of a work is not identical to the purpose of its use. The *Fatzerdokument* was mainly made for the learning purposes of the

writer. Should it later become the object of teaching, the students will learn something completely different through this object than does the writer. I, the writer, do not need to finish anything; it is enough that I teach myself. I merely lead the experiment, and it is my method the spectator can investigate."<sup>33</sup> This at first seems to be the kind of exercise in aesthetics Brecht had criticized in Hindemith's explanation of the *Lehrstück*. However, in another passage of the *Fatzerfragment*, Brecht describes the relation between technique and attitude, which in turn sheds light on the connection between imitation, copying, and criticism. In this case, however, the reference is to the criticism of the commentary and its writing style instead of the document, but the conclusions to be drawn apply to both. In that passage, Brecht maintains that the "style of writing determines the choice of thoughts, the attitude of the writer, and the purpose of writing."<sup>34</sup>

The central aspect of the *Lehrstück* is the notion that by imitating and copying, "thinking the thoughts of the commentary," or by taking on its attitudes, the student will recognize "the shortcomings of the commentary in its greatness and smallness, in its arrangement and its taste."<sup>35</sup> Brecht has been accused of behaviorism because of his treatment of attitudes as equal or prior to thought. In fact, Brecht had read Watson and had praised his efforts, but his agreement was not without reservations. Probably the clearest statement of his views on behaviorism is to be found in the text to the *Threepenny Opera* trial. Brecht observed: "Behaviorism is a psychology that was created by the need for commodity production to arrive at methods that could influence the buyer, that is, an active psychology, progressive and revolutionary (cathected). It has its limits in consonance with its capitalist function (the reflexes are biological, only in some Chaplin films are they already social)." In the same passage he wrote, "The great American comics present humans as objects; they could have an audience of reflexologists."<sup>36</sup>

This positive evaluation of the treatment of human beings as objects stands in curious contrast to Brecht's preoccupation with consciousness within the structure of performance and reception. The problem is complex. A simple reduction of Brecht's treatment of the subject to Watsonian behaviorism is erroneous because Brecht ex-

plicitly rejected the central assumption of that type of behaviorism. Brecht's emphasis on the social dimension in the formation of the subject, coupled with his insistence on gesture, attitude, and action, brings him into closer affiliation with the Russian school of reflexology. (Incidentally, the leading figure of this school, Vladimir Bechterev, was the teacher of Asja Lacis, whose influence on Brecht's conception of the *Lehrstück* was, as we have seen, considerable.) In his book *General Principles of Human Reflexology*, Bechterev defined reflexology in the following way: "The aim of reflexology is the strictly objective study, in their entirety, of the correlations of the human being with the environment through the mediation of man's facial expressions, his gestures, the content and form of his speech, his behavior, and, in general, everything by which he manifests himself in the environment."<sup>37</sup>

Bechterev bases his theory on the assumption that consciousness and the nervous system coincide. As a consequence, he sees no difference between mental processes and other activities. He bases this assumption on the physical law of the identity of matter and energy. Bechterev wrote:

Our subjective world, like all our brain processes, is a result of influences coming from outside. . . . The external world . . . is subject to the law of causality or, more accurately, to the law of relations. And when we pursue our analysis to the end, we must acknowledge one fundamental and primary principle of all being, and this we call energy. In the concept of energy we have the idea of various manifestations of movement under the form of great masses. . . . The nervous current and the so-called neuro-psychical, or, objectively speaking, brain processes are also products of this molecular energy.<sup>38</sup>

By maintaining the basic unity of psychic and physiological processes, Bechterev escapes the reduction of one to the other. It represents a dialectic not unlike Karl Korsch's postulation of the "identity of consciousness and reality," which was, as we shall see, crucial to Brecht's understanding of dialectical materialism. Although reflexology places the main stress on the objective study of human behavior—language, facial expressions, and gestures—it does not suppress the importance of abstract thought or individual psychology; it

attempts to anchor these "higher" or "association" reflexes in material reality. Brecht's emphasis on attitude and gesture is equally intent on preserving the unity of mental and physiological processes.

As biosocial entities, humans are capable of development through social interaction, Bechterelev argued, and he insisted that imitation was the basis of social life. What sustains the development of imitation in the biological scale of animal life is that imitation is the result of selection: "Imitation cannot be 'blind' without any correctives on the part of the individual, who, through imitation, notes certain phenomena which are new to him."<sup>39</sup> Imitation is thus understood as the most basic element of learning that includes the possibility of alternative choice. Similarly, Brecht's *Lehrstück* experiments are centrally concerned with the relation between imitation and learning as well as with the element of choice. The participants are called upon to copy the text and the style of acting until criticism has changed it. Further, the idea that through imitation "certain new phenomena" are brought to the attention of the actor/audience reappears again in the "V-Effekt" of epic drama as the element of astonishment or of seeing the familiar with new eyes. Brecht's instructions for the mode of delivery always aim at concentration and maximum alertness (*grosse Anstrengung*). This point represents the juncture of Brecht's preoccupation with the subject in his dramatic theory and his emphasis on behavior: "The *Lehrstück* rests on the expectation that the actors may be socially influenced by executing certain attitudes and repeating certain speech patterns."<sup>40</sup>

Brecht's *Lehrstück* experiments fall into the same period when his radio theory was written. The radical position he holds in those short essays can now be better understood from the vantage point of the intentions of the *Lehrstück*. Brecht's opposition to the political institutions of radio and their unilateral distribution of programs has its correlative in the total abolition of the conventional actor/audience structure in theater. Just as the actors and audience are encouraged to take charge of the text, to criticize and change it, the listeners are called upon to appropriate the apparatuses for their own needs and interests. Brecht's complaint about the eclectic and random selection of programs distributed by the dominant media originates in his demand not only for new topics to be discussed, but also for an

examination of attitudes and new behavior, the promotion of which is precisely the aim of the *Lehrstück*.

The utopian element of the *Lehrstück* is expressed in its startling new structure and in the treatment of new themes on the more tenacious level of patterns of behavior, attitudes, and gestures. Brecht's preoccupation with gesture in epic drama is carried to its most extreme point in the *Lehrstück*. Brecht recognized that content can change but that it can also be corrupted by old forms. Nothing is really gained until this new content has taken shape in everyday attitudes. To get at this juncture of form and content, Brecht sought to reconstruct the formation of behavior, gestures, and attitudes in the learning process through imitation. By beginning at the point where certain persistent patterns were formed, Brecht thought it was possible to unravel the patterns originally learned and substitute new ones, this time consciously chosen. This utopian project is closely linked to the expectation—which existed in Germany before the rise of fascism—of a new society similar to the new Soviet state. Walter Benjamin, in his "Program for a Proletarian Children's Theater," gave expression to this same expectation by designing an alternative way of learning and communicating for children:

In this children's theater lies a power which will overthrow the pseudo-revolutionary behavior of the recent bourgeois theater. For what is truly revolutionary in effect is not the propaganda of ideas that here and there excites actions which cannot be consummated, and which are dismissed at the theater exit in the first sober moment of reflection. What is truly revolutionary in effect is the secret signal of what will come to be, which speaks from the gestures of children.<sup>41</sup>

### 3 *Kuhle Wampe, or Who Owns Realism?*

The sound film *Kuhle Wampe, oder Wem gehört die Welt?* (*Kuhle Wampe, or Who Owns the World?*) was begun in the summer of 1931. Brecht and Ernst Ottwald collaborated on the script, Slatan Dudow directed, and Hanns Eisler wrote the music. Unlike the filming of the *Threepenny Opera*, making *Kuhle Wampe* was a positive experience in collaborative work. A small amount of private money ensured a contract that, as the team was told, for the first time in the history of film granted legal ownership to the artists or, to speak in Walter Benjamin's terms, made the authors the producers. Nevertheless, raising the remaining funds to complete the project presented major obstacles, and it took almost a year to finish the film. Brecht came to the conclusion that organizing the production was far more time-consuming and required much greater effort than the actual artistic work. This state of affairs suggested to him that organizing was an essential part of the artistic process. However startling this conclusion may seem, there is nothing surprising about his acquiescence, given that he had always refused to consider art in a vacuum, disconnected from other social processes.

The success of the artists' team effort was finally due, as Brecht saw it, to the fact that "the work as a whole was political."<sup>1</sup> This evaluation harks back to his discussion in the *Threepenny Opera* trial of the notion that film should be the work of a collective. There Brecht argued that members of a collective cannot work well together unless they have some common goal or focus. Such a focus cannot be

established sufficiently by the desire to provide an evening's entertainment. On the other hand, "if the collective had specific pedagogical intentions, it would instantly become an organic body."<sup>2</sup> It is easy to see how a common political analysis such as the one depicted in *Kuhle Wampe* would be capable of cementing the working relations within a team of artists with talents as diverse as those of the people working on this film.

*Kuhle Wampe* was barely finished when it was censored. On March 31, 1932, the Berlin film censorship bureau (*Filmprüfstelle*) reached a decision that prohibited public performances of the film within the Reich, on the grounds that it jeopardized public security and the vital interests of the state. The decision was appealed by two members of the same committee that had prohibited the film. The hearing for the appeal was scheduled to take place before the next highest body of the censorship bureau (*Film-Oberprüfstelle*), and on April 9, 1932, a decision was reached that corroborated the initial ruling, this time with more specific reference to what the committee considered to be the film's legal infractions. The constitution of this second committee reflected the political atmosphere during the end phase of the Weimar Republic on the eve of the fascist takeover. Dissenting voices were practically absent; the members' political bias ranged from German Nationalist to National Socialist persuasions, and their pro-censorship position was notorious.<sup>3</sup>

The public had followed the filming of *Kuhle Wampe* with great interest and was eager to see how this film dealt with the unemployment situation of workers and small employees during the world economic crisis. The prohibition of the film therefore caused an immense uproar not only in the liberal and leftist newspapers, but also in public protest rallies organized by a number of cultural and political associations. Against this background of protest, *Kuhle Wampe* was submitted once again to the censorship bureau, with a number of passages cut that had been singled out earlier as particularly offensive. On April 21, 1932, the film was finally released for public viewing after the committee had made further cuts. It is reasonable to assume that the quick reversal of the decision to prohibit the film was primarily due not to these cuts but to the wave of protests associated with the censorship.

The first public showing of *Kuhle Wampe* took place in Moscow in mid-May of 1932. According to Bernhard Reich, the reception was less than enthusiastic, since the audience had expected one of the usual revolutionary propaganda films and did not understand Brecht's distanced treatment. The premiere in Berlin on May 30, 1932, on the other hand, was an enormous success; 14,000 spectators saw the film in the first week of its showing. It was held over and distributed to another fifteen movie theaters in the city. In October 1932 *Kuhle Wampe* was shown in Paris and Amsterdam, and in November it opened in London. The United States premiere under the title *Whither Germany?* took place in New York in February 1934, barely a year after *Kuhle Wampe* had been definitely prohibited in Germany, this time by the new National Socialist censorship bureau in March 1933. Brecht had left the country in February of the same year, the beginning of his long exile.

As in the case of the *Threepenny Opera* trial, Brecht followed the controversy with great interest, and at the same time quite dispassionately, to see how the state—that is, the representatives of the Weimar Republic—would react to what he himself understood to be a revolutionary film. Characteristically, he also looked at the problem from a practical point of view, since getting the film past the censorship bureau was naturally his first concern. In the course of the proceedings he learned to appreciate the intelligence of some of the censors, who understood and described his artistic methods much more accurately, Brecht thought, than even his most well-meaning friends among the critics. In one sense Brecht saw the censorship bureau as a test of the efficacy of his work. It should be pointed out in all fairness to Brecht's friendly critics, among whom were Rudolf Arnheim and Herbert Ihering, that they purposely played down the radical impact of the film in order to get it past the censors and thus specifically avoided the question of its effect on the audience. The censors, on the other hand, were mainly interested in audience reception and in this respect were very close to Brecht's own interests, albeit "from the point of view of the police,"<sup>4</sup> as he explained in a brief description of the censorship actions entitled "Small Contribution on the Topic of Realism."

In this short essay Brecht portrayed the censor as an intelligent

man capable of an accurate analysis of the film's realistic method. The censor's criticism of the film centered on the episode of the suicide of an unemployed young man. A few lines from the film's protocol will recall the scene:

The young Bönike—gets up and goes to the window. The camera pans and follows him. With his back to it, he abruptly opens the two right wings of the window so that it is now entirely open. With his hands on the window he looks to the left at his wristwatch. The camera moves in for a close-up of the watch over his shoulder. The young Bönike turns to the left, slowly takes off his watch and carefully places it on a bureau. Then he turns to the window sill again, removes a flower pot and climbs onto the window sill.<sup>5</sup>

The censor's objections had to do with the formal aspects of this sequence, not with the fact of showing a suicide per se. He argued that the film did not portray a real "flesh and blood individual," a "human being" with his own particular "sorrows and joys" and his own "fate."<sup>6</sup> The consequences of this kind of portrayal he understood to be political. Since the film shows the suicide not as the unfortunate outcome of a disadvantaged individual's struggle to survive but as a typical, everyday occurrence, it follows that the makers of this film must feel that society itself is causing young people to commit suicide by not providing jobs for them. He further questioned the acting technique, which he found too demonstrative, almost "mechanical, as if the actor was supposed to show how to peel cucumbers."<sup>7</sup>

The exact date of this short essay is not known. The editors of Brecht's *Collected Works* at Suhrkamp place it safely but vaguely in the 1930s. It seems reasonable to assume that Brecht wrote the piece shortly after the actual censorship procedures, sometime in the spring of 1932. A more speculative approach would place it in the second part of the decade at the time of the expressionism debate, also known as the realism debate. This debate was conducted among Left intellectuals in Eastern and Central Europe in the wake of the Russian Revolution, with the intent of determining a socialist concept of realism.

Unless there actually was a censor as perspicacious as Brecht described him, this short essay could very well have been written in

response to the widening gap in the definitions of realism that characterized this debate. The formulation "flesh and blood individual," in particular, that Brecht had the censor put forth as the "proper" aesthetic procedure while contrasting it with the film's "demonstrative," less than "human interest" story—that is, epic technique—could be read without any problem as part of Brecht's polemic against Georg Lukács, whose definition of realism shows a certain resemblance to the censor's. Whatever the case may be—whether the piece was written as a response to the debate or not—it represents a splendid exercise in epic demonstration of what epic theater is by showing the effect of this technique on those who are interested in the status quo. And if Brecht had intended such an identification of the censor's point of view with that of his adversaries in the realism debate, the essay would be a masterpiece of polemical cunning as well.

*Kuhle Wampe* was, and remained, the only film Brecht had worked on that allowed him to make decisions on every level and at every stage of the production. At the same time, it was an ideal collaborative effort with respect to both aesthetic and political goals. It was Brecht's misfortune that as soon as the conditions were right to allow for such a work to arise they were already on the way out for good. The year 1933 marks a watershed of tremendous proportions in Brecht's artistic career. Aside from the nearly insurmountable problems of writing drama in exile, without a definite audience in sight to connect with, Brecht had to deal with the collapse of a specific historical-political situation that was fundamental to the development of his aesthetic theories. In addition to these changes on the home front, the other source of inspiration and guide for his practice, the revolutionary artists in Soviet Russia, were in the meantime undergoing their own kinds of transformation.

The Hungarian drama and film theoretician Béla Balázs, who taught at the Moscow Film Academy between 1932 and 1946, described the swing in cultural politics in the USSR in an essay entitled "Meyerhold and Stanislavsky." In this essay Balázs was attempting to explain why, in the twentieth year of the existence of the Soviet state, the celebrated revolutionary theater of Meyerhold was suddenly declared antiquated while Stanislavsky, whose quies-

cent naturalism in theater had been well established before the Revolution and who did not change the fundamental principles of his conceptions of theater even afterward, was now raised to the stature of a hero. The reason, Balázs argued, should be sought not in changes undergone by either one of the theater giants, but in changes in the audience. The revolutionary art of the early years was mainly represented and supported by bourgeois intellectuals, and they were the ones, continued Balázs, who made artists like Meyerhold great. Soviet audiences, however, had totally changed in the two decades since the Revolution. A new type of Soviet intelligentsia had emerged: the farmers, workers, and clerks who had since been able to satisfy their hunger for education and who had spent their leisure time in theaters, concerts, and libraries. This new audience had nothing in common with the old type of intellectuals, the specialists in matters of the mind, "who look at real life only contemplatively."<sup>8</sup> Balázs characterized the old audience as having a more jaded taste for chiseled forms (formalism), whereas the new intellectuals were portrayed as the vital heirs of the Revolution who simply did not understand Meyerhold and preferred a bread-and-butter diet of Shakespeare, Goethe, Pushkin, Tolstoi, and, in the case at hand, Stanislavsky. The interesting thing about Balázs's article is that he presented the change in cultural policies in the USSR of the 1930s entirely as a decision reached by the people; the government is shown only as backing up this decision, not as in any way initiating it.

This view of things certainly does not correspond with how Brecht saw the development of Soviet Russia. In his Svendborg "Conversations with Brecht" of 1934 and 1938, Walter Benjamin recorded Brecht's opinions on this matter. Brecht regarded the political development of the Soviet Union with great skepticism and a good amount of ambivalence. Fully aware, on the one hand, that Stalin's regime was "personal government" and a far cry from socialism, he was, on the other hand, willing to credit him with enormous achievements in the consolidation of the Soviet state. Nevertheless, reading Trotsky proved to Brecht that a legitimate doubt as to Stalin's conduct was in order, and in the event that this doubt should become certainty, he thought the regime should be publicly attacked.

Brecht held a similarly ambivalent position regarding Soviet liter-

ary policies. While he advocated nonpolarization of the theoretical debate, he nonetheless launched into a polemical dispute in answer to Lukács's arguments about expressionism and his definition of realism. In his polemic, Brecht attacked not only Lukács's position, but that of the entire coterie of cultural functionaries in the Soviet Union. Benjamin recorded Brecht's view of them as "enemies of production. Production is uncanny to them. It cannot be trusted. It is unpredictable. One never knows what results it will have. And they themselves do not want to produce. They want to act the *Apparatchiks* [functionaries] and have control over others. Each one of their criticisms contains a threat."<sup>9</sup> Yet Brecht did not publish his polemic against Lukács at the time of the realism debate—it was published only posthumously, in 1966.

The expressionism/realism debate was conducted during 1937–38 in the Moscow magazine *Das Wort*, an organ for German exiles. The occasion for this debate, which engaged fifteen writers and literary critics as well as art critics, was an exhibition presented by Hitler in the fall of 1937, featuring expressionist art under the title "Degenerate Art." At the same time, Alfred Kurella (a.k.a. Bernhard Ziegler), one of the leading cultural policymakers in Moscow, published an essay on Gottfried Benn in *Das Wort*, which culminated in the statement that the spirit (of decadence) that had informed expressionism also had informed fascism. This assessment of expressionism by representatives of Soviet socialist realism as degenerate and therefore fascist and by representatives of fascism as degenerate and therefore communist provoked great controversies among Left artists and theoreticians, which culminated in the polemic between Lukács and Brecht and between Lukács and Ernst Bloch.

Bloch opened the debate by pointing out that Kurella's position was not altogether new. He argued that Georg Lukács had come to similar conclusions in his article "Grösse und Verfall des Expressionismus" (Greatness and Decline of Expressionism), which was published in 1934, and he subsequently addressed his criticism to the arguments in that article. Bloch first objected that Lukács's rejection of expressionism was based not on the evaluation of individual works of art, but on critical categories he had taken from prefaces or introductions to anthologies of expressionist writings. Lukács's

preference for works of German classicism from Goethe to Heine and his admiration for Balzac and Tolstoi were all based, as Bloch saw it, on his concept of "unfragmented, objective realism [*unzerfallener, objektiver Realismus*]."<sup>10</sup> Bloch then related these findings to the central issue in the debate, the question of mimesis, the artistic reproduction of reality. He came to the conclusion that Lukács's understanding of mimesis rested on a view of reality as an objective, infinitely mediated, but closed totality. With this observation he also thought he had broached the question of classicism versus modernism, which he felt was at stake in the debate. In his response, however, Lukács rejected that notion. In his article "Es geht um den Realismus" (Realism Is Our Concern) of 1938, Lukács mapped the development of literature largely in terms of a closer versus a more distanced relation to realism and concluded that the crucial issue to be discussed should be not the dichotomy between modernism and realism, but the definition of what constitutes realism.

Within the context of Soviet cultural policies and exiled Left intellectuals, there was no question but that realism was to be considered the appropriate form of literature for the new socialist state. It was understood to rest on a long tradition of aesthetics initiated by Marx and Engels in the nineteenth-century. The question, therefore, was simply posed in terms of the "correct" definition of realism. Lukács remained more closely aligned with Marx's, Engels's, and Lenin's criteria (and was thus also the least historically specific) in this battle of definitions.

In all fairness to Lukács, for he is continually characterized as a nineteenth-century classicist,<sup>11</sup> it should be pointed out that his position as a cultural functionary under Stalin had much to do with his tenacious clinging to nineteenth-century forms. Lukács saw himself as stemming the tide of crude socialist realist instrumentalization of literature and art under Stalin, which confined the function of literature largely to reeducating workers in the spirit of socialism. Lukács's return to a Marxist-Leninist position on realism not only was orthodox, it was also an attempt to salvage a relatively autonomous space for art and literature in a political atmosphere that demanded the subjugation of cultural activities to political ends. Given those circumstances, for Lukács the safest and most effective way to coun-

teract official policies was to invoke orthodox teachings. Lenin's resolution at the 1920 Congress of Proletkult had recognized that Marxism had its world-historical importance as ideology of the revolutionary proletariat not by rejecting but, on the contrary, by preserving and developing the most precious products of the bourgeois era and the past two thousand years of human thought and culture.<sup>12</sup> It is true that in spite of his promises to grant the Revolution the unleashing of all repressed forces, Lenin had increasingly tried to put a stop to the experimental iconoclasm of the proletkult artists, opposing it instead with the model of the preservation of "the beautiful old." Yet in comparison with Stalin's instrumentalization of culture, Lenin's position, which Lukács adopted as his own, afforded some protection against the worst incursions of state censorship. This was the political background to Lukács's theoretical elaboration of realism. Of necessity his views had to clash with the aesthetic precepts of Brecht, who forged his ideas, as Benjamin put it, in a "situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic"<sup>13</sup> and who countered this situation by politicizing art.

In his reply to Bloch, Lukács returned to the latter's discussion of totality as the underlying assumption in his own (Lukács's) theory of reflection. Raising the question whether the "closed cohesiveness" of the capitalist system formed an objective whole in reality, independent from individual consciousness, Lukács had recourse to Marx and his notion that "the relations of production in every society form a totality."<sup>14</sup> Lukács elaborated on this view by pointing out that, while on the surface the various aspects of the economic system seem to be, in fact, fragmented and autonomous (banking, trade, etc.), in times of crisis the interdependence of all of these parts becomes manifest. The relevance of these thoughts to literature was established by Lukács via a theory of reflection. If literature is a special form of reflection of objective reality, Lukács argued, it is important to grasp reality as it is actually constituted and not only as it seems on the surface. This argument hinges on the essence/appearance problem, which, as has been pointed out many times, is no doubt a legacy of idealism, and of German idealism in particular, but also underlies Marx's concept of the "fetishism of commodities." Here as everywhere Lukács remained very close to Marx in his view of the subjects'

response to market mystification: "The fundamental economic categories are in their immediacy always reflected in reverse in the minds of the people."<sup>15</sup>

Contrary to the results of many of the discussions in the past decade or so on Brecht's theories and on his opposition to Lukács, Brecht did not contradict Lukács with respect either to the mimetic intention of art or to the essence/appearance dichotomy within a social whole. Again and again, Brecht stated that the goal of epic theater is to create "pictures of reality" and to find the best way to render reality. And in a discussion about art and "our best painters" he maintained that "they should deliver more than mere reflections. The object before them splits into two parts, one that is present and one that is to be created, a visible one and one that is yet to be made visible; something is there and something is behind it. Here ancient images, the ideas of Plato, which Bacon had secularized in his *Idolas*, are haunting us."<sup>16</sup> Brecht went on to specify some of the things that are "behind" the objects. They are not only forces we have learned to understand through the laws of science, such as electricity and microbiology, but also social processes. The latter, Brecht contended, are no less decisive than physical laws in their ability to influence the course of events.

Brecht did depart from Lukács theoretically, however, when it came to a closer definition of social "totality," which both understood to be the unity of infinitely mediated, relatively autonomous complexes. The difference was one of emphasis. Generally Brecht focused on the aspect of infinite mediation and of the relativity of autonomy, whereas Lukács stressed unity and the autonomy of the various social complexes. Lukács's emphasis derived from the orthodox Marxist view of the distinction between base and superstructure and the ultimate dependence of the latter on the former, whereas Brecht remained close to his teacher Karl Korsch in this respect. Korsch's unorthodox concept of "intellectual action," which is grounded in the manifest reality of ideologies, had its correspondence in Brecht's conception of an operative literature as practice in the form of criticism of ideology and in his concept of dialectical thought as "interventionary thought."<sup>17</sup>

Brecht's relationship with Korsch goes back to the early 1930s.

From November 1932 until February 1933, a circle of Korsch disciples met regularly at Brecht's home for workshops on Marxism. The explicit goal of this group, which among others, included Döblin, Elisabeth Hauptmann, Slatan Dudov, and Hanna Kosterlitz, was to find an alternative to the Marxist orthodoxies from Kautsky to Stalin. Marxist theory in the Stalin era was distinguished by an objectivism that postulated dialectical materialism to be a generally binding worldview by expanding dialectics into the realm of nature. For a theory of knowledge this meant that the subject was in the position of gradually approximating a scientific "truth." For a concept of history it involved the teleological belief in the "necessity" of historical progress. And for aesthetics it led to a reflection theory of artistic reproduction. Furthermore, the concept of production itself was restricted to a quantitative increase in economic production.

In 1923 Korsch had published *Marxism and Philosophy*, his attempt to restore historical materialism—which the Second International had reified into a set of scientific and economic principles without referential value for revolutionary practice—to the status of a theory of social relations, not restricted to a partial aspect of society. While Korsch also claimed historical materialism was a science, he did not see it as a separate, compartmentalized discipline but considered it a critique of the "whole of bourgeois society and so of all its forms of consciousness."<sup>18</sup> Scientific meant to him the particular forms of consciousness that have found their expression in the political economy of bourgeois society. Consequently the critique of political economy was for Korsch theoretically and practically the first priority. However, the priority of tasks of investigation was not to be confused with an economic determination of political and cultural forms. Korsch argued instead for the "coincidence" of reality and consciousness: "Intellectual life should be conceived in union with social and political life, and social being and becoming (in the widest sense, as economics, politics or law) should be studied in union with social consciousness in its many different manifestations, as a real yet also ideal (or ideological) component of the historical process in general."<sup>19</sup> Korsch's critique is leveled against an approach to consciousness that is "totally abstract and basically metaphysical dualism," and that declares consciousness to be a "reflection of the one

really concrete and material developmental process, on which it is completely dependent (even if relatively independent, still dependent in the last instance)."<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, in his "Theses toward a Theory of the Superstructure" Brecht emphasized culture as a self-developing factor and acknowledged the ability of consciousness not only to conceive but also to initiate changes that go beyond economic determination: "The way in which superstructure is created is by anticipation."<sup>21</sup>

In the same year, 1923, that Korsch published his *Marxism and Philosophy*, Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* appeared, a similarly "heretical" departure from orthodoxy in its overestimation of the subjective factor. Unlike Korsch, Lukács later disavowed this earlier position and aligned himself not with Stalinism, but with orthodox Marxism-Leninism. In the aesthetic debate between Brecht and Lukács, these theoretical differences were the background for some very detailed and specific disagreements about matters of form. Lukács's emphasis on "closed" totality and autonomy was applicable not only to the function of culture within society, but also, on a smaller scale, to the function of the work of art vis-à-vis its audience. The autonomy status of art as conceived by Lukács renders any direct influence on social practice impossible. While art can reflect more or less correctly the historical forces at work in the depiction of a contradictory reality, it cannot have any direct impact on reshaping this reality. Its proper reception is contemplative, and the effect it has on the audience is educational in Friedrich von Schiller's sense of a gradual refinement of human instincts and human actions.

In contrast to this, Brecht's validation of consciousness and culture as active agents, coupled with his emphasis on the relative aspect of autonomy—that is, his refusal to see any particular social expression in isolation—empowered art and culture to intervene directly in the social complex. This tendency manifested itself with demonstrative clarity in the *Threepenny Opera* trial when Brecht refused to consider film as separate from other forms of art because of its more obvious involvement with business. The interdependence of all forms of art and the interaction of culture, law, and the economy were in the forefront of Brecht's analysis and continued to be that way in the succeeding years, especially and acutely so when he came into contact

with Hollywood. As much as he stressed the power the economy has over cultural production, he never lost sight of the notion of the interventionary power of culture.

These theoretical points were touched on only briefly in the realism debate, mainly by Lukács and Bloch, concerning the question of totality. For the rest, the discussions revolved around quite concrete and specific suggestions for a literary practice, and around each participant's view of the most fruitful formal avenue—or as Brecht preferred to call it, technique (*Technik*)—in the employment of realism. It was in this area that the differences exploded to their full extent. The choice of a battleground restricted to literature was no coincidence. Walter Benjamin noted in his Svendborg "Conversations with Brecht" of 1934: "The publications of Lukács, Kurella and others cause Brecht a lot of trouble. He thinks, however, that one should not contradict them in the field of theory."<sup>22</sup> A united front in matters of theory obviously seemed more important to Brecht in those difficult years of struggle against fascism than sorting out those dividing differences. In his polemic against Lukács, Brecht subsequently remained almost entirely within the area of literary practice. Within that field, however, he opposed nearly every one of Lukács's prescriptions.

A short synopsis of Lukács's points will bring Brecht's writings on realism into focus. In keeping with his emphasis on the unity of the social complex, Lukács demanded that the realistic work of art possess an "artistically created . . . surface . . . which shows the connection between essence and appearance in the segment of life portrayed."<sup>23</sup> And along the same lines, Lukács contended that every work of art is a self-contained context whose goal is "to provide a picture of reality in which the contradiction between appearance and reality, the particular and the general, is resolved in such a way that the two converge into a spontaneous integrity in the direct impression of the work of art."<sup>24</sup> Comparing Thomas Mann and James Joyce, Lukács rejected the latter's montage and interior monologue technique because, as he saw it, it identifies the subjective and distorted view of the world of the individual characters with reality itself. Mann's characters, by contrast, are shown beyond their subjective predicament to be only part of a larger complex of reality. They,

like the characters of all the great realists, are types, in whose lives the dynamics and contradictions of a particular social era are rendered visible. Only through plot can the dialectic of human existence and consciousness be expressed, and only through the actions of the characters can the contrast between what they objectively are and the way they imagine themselves be expressed in a process the reader can experience.

The interpolation of theses or comments by the author could, of course, establish these distinctions as well, but Lukács did not consider that an artistic solution. His emphasis was on harmony, integration, and organicity throughout. Thus, instead of abstractly rendering thoughts and commentaries, the great realists, according to Lukács, pursue the vital contradictions of life in their manifold and rich entanglements and portray them in the immediacy of the artistic surface (*Oberfläche*). Since Lukács drew his examples of formal criteria mainly from nineteenth-century realist writers, especially Balzac and Tolstoy, it is not surprising that he also favored the individualization of characters, claiming that all great works of literature have always had such individuals. Individualization in Lukács's terms had nothing to do, however, with psychologically motivated characters depicted as self-contained individual entities; rather, Lukács envisioned character individualization through intellectual physiognomy. By this he meant that the character's total personality is synthesized and exemplified through his or her mode of thinking.

Brecht's most immediate response to the debate was to redefine the terms of the discussion. The realism/formalism dichotomy did not seem to him a valid approach to the problem. "Realistic writing is not a matter of form. All aspects that are in the way of getting to the bottom of social causality must go, all formal aspects that help discover it must be used."<sup>25</sup> This eminently practical attitude also rendered the definition of formalism less than formidable. Brecht simply suggested broadening the concept "formalism" beyond its aesthetic context in order to see what it means in everyday life. If a task is only "formally" completed, it is not really completed; if someone is "formally" right, he is not really in the right—and so on. Returning to literature, Brecht argued that, understood in this way, it becomes quite clear that formalism itself is not necessarily a matter

of form. It is quite possible to detect a great deal of formalism in works that are realistic in form. From this vantage point, it is but a short step to point to the formalistic aspect of the realism debate itself. Brecht insisted that anyone who tied realism to one fixed set of forms (especially when defined as narrowly as those set out by Lukács) was himself a formalist.

For Brecht, realism cannot be subtracted from past, established works; it must be sovereign with regard to all conventions. Whether a particular technique is realistic, Brecht thought, can be determined only in each concrete instance. While the techniques of the nineteenth-century realist novels are very useful in coping with the rich and differentiated psychology of bourgeois individuals, they do not lend themselves to the modes of production a socialist writer is likely to draw on.

Next to partisanship and ideological criticism, the task of realism, as Brecht saw it in the most general terms, is to disclose the causal nexus of social complexes. Further, he specified that realism should emphasize the moment of development; it should be concrete but also allow for abstraction. The latter point is particularly important, since it makes possible a "practicable" (*praktikabel*) definition of realism. This was at the heart of Brecht's concern, since it is directly related to the interventionary (*eingreifend*) nature of the work of art. "Practicable" images of reality are those that open reality up to be "grasped"—in the sense both of being understood and of being seized—by the viewing subject. Along the same lines, Brecht also talks about *Beherrschung der Wirklichkeit* ("control over reality"), again with a double meaning for the word *beherrschen* as implying both knowing and controlling.

Some of these formulations may cause discomfort if read out of context. To clear Brecht from the odium of what Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer describe as the project of Enlightenment (The human mind, which overcomes superstition, is to hold sway over a disenchanted nature)<sup>26</sup> may be very difficult—the more so since Brecht frequently and enthusiastically referred to Bacon, the great Enlightenment philosopher whom Adorno and Horkheimer identified as the originator of the power and knowledge equation. Suffice it to point out that Brecht was able to glean from Bacon's writings a

number of maxims, such as "natura non nisi parendo vincitur" ("nature can be controlled only by those who obey her"),<sup>27</sup> which are certainly more congenial to dialectical thinking than the idea that "what men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order to wholly dominate it and other men."<sup>28</sup>

Similarly vulnerable to misunderstanding is Brecht's concept of production and productivity. Many critics of Brecht have taken his insistence on productivity as a sign of his admiration for the productivist ethos of Soviet Russia, a policy of increased economic and technological production, which was initiated by Lenin and intensified by Stalin. While it is true that "Brecht's focus on production (like Walter Benjamin's) became the guiding principle for an aesthetic which linked the formation of cultural forms with technological and industrial work,"<sup>29</sup> it is also true, and of utmost importance to see, that this focus on production was a critical one, one that has very little to do with the Soviet productivist ethos. What characterizes the new concept of productivity in all areas of social life is the dimension of criticism. In his "Short Organon for Theater," Brecht asked: "What is a productive attitude vis-à-vis society, that we, children of a scientific age, would enjoy in our theater? . . . the attitude is a critical one. With respect to the river, it consists of the regulation of the river . . . with respect to society, it consists of the revolution of society."<sup>30</sup>

The scope of this concept reaches from the immediate constellation of the new drama and its specific stage-audience relationship to the definition of socialism as "great production." In this connection, Brecht wrote: "Production must naturally be taken in its broadest sense, and the struggle is directed at the liberation of the productivity of all people from all bonds."<sup>31</sup> Brecht considered economic production as only one kind within a wider framework of productivity, which also includes the production of the agencies of socialization—that is, language, the development of the structure of drives, and the production of experience. Brecht even derived the ethical principles of our time from productivity taken in this broad sense and considered the highest value to be "the development of all human-kind."<sup>32</sup>

As we have seen, one of the lessons Brecht drew from the *Three-*

*penny Opera* trial was the realization of the pervasiveness of commodity production and of the fact that the law was on the side of this production: "Law, freedom, character, have all become functions of production, i.e., variable entities."<sup>33</sup> The alternative to this undifferentiated, leveling pervasiveness of commodity production, which is paralleled in drama by the narrowing effect of clichés and stereotypes and in the theater by the totally subsuming performance and its concomitant passive reception, is a concept of production equally pervasive but not subsuming.

In terms of Brecht's position in the realism debate, this new notion of productivity is crucial. Brecht's break with the traditional notion of form, considering form an instrument instead, a technical means for opening up the material to critical insight, was certainly informed by it. For most fundamentally and at the same time most simply, productivity in Brecht's sense describes an attitude that sees the world as changeable and susceptible to criticism. This attitude is also basic to Brecht's project of refunctionalization. The traditional notion of form had already become problematic in Hegel's *Asthetik*. Hegel thought that art had once been able to represent the substantial totality of the heroic world epoch in a unity of subject and object, but that thought and reflection had outstripped the fine arts. The development of European art in the second half of the nineteenth century went in the direction of partiality, criticism, and self-consciousness. Brecht's reaction to attempts by Marxists such as Lukács to salvage traditional aesthetics was to insist on "not making connections with the good old ideas but with the bad new ones."<sup>34</sup> While Brecht never prescribed a fixed compendium of forms to go under the heading "realism," he did work out a number of techniques (in collaboration with his theatrical staff) that he believed to be helpful in the realistic assessment of his time. It goes without saying that the techniques themselves were specific to this time.

Productivity as a specific dramatic principle, capable of critical portrayal, must be located in the various distancing techniques Brecht called *Verfremdungseffekt*, the *V-Effekt*. Brecht used the term "epic theater" loosely and unprogrammatically as early as 1926. The epic style was developed in a series of experiments at the Schiffbauerdamm Theater in Berlin that drew not only on professional theater,

but on amateur groups, schools, and workers' choirs as well. Its governing technique, the *V-Effekt*, was mentioned only about ten years later by Brecht and has been the object of considerable debate as to its origin. Among others, Bacon, Nietzsche, Hegel, and Marx as well as the Russian formalists (particularly Sklovskij and his *ostranenije*) have been variously suggested as forerunners. Since, however, the *V-Effekt* came to designate epic techniques that had developed over more than a decade and had drawn from traditions as diverse as the comic acting of Karl Valentin and the gestural simplicity of oriental theater, the attempt to find a single source for the term seems futile.

Before 1937, Brecht used the term *Entfremdung* instead of *Verfremdung*, a usage that corresponds to the young Hegel's use of the same term—namely, negation, the second step in the dialectical movement.<sup>35</sup> Later, even after Brecht had abandoned Hegel's term, he still attempted to relate his dialectics and *Verfremdung* when he wrote: *Verfremdung* as understanding (understanding—non-understanding—understanding) negation of the negation."<sup>36</sup> In this connection Ernst Bloch correctly observed that "the '*Verfremdungseffekt*' ('distancing effect') is brought about in the form of a distanciation, the resituating of an event or character out of the customary circumstances, in order to let it be considered less self-evident. Whereupon, hopefully, the scales will fall from the eyes *exempla docent*—however, only indirectly. Last but not least, it should call attention to the familiar alienation ('*Entfremdung*')."<sup>37</sup> The nexus productivity, criticism, and negation as *Verfremdungseffekt*, which relates concrete technique to aesthetic-philosophic principles and ultimately to practical-experimental criteria, describes Brecht's view of reality and of social totality as an open-ended process.

Brecht's dissatisfaction with the theater and the audience as he found it expressed itself first, as already mentioned, in his comparison of theater with sports events. It was precisely the expertise of the sports audience—the actively interested attitude of people watching a boxing match, for example—that seemed ideal to Brecht. Instead, the average spectator he found in the theater was a customer, exhausted from a day of taxing work, wishing to buy a few hours of refuge from an intolerable reality. Brecht realized, of course, that the

theater-audience relationship was reciprocal. On the one hand, even intelligent spectators deposited their wits in the checkroom along with their coats, since their expectations of what awaited them in the theater were determined by what they had seen there before; on the other hand, theater oriented itself by the taste of the audience. "The increasing influence of the buyer on the 'how' of the product can no longer be doubted, and it has a reactionary effect."<sup>38</sup> Brecht believed that in their interactions performance and audience, with the expectations they place on each other, are inseparable and must be dealt with as a unity. In times of the audience's willing renunciation of critical participation, the interdependence of audience and performance acts as a vicious circle, one reinforcing the other to disfranchise the spectator completely. The dilemma Brecht faced in his attempts to change the position of the audience is similar to the situation he encountered in his sociological experiment. The public had given up its claims to the right to know, to be heard, and to control its own public institutions: "We had to invest the public with a claim which it had given up long ago, but for which it was still responsible."<sup>39</sup>

For Brecht, the "culinary" character of bourgeois art was fundamentally related to its principles of formal organization, which emphasize closure and empathy (*Einfühlung*). These forms, he thought, facilitate identification with individual life histories that function to transform a heterogeneous audience with divergent social interests into a homogeneous group. The binding force behind this homogeneity is the belief in the eternal sameness of human experience.

Brecht argued that part of the reason empathy obstructs causal analysis is that the traditional perspective of the individual hero with whom the spectator identifies is inadequate in presenting and demonstrating the complex causality of social relations. In his dispute with Lukács, Brecht was particularly opposed to the insistence on the individual character as representative of social causality. Lukács's formulation that called for a convergence of the particular (individual) and the general (social causality) was no longer valid in our time. Brecht thought that the perspective of the individual hero was too narrow and limited to incorporate the complexity of modern social relations. He replaced the idea of the typical, which for Lukács was just this unity of universal and individual, with the notion of the

gestus, which focuses on the social situation itself—on the typical relations among several people.

The role of empathy in the viewing process was a matter of great concern for Brecht in his dramatic practice. Three entries in his *Arbeitsjournal* dating from January 1941 testify to his insistent inquiry into the effect of empathy on reception. Brecht began the discussion of the role of empathy and identification in theater by recognizing its importance for two phases of the acting process: first, for establishing and, second, for the actual creation of the character to be represented. This identification of actors with their parts must, however, remain a phase and must be superseded by the distinction between actor and role in the final performance. What initially seemed most important for Brecht, however, was that this oscillation between identification and distancing should not spill over to the audience: "It is important that each case of identification occurs without hypnosis, i.e., it should not cause the spectator to identify."<sup>40</sup>

The entry three days later concerning non-Aristotelian theater records Brecht's consultation with the actors Gried and Weigel on the possibility of separating the instant of identification on the level of reception. The conclusion was negative. In response, Brecht pointed to the comic actor who makes the audience laugh with his role identifications as an example for the successful separation of the two levels. (Comedy, of course, remains one of the models of epic acting.) At this point, however, Brecht was undecided about the practicability of omitting altogether identification on the part of the spectator. He had recourse to practice and to his proposed goals of productivity and refunctionalization: "It is necessary to find exercises and ways of rehearsing which produce the desired effects. These are relatively easy to check. One simply has to ask: Is the specific moment of reality sufficiently exposed to causal analysis?"<sup>41</sup> Here Brecht proved once again to be devoid of any formalistic tendency. Even the most shunned effect is considered in the light of each specific, concrete case.

In his later theoretical writings Brecht showed a similarly flexible attitude toward Aristotelian catharsis, which he himself had once set up as the antipode of epic theater. In the *Messingkauf Dialogues*, for

example, he mentioned Aristotle's description of catharsis in tragedy as producing the emotions of pity and fear. Far from rejecting these emotions as such, Brecht acknowledged their value after providing a new context for them that excluded the notion of fate. Fear as fear of people, and pity as pity for people, are useful notions, Brecht wrote, for a theater that considers the fate of mankind to be men and women themselves. It is *not* the elimination of emotional participation in the performance that Brecht was interested in. What he objected to was the reduction of an infinite variety of emotional as well as intellectual responses to one single mode of reception, namely, empathy—the simple act of identification with the hero in the performance. This act signals the dissolution of the actively participating audience, which instead is subsumed as a passive part of the performance.

It is advisable to think of Wagnerian opera and Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in conjunction with Aristotelian drama in order to realize more fully what Brecht was opposed to: "As long as 'total art' [*Gesamtkunstwerk*] means that the totality is a hodge-podge, that is, as long as the arts are to be melted together, all of the individual elements are equally degraded insofar as each one serves only as the key for the other. The melting process also draws in the spectator, who is being melted down as well and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art."<sup>42</sup>

It was the uniformity and the abstractness of empathic identification—that is, its deletion of the specific interests of the audience—that Brecht argued against. Brecht counters the impoverishment resulting from empathy by invoking the entire spectrum of human rational and emotional capabilities in the reception of art, which represents at the same time Brecht's dialectical solution to his impasse on the possibility of eliminating identification on the part of the spectator:

We know that the whole scale from sobriety to intoxication and the tension between the two is present in the appreciation of art. Any effort to present scenes and characters so that they can be bloodlessly noted and weighed up would be quite unnecessary and even harmful for our purposes. All the premonitions, expectations, sympathies we bring to our real-life dealings with people should be aroused here, too. The audience shouldn't see characters that are simple people who do their own particular deed, that is, prepare

their own entries, but human beings—shifting, raw material, unformed and undefined—that can surprise them. It is only when confronted by such characters that they will practice true thinking; that is to say, thinking that is conditioned by self-interest and introduced and accompanied by feelings, a kind of thinking that displays every stage of awareness, clarity, and effectiveness.<sup>43</sup>

The abstraction from actual interests of groups or individuals produces an apparent homogeneity of the audience, which is in reality nothing but a conglomeration of isolated, atomized individuals whose needs for gratification are being exploited in the stereotyped characterizations of life.

The dramaturgical manipulation of the traditional drama with its element of suspense in the building of the plot, with its identification with the point of view of the individual hero, if unusable for the new drama: "This manner of subordinating everything to one idea, this obsession with coercing the spectator into a one-dimensional dynamic where he is prevented from looking left or right, up or down, must be rejected from the point of view of the new drama."<sup>44</sup> The new drama aims at releasing the audience's productivity not through dramaturgical manipulation but by allowing the spectators to make their own discoveries and experiences and to come to their own conclusions: "It seems important for a materialistic representation to let the consciousness of the persons be determined by social being itself and not to manipulate it dramaturgically."<sup>45</sup> The complexity of viewing is the other side of Brecht's rejection of the manipulation implicit in empathy. Viewers must be left free to compare the material presented with their own experience in real-life situations. The audience becomes a coproducer by "creating in its own mind other ways of behavior and situations, and, following the events, holding them up to comparison with those presented by the theater. Thus the audience itself becomes a storyteller."<sup>46</sup>

Empathy is replaced by the new principle of *Verfremdung*, which, to the degree to which empathy had been central in old drama, holds the key to the "new production." The effect of this distancing is to historicize the events onstage, to remove the aura of inevitability, fate, or even just the normality, the matter-of-factness, from the relations portrayed. It produces, as Brecht said, astonishment in the

spectator and stimulates speculation as to the necessity of the course of action. For Brecht, the new attitude of the audience is that of a scientist vis-à-vis nature. In short, society has become the object of change; it is the arena for any number of experiments. By defining the new attitude of the audience as a critical one, Brecht identified the spectator with the subject of history and his theater as the training ground for the subject's conscious rejection and overcoming of a contradictory reality. Hence the main thrust of the Brechtian dialectic is not confined to the portrayal of a contradictory social totality. For Brecht this was only the point of departure for a dialectic between the performance, which produces pictures of life, and an audience that learns how to deal with it.

*Kuhle Wampe* met all these criteria. The "fate" of young Bönike absorbs no one, yet an audience interested in the question of unemployment will critically review the "pictures of reality" of the Weimar Republic, the unemployment relief system, the eviction laws, the increase in unemployment figures, to be able to "grasp" the fabric of that society. Realism in *Kuhle Wampe* is not the result of a human-interest story, yet human interest in the story of young Bönike and his family leads the audience to appraise and evaluate the conditions of their reality and to ask questions about it even without the aid of the second part of the film, which shows the organized communist response to this economic situation. Although empathy is forestalled, interest is not. What had most riled the censor of the film was its refusal to identify with the point of view of one character, thus preventing the audience from adopting the perspective of one fateful, fated human life. At the same time, this refusal to place the individual human being at the center of events provoked anxious waves of controversy among the more or less orthodox theoreticians of socialist or critical realism, lest realism be confused with modernist practice and its concomitant techniques such as montage and self-conscious devices of all sorts. While Brecht generally shunned labels like "realism" or "modernism," it is safe to say that the definition of either one became far more complex after Brecht, who claimed to be a realist and yet more often than not adhered to modernist practice.

## 4 Montage in Theatre and Film

The inorganic work of art, the object constructed out of fragments, has its own history. In an article "On Brecht and Eisenstein," Rainer Friedrich pointed out that Brecht often used the term "montage" to contrast modern with traditional art. The traditional Aristotelian concept of art, argued Friedrich, centers on the concept of mimesis as *natura naturans*, the productive process of nature. The rise of modern subjectivity in the Renaissance, Friedrich continued, did not do away with the concept of mimesis, but instead merely altered it. The artist was now considered *ut alter deus*, another god. The implication was that the artist no longer imitated nature but was the creator of another nature, the realm of art. The latter was subsequently considered a higher form of reality. Insofar as the aesthetic realm still presented itself as natural and the organic work of art was the norm, the moment of construction first entered on the basis of negating its own artificiality, its constructedness: "For the practical principle of the organic work of art is *ars est celare artem*, art as the concealment of art."<sup>1</sup>

The hallmark of the modern work of art, on the other hand, is divesting itself of the pretense of being nature and freely displaying itself as artifact. In that sense Friedrich contended that montage is the principle of the modern work of art. The emphasis montage places on the separateness of elements and on heterogeneity prevents the formation of an organic unity. In film, as Sergei Eisenstein has pointed out, it is the mechanical process itself that requires the cutting and juxtaposition of shots.

Although montage seems most suited to film, it actually was developed first as an artistic principle in other art forms. The paintings, poetry, and drama of dadaism, surrealism, and Russian futurism laid the groundwork for Eisenstein's formulations of film montage. Other critics see the first emergence of montage in connection with cubism, described by Peter Bürger as "that movement in modern painting which most consciously destroyed the representational system that had prevailed since the Renaissance."<sup>2</sup> And Roland Barthes, in an essay entitled "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," pursued the beginnings of montage even further to include the French Enlightenment dramatist and theoretician. Barthes based his comparison of the three authors on their common concern with constructing representations, the cutting out (*découpage*) of a theatrical scene or a pictorial tableau. For Diderot the tableau implied a selection process, an intellectual act that presupposes the unity of the subject of that act. Barthes considered the epic scene in Brecht and the shot in Eisenstein to be related to the tableau in Diderot's sense. They construct a meaning and, at the same time, the "production of that meaning,"<sup>3</sup> highlighting the fact of its constructedness. Similarly, in his book *The Film Sense* Eisenstein pointed out what he considered the real strength of montage: "The spectator not only sees the represented elements of the finished work, but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image just as it was experienced by the author." He compared this method with Marx's definition of genuine investigation: "Not only the result, but the road to it also, is a part of the truth. The investigation of truth must itself be true, true investigation is unfolded truth, the disjoined members of which unite in the result."<sup>4</sup> Eisenstein defended the principle of montage while at the same time deploring its abuses. The error lay, he commented, "in placing the main emphasis on the possibilities of juxtaposition, while less attention seemed to be paid to the problem of analyzing the material that was juxtaposed." In defending montage, Eisenstein maintained that it continues to be true "that the juxtaposition of two separate shots by splicing them together resembles not so much a simple sum of one shot plus another shot—as it does a creation."<sup>5</sup> The problem was to establish a balance between formal and substantive concerns. Eisenstein solved it by

relating each montage segment as a particular representation to the general theme. His subsequent definition of montage is: "Representation A and representation B must be so selected from all the possible features within the theme that is being developed, must be so sought for, that their juxtaposition—that is, the juxtaposition of those very elements and not of alternative ones—shall evoke in the perception and feelings of the spectator the most complete image of the theme itself."<sup>6</sup>

By image Eisenstein understood a condensation of a chain of representations. The aggregate of associations that turns, for example, the geometric figure of a clockface reading 5:00 P.M. into an image of that time in the afternoon is reduced to a minimum, subject to the laws of economy of psychic energy. Thus only the beginning and the end of the process are perceived. Although the image enters the consciousness and feelings as representative of the whole chain of associations, every detail of this chain is nevertheless preserved in the memory and the sensations. There are then two essential stages in the process of remembering: Eisenstein distinguished the act of assembling an image from the finished product of this act and its significance for the memory. The practice of real-life remembering emphasizes the finished product and pays as little attention as possible to the assembly stage. The work of art, on the contrary, concentrates on the process of establishing images. Its method, Eisenstein argued, is analogous to image creation in life itself—the construction of a chain of representations.

The relation between the individual segment of a montage and the total effect is understood differently by Eisenstein and Barthes. Eisenstein's stress on the relation of each individual shot to the general theme closely follows Marx's idea of the various members united in the result.<sup>7</sup> Barthes, on the other hand, considered each tableau in relation to the whole play autonomous and meaningful in itself, not merely a step in the narrative flow. He found these autonomous instants akin to Lessing's description of the pregnant moment in his *Laokoon*. As such they embody an instant of the flow of time itself—past, present, and future—petrified, as it were, in one perfect representation. In Brecht, Barthes concluded, it is the social *gestus* that takes up the idea of the pregnant moment.

To determine the relation between the individual segment of a montage and the total effect in Brecht's dramas, we must look not only at the notion of the *gestus* but at its complement, the fable, as well. Emphasis on the fable, which for Brecht stands for the total effect of the play, seems to counter claims for the autonomy of the segment. The fable, which Brecht called the heart of the play, corresponds structurally to his view of social reality: it develops in contradictions. Its parts are first clearly separated from each other, then confronted in such a way that contradictions result, which themselves lead to another set of events. This not only provides the space for the audience's critical comparisons, but reflects at the same time the dialectic between the individual event and its connection to and elucidation by the context of its sociopolitical determinations. Thus it seems that, at least in this respect, Brecht is close to Eisenstein's view of the relatedness of each fragment to the total effect.

In his "Short Organum for the Theater" Brecht pointed out that, for the actor, understanding the character depends on understanding the fable: "Only from the vantage point of [the fable], the delimited total event, is it possible to arrive at a final character . . . the fable in its totality gives [the actor] the opportunity to put the contradictions into context; for the fable as a limited event has a certain meaning, it satisfies only certain interests out of many possible ones."<sup>8</sup> What is interesting about this conception of the fable as a limited event is its relation to the negative movement in the dialectic, in the sense that determination, selection—this and not that—is negation. As opposed to an endlessly proliferating chain of meanings emanating from each *gestus*, the fable delimits the field of events and enables the actor in this way to create the appropriate character.

In his assessment of the *gestus* and the fable in Brecht, Walter Benjamin was closer to Barthes's position on the relation between autonomous segment and the total effect. He radically emphasized separate elements when he denied the importance of the fable on the dialectical impact produced by epic theater. He contended that "this dialectic is not dependent on a scenic sequence in time, but manifests itself already in the gestic elements on which all time sequences are based." Benjamin further described how the *gestus* is immanently dialectical insofar as, in an instant, it clarifies a situation through

movements, actions, or words: "Just as for Hegel time is not the mother of dialectics, but only the medium in which the latter represents itself, so the contradictory course of expressions and attitudes is not the mother of dialectics in epic theater, but the *gestus* itself."<sup>9</sup>

Benjamin's forcefulness warrants another look at the highly complex notion of *gestus* in Brecht's writing. Two distinct usages emerge upon close inspection; one addresses the social attitudes underlying any aspect of the performance, and the other refers to an actual unit of the performance that is informed by such attitudes. When Brecht defines the *gestus* as "the area of attitudes which characters have in relation to each other" and says that "the actors' posture, tone of voice, and facial expressions are all determined by a social *gestus*,"<sup>10</sup> it is the underlying attitude that seems to be the dominant notion. On the other hand, in his discussion on What is a social *gestus*? Brecht wrote: "Not every *gestus* is a social *gestus*. The posture of warding off [*Abwehrhaltung*] a fly is in itself not yet a social *gestus*; warding off a dog can be one if it expresses the struggle of a poorly clad person against watchdogs."<sup>11</sup> Here Brecht referred to *gestus* as a unit of performance. This double perspective is perfectly captured in the word *Haltung*, which means both a mental position or attitude and a physical posture or bearing. At times Brecht was able to accommodate both aspects in his definition of *gestus*, as in his description of the *gestus* as the "whole complex of individual gestures [*Gesten*] and statements of the most varied kind, which underlies the strange/estranged [*absonderbar*] proceedings between people and which relates to the full spectrum of attitudes of everyone involved."<sup>12</sup> In its capacity as underlying attitude or modus of social contact, the *gestus* informs every aspect of epic theater, from acting to music to decor, as well as the use of language.

In *Me-ti: Buch der Wendungen* (Me-ti: Book of Changes), Brecht characterizes his use of language as "stylized and natural" at the same time. It is the consequence of capturing in language the social *gestus*, the attitudes people have toward each other. In Brecht's language social attitudes always remain visible: "This language he called gestural language, because it was only an expression for the *gestus* of

people." Thus language is for Brecht "a tool for action," while at the same time this tool is socially determined and formed and exists before its use by the individual or, as Brecht puts it in *Me-ti*, "Even if someone speaks to himself he speaks with others."<sup>13</sup>

Brecht's belief in the social nature of individuals is crucial to his notion of the *gestus*. In contrast to the "creation of a universe" in the bourgeois novel, which to Brecht is usually nothing but the more or less coherent view of the world of its author, the *gestus* stands for the "inductive" method of representation, which is, as Brecht saw it, most congenial to and characteristic of cinema: "Its great, inductive method, which it [cinema] at least makes possible, can have invaluable significance for the novel."<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere he wrote: "The external perspective is specific to film and makes it important. For film the principles of non-Aristotelian drama (a drama not based on empathy and mimesis) are acceptable without question." Brecht saw part of the influence of film on drama as a process of countering ideology: "It [film] destroys large sectors of ideology, when it concentrates only on 'external' action, dissolves everything to processes, renounces the hero as medium and the human being as the measure of all things, it shatters the introspective psychology of the bourgeois novel."<sup>15</sup>

And with respect to character depiction, Brecht wrote: "The treatment of character in the cinema is interesting for drama. It [film] simply uses ready-made types for the personification of its characters; they are put into action according to function only and appear in certain situations where they can take on certain attitudes. Any motivation based on character is omitted, the inner life of the characters is never the main cause and rarely the main result of the action, the characters are seen from the outside."<sup>16</sup> Characterization from the outside is part of the basic principle of figuration for Brecht and does not imply stereotyping. Brecht's explicit descriptions of character and role creation are important in understanding his position:

The actor builds the character by going from sentence to sentence as if to make sure about this character, about the sentences which it is supposed to speak, to listen to, or receive, collecting from scene to scene confirmations and contradictions. . . . This step-by-step procedure is better than a deductive, derivative one, which, departing from a total conception which was

formed hastily, probably after only one superficial reading of the role, extracts the instances and occasions, post festum so to speak, from the literature and the 'material' in question.<sup>17</sup>

The connection between reception and representation becomes explicit in Brecht's concern that the audience not be presented with a ready-made, a priori figure. Coproduction happens only when production is visible. Similar to the process of establishing the image as defined by Eisenstein, the process of creation is stressed rather than the final product.

How then can one explain Brecht's enthusiasm for what he considered the "ready-made" types used by the film industry? It seems that it is part of his iconoclastic position, which insists on cleaning the slate before readmitting any of the traditional concepts of aesthetics, and even then using them only in an entirely new context. The "stereotype" of the Hollywood film functions as a contradiction to the "great individual" of bourgeois art, as an eraser to arrive at point zero, from which a new concept of characterization can be built. Brecht's use of masks in the theater has a similar purpose—it is not a matter of going back to the origins of drama, but one of using techniques other than those valued by the "old drama," which depicts the movements of the characters' psyche by means of facial mimicry.

By the time he wrote the *Messingkauf Dialogues*, Brecht was trying to reconcile these divergent positions. He wrote with reference to the representation of relations among people that it was the intention of his drama to make average summary statements, for how else could one predict the movement of great masses of people except by finding the laws governing these relations? Nevertheless, Brecht argued that it is necessary to call attention to the average summary character of our statements by "stressing the fact that we are dealing with an individual case in our drama and by emphasizing again and again its deviations from the law." And in addition, he wrote in the same piece, "You can judge the extent of a law by the extent of its limits. You shouldn't seek examples of it in overly accommodating and obliging types, but preferably in those who (within reason) deviate. . . . Laws only provide you with extremely broad averages, summaries, guides."<sup>18</sup>

In a short essay entitled "The Singularity of the Character," Brecht raised the question of character diversity apart from the obvious social and epochal determinations necessary to create a historically specific type. Differences must be shown that pertain to the living, irreplaceable individual who is not identical with other people in the same situation: "No doubt this ego must be portrayed. . . . The character's depiction as a member of a class and an epoch is impossible without his portrayal as a specific individual inside his class and epoch."<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, Brecht rejected abstract notions of difference. In "Difference for the Sake of Difference," he insisted that the recognition of diversity was a partial truth. While he found it necessary to hold on to this partial truth, he also opposed it when it was put forth as the "ultimate wisdom," because then it denied the possibility of predicting human action. Brecht thought it was precisely the study of concrete differences that made predictions possible. He turned against advocates of the "manifest grandeur" of mankind and the "unimaginable human potential" for development. "By magnifying mankind they take away from the concrete person. . . . In reality, this serves as an excuse for their submission to every influence and their own lack of influence on anything."<sup>20</sup> This ambiguity on the subject of predictability, the "law," and the unpredictability of concrete difference is evidence of a rather complex view of characterization. It seems clear that the aesthetic principle informing the *gestus* is a cumulative one that comprises "depiction from without" and predictability as well as concrete differences.

In the following discussion of the relation between *gestus* and fable, *gestus* is used in the sense of a unit of the performance, since *gestus* in the sense of an underlying attitude applies to every part of the play. In its most general usage, *gestus* means no more than epic, as Brecht pointed out when he wrote of "the general *gestus* of demonstration, [which] always accompanies the specific one of what is demonstrated."<sup>21</sup> Walter Benjamin's definition of the *gestus*, to which it is possible to return at this point, addresses this specific use, the *gestus* as a unit of performance. Benjamin's claim that the dialectic is not dependent on a sequence in time but is fully contained in the *gestus* is a recognition of the autonomy of the *gestus* but seems

to contradict Brecht's pronouncement in the *Short Organum* that the fable is the heart of the play. Benjamin's definition of the *gestus* is no doubt related to the concept of allegory he had proposed in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, in which he sees allegory as contrasting with the symbol. In opposition to the symbol, which is organically related to a totality, allegory is simply a fragment, an acknowledged part of the whole without representing a greater totality. Benjamin describes the constructedness of the allegorical work with reference to the baroque drama: "The common feature of these dramas is their incessant piling up of fragments without the rigorous notion of a goal."<sup>22</sup> The congruence of Benjamin's view of allegory and the Brechtian *gestus* is highly dependent on whether the fable can be seen as a "piling up" of fragments or rather as a totality. As we shall see, neither view is completely appropriate.

Brecht's rejection of Lukács's concept of totality in the realism debate of the 1930s eliminates the latter possibility. Brecht seems to have looked at the fable itself as a fragment of reality and not as a completed whole reflecting reality in its totality. In other words, the fragmentary character of Brecht's plays manifests itself on every level—the level of the *gestus* and the scene as well as the level of the fable. Like the *gestus*, the scenes are autonomous, and their structure is that of a "play within the play." Moreover, the scenes are not imperceptibly joined to one another; they are set against each other (*gegeneinander setzen*) and tied together in such a way that "the knots become conspicuous."<sup>23</sup> Brecht often referred to this structure as the "number character" of his plays, by which he meant the cabaretlike sequence of self-contained pieces. This notion of the structure of the fable is quite similar to Eisenstein's "montage of attractions," so named after the sequence of "acts" in a circus. The autonomy of the parts and the possibility of shock resulting from their contrapuntal juxtaposition is similar. Yet another structural parallel to Eisenstein—and one that brings Benjamin's interpretation into question—has to do with the limitations set on the autonomy of parts. As in Eisenstein's meticulous selection of each image to evoke the theme, the parts of the Brechtian fable are not as independent and autonomous as Walter Benjamin had suggested. Like Eisenstein's montage, Brecht's sequence of scenes is not just a "piling up" of

fragments without a goal, but a very purposeful juxtaposition to achieve certain effects. It is true that Brecht's fables display not only one but many surprising turns of events; there are leaps forward and setbacks, complications and resolutions, not following a fixed curve and sequence. Yet the framelike closure of each element in the fable is nevertheless embedded in the flow of events. And for Brecht it is precisely the fable in its aspect of total composition, in its emphasis on how individual episodes are joined, that represents "the heart of the play." It seems, then, that the question of the relation between the *gestus* (and by implication the scene) and the fable can be decided in terms of its similarity to Eisenstein's description of the relation of the individual representation and the total montage. The *gestus* can thus be thought of only as relatively autonomous.

The equation Brechtian fable = Eisensteinian montage is justified in yet another respect. Brecht did not consider the fable to be story line pure and simple but saw it as a kind of total composition of the play. Like the *gestus*, which is simultaneously both an underlying attitude and an outward expression, the fable is both story line and composition. Here again, as everywhere in Brechtian terminology, the refusal to separate form from content is evident: "The fable is interpreted, produced, and exhibited by theater in all its aspects [*in seiner Gänze*], by the actors, the designers of sets, masks, and costumes, and the musicians and choreographers."<sup>24</sup>

However, the difference between Brecht and Eisenstein also has to be addressed. This difference is rooted in their very conception of what the "whole" signifies in this relationship between the part and the whole. For Brecht the fable is, as was mentioned, a "limited event," just a larger part—ultimately a fragment. The whole here means nothing but the entire composition without any connotations of totality in the Lukácsian sense. Eisenstein, on the other hand, was from the very beginning more concerned with "organicity" (see note 7).

The reasons for this difference are largely historical. As noted earlier, Brecht followed the productions of Soviet directors of film and theater, and without doubt this influenced his own elaborations on epic theater. Yet at no time did he lose sight of his own specific

sociohistorical conditions and their requirements. This, as we have seen, was not just a matter of national differences but had to do with changes in political systems inside Germany. At times Brecht's attitude toward the adjustments these changes required in his theory and practice betrayed a deep sense of frustration, as is evident in his 1939 *Arbeitsjournal* entry referring to *Galileo* as a step backward technically from the *Lehrstück*. In other contexts, he displayed considerable self-mockery, not devoid of sarcasm, when he wrote, about the same time as the *Galileo* entry, that illusionism in theater and film had been attacked on the grounds that it is a kind of drug traffic, a mark of decadence and a detrimental influence on the public. In a combination of resignation and antagonism, Brecht concluded that these protests are not "particularly useful" when the times are such that drugs are needed.<sup>25</sup> Yet concessions to the times are on the level of adjustments, not compromise. The epic *Schaustück* can hardly be termed illusionist. In the course of these adjustments, the relationship between *gestus* and fable experienced a shift in emphasis. Since most of Brecht's theoretical writings involving the *gestus* and the fable date from the late 1930s and the 1940s, they already reflect a greater concern with the fable as story line and total composition. The *Lehrstück* is not nearly as focused on the fable, for obvious reasons. As soon as there is a conventional audience, which the *Schaustück* still requires, the plays tend to stress narrative flow. This of course does not mean that the *gestus* loses all importance. On the contrary, the fable is still conceived of as "the total composition of all gestic events."<sup>26</sup>

In transposing dramatic theory into film theory, the relation between *gestus* and fable plays an important part, since it addresses the question of narrativity. It is tempting simply to apply to film the results of the *gestus*/fable discussion as elaborated on the basis of the epic *Schaustück*. Such an approach, however, would not take into account the specificity of film. Yet Brecht had always paid explicit attention to specific differences in media, and it is therefore necessary to make adjustments in the findings based on theater.

While Roland Barthes's and Walter Benjamin's emphasis on the autonomy of the *gestus* may not be the most appropriate approach to

the *Schaustück*, when it is applied to film it is much closer to Brecht's intentions. Brecht stressed interruption, discontinuity, and the separation of individual parts to a much greater degree for film than he did for his plays. The reason for this shift must be sought in Brecht's view of film as following the laws of visual rather than dramatic art. It is likely that he was influenced in this view by the theoreticians of German expressionist film. Compare, for example, the formula of Hermann Warm (one of the set designers for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*), "Films must be drawings come to life,"<sup>27</sup> with Brecht's statement, "Film obeys the same laws as graphic art."<sup>28</sup> In any case, Brecht's conception of film as part of the fine arts rather than of narrative or dramatic forms of art accounts for his treatment of film as static: "Its character is static, and it must be treated as a sequence of tableaux. These emphatic interruptions must bring about effects, or else they would just be ordinary mistakes."<sup>29</sup> Brecht never elaborated on the nature of the effects to be brought about, but it stands to reason that he was talking here about a concept of montage, based on contradiction, corresponding to the fable of the epic play.

Brecht's main concern, however, was directed at the compositional aspects of each individual tableau. He thought that the tableaux must be composed rigorously, since they should be comprehended at a glance like a drawing on a sheet of paper, and that therefore each detail must correspond "in a great way" (*in grosser Art*) with the center. The ineffable "great way" can best be understood when studying Brecht's *Modellbücher*, a kind of photographic record of his productions. Brecht considered this kind of visual instruction indispensable and not to be replaced by conceptual formulas.

The question of what Brecht might have meant by a tableau, a frame, or a shot is complicated by his rather enigmatic prescription: "The construction of the individual images [*Einzelbilder*] must, on a large scale, exactly reproduce those [images] from the individual shorter takes [*Einzelaufnahmen*]; any kind of blurring is not artistic." Here the term *Bild* ("image") is used instead of tableau, but the question whether Brecht is talking about shot and frames or sequence and shots is relevant to both and invites discussion. The statement is preceded by Brecht's reiteration of the static nature of film: "It [film]

is limited to one view [*Vision*] which is basically motionless. For greater effect, various phases [*Phasen*] are introduced into this view."<sup>30</sup> Although in these passages Brecht was describing the specificity of film with a view to its use in epic theater, he nevertheless addressed what he considered the aesthetics of film in general. It is curious to see how radically his elaborations differ from those of the early Russian filmmakers, especially Dziga Vertov. Whereas Vertov had based his "cine-eye" theory of cinema on dynamics and movement, movement for Brecht was a special effect in an otherwise stationary tableau.<sup>31</sup>

It might be best to keep in mind that Brecht's descriptions and usage of terms such as tableau (*Tafel*), image (*Bild*), and view (*Vision*) in this particular passage were directed at film in epic theater and that he thought of it not in cinematic terms but rather as part of the theatrical performance. In other words, it is safe to say that the "tableau," "image," or "view" corresponds specifically neither to the shot nor to the frame; rather, it may be thought of, for the time being, in terms of an epic scene or episode. As such it bears a close resemblance to the subdivision of the first order in film that Christian Metz has termed "autonomous segment" or "syntagma."<sup>32</sup> Metz defined the syntagma as any section of a film that is not interrupted by a major change in the action, a unit of demarcation such as a fade-out, or a sudden change to another syntagmatic structure. In his analyses of narrative films made in this country between 1930 and the early fifties, Metz established eight distinct types of syntagmas. With the exception of one single-shot syntagma, all the remaining seven syntagmas contain more than one shot.

In the following example of a syntagmatic analysis from the first part of *Kuhle Wampe*, some of Brecht's remarks about the specificity of film may become clearer. The analysis is based on a transcript by Wolfgang Gersch and Werner Hecht.<sup>33</sup> The choice of the passage was made with a view to its dynamic nature in order to maximize the possibility of a challenge to what Brecht has said about the static nature of film. Appropriately, it was given the title "Job Hunting" (by the editors of the transcript), and it contains six different syntagmas:



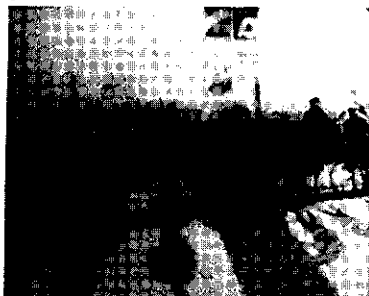
31

1. The opening shot of this passage (shot 31 within the context of the entire film) is a single-shot syntagma. It fades in on a newspaper with the following headline: "Labor market, published by the 'Berlin Local Gazette' with Job Openings (free)." This single-shot syntagma establishes the theme of the whole passage. It ends with a fade-out.

2. Shots 32-40 are a scene, one of the four chronological or narrative syntagmas. The shots in a scene are arranged consecutively with respect to the action, time, and space. Shots 32 to 40 show a street with an advertising pillar, the place where the "Local Gazette" with the job openings will be distributed. Gradually the space fills up with expectant people, including young Bönike, who is the protagonist of sorts of the first part of *Kuhle Wampe*. This movement of concentration is illustrated in a single shot (32a, b). While the camera is perfectly still, pointed at the pillar, first two persons and then a third enter the frame and so on, until there is a small crowd assembled at the end of the shot. In shot 35, the newsboy arrives and the unemployed men and women crowd around him tearing the copies from his hand and then trying to break through the thronging circle. Shot 37 is a close-up of young Bönike



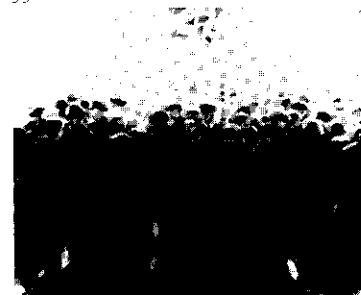
32a



32b



33



34



35



36



37



38



39



40

reading the paper. Shot 38 focuses on hand gestures. Some people are still reaching for papers, but the newsboy indicates that he has no papers left. In shot 39, Bönike folds the paper, puts it in his pocket, and starts riding away on his bicycle. Others are still reading or getting on their bikes. The last shot shows some of the men in the group following Bönike.

In this scene, the static tableau quality of the composition is most obvious. We are presented with "one view," a specific corner of the street, and the "phases" which are introduced into this view "for greater effect" are the two movements of concentration and of dispersal. The concentration of the many unemployed people reaches its apex in shots 35 and 36 and then begins to recede until it develops into a full-fledged race for the job openings advertised in the paper.

3. The race for work is depicted in an ordinary syntagma between shots 41 to 45. The potential dynamics of a race are undercut by the ellipses of space and time between the individual shots. Moreover, and this is not necessarily an aspect of the ordinary sequence, the shots alternate between shots of a group of bicycle riders, young Bönike among them, and medium long shots of feet pedaling bikes (the relationship between the group of bikers and the speeding vehicles is established by implication only). The effect of these alternating sequences and the ellipsis created by them is a condensation of the action itself, a static representation of speed, which is again emphasized by the relatively static camera (except for an occasional slight pan or tracking shot, the camera remains still). The composition of this syntagma functions solely to convey the notion of speed and competition through an abstraction and stylization of speed rather than the suspenseful action between the job hunters. The static camera on the one hand, and the refusal to turn the race into a personalized event between the "hero" and his competitors, has a definite impact on the mechanism of identification in the cinematic viewing situation as described by Christian Metz (to be discussed later). One recurring device to keep the spectator from "following" Bönike, the



41



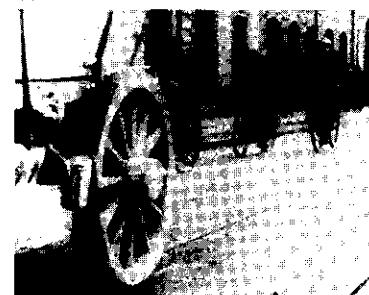
42



43



44



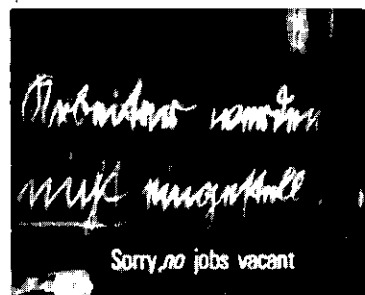
45

"hero" of this episode, is to let him enter or leave the frame casually instead of focusing the camera on him constantly. Both primary cinematic identification (the viewer's identification with the camera) and secondary cinematic identification (identification with a character of the diegesis) are minimized by these strategies.

Each one of the individual shots within the sequence is structured separately, so that each one by itself could represent the same idea of speed and competition. It is in this sense that the *Einzelbilder* (here, syntagmas) reproduce on a large scale the "shorter takes" (the shots). The autonomy of each individual shot is what prevents the "nonartistic" blurring. At the same time it is precisely the autonomy of each shot that underlies the static effect and its concomitant break with identification. In the epic terminology of fable and gestus, it is clearly the gestus that is privileged here. The same is apparent when comparing the statement "the fable is the heart of the theatrical performance" with the phrasing of the demand that the larger images exactly reproduce the "shorter takes," which can be understood to mean that the relation of the individual units to each other within the montage is an "inductive" relation, in the sense that the larger units reproduce the smaller ones, the details.



46



47



48



49

4. Shots 46–48 form a scene once again. The general theme of this syntagma could be captured by the term "frustration." The setting is the janitor's hut in the factory backyard. Some of the job hunters are filing past the window of the hut to inquire about job openings but are turned away. Each one enters the frame from the right side and exits to the left. This procession is interrupted only once by a close-up of a board the janitor has placed in the window with the inscription "no job openings." The tableau-like quality of this syntagma is underlined once again by a totally static camera but also by the repetitive filing of the job hunters past the window.

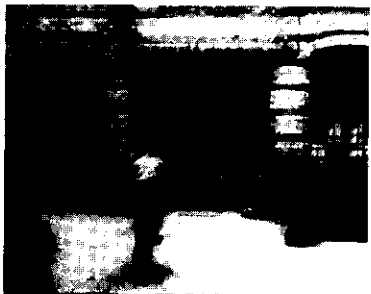
5. The last syntagma, another ordinary sequence, is structured like the third syntagma. It comprises shots 49 to 56, which could actually be cut into two ordinary sequences, because shot 52 contains a camera tilt up a factory building, where it stops and tilts back down. This movement effectively inter-



50



51



52a



52b

rupts the alternation between speeding bicycle wheels and job hunters (here, there are more close-ups of young Bönike than in the third syntagma). Shot 53 resumes the race, which ends on a note of frustration like the previous scene. In a sense, the last shot is a repetition of the fourth syntagma in abbreviated form and of shot 52. In this shot, the workers are seen from the rear as they ride into the factory gateway (52a), then the camera tilts up and down the facade of the building they have just vanished into (52b), and finally, the workers reappear in the gateway as they leave the building (52c). Similarly—and this is the third instance of an unsuccessful job quest—shot 56 (a, b) shows the job hunters entering through the gate of a factory yard and vanishing around a corner only to re-emerge instantly and dejectedly. The shot ends with one gestus that encapsulates not only this miniscene, but the entire syntagma as well as the whole series of syntagmas entitled "Job Hunting." The gestus in question is young Bönike's crumpling up the newspaper that had served him as guide in the search for a job and throwing it away. Once again, the "reproduction" of the "shorter take" within the larger images is exemplified.



55



56a



56b



52c



53



54

Looking back for a moment on the inclusiveness of the term *gestus*, covering the whole spectrum from a single gesture to a short scene to an underlying attitude within a larger sequence, the vagueness of Brecht's usage of "tableau," "view," and "image" or "shorter takes" becomes somewhat more understandable. And further, since Brechtian film narratives are constructed on the notion of the *gestus* in this flexible sense, the various terms Brecht used for larger versus shorter units of film can now be translated into filmic terms to include not just the shot versus the syntagma, but fragments of a shot, that is, a number of frames versus a whole series of syntagmas. The privileging of the *gestus* in film implies an emphasis on interruption and fragmentation at every level. On the level of the film's overall composition, or what in epic theater would be called the fable, the cohesiveness of its narrative fabric (Brecht saw *Kuhle Wampe* as consisting of four separate parts) is far less emphasized than any *Schaustück* that comes to mind. This will immediately become clear when we compare the "protagonists" in epic plays and in *Kuhle Wampe*. The character of Mother Courage, for example, no matter how dispersed over space and time, nevertheless lends cohesiveness and unity to the play by binding many disparate episodes, events, and characters to her orbit of experience. The same is true for Grusche, Shen Te, Puntila, Galileo, and others. In comparison, in *Kuhle Wampe* the character of Anni, who comes closest to ranking as protagonist, has no such binding function. Anni has a very small part in the first segment, rises to center stage in the second, and recedes more and more into the background in the third part, to the point where she practically disappears in the last segment.

Brecht's insistence on the static nature of film is an insistence on the cutout quality of each film segment, be it frame, shot, or syntagma. The composed tableau stands for the selection and choice of sections of reality rather than the capturing of a slice of life by the "candid" camera eye or the narrative flow of Hollywood montage, which covers up all disruptions to a perfect impression of reality. Brecht then simply insists on making explicit in his treatment of film the relation between reality and its reproduction by the camera that is already implicit in the process of filming. As Jean Mitry comments:

The film image is limited by its frame; everything that is inside this frame takes on dimensions and a significance that is relative to this frame and does not exist outside it. In other words, the frame limits and delimits a field that determines a number of geometric, architectonic, and plastic relations that do not exist in reality. At least, by limiting certain relations which in reality are lost among an infinity of others, since reality is not limited by a frame, it underlines them.<sup>34</sup>

Brechtian gestural montage is adequately described by this acknowledgment of choice of frame, which carries with it an emphatic break between units, leaving the audience free to "cofabulate." It interrupts the continuity of space and time and in this way prevents the equivocation between reality and its representation. Brechtian realism is not based on a direct correspondence between sign and referent. Any simple rendition of reality is inadequate in Brecht's terms. A photograph of a factory, he contended, yields very little information about that institution. His famous pronouncement that reality has "slipped" into functionality has important aesthetic consequences. As Benjamin has pointed out, technique is a dimension of function, and this technique is identified by Brecht as constructed, artificial, posed—in short, as montage. In this way Brechtian realism avoids the pitfall of a naive belief in the truth value of naturalistic reproduction, while at the same time preserving avenues of access, however mediated they may be, to the portrayal of social reality. The *gestus* itself, rooted as it is in the body, a learned and yet almost neurological reflex to experience, testifies to this attempt of the sign to connect with concrete reality.

Gestural montage is also a versatile tool for confronting what Brecht recognized as a contradictory reality, both because of the possibility of juxtaposing opposite elements and because, as Benjamin has pointed out, the individual *gestus* is in itself dialectical. The single *gestus* of reading the newspaper in *Kuhle Wampe* illustrates these points well. The first instance of newspaper reading occurs immediately after the episode of the son's frustrated search for work. The father is reclining on the couch reading while the mother is busy setting the table and serving lunch. Old Bönike enjoys this special privilege not only vis-à-vis his wife, but also with respect to his son.

Both father and son are on the dole, but the father's seniority entitles him, although he is able-bodied, to lounge on the couch while the son engages in a frantic daily hunt for work. The newspaper, moreover, corroborates the father's privileged status, as he announces a piece of information culled from his reading, which represents a direct blow to the son's position in the family: young Bönike's age group will no longer receive unemployment benefits from the state.

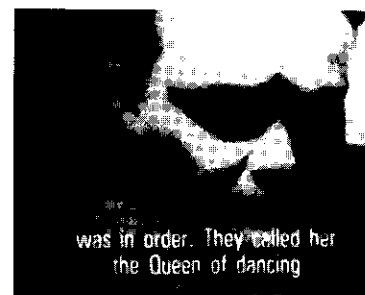
The second instance of newspaper reading takes place in the family's new *Kuhle Wampe* domicile after their eviction from their city apartment. This time old Bönike reads out loud an account of the trial of the suspected spy and nude dancer Mata Hari. This account, which includes a detailed description of Mata Hari's erotic charms, represents another official corroboration of Bönike's seignorial attitude, extending it to the area of general male sexual privilege. This privilege enhances his gestus of newspaper reading, with respect both to the activity of reading itself (as he takes command of the text by reading it out loud to his wife) and to the subject of the passage (as he vigorously inhales the smoke from his cigar at points of particular erotic interest).

Bönike's gestus, which is comparable to the "culinary" or consumer gestus Brecht abhorred in audiences, sharply contrasts with his wife's gestus, which is also one of consumption. Mother Bönike is absorbed in her household accounts. Weighed down by the responsibility for making ends meet at the dinner table, she has no ears for her husband's account of a less pressing kind of satisfaction. The opposing gestuses of father and mother totally isolate the two from one another in spite of their physical proximity.

The juxtaposition of these conflicting gestural moments results in a montage that produces effects on the level of broad humor:



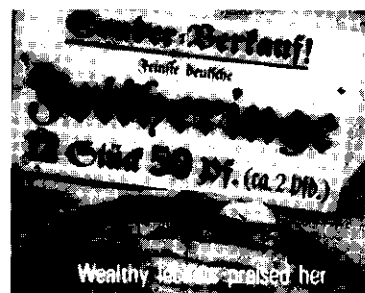
194.(4.7m) medium shot.  
*The father sitting straight up holds the newspaper at eye level.*  
Father Bönike . . . when she appeared at the Wintergarten. He visited her in her dressing room in order to find out how the nude dance . . . Mata Hari . . . and that everything



195.(2m) close-up.  
*The mother's head.*  
Father Bönike's voice . . . was in order. They called her the queen of dance . . .



196.(1.3m) close-up.  
*Packaged shortening with price tag:*  
"½ pound excellent veal fat, home-made 45."  
Father Bönike's voice . . . and meant the queen of love. . . .



197.(2.6m) close-up.  
*Herrings with price tag: "Sale. Finest German herrings, 50 cents a dozen, approx. 2 pounds.*  
Father Bönike's voice . . . The rich connoisseurs advertised her as a treat of the rarest kind.

But beyond this humorous level of contradictions, other conflicts appear in the sequence. Father Bönike has trouble pronouncing words like "symbolism" and "androgynous." It is clear that, although Mata Hari is an object for him to fantasize about, she is not an object for him in everyday reality. She is a courtesan who exacts astronomical sums for her favors; her lovers are members of the nobility and court officials. Thus Father Bönike exhibits a certain amount of reverence and awe in the face of so much splendor. His own herring-fed existence is transformed during the brief period when he is allowed to identify with the duke of Brunswick or the chief of police. Overwhelmed by the description of the splendid details of the courtesan's life, Bönike has no apparent moral scruples concerning her métier. This, however, is no indication of Bönike's liberal spirit. On the contrary, the subsequent scene shows him threatening to kill his daughter should she be pregnant. The single gestus of stumbling over a somewhat demanding vocabulary reveals a network of specific social relationships, which is made even more complex by the contrapuntal positioning of the material.

The stylized demonstrational quality of Brechtian montage emphasizes external detail but not random external detail: it focuses on the contradictory aspects of sociopolitical life. In this sense Benjamin described the gestus as the "material" that is found in "reality," and specifically in contemporary reality.<sup>35</sup> But once again the contradictions become visible, and the material becomes a gestus only if the flow of representations is interrupted to make the discovery of these contradictions possible. The framelike closure of each episode gives events, unlike those in life, a marked beginning and a marked end.

The separation of elements, another epic principle, is also closely related to this concept of montage. In a collection of short essays on film music that Brecht wrote during his exile in the United States, he mentioned the separation of elements and argued that these techniques had so far been used only in documentary films, that is, in a rather limited way. If carefully handled, "this principle of the separation of the elements of music and of action could bring about some new effects for the feature film as well."<sup>36</sup> Each of these elements must be taken into consideration from the very beginning in planning the film's effects. Whatever function is assigned to one element—music,

for example—must be left to be carried out by it, Brecht thought, in order to achieve maximum autonomy of each element. In this manner, each one of the "sister arts" contributes genuinely to the dramatic or filmic work and is not assumed to be simply underlining the text and the action. Only when each element is independent in this essential, functional way can it be used to contradict the action and make a far more complex statement than could a simple reinforcement of the action. Brecht gave an example to demonstrate possible uses of music in a film scene—reminiscent of Sternberg's *An American Tragedy*—in which a young man rows his girlfriend out to the middle of a lake with the intention of overturning the boat and drowning her: "The music can do two things; it can anticipate the feelings of the audience, create suspense, and describe the gruesomeness of the deed. But it can also express the serenity of the landscape, the indifference of nature, the everyday aspect of the event insofar as it is only an excursion."<sup>37</sup> Brecht concluded that if the music is chosen to do the latter, giving it a more independent task, it will make the murder appear even more terrible and unnatural.

A well-known example from *Kuhle Wampe*, in which Hanns Eisler's music is used in counterpoint, is the passage of lyrical effusion on the theme of springtime, regeneration, and recurrent love in the second part. The text is countered by somber, almost funereal music, calling the words into question—contradicting them and at least bringing to mind the exceptions, the problems love can cause for some young people. Music can be used either to provide a logic for a plot or to bring out contradictions: "The filmmaker is able to describe the course of events much more dialectically, that is, contradictory and irregular, if the music creates a constructive, "detail-collecting" attitude in the audience."<sup>38</sup> Brecht cited the example of the collaboration of Eisler and Joris Ivens on the documentary on the building of the Zuider Dam to demonstrate that the montage can be "richer, more complex, and longer" if the music provides a context for it. In this instance the music was used to make a connection between two great processes in the film: "the gaining of agricultural territory resulting from the building of the Zuider Dam, and the burning of Canadian wheat for the purpose of regulating price."<sup>39</sup>

The principle of literarization, the interruption of the closure of

the *mise-en-scène* by extrinsic material, is a way the decor can comment in an independent manner. Emblems, photography, written passages, and film passages for theater and, conversely, theater passages for film, are all means of disrupting, commenting, and making the exposition of contradictions more feasible. The only objection to this principle, Brecht wrote, comes from the schoolmaster's point of view, which insists that everything stated be part of the plot, that the work of art should express everything from within itself. Responding to charges of manipulation resulting from literarization, Brecht answered that the traditional drama in its very one-dimensionality was highly manipulative. It does not accommodate more than one point of view, thus coercing everyone to see things in the same way. While it may deal with social contradictions on the level of dramatic material, it is completely undialectical with respect to the reception of this material. The pseudo-objectivity of the "organic," self-contained work of art presents the real obstacle to the audience's productivity. In contrast, the clear identification of the author's voice as a subjective point of view among many other possible positions prevents the spectators' identification with a unified representation parading as objective truth.

Ultimately, it is the variety of points of view presented by the separate components that allows the audience to make comparisons with their own personal experience. This productive cofabulation leaves the spectators free to agree with, disagree with, or change any of the parts presented on stage. Montage, with its many-layered possibilities, allows for the articulation of the spectators' own interests and judgments vis-à-vis artistic representation. Brecht's greater emphasis on interruption in film than in theater is safeguarding the spectators' productive potential in the sense of critical ability. In a few scattered remarks about film specificity, Brecht has described the aesthetic difference of this new technological medium in terms of intrinsic properties. The notion that the illusionistic power of film is greater than that of theater and that therefore more emphasis on interruption is needed to counteract its seductive powers is not stated in those terms in Brecht's writing. Insofar as this view represents the opposite of Brecht's earlier confidence in the antiauratic effect of the technological media, he chose not to pursue this aspect, even though

he recognized the illusionistic potential of film, at least since his encounter with the dream factory, Hollywood. In spite of this, Brecht never quite lost his belief that the "natural," media-specific qualities of film favor the "inductive" method and the approach "from without." Yet the direction in which film industries developed at home and abroad increasingly drove Brecht into a position of embattled antagonism toward current modes of cinematic expression. His creative impulses toward the medium of film were thus stymied and transformed into negative criticism.

## 5 Brecht's Reception East and West

During his years of exile, Brecht continued his involvement with the film industry, first in Europe and later in Hollywood. The vicissitudes of his scriptwriting and film production career have been painstakingly recorded by Wolfgang Gersch and John Willett. Both critics also give an excellent account of Brecht's work with the East German Film Company DEFA.<sup>1</sup> A brief summary of the major projects of this period will therefore suffice here. An analysis and evaluation of the reception of Brechtian thought, particularly as interpreted by film theoreticians and filmmakers in France, England, and West Germany in the past two decades, will be the focus of this chapter.

As mentioned before, the reception of *Kuhle Wampe* was not nearly as enthusiastic in Moscow as it had been in Berlin. For one thing, Soviet audiences had difficulty grasping the urgency of the unemployment situation in Germany because the levels of poverty were apparently quite dissimilar in the two countries. Nevertheless, the Moscow film studio Mezhrabpom showed interest in the Brecht-Eisler-Dudow team and sponsored another film to be written by Brecht. The project came to an end, before it really had begun, with the fascist takeover in Germany in 1933. Another film project, again funded by Mezhrabpom, involved Piscator and the old Schweik material. This film was also never completed.

The years immediately following his departure from Germany were difficult for Brecht as far as access to foreign film industries was

concerned. In spite of the efforts by many of his friends and former collaborators to get his proposals for film stories accepted, nothing really materialized until 1936, when Fritz Kortner was able to secure him a contract to write a script for the filming of Leoncavallo's opera *Pagliacci*. Although Brecht entered into this project as a matter of financial survival, he nevertheless took the assignment quite seriously, which proved to be his undoing. He was paid and dismissed. Brecht wrote it off to experience: "I thought I would be able to learn how to write film scripts, but I realize that I can pick it all up in one morning; the technique is very primitive."<sup>2</sup> Since Brecht's text of *Pagliacci* has been lost in its entirety, it is impossible to say whether any part of it was adopted in the final version of the film, as some critics claimed at the time.

Brecht's attempts to circumvent the film industry did not meet with much more success. In 1937 he turned to Piscator once again with plans for a film on the subject of the Spanish Civil War, involving an incident that revealed the support given by the British fleet to Franco's blockade of the city of Bilbao. Since Piscator was not in a position to film this story, Brecht fell back on his novel *Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar* (The Business Deals of Mr. Julius Caesar) to turn it into a film treatment. Much of Brecht's lack of success in film in those years had to do, of course, with political events in Europe and his precarious status as an exiled German writer. When, for example, he went to Paris in 1938-39, he offered his opera *Mabagonny* and the musical *Happy End* to a film company. He found immediate resonance, only to see the entire project fail once again when Germany and France went to war in September 1939. In comparison with the rich production of plays, prose, and poetry during his years of exile in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, the work on film took a relatively unimportant place in Brecht's overall creative output. One of the few exceptions was the film exposé *Vi vill Flyga* (We Want to Fly) that he wrote in collaboration with Henry Peter Matthis. This ratio shifted somewhat in favor of film after Brecht had moved to Hollywood. The reason for the shift had less to do with increased opportunities for film work than with the total lack of preconditions for writing plays.

When Brecht arrived in America in July 1941, his first choice of

arena for his creative engagement was not Hollywood. He intended to represent himself primarily as a playwright and test his chances in theater, mainly in New York. Only when that attempt had failed did he decide to try his luck in Hollywood. Brecht was prolific. In the six years of his sojourn there he managed to work on some fifty film projects of various sizes, from short sketches to larger treatments.<sup>3</sup> None of his efforts, nor the efforts of his friends on his behalf, brought him any success. Only his contact with Fritz Lang resulted in the realization of a project, but in the end it also turned out to be a great disappointment to Brecht. The project in question is the film *Hängen Also Die*, about the assassination of Reinhart Heydrich, the commander of the Nazi occupation forces in Czechoslovakia. Brecht and Lang worked intently together on this scenario. Since the exact circumstances of the assassination were not known at the time, they had to invent a story surrounding the event. Producer Arnold Pressburger showed interest in the project, but Fritz Lang had to sign as coproducer—perhaps to lessen the risk.

Differences between Brecht and Lang in their conceptions of the story became apparent early in their collaboration, but Brecht persevered. On the whole, Lang seemed mainly interested in an action film in the gangster genre, with characters that were easily understandable to the audience as clichés or deviations from clichés, shunning, as Brecht saw it, neither a certain dose of sensationalism nor gratuitous surprise effects. Brecht, on the other hand, remained true to his preference for detailed observations of ordinary, everyday events and interactions between people. Conflicts between Lang and Brecht led to the introduction of a third party, the scriptwriter John Wexley. Wexley was politically closer to Brecht than to Lang, but he did not comprehend Brecht's nondramatic approach to scriptwriting. Brecht was able to talk Wexley into writing an "ideal script" alongside the "official" script, but after seventy pages had already been completed, Wexley decided to back out. Fritz Lang had not shown any enthusiasm for the direction the "ideal script" was going and had pressured the two to continue writing the "official" version. Finally Lang suspended Brecht, let Wexley cut the official version, which was about twice as long as Lang had desired, and did some cutting of his own to give it the shape he wanted. Brecht was disappointed not only

in the final product, but also because Wexley had signed as sole author of the script. Unfortunately the "ideal version" of the film script has been lost; it might have immensely enriched our understanding of Brecht's relation to film.<sup>4</sup>

In 1942 Brecht returned to his Caesar material after director William Dieterle had urged him to write a script about "Caesar's last days." The text was later included in the *Kalendergeschichten*. Hollywood once again was not interested. Nevertheless, Brecht wrote several other biographical sketches that, like the Caesar treatment, focused not on the extraordinary individual, the hero, but on the social circumstances determining and producing these individuals. One of these sketches, written about 1942, is the film exposé about Henri Dunant, founder of the Red Cross. At first Brecht had intended the subject for a play along the lines of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (The Good Woman of Szechwan) as a humorous demonstration of the impossibility of being virtuous in a society whose ideology extols virtue but whose practice contradicts it. Shortly after, however, he recognized that the material had tragic rather than comic potential, and he discontinued writing the play in favor of a film exposé. Another biographical sketch entitled *Die Fliege* (The Fly) describes the embroilment of American scientist Walter Reed with political and social unreason in his struggle against the Yellow Fever epidemic in Havana in the 1890s.

Gersch divides the rest of Brecht's exposés and sketches for films into three categories: first, films about emigration, war, and postwar topics; second, the adaptations; and last, the logical (*ausmathematisierten*) stories. In the first category are titles like *Rich Man's Friend*, a comical story about Peter Lorre's emigration to London, to be played by Lorre himself; others, like *Silent Witness* (*Der stumme Zeuge*), *Die Frau des Richters* (The Judge's Wife), and *The Goddess of Victory* (*Die Siegesgöttin*) deal with collaborators' attempts to cover up their wartime affiliations and with questions of postwar restoration. Notes and sketches on plans for adaptations show a wide range of interests, from Homer's *Iliad* to Oscar Wilde's *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime*. The most important project of this type is the film text *All Our Yesterdays* an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* set in modern America. All of Brecht's adaptations are free versions rather than close transpositions,

following the original in more or less loose outline and always placed within a modern context and problematic. One of the best examples of the "logical stories" is *Der grosse Clown Emaël* (The Great Clown Emaël). The film exposé describes the ruses and intelligent trickery the great clown performs in order to surround his foolish but beloved wife with the romanticism she craves. One of his strategies involves the performance of a scene from Shakespeare's play *Richard III*. This scene is the basis for a "subsidiary purpose" on Brecht's part, to show "how in his opinion Shakespeare should be played."<sup>5</sup> Especially in this third category of film texts, Brecht went a long way toward accommodating audience expectations, but to no avail. Hollywood remained closed to him "for the same reasons it had refused Sergei Eisenstein a decade earlier."<sup>6</sup>

If Hollywood did not agree with Brecht for reasons of ideology, one might have expected his contacts with DEFA, the newly established film company of the German Democratic Republic, to have been more successful. The opposite proved true. It seems that ideological mystification of any persuasion, whether capitalist or socialist, provoked Brecht's resistance. His relation to DEFA was very different, however, from what he had experienced in Hollywood. In his collaboration with the East German company, Brecht could at least count on a common goal, the building of a new socialist society. Disagreements centered on DEFA's idealizations of socialism, accompanied by a refusal to own up to conflicts—in other words, its lack of realism and a tendency toward simplified ideological constructions. As a result, Brecht was not much more successful in his dealings with the film industry of the German Democratic Republic than he was in Hollywood.

Upon his return from exile, the attractive offer of his own theater, the much dreamed of and theorized control over the apparatus, influenced Brecht's decision to settle in the German Democratic Republic. Theater, therefore, was once again of primary importance to him. Nevertheless, he contributed extensively to the building of a new film production for his elective homeland, partly in advisory capacities—the planning of projects, policymaking—and partly by proposing his own work. The major project in this latter category was the adaptation for the screen of *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (Mother

Courage and Her Children). The history of failed attempts at collaboration on this particular plan between Brecht and DEFA from 1949 to 1956 reflects their difficulties in reaching agreement on aesthetic questions in general. In quick succession Brecht worked with and discontinued work with a number of renowned scriptwriters: Robert A. Stemmle, Joachim Barckhausen, Graf Alexander Stenbock-Fermor, Hans Winge, Emil Burri, and finally Wolfgang Staudte.

Burri and Brecht had finished the first script, but DEFA demanded a second one guided by greater concern for current political events. Staudte, who was to direct the film, also worked on this second script. Later, even a third version was submitted. Things went well until the question of casting the characters arose. Brecht wanted as many actors as possible from the Berliner Ensemble, whereas Staudte had international stars in mind. DEFA suspended the whole project for the time being. This decision might have been partly influenced by the so-called formalism debate, which was in many ways a continuation into the 1950s of the realism debate of the thirties. This debate, which lacked the international tone and East-West exchange of aesthetic points of view present in the thirties, brought epic theory into disrepute. "The criticism was influenced by Lukács's positions,"<sup>7</sup> which in the fifties had gained great popularity in Party circles.

The importance of the *Mother Courage* film project for this study lies not in the description of the difficulties between Brecht, Staudte, and DEFA, which were predictably thorny, but in an analysis of Brecht's vision of how his plays should be adapted to the screen. With respect to the changes in content, it can easily be summarized in the character of Courage herself. By showing her as a more greedy and less sympathetic figure, Brecht meant to strengthen his statement against war and any collaboration or participation in it. As far as film form is concerned, he seems to have remained true to the insights he had had in the 1930s. In November 1939 Brecht noted in his *Arbeitsjournal*: "I thought about the Courage film. The naturalism should be cut out. First technical experiments: Can a daguerreotype photograph be achieved (by overexposure and underexposure, etc.)? The principle of accidental grouping should be given up in the composition. On the screen, only that part of the set/decor that plays

a part should be shown."<sup>8</sup> The idea of daguerreotype photography was dearest to Brecht, and he clung to it the longest. Daguerreotype was for Brecht a safeguard against naturalism. The grainy texture of this photography would not encourage identification. Mimicry as the mirror of the soul has always been the number one characteristic of naturalist representation for Brecht, and he felt that the optical effects of daguerreotype were in direct opposition to such an approach, that they ensured a measure of *Verfremdung*.

Sometimes Brecht referred to "poetic" filmmaking when he wanted to oppose it to naturalistic approaches. The question, How can one make a film that looks like a poem?<sup>9</sup> which Brecht raised to solve the problem of the parabolic character of *Mother Courage*, echoes in some sense his earlier description of film specificity in the context of film in epic theater: "The lack of plasticity of film, which has such a spiritual effect, predisposes it [film] against plot in the dramatic sense."<sup>10</sup> It may seem as though Brecht had replaced his original comparison of film and graphic art with one of film and poetry, but another notation referring to the *Mother Courage* project shows that this is not the case: "[Mother Courage] should be filmed in the manner of a drawing, with implications and connotations only; it should be elegantly suggestive."<sup>11</sup> The passage makes clear the extent to which the poetry/drawing comparisons reinforce rather than oppose each other. What was important to Brecht was a degree of artificiality and stylization common to both poetry and graphic art that is the very opposite of naturalistic "plasticity." Brecht's preference in this connection for static, tableaulike effects also survived into the fifties, as some of his criticism of Alberto Cavalcanti's *Puntilla* film (1955, Austria) shows us. Brecht complained that the film sacrifices everything to movement: "It was a mistake to delete Matti's great Pappmann speech out of fear of [a lack of] movement. [The speech] could have prevented the senseless, impressionistic movement of the photography and the cutting."<sup>12</sup>

The difficulties between Staudte, DEFA, and Brecht had their origins in these aesthetic differences. When Brecht realized that *Mother Courage* was about to become a monumental color production, his protests were decisive enough to arrest work on the whole project for the time being. Shortly before Brecht's death, negotiations be-

tween DEFA and Brecht started up again under changed conditions. This time Erich Engel was to be the director. But all plans for a film adaptation of *Mother Courage* came to a halt. Brecht died in August 1956. Four years later, Brecht collaborators Peter Palitzsch and Manfred Wekwerth produced, under DEFA's sponsorship, a documentary filming of a *Mother Courage* performance by the Berliner Ensemble.

#### FRANCE

Brecht's tenacity in holding to the aesthetic principles he had formed in the 1920s in conjunction and interaction with the classical avant-gardes from dada to constructivism may have been the cause of his unsatisfactory, if not downright frustrating, experiences with the film industries in East and West; yet undoubtedly his perseverance was crucial in the reemergence of these principles in the 1960s and 1970s. France was in the forefront of Brecht's European acclaim in the mid-fifties.<sup>13</sup> After the Berliner Ensemble visited Paris with its production of *Mother Courage* in 1954, the tide of criticism began to turn in his favor. Major ground-breaking advocates of Brechtian theater in France were Roland Barthes and Bernard Dort, who first insisted on the importance of Brecht's claim that art should intervene in the historical process. Translations of the collected works of Brecht into French and the ever-increasing critical support of his theories led to a scrutiny by film theoreticians of the applicability of Brechtian epic principles to film. The result was a special Brecht issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1960 in which Bernard Dort noted that

the Brecht wave is now reaching the shores of cinema. I don't know if the producers have been touched by it . . . but the critics, in any case, evoke Brecht, and invoke him sometimes, too, and try to talk of "Brechtianism." *Positif* is now nicely contaminated; *Cahiers du Cinéma* is not missing out either; for several years there already, Louis Marcorelles has done an obstinate, subversive job; last October Eric Rohmer, without self-consciousness, pronounced the name of Brecht. The sign does not fool: A Brechtian epidemic has broken out at *Cahiers*.<sup>14</sup>

Until 1968, however, the influence of Brechtian theory on *Cahiers* was largely confined to formal considerations. A good example of this

type of application of Brechtian theory is Louis Marcorelles's discussion of Bergman's *The Virgin Spring* (1960) in terms of Brecht's techniques. What Marcorelles stressed was the parable character and the open-endedness of Bergman's film, which he compared to such Brecht plays as *The Good Woman of Szechwan* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The philosophical difference between the two artists—that is, Bergman's Christian metaphysics and Brecht's Marxism—was merely considered interchangeable subject matter.

The influence of Brecht on the French New Wave was uneven. In some cases it was more a matter of critics superimposing Brechtian categories on films without clear indication by the respective authors that these were indeed intended. Andre S. Labarthe's and Jean-André Fieschi's critiques of *Les bonnes femmes*, *Ophélie*, and *Landru* (1962) by Claude Chabrol seem to fall under this heading. However, other New Wave filmmakers, most notably Jean-Luc Godard, have consciously adopted Brechtian terminology in their writing and Brechtian techniques in their films. While Godard's films *Les carabiniers* (1962), *My Life to Live* (1962), and *Alphaville* (1965) lend themselves primarily to formal comparisons with epic devices, such as self-reflexivity, episodic structure, refusal to identify with characters, and lack of resolution, his films made around 1968 and through the 1970s are explicitly political in subject matter as well. The year 1968 is usually considered the watershed between the older and the new Marxist-Leninist *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and Godard played a significant role in this development. After May 1968 he was instrumental in forming the Groupe Dziga-Vertov, which as its main achievement released *Tout va bien* in 1972. In *Cahiers's* theoretical treatment of the Groupe's efforts, Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin are cited as defining the parameters of political films. In contrast to the commercial notion of this genre, which exploits political subjects for sensationalist effects, Godard and Gorin held that political films must be made politically. They located the political dimension in the practice of filmmaking itself, engaging on the level of combating the apparatus and its profit motive. Appropriately enough, the *Cahiers* text links these statements to Brecht: "It draws from the distinction Brecht makes in his introduction to *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* between

'dramatic' forms and 'epic' forms, the former being, in *Cahiers's* terms, 'metaphysical, idealist, and petty bourgeois,' the latter 'materialist, dialectical, revolutionary.'"<sup>15</sup> *Tout va bien*, a film about a workers' strike, was the first film Godard made after 1968. It is modeled on Brecht's text *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. The reception of Godard's film at the *Cahiers du Cinéma* was favorable, and it was compared to advantage with a film on the same subject, Martin Karmitz's *Coup pour coup* (1972). The reasons, one might have guessed, are Brechtian in nature. *Tout va bien* not only presents the strike in exemplary fashion as a "crystallization, a condensed reflection of forces and contradictory positions that confront each other on the scene of the class struggle today in France,"<sup>16</sup> but it also provokes the audience's participation by confronting it with multiple points of view and a variety of political interpretations.

In the meantime, Godard's "Brechtianism" has become a commonplace and is therefore in need of critical revision. In view of his professed affiliation in matters of aesthetic and political choice, there is no doubt that Godard is the heir apparent of political avant-garde filmmaking in the illustrious tradition established by Eisenstein, Vertov, and Brecht. Like his predecessors, Godard breaks with illusionism, with the unified plot and its compelling identificatory structure. There is the play with contradictory elements, the stylized, emblematic use of codes, an emphasis on the autonomy of separate and heterogeneous elements, the interruption of the cinematic flow by the written word and by visual, auditory, or verbal commentary; there is transgression of genre divisions, mixing fictional, documentary, and cinéma vérité approaches in the same film. And finally, Godard's films are a complex web of cross-references and quotations taken from literary, visual, and auditory sources.

In all these techniques, devices, and aesthetic strategies, the Brechtian mode is readily apparent. Yet whenever a term is used in this categorizing way, although it is useful immediately in pointing to a specific aesthetic tradition, it remains ultimately too vague and general. This is especially the case with Godard's work. To say that he is a Brechtian filmmaker is not to say very much beyond the most obvious orientation. The complementary move—to determine what

is different from this tradition in Godard (and in all the Brechtian filmmakers discussed here)—seems to be as essential as the enumeration of similarities.

Godard's 1969 film *Le gai savoir* is a good example for pointing out those differences. In this film, the direct representation of a social problem in the sense of a *gestus* is practically absent. The two young protagonists Emile Rousseau and Patrice Lumumba are grouped in the foreground of an otherwise dark screen discussing politics, the state of the student movement, and revolutions in the Third World. At the same time, they talk about issues of culture—the media in particular—and come to the conclusion (echoing Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*) that cinema must be brought back to degree zero in order to find its structural components. They demonstrate possibilities of structuring by entering and exiting the frame in differing arrangements and by placing themselves in a variety of ways in relation to each other inside the frame. The connection between culture and politics is established in their discussions (reflecting Althusserian theory) about the production of meaning by the bourgeois cultural apparatus and its repressive forces, education, communication, and so forth. Intercut between these passages of verbal analyses and discussions are documentary sequences and stills, mostly of clearly recognizable political significance.

The difference between a text like *Le gai savoir* and *Potemkin* or *Kuhle Wampe* lies in the former's refusal of visual representation, the creation of what Brecht called "pictures of reality." Instead, the very process of signification and image creation and its impact on perception, including the perception of political reality, becomes the subject of Godard's films. The high degree of verbal argumentation, with images in an almost auxiliary and tentative position (this is more true of *Le gai savoir* than of most other Godard films), places these films in a metadiscursive relation to art and politics. Of course, Brecht's *Lehrstück* theory and practice comes to mind immediately as a parallel concern in the theater to what Godard does on screen. The point of the *Lehrstück*, however, is the elimination of the audience as spectators and their involvement in the process of learning how to change basic attitudes and patterns of conduct through direct participation. The film-viewing situation, however, is the furthest re-

moved from this possibility. The only attitude or pattern that can be addressed in this context is that of viewing itself, which is exactly what Godard intends and what his discourse about cinematic discourse accomplishes. The term "theoretical film" adequately describes this difference.

Such distinctions in categorizing could possibly entail ramifications in the critical vocabulary pertaining to the avant-garde. It seems to call into question, for example, the division of the avant-garde into aesthetic and political, as was proposed by Peter Wollen. While Wollen's model is a first step in the right direction, breaking up the monolithic concept of the avant-garde, it is still in need of greater differentiation. The notion of a "theoretical avant-garde" that cuts across the aesthetic/political distinction but groups together works with such pronounced metadiscursive tendencies as Godard's films might be useful in this context.

It is also important to point out in this connection that the assimilation of Brecht by the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* did not occur without the admixture of theoretical elements that were peculiar to France at the time. This dates back probably as far as the 1950s, when Roland Barthes's energetic critical intervention contributed to the favorable reception of Brecht in France. Barthes's position as the initiator both of a strong movement of semiotic/semiological analysis and of ideological criticism of cultural products had associated Brecht with these intellectual tendencies from the beginning. This is not to claim an incompatibility in this conjunction. Jean-Louis Commolli, for example, who is a committed Brechtian critic of the *Cahiers*, wrote about Godard's film *La Chinoise* (1967) (the film shows the protagonist erasing the names of a number of playwrights from a blackboard, leaving behind only the name of Brecht) in terms of a semiotic analysis of the signifiers rather than the signifieds. His advice as to the correct procedure for reading the film is to forgo interpretation until all the details in each shot have been deciphered. Commolli, furthermore, claims scientific status for this method as opposed to the critical, evaluative approach to film analysis. It is easy to see that Brecht's description of how the ideal audience would watch with a detail-collecting and comparing attitude can be understood in Commolli's terms. This is equally true of the whole notion of

the *gestus* and the "depiction from without." It is also what interested Roland Barthes in Brecht in the first place, which becomes clear in the following passage:

For what Brechtian drama postulates is that today, at least, the responsibility of a dramatic art is not so much to express reality as to signify it. Hence there must be a certain distance between signified and signifier: revolutionary art must admit a certain arbitrary nature of signs, it must acknowledge a certain "formalism," in the sense that it must treat form according to an appropriate method which is the semiological method.<sup>17</sup>

Yet when this statement is compared with Brecht's pronouncements on realism, his insistence that realism has "slipped" into the dimension of function, some questions arise. What matters to Brecht is not only the articulation of meaning within a closed system of signifiers, but a direct exploration of social causality and experience. It therefore seems that Brechtian theory and the semiological project are only partially congruent. While Brecht recognized and made excellent use of the distance between signifier and signified (epic techniques can certainly be described in those terms), it remained a means to him in the investigation of actual social conditions and relations.

Among film theories, the most comprehensive system developed in France is probably that of Christian Metz. Although Metz's work is almost entirely cast in the semiotic model, with a shift in his later writings (*The Imaginary Signifier*) to include modes of subjectivity as proposed by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, his analysis of the spectator in the cinematic viewing situation opens out to an evaluation (in Metz's account very tangential) of his findings in Brechtian terms.

In Metz's view, the cinematic signifier is closer to the imaginary, to the fictive, and to fantasy than the theatrical signifier, since in cinema everything (voices, actors, sets, etc.) is recorded and nothing shares the same space and time continuum occupied by the spectator. Further, Metz holds, film shows certain similarities to the primordial mirror in which the child sees itself as an other and "identifies with itself as an object."<sup>18</sup> What film has in common with the mirror stage (a concept taken from Lacan) is a "sub-motor and hyper-perceptive state"<sup>19</sup> that Jean-Louis Baudry had outlined in his article "Ideologi-

cal Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" (*Film Quarterly* 28, 2 (Winter 1974-75)). In this state the subject is all-perceiving, particularly since it differs from the mirror stage in one important aspect: the spectators, unlike the child in the mirror, do not reflect themselves in the screen. Metz goes on to ask with what or with whom, then, the spectators do identify during the projection of the film. He comes to the conclusion that "the spectator identifies with himself, with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as the condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject, which comes before every *there is*."<sup>20</sup> Concretely, this means that the audience identifies with the camera. In the film-viewing process this identification with the camera and its movements is a given, or rather a precondition, for viewing at all. Nevertheless, Metz insists that this primary cinematic identification is that of a transcendental, not an empirical subject. By way of explanation, he refers to analyses of quattrocento painting and its role of monocular perspective and the vanishing point, placing the spectator-subject in the position of some ultimate signified, which is of course none other than the point of view of the author.

Besides primary cinematic identification, Metz distinguishes secondary, tertiary, and so on, cinematic identifications that designate those of the spectators with the characters of the diegesis. Most interesting, Metz discusses these forms of cinematic identification in terms of psychic functions to help in understanding the film. Similarly, Brecht had questioned his actors about the possibility of audience-performance interaction without any kind of identificatory mechanism. Just as the answer was negative then, Metz asserts that a certain degree of analogical projection is necessary in order to understand the fiction film. In fact, what seems to be most basic in terms of reception in the cinematic situation is an oscillation between identification and nonidentification or between belief and disbelief. In psychoanalysis this oscillation characterizes, as Metz points out, the situation of fetishism. Metz maintains that this analogy, first established by Octave Mannoni in his studies on theatrical illusion, also holds true for the cinema. Some restrictions, however, are in order. The analogy to fetishism applies to cinema and theater in the same measure only with respect to the fiction-fact as such. With respect to

representation and signifying material, Metz insists on specific differences between the two media. In his views on cinematic specificity Metz, unlike Brecht, focuses on the illusionistic potential of films. As mentioned above, Metz describes the cinematic signifier as being closer to fiction insofar as none of its aspects are related to the actual space and time of the performance: "The cinematic signifier lends itself the better to fiction in that it is itself fictive and 'absent.'" <sup>21</sup>

In Brechtian terms this means that cinema lends itself more readily to "culinary" and illusionistic indulgence than the theater does because its level of reality is uniformly coded by fiction. It is uninterrupted fictionality without the built-in "distancing device" of the plot (fiction)/set (reality), character/actor split in the theater. Metz relates these observations to Brechtian theory when he remarks: "Attempts to 'defictionalize' the spectacle, notably since Brecht, have gone further in the theatre than in the cinema, and not by chance."<sup>22</sup> In other arguments involving psychoanalytic analogies, Metz ties cinematic scopophilia to the primal scene as described by Freud. He bases this comparison essentially on the keyhole perspective of the viewing situation in the movies as well as on a sense of shamefacedness that attaches to cinematic voyeurism. However, Metz's project concurs most strongly with Brecht's thought in his painstaking account of the mechanism of primary and secondary cinematic identification and its difference with respect to identification in the theater. Metz recognizes the importance of his findings for the kind of political film Brecht had envisioned when he writes: "The militant use of the two signifiers is by no means identical. In this respect the theatre is clearly at a great advantage, thanks to its 'lesser degree of imaginarity,' thanks to the direct contact it allows with the audience. The film which aims to be a film of intervention must take this into account in its self-definition. As we know, this is by no means easy."<sup>23</sup>

Although Metz's final description of the "imaginary signifier" is different from Brecht's view of cinematic specificity, his work represents an important advance in film theory in a genuinely Brechtian sense. For one thing, Metz's research incorporates a more recent historical period, the Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s, which Brecht addressed only polemically and never really theorized about. Brecht's belief in the "antiauratic" nature of film was based on

the previous epoch, where the possible directions film could take were wide open and where Chaplin and Eisenstein among others did indeed forge avenues of filmmaking radically different from those that went into the definition of Hollywood films. And finally, in an odd dialectical twist, Brecht's description of film as static and his greater emphasis on interruption turn out to be an appropriate counterstrategy to the lure of the "imaginary signifier."

#### ENGLAND

The introduction of Brecht into debates on film theory in England followed in the wake of a more general orientation toward French theory, particularly by the British film journal *Screen*. Two issues of *Screen* are especially important in this context. *Screen* of summer 1974 (vol. 15, no. 2) first introduced some theses on Brecht's relevance for the cinema and was followed up by a special issue (Winter 1975-76, vol. 16, no. 4), "Brecht and the Cinema/Film and Politics," which is a transcript of the 1975 Edinburgh Film Festival Brecht Event. In a short editorial remark, Ben Brewster outlines the aims of the editorial board of *Screen* in organizing a set of screenings and discussions on the topic "Brecht and Cinema/Film and Politics." Some of these goals include the exposition of Brecht's own interventions in the cinema, critical appraisals of recent political cinema, and finally, Brecht's impact on cinema and television in Britain. The issue was to extend and deepen the theses advanced in the previous Brecht issue, and the recorded discussions were meant to clarify the "difficulties and contradictions implicit in those theses."<sup>24</sup> Some of these theses are new to the debate on ideology and film form. In Colin McCabe's "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," for example, the initial analysis of a metalanguage in film similar to that in the novel merges with his consideration of Louis Althusser's definition of ideology as always "imaginary." McCabe points to the inevitable result of Althusser's thesis, which is that "art can be allotted no specific field of action other than its effects on the content of ideology."<sup>25</sup> This lumping together of art and ideology has been an ingredient of, but also an embarrassment to, traditional Marxist thought, argues McCabe, and he proposes aspects of Brechtian

theory and practice as a way out of the dilemma. Brecht's conception of art as a transformative practice—transformative of ideology and the position of the subject within ideology—would constitute art beyond the pale of either science or ideology as a separate area of activity.

In his article "Lessons from Brecht," Stephen Heath takes on the notion of distancing in Brecht and opposes it to the term "separation." Heath gives a subtle reading of distancing when he takes as his point of departure Brecht's description of Chinese paintings, where Brecht discusses the lack of monocular perspectives in these paintings in positive terms as the absence of constraint and violence. Much as in epic theater, the individual elements of these paintings are placed side by side—they could exist independently even though they sustain relations among themselves. Here the viewer is left at a distance, not coerced into one particular meaning but able to generate a "series of meanings and re-meanings (a tabularity), a multiperspective without the fixity of depth. Instead of representations, displacement—of eye, of subject (in both senses of the term)."<sup>26</sup> What Heath objects to is the facile reading of distancing as a simple technique that leaves the illusion of representation intact, and second, the equation of distance and separation. The choice of this latter term is unfortunate, since it evokes the Brechtian principle of the "separation of elements," which is the key to the multifaceted presentation of material and hence to distancing. By "separation" Heath means, however, the classic mode of representation of "Aristotelian" theater with its pretense of the fourth wall that places the audience into a structure of fetishism. Unlike Metz, who states this situation as a given (however, not without an awareness of alternatives), Heath is more concerned with the possibilities of radically different forms of representation. He sees both the analysis of the fetishism of commodities in Marx and fetishism in Freud as theory of the construction of the subject, to be raising questions about the function of representation: "Not the alienation of essence but the essential denial of work, production, the refusal to grasp the positions of subject and object within that process."<sup>27</sup> In Brecht, "the aim is no longer to fix the spectator apart as receiver of a representation but to pull the audience into an activity of reading; far from separat-

ing the spectator, this is a step towards his inclusion in a process."<sup>28</sup> Brechtian montage, productive of contradictions, pulls the audience out of its fixity and frees it to perceive its own contradictory position. Heath continues his essay by placing these considerations into a larger framework, the debate on ideology and the subject's position in ideology.

Althusser's description of the structural positioning of the individual as subject ("interpellation") through a number of social institutions ("ideological state apparatuses") such as the family, school, and church serves for Heath to explain the thrust of Brechtian critical intervention. (Language as constitutive of the subject is here referred to only briefly.) "To work on the reality of the illusion is effectively to work on the ideology of representation and the subject-positions it determines."<sup>29</sup> In contrast to montage, which is informed by dissociation, narrative (linear progression) is characterized by Heath as closing off the avenues of participation by the audience; in short, narrative is informed by the principle of "separation." This analysis finally leads to an assessment of Brecht's view of cinematic specificity: the potential of film for exterior depiction and its "static nature" are both seen by Heath as possibilities in film for holding back the narrative.

These readings of Brechtian theory, couched as they are in the terminology of structuralist Marxism and Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis, could be challenged on the grounds that they exceed Brecht's intentions. The point, however, is not—as Stephen Heath writes with regard to Brechtian cinema—to define an essential Brecht, but to use the major aspects of his theory and practice to elucidate current cultural phenomena. This, it seems, is itself a Brechtian position. Yet some of the objections that a few of the *Screen* editors (Edward Buscombe, Christine Gladhill, Alan Lovell, Christopher Williams) raise to the use of psychoanalysis in *Screen* for understanding cinema in the Brechtian tradition are not entirely unfounded, at least not with respect to the resulting confusion of terminology. As mentioned above, Stephen Heath's choice of the term "separation" to designate the fourth wall of classical closed dramatic forms is unfortunate; to compound the problem, the Edinburgh transcript of Colin MacCabe's talk on Godard's films *Deux ou trois*

*choses que je sais d'elle* and *Tout va bien* is entitled "The Politics of Separation." Here separation is used as a Brechtian term when MacCabe attempts to show, once again by recourse to psychoanalysis, how the production of the separation of elements will bring about in the spectator the relaxed attitude of the learner. MacCabe draws on the various stages in human sexual development proposed by Freud (oral, anal, and genital) and polarizes the pleasurable state of identity of the infant and the breast, of presence of the object, with the state of separation, of absence of the object, that is the precondition for desire and knowledge. "Caught in the homogeneous state of consciousness the object finds itself trapped in the unity of belief, i.e., conferred an identity. In order for knowledge to occur, there must be separation so that this identity is broken down into a set of relationships."<sup>30</sup>

Separation is used in this instance to cover a whole spectrum of situations: from Freud's treatise on infantile sexuality as a succession of phases superseding one another to his observations on the infant's "fort/da" game, establishing the notion of presence and absence of the mother or nursing person; to Lacan's discussion of the ascension of the subject from the imaginary to the symbolic and the concomitant polarization of identity, pleasure, belief versus separation, desire, knowledge; to the spectator's position in the theater or in the cinema, designating both the separation of elements in the presentation of the dramatic material and the state of distanced, that is, nonidentificatory viewing on the part of the audience. This is surely more coverage than should be expected from any single term. Aside from the possibility of questioning Lacan's as well as Freud's theories, the equation of terms taken from psychoanalysis used to explain the formation of the subject and terms used to describe the cultural activity of adults is problematic, as Christian Metz has already pointed out in connection with Baudry's application of the mirror phase to the cinematic viewing situation. Insofar as in the latter case secondary processes—that is, processes pertaining to the symbolic—are concerned that assume a subject that has already "ascended" to the symbolic, the comparison is inadequate. If, on the other hand, the line between imaginary and symbolic is taken in a more fluid sense, then the original rigid polarizations pleasure/desire, belief/knowledge, and so forth, also break down. In any case, from Brecht's point

of view any opposition between pleasure and knowledge would be problematic, since the conjunction of the two is crucial to his entire theory. Brechtian dialectics does not emphasize bipolar oppositions, the basic one being the opposition between subject and object. With reference to Korsch's thesis on the unity of opposites, Brecht wrote, "When you talk about process, think of yourself as one who acts and is acted upon."<sup>31</sup> His notion of intervention is dependent on this unity as well as on the unity of theory and practice, which was not in question for Brecht. This aspect of Brecht may also mark the limitation of applying a structuralist Marxist model to his theory, however many excellent contributions the latter has made to Brecht studies.

Ben Brewster's analysis "Brecht and the Film Industry," which gives a close account of the *Threepenny Opera* lawsuit and a comparison of script outline, shooting script, and final film, is also part of the Edinburgh transcript, which together with James Pettifer's article "The Limits of Naturalism," another essay by Stephen Heath entitled "From Brecht to Film: Theses, Problems," and articles by Alan Lowell as well as by Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen on Brecht in Britain, is a truly remarkable landmark in bringing Brecht into the orbit of recent film studies.

In his book *Questions of Cinema*, Stephen Heath brings together many of the arguments he previously worked on in his Brecht essays. Although at this point Brecht figures only as a frame of reference to focus on the ideological place of cinema (see chap. 1, "On Screen, in Frame: Film and Ideology"), this very reference invites a look at Heath's more recent elaborations of concepts in film theory that were already present, *in nuce* as it were, in the *Screen* debates of the mid-seventies. The most striking one (and the only one that can be looked at here), the concept of "suture," represents probably the most thorough psychoanalytic and semiological analysis of the mechanism of identification in the cinema. "Suture" is a concept first introduced by Jacques-Alain Miller and delivered at Lacan's seminar as a contribution to Lacanian theory. Subsequently, the term was adapted for film theory by Jean-Pierre Oudart, critic of *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

Heath begins his chapter on "suture" by explicating Lacan's theory of the subject. Very schematically put, Lacan postulates language as cause of the subject, and the symbolic or the place of the Other as the

locus of its (language's) operation. Thus there are two domains, the subject and the Other; between the two are the processes of the unconscious, defined as the "discourse of the Other," since it is considered to be structured as a language: "The unconscious is finally not so much a position as an edge, the junction of division between subject and Other, a process interminably closing."<sup>32</sup> The subject as an effect of speech establishes the radical primacy of the signifier. Language imposes being, and except for the operation of language and the symbolic, the subject is a category of lack ("lack-in-being"). This is to say that as an effect of language the subject is split, divided in the symbolic; it is represented and excluded—excluded, because meaning as it arises in the symbolic by the function of the signifier entails the disappearance of being (aphanisis). Language thus both confers being and induces its disappearance. Lacan designates this postulation of the division of the subject in language "alienation," the first fundamental operation in the causation of the subject. The second operation is that of *separation* (and the following will make it clear why Heath chose the term separation to oppose to distancing). Separation is the subject's relation to the Other; it (the subject) parries the moment of its lack (-in-being) in an "interminable rerun of the signifiers . . . metonymy of desire."<sup>33</sup> This is the drama of the subject in language. Avoiding the truth of division, the subject attaches desire to images in an act of projection, which is a function of the imaginary. Suture is this joining operation between the imaginary and the symbolic. Its result is the ego. "The ego is not to be confused with the subject: it is the fixed point of imaginary projection and identification, where the subject as such is always on the side of the symbolic. . . . suture is toward the imaginary."<sup>34</sup>

Suture in cinema, as described by Oudart, is the avoidance of realizing cinema as discourse and the image as signifier by effacing the absence (erecting the fourth wall, "separation"), the limits imposed on identification by the awareness of fiction (the screen, the frame). Classically, a character in the diegesis takes the place of absence, suturing the break of awareness and at the same time constituting the spectator as cinematic subject. Oudart and Heath consider the system of suture as the ideological operation of a film. These observations are followed by the discussion of a number of

specific cinematic strategies like shot-reverse shot and depth of field to demonstrate suturing procedures in cinema.

The contribution of the concept of suture to an understanding of the identification processes in the cinema and the theater undoubtedly lies in its emphasis on the "drama of the subject in language,"<sup>35</sup> and it stands or falls with the acceptance or nonacceptance of Lacan's theory of the subject. An evaluation of this theory obviously exceeds the scope of this book. Although at this juncture Brechtian theory provides only the frame, or rather, the door to a criticism of ideology for Heath, his work from that time nevertheless constitutes the most incisive attempt to mesh the concerns of psychoanalytic and semiotic film theory with Brechtian thought.

The essays by Martin Walsh, written throughout the 1970s, that have appeared in a volume entitled *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema* are of major importance in establishing the role of Brechtian theory for a particular kind of cinema that defines itself in opposition to the practices of Hollywood, to melodrama and docudrama alike. While Walsh places Brecht alongside Eisenstein, Vertov, Meyerhold, Tretyakov, Mayakovsky, and the other members of the Russian avant-garde, he does not consider him simply a transmitter of their ideas. Walsh writes: "The cast of [Brecht's] mind was not derivative, the quality of his thought never second-hand. Rather, our current re-discovery of the experimental activities taking place in Russia in the 20s serves to highlight Brecht's position as not that of an isolated genius of the European avant-garde, but as the brilliant representative of a wiry strand of aesthetic history."<sup>36</sup> Walsh sees Brecht, therefore, as a pivotal figure in the continuity of political avant-garde film from Vertov to Straub. Without Brecht, Walsh contends, "it is doubtful whether Godard, Makavejev, Straub, to mention only the most luminous figures of the radical cinematic avant-garde of today, could have produced the body of work that they have."<sup>37</sup> The most remarkable aspect of Walsh's own work lies in his detailed analyses of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's films. Four articles in this volume are devoted to Straub/Huillet. While the first, "Political Formations in the Cinema of Jean-Marie Straub," deals with five of Straub's early films (*Othon* [1970], *Machorka-Muff* [1963], *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* [1968], *Not Reconciled* [1965], and *The*

*Bridegroom, the Comedienne and the Pimp* [1968]), the other three articles focus on one film each in brilliantly creative comparisons of Straub/Huillet's cinematic strategies and Brechtian theory, only a few examples of which can be given here. The films analyzed in these articles are *History Lessons*, based on Brecht's fragment-novel *The Business Deals of Mr. Julius Caesar*, second, *Introduction to Arnold Schoenberg's "Accompaniment for a Cinematographic Scene,"* and last, *Moses and Aaron*. Departing film-historically from the time—the first two decades of this century—when the cinema adapted to a set of codes largely derived from the nineteenth-century novel and from perspective painting, Walsh shows how Straub/Huillet systematically subvert these codes in an effort to counter the intended effect of the traditional cinematic norm, namely narrative continuity and the spectator's identification with the characters on the screen. On every level of filming, from the position of the camera vis-à-vis the pro-filmic subject to the framing and composition and the final cutting, Straub/Huillet meticulously counter established conventions such as the 180-degree rule and the 30-degree rule. They decentralize the positioning of the actors by frequent partial framing and make use of "empty" frames, their camera refuses to follow movement, they deliberately underline artifice in historical reconstructions, and they insist on noninterpretative monotone readings of texts and on direct sound. These are just a few of the more obvious deviations from tradition that have antecedents in European film history in two exponents of ascetic aesthetics, Carl Dreyer and Robert Bresson. Walsh, however, suggests a fundamental distinction between Bresson and Straub in that Bresson's emphasis on sparseness aims at enabling the audience to feel its way to the heart of his films, whereas Straub/Huillet have a functional view of their techniques; they are more interested in forcing the audience to think and coproduce the filmic text. This aspect simultaneously represents their link to Brechtian theory.

In his article on *History Lessons*, Walsh gives a complex account of Straub/Huillet's formal organization and point-of-view structure, which is characterized by a constant displacement of the narrator. Just as Brecht had located his own point of view in the montage, Straub/Huillet refuse to let the camera identify with the point of

view of any one of the speakers in the film and thus prevent the identification of the audience with any one character in particular, encouraging a more diverse, heterogeneous, and complex viewing. This multinarrational structure is supported by other strategies such as the diagonal orientation of the camera—both laterally and vertically—to avoid the spectator's inclusion in the narrative space. Classical narrative's shot-reverse shot places the camera barely to one side of the character's eyeline (over-the-shoulder shots) to ensure the spectator's placement inside the narrative space. Other Brechtian strategies to rupture the unified understanding of texts are related to the principle of "literarization"—that is, a series of quotations to dislocate the narrative flow—and further, careful attention is paid to episodic structure.

It is a mark of Walsh's deep understanding of the work of Straub/Huillet as well as of Brecht that he is able to locate the limit of this comparison and point to differences. He writes:

Although Straub/Huillet's editing strategies respect Brecht's segmentation, those strategies in no sense themselves support the content of the segments. . . . the formal organisation of each sequence is an explicitly materialistic one which, more than simply "drawing attention to itself," is involved with an exploration of the parameters of classical narrative forms. . . . the knowledge [Straub/Huillet] are concerned with is not that of the signified (the demythologization of Caesar—that is Brecht's task) but rather with that of the signifier.<sup>38</sup>

This statement is reiterated in even more radical terms in the article on *Moses and Aaron*, where Walsh argues that Straub/Huillet's claims for radical content are often undercut by the formal investigations of language akin to the "suspension of meaning" in Roland Barthes's sense.

As a final assessment of the relation between Brecht and recent film theory, Walsh's analyses are exemplary, not only because of his ability to give textual evidence of the connection between the cinematic strategies of radical filmmaking today and Brechtian techniques, but also because of his clear-sighted distinctions between them. The difference between Straub/Huillet and Brecht that Walsh has pointed out corresponds to the critical revision of the term

Brechtian advanced earlier in Godard's case. To be sure, Brecht wrote for purely experimental reasons—the *Fatzer*-fragment, a *Lehrstück*, was conceived as self-understanding about formal matters that Brecht considered necessary and technically advanced—yet in its entirety his work is a monument to the critique of ideology understood not only as signifying practice but including the multiple determinants in social relations.

#### NEW GERMAN CINEMA

Alexander Kluge is perhaps the only figure in New German Cinema whose development is fully congruent with that of the New Wave of German film, from its inception in the early sixties as alternative cinema to its present metamorphosis into a branch of the entertainment industry. Kluge was one of the signatories of the Oberhausen manifesto of 1962, which proclaimed the demise of conventional German cinema and the creation of the new German feature film. At the same time, the group of twenty-six young and prospective filmmakers insisted on new freedoms for the new cinema, specifically the freedom from the influence of commerce and vested interest. The Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film, which was established as a result of these demands and the lobbying practices that went with them, supported, with the help of government funds, unknown and first-time filmmakers on the basis of scripts submitted. For Kluge, who was closely associated with these activities, the founding of New German Cinema was an instance of cultural and political putting into practice of what in theory he has called the "proletarian public sphere." Working with contemporary theorists of the Frankfurt school, in particular Oskar Negt, Kluge has, on the one hand, based his approach to media analysis on the experiments and thoughts of members of the political avant-garde such as Brecht and Benjamin; on the other hand, he has succeeded in establishing a connection between these early theories and Jürgen Habermas's theory of communication. Habermas's concept of the public sphere, the development of which he discusses in his book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Structural Changes in the Public Sphere), is crucial to these elaborations.

In Habermas's view, the constitution of the bourgeois public sphere was fundamentally related to the separation of state and civil society in such a way that it remained part of the private sector. Underlying the bourgeois public was a specific subjectivity that was the result of the intimacy of the patriarchal, nuclear family. The private citizens who gather as a public and engage in open debate are not synonymous with their social activity—they retreat again to their private life in the family. The structural changes in the relation between public and private interest led to the dissolution of the classical bourgeois public sphere itself. Habermas thinks that the state interventionism at the turn of the century acted on behalf of the interests of bourgeois civil society. Conflicts that could no longer be contained by the private spheres, and the transference of private interests into concerns of the state, gradually destroyed the basis of the bourgeois public: the separation between state and civil society.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, though the bourgeois public sphere is no longer representative of late capitalist society, Habermas argues, it runs parallel to the new forms the public has taken on. It still functions as an ideal, and as such it continues to dictate the categories and experiences of the classical bourgeois public. These categories or forms, for example, "the separation of powers, the separation between public and private, between politics and production, between public language and the possibility of real social expression, between education, science, and art on the one hand and the interests and experience of the masses on the other,"<sup>40</sup> are an obstacle, in Negt and Kluge's view, to the emancipation of the majority of the population.

The contradiction and at the same time the weakness of the dominant interpretation of the public sphere is its claim to represent the entire society while excluding substantial life interests, namely the socialization in the family and the industrial apparatus. At this juncture Negt and Kluge describe in their coauthored book *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (Public Sphere and Experience) how the new "public spheres of production" (the consciousness industry and advertising, administrative and industrial complexes) in fact constitute a much more inclusive public sphere. They overlap the classical bourgeois public sphere but have different roots. Their effectiveness derives directly from capitalist production interests; by circumventing

the traditional public sphere as mediation, they seek direct channels to the private sphere of individuals. Thus Negt and Kluge use the term public sphere as an accumulation of different forms with varying characteristics and origins. The utility, or in Negt's and Kluge's terms the use value of the public sphere (to which Brecht gave such a crucial place in his dramatic theory as well as in his thoughts on the media), is fundamentally dependent on the degree of social experience expressed. Social experience in its broad sense can be used either in the interest of the dominant public sphere or in an emancipatory way. The determination of the use value of the public sphere thus has to do with the specific relation between particular interests tied to a definite public sphere and the whole of society.

Negt and Kluge tried to capture the notion of the value of the public sphere in the term "proletarian public sphere," which is not coterminous with the empirical public sphere of the working class (although it is based on it). This concept was advanced by Negt and Kluge as a critique of, or rather a corrective to, Habermas's theory of communication, which, based as it is on the "ideal speech situation," harks back to the ideal of communication of the bourgeois public. This ideal was to ensure the weight and influence of the public vis-à-vis the governing body in the distribution of political power. Negt and Kluge bring Habermas's theory of communication into the orbit of modernity when they link their conception of the public sphere to the media theoreticians of the twenties:

A proletarian public sphere founded on the beginnings of autonomous class politics, albeit empirically not lending itself at all to a clear definition or localization, say, in class organization, was the presupposition shared by Brecht, Balázs, and Benjamin. They took it as their point of departure to fuse the intelligentsia's collective mode of production fostered by advanced forces of production in means of communication with the specific organizational forms of experience emanating from the proletariat.<sup>41</sup>

When Brecht embarked on the "sociological experiment," the public trial over the filming of his *Threepenny Opera*, he was fixing a moment in the process of shifting public spheres, a moment in which we can see the "public spheres of production" in the making. At the same time, Brecht was keen on exposing the ideal categories of the classical

bourgeois public sphere as ideology. His thorough investigation and patient articulation of the function (and refunctionalization) of the apparatus can unquestionably be considered a cornerstone in Negt and Kluge's concept of the public sphere. And in turn, the foundation of New German Cinema marks a positive instance of practical application of this complex of theories. The request of the Oberhausen group for freedom from the tutelage of vested interest is none other than Brecht's demand to wrest the means of communication from the apparatus and place it in the hands of the artists themselves. In this most fundamental way, Brecht's impact on the beginnings of New German Cinema can be established.

Formally, Brecht is ubiquitous in New German Cinema. When asked about Brecht's influence, Rainer Werner Fassbinder once stated that all filmmakers had to confront him at one point or another. The question arising in each case, then, is the extent to which Brecht is foregrounded and in what other aesthetic and political contexts he is presented—in other words, once again a question of differences. Straub, as already discussed, is opting for an ascetic aesthetics. Kluge, in contrast, stresses Brechtian multilayered montage, not sparseness but density, in an overwhelming compilation of material of the most diverse kind. Kluge's montage "does not serve to manufacture an orderly comprehensible overview, ultimately leading to insightful interpretation; instead, it creates gaps that can be penetrated by the associations and the imagination of the spectator."<sup>42</sup> This bombardment of images, words, and music (the last is very important for Kluge), a bewildering jungle of quotations and observations, literarization with a vengeance, has emancipatory intent. It is designed to stimulate in the spectator experiences and qualities not normally encouraged, such as curiosity, memory, and the hunger for seeing and hearing.<sup>43</sup> Kluge's own definition of montage is crucially concerned with the expression of subjective experience. This concern also underlies his attempt at blurring the borderline between documentation and fiction. "Documentation alone cuts off context [*Zusammenhang*]: there is nothing objective without feelings, actions, wishes, that is, the eyes and senses of people who act" and conversely, "no narration is successful without a certain measure of authentic material, that is, documentation."<sup>44</sup> In questions of point-of-view

structure, Kluge's voice-over technique has been challenged as overbearing, especially when it is used as commentary to female protagonists' fumbling attempts to make sense of their political environment.<sup>45</sup> These are serious charges, especially in view of Kluge's project to "unblock" the public sphere for representation of the experience of larger and larger segments of the population. Nevertheless, Kluge remains one of the key figures in New German Cinema both as founder and as untiring director.

The enumeration of Brechtian aspects of New German Cinema's *Autoren* could continue indefinitely. Only one other example, that of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, should be included here, since Fassbinder's development is in many ways exemplary for much of New German Cinema. In his early years with the "antitheater," Fassbinder had worked with Straub. He had acted in Straub's production of Ferdinand Bruckner's *Krankheit der Jugend* (Sickness of Youth), which eventually found its way into the former's film *Der Bräutigam, die Komödiantin und der Zuhälter* (1968) (The Bridegroom, the Comedienne, and the Pimp). That Fassbinder had learned from Straub and through Straub from Brecht is evident in his first original play, *Katzelmacher*, filmed in 1969. Straub had explained his reduction of Bruckner's play to a ten-minute performance by pointing out his intent to leave out all psychology and show people's relations with each other as constellations that dissolve and regroup. A more "gestural" Brechtian exercise is hard to imagine, and the relation to Fassbinder's film is immediately apparent. *Katzelmacher* is structured exactly in those terms. A clique of small-town cronies are grouped and regrouped in different arrangements, ornamentally draped, as it were, along the banister of a staircase where they like to congregate. Each new constellation signals a new aspect in the dynamics of their relations. The gestural quality of this structure is supported by the segmentation of the film into separate episodes. Each pair of episodes is divided by a musical passage (set to Schubert's *Sehnsuchtswalzer*) that accompanies the fixed constellation of two—usually different—people of the group walking through town engaged in passing on or creating gossip. The sparseness of decor and the terseness of the dialogue add to the stylized effect of the film. *Katzelmacher* is very much a film that shows the social relations among the people in the

sense of the Brechtian *gestus*, with one qualification. Implicit in Brecht's use of the term "social relations" is the notion that its bottom line is class relations, whereas for Fassbinder, even at his most Brechtian, the causal nexus exhibited by the *gestus* is a dynamics of power relations, which include economic and class considerations but are fundamentally grounded more in sexual politics and gender difference. Fassbinder's affinity to melodrama, in other words, was a fact even before his "discovery" of Douglas Sirk.

Fassbinder's turn toward Sirkian melodrama is only one aspect of his early fascination with different Hollywood genres (the gangster film and film noir being the most obvious examples), albeit one that probably gained him the popularity he so rapidly attained. This move should not be understood as the idiosyncratic decision by the lone genius director, but should be seen in context with a wider debate on the political validity of alternative radical and theoretical filmmaking. New German Cinema grappled with these questions through most of the sixties. In the early seventies the call for more audience-oriented films was pervasive in the Federal Republic. Naturally this did not happen without shifts in the funding policies that had made the sixties' experiments possible. Lobbying efforts of the old film industry brought to pass in 1967 the Film Subsidies Bill, which in conjunction with the Film Subsidies Board gave support only to already established producers, with a view to the gross income of their previous films. Sirk's own belief that show business has always had to make its money back coincided with the sentiment of the time in favor of greater popular appeal and commercial success.

Fassbinder's dealings with Hollywood genres might be characterized in terms of nostalgia as much as subversion and parody, as has been proposed. It is the nostalgia for the beautiful and powerful images of Hollywood movies, whose innocence is lost forever once their attraction has been analyzed. It is also nostalgia for the compassionate and simple love of one's fellow humans that Fassbinder ascribes to Sirk while deploring its loss in himself—and in his generation, for that matter. The Hollywood Fassbinder pays homage to is not the Hollywood of today, which seems to be caught in a similar wave of nostalgia. However, while recent Hollywood movies about the fifties are mainly concerned with exact or self-conscious reproduc-

tions of "how it was" in matters of style, language, and mores, Fassbinder's nostalgia, in contrast, is an attempt to recapture some of the essence such as melodrama's heroicizing of average and lowly lives and the emotional intensity in everyday situations. His subject matter, on the other hand, is mainly contemporary (with the exception, of course, of historical material such as *Bremer Freiheit* [1972] (Bremen Freedom) or films based on novels such as *Fontane Effi Briest* [1972-74]). Stylistically, one cannot really talk about one Fassbinder, since the proliferation of filmic forms he has created in his career as director and writer of film and theater has yet to be tabulated. Experimental endeavors and more commercial projects occur side by side as, for example, with *Eine Reise ins Licht-Despair* (Despair) and *In einem Jahr mit 13 Monden* (In a Year of Thirteen Moons), which were made in 1978 and followed by *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (The Marriage of Maria Braun), made in the same year and finished in 1979.

However many different styles Fassbinder mastered, the melodrama stands out as the form he excelled in. And among his melodramas, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* ranks very high, not only because of its monumentality but because it is the summation, the crowning effort, of his artistic capabilities. Fassbinder had first read Alfred Döblin's novel of the same title when he was fourteen years old. The story of Franz Biberkopf, ex-convict, pimp, and thief, who vows to remain honest after he is released from prison but slides irresistibly back into his former ways, at first bored the young Fassbinder. But as soon as he came to the place in the novel where Franz meets Reinhold, a cold and enigmatic creature (Döblin frames him as a figure of death reminiscent of Thomas Mann's descriptions in *Der Tod in Venedig* [Death in Venice]) and a professional criminal, he was unable to put the book down. From then on Döblin's novel accompanied him through his life—private and artistic—and he set himself the goal of filming this work when he knew enough about the craft. He was finally able to realize his dream in 1979-80 when he directed (16 mm color) the magnificent fifteen-and-one-half-hour television serial, composed of thirteen parts and an epilogue, for WDR (West German Radio).

This acknowledgment of Fassbinder's excellence in the melodramatic genre seems to place him in opposition to Brecht rather than in

his following. The conjunction of Brecht and melodrama is as great a challenge to established norms in thinking about Brecht as Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's attempt to wed Brecht to Wagner. This means only that there is all the more reason to look into the nature of this challenge and to get a more precise view of just how divergent their projects are. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is well suited to serve as a reference point in this investigation, particularly since it introduces Döblin as a third party with his own separate relationship to Brecht.

Brecht and Döblin were both members of the Berlin literary circle *Gruppe 1925* and knew each other well. They both attended Korsch's seminars and met at Brecht's house in regular group meetings for discussions on Marxism and aesthetics. In his early notebooks (from September 1920) Brecht mentioned two books by Döblin he had read: *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun* (Wang-lun's Three Leaps, 1915) and *Wadze's Kampf mit der Dampfturbine* (Wadzek's Struggle with the Steam Turbine, 1918). The commentary is fascinating with respect both to Brecht's own development and to Fassbinder's predilection: "There is great power in it, all things are set in motion, the relations between people are brought into focus with extraordinary sharpness, all gestures, and mimicry are incorporated into psychology with virtuosity and everything scientific is removed . . . danger: Döblin's baroque."<sup>46</sup> In contrast to this early accolade, a 1928 entry on Döblin is critical of his aestheticism and bombast.<sup>47</sup> Yet in October of the same year a letter to Döblin praises his writing as capable of "expressing a new world view," while at the same time "filling the gap, which is being created by the present Marxist aesthetics."<sup>48</sup> The variable in this complex of contradictory statements is Brecht, not Döblin. Brecht's position on psychology in literature shifted radically during the eight years in question. While in 1920 Döblin's use of psychology compared favorably to the scientism of the naturalists, by 1928 psychology itself had to go, whereas science as experiment, theater as laboratory, had a firm place in Brechtian aesthetic vocabulary. Brecht's change signals his alignment with the historical avant-garde. The only thing Brecht validated throughout is Döblin's montage technique. No doubt with a view to developments in the aesthetic debate in Soviet Russia, Brecht was rallying support for the forces of modernism to counter the socialist realist reaction afoot.

Nevertheless, Brecht is no stranger to the melodramatic sen-

sibility. What comes to mind immediately in opposing his theory to melodrama is his supposed aversion to emotions. In spite of Brecht's numerous attempts to rectify what he considered an oversimplification (which, to be sure, was partially due to his early writings, where he does place emotion and reason in opposing columns) by pointing out that he is opposed not to emotions but to reducing a plurality of emotions to one, namely empathy, he has largely become pegged as the representative of an antiemotional aesthetic. His obvious deviations from this pigeonholing effort are usually written off as inconsistencies. Yet there is a good argument to be made for Brecht's capacity for melodrama, which is sometimes developed to the point where it gets in the way of his dramaturgical intentions. (Had he not invested the character of Mother Courage with such heartwrenching qualities—when, for example, she gives up her chance to marry for her daughter's sake but presents it as an addiction to life on the road so as not to let her bear the burden of the sacrifice—that later, when he wanted to emphasize her stubborn ways, he was unable to turn her into a villainess no matter how hard he tried?)

A look at the characteristics of melodrama with a view to Brechtian theory and practice might yield some interesting insights into this relationship and at the same time elucidate the conjunction between Brecht and Fassbinder. The text I will use to describe those characteristics is Peter Brooks's comprehensive study *The Melodramatic Imagination*.<sup>49</sup> Brooks's point of reference is the melodrama in France, where this genre was established at the beginning of the nineteenth century following the Revolution. Audiences for this type of drama in France were not strictly confined to the lower classes, as was the case in England, but included all sectors of the middle classes and occasionally members of the aristocracy as well.

The major points in Brooks's definition describe melodrama in terms of:

1. An exciting, excessive, parabolic, and hyperbolic story from the banal stuff of reality (implying a refusal to live beyond the ordinary).
2. A victory over repression and the desire to voice one's deepest feelings, to the point of indulgence in emotionalism, saying what is unsayable, saying everything. There is a hierarchy of difficulty in finding appropriate expression that ascends from words to gestures to

visual representation (the tableau) to music. When words are inadequate, gestures, tableaux, and music (what Brooks calls "the text of muteness") take over to express the inexpressible. Both the use of gesture and the use of music also point to the origin of melodrama in pantomime and in musical drama.

3. Extreme moral polarization between good and evil, virtue and villainy and a high degree of personalization of good and evil in a clearly defined moral universe. The melodrama strives to prove the existence of a moral universe. Virtue has to undergo extremes of pain and anguish; it resists but does not struggle, and it is finally recognized and rewarded. The villain, in contrast, is an active force and the motor of the plot. For a short time villainy is triumphant, but it is finally recognized as the evil component of mankind and expelled from the universe.

4. A movement of desacralization, divorce from mythic substrata, democratization of morality, privatization, and personalization is countered by the urge toward resacralization and the pressure to yield meaning beyond the surface of things.

The representational forms of melodrama include:

1. Exteriorizing of conflict and psychic structure. Physical conditions represent moral states. Physical signs make the characters legible to others. A whole scale of codes goes into the production of signs. This occurs on all levels of production, stage decor, costumes, and so forth, and it especially affects the "text of muteness"—gestures, tableaux, and music.

2. Inflated, sententious language and a refusal of nuance.

Even just a cursory glance over these genre characteristics reveals an astonishing correspondence between Brecht's theater and melodrama. It can be taken for granted that Brecht's plays are dealing with ordinary life and for the most part with ordinary people as well. He frequently uses the parable form, and the polarization between good and evil is not unusual for him. The split personality of Puntilla or the disguises of Shen Te/Shui Ta can be seen both as parodies of these conventions and as modern versions of them. Further, the notion of a moral universe might be rephrased only slightly: Whereas melodrama strives to prove the existence of a moral universe, epic theater strives to demonstrate the possibility of it. Thus we see virtue/

villainy not rewarded/expelled but represented in perpetual replay until such time as the conditions will allow for appropriate action.

The movement of desacralization, divorce from mythic substrata, and democratization of morality is very close to Brecht's project of an antiauratic art just as the representational modes of melodrama—the exteriorization of conflict and of psychic structure—instantly remind us of Brecht's "depiction from without." The readability of Brechtian theater in terms of signs is precisely what is at stake in the notion of gestus (which, as discussed earlier, is not confined to gesture in the sense of body language but pervades the entire *mise-en-scène*). The important difference between the gestures of the "mute text" and the epic gestus is that the emphasis of the former lies in the revelation of psychic entanglements, whereas the gestus, though it may deal with emotional and psychic conflict, is ultimately anchored in social relations. This distinction also sets Brecht against melodrama's investment in expressing emotional dilemmas in a personalized and privatized context.

Melodrama's urge toward resacralization is also absent in Brechtian drama, but the pressure to yield meaning beyond the surface of things can once again be usefully compared, if slightly deflected from a spiritual dimension to a social one. The meaning Brecht was after, a meaning he considered hidden behind the surface of things, had to do with understanding social causality. The last point, finally, concerning inflated, sententious language does not apply to Brecht, who if anything was prone to understatement. He did, however, refuse nuance if it was a matter of nuance for nuance's sake.

One simple way to explain the surprising amount of overlap between melodramatic characteristics and epic theater is to refer back to Brecht's background in the "plebeian" traditions of the stage from *commedia dell'arte* to the skits of Karl Valentin. Melodrama's origins in the French Revolution, its iconoclastic attitude to traditional literary forms, and its thrust to democratize art are congenial to Brecht's own intents and sources. In its further historical development—its entrenchment in bourgeois forms and the glorification of the individual's inner, psychic space—melodrama parts company with epic theater. Brecht's evaluation of the opera as discussed earlier can shed some light on his relation to melodrama as well. For in

accounting for the differences between epic and melodramatic forms it is essential to point out not just how melodrama differs from epic theater but also how epic theater differs from melodrama. And here the whole compendium of distancing techniques Brecht devised in contrast to Wagnerian opera and Aristotelian drama would be applicable as well.

The question now is, How can Fassbinder be situated in this field of determinations? What is his relation to melodrama and to Brecht? Or rather, how does he modify both of these aesthetic traditions to forge his own art? One way of approaching these questions is to see how Fassbinder dealt with Döblin's novel, how he transformed his text—one of the few in German literature that make the metropolis itself central to the narrative (the so-called *Großstadtroman*)—and turned it into his own.

The protagonist in Döblin's novel is the city of Berlin. Franz Biberkopf, whose life is most closely scrutinized among the multitude of characters in the story, is still second to the rhythm and the mosaic of everyday life that the city represents. Döblin's masterly montage technique weaves together fragments of the chatter of discourses and of the fates of myriad unknown faces. In this intricate tapestry Biberkopf is but one strand, even if a very conspicuous one. In contrast to this, Fassbinder makes the life of Franz central to his conception. More specifically, he makes the friendship between Franz and Reinhold the overruling theme of the entire work. Aside from Fassbinder's subjective reasons for this choice (whether Döblin had written his life story or whether he had lived Döblin's novel, he never attempted to solve) this shift in focus means a decisive step in the direction of melodrama's claim to sound out psychic depths and to give voice to the deepest feelings. As in so many of Fassbinder's films, the insistence on expressing emotion and making it central has a peculiarly critical dimension. As a post-Brechtian filmmaker and one who was perfectly aware of Brecht's dramaturgy, Fassbinder was not oblivious to the contrast his choices represented in terms of that tradition. Yet he also recognized the importance of historical specificity. His generation, the postwar generation of the economic miracle, did not suffer from economic crises, inflation, or unemployment, nor

did it feel the same urgency to make political choices as did Brecht's audience in the twenties. Instead the urgency had shifted, in Fassbinder's opinion, to the devastation and marginalization that society's concentration on economic strength had wrought upon the psychic and emotional needs of its population.

Fassbinder starts from the premise that the fascination Reinhold holds for Franz is pure disinterested love between the two, and he goes on to ask: "What should a creature that was educated more or less as we were do with a love that does not lead to any visible results or anything that could be exhibited, exploited, in other words useful?"<sup>50</sup> He concludes that such a love could only cause anxiety and fear in those of us (and that means all of us for Fassbinder) who have learned that love like everything else must be useful and usable. In Fassbinder's analysis, social coercion and repression are responsible for the disruption of affection and love between people. If as a consequence people give up these feelings, they give up themselves, or at least an essential part of themselves. This concern, Fassbinder claims, is at the core of all his work, and he conceives of it as political.

Fassbinder's choice of melodrama as his privileged form is not surprising and certainly is no coincidence. Through two centuries melodrama has accommodated variously the need for emotions and the need for political reform. Political drama as Brecht defined it had to "distance" itself from melodrama in very essential ways in order to oppose the latter's decline into consumerist vicariousness. After Brecht, and equipped with his insights, it seemed possible for Fassbinder to repoliticize this haggard genre and give it a new lease on art. In this process Fassbinder has made use of everything he cherished: the beautiful images of Hollywood, Sirk in particular, Döblin's loving description of the city of Berlin and its people, and Brecht's insight that in order for any work to be a work of art, it cannot subdue the audience's senses but must increase their responsiveness and their perception.

Fassbinder found a perfect measure and balance between identification and distancing, between the excess of emotional yearning and the intervention of critical thought. He went beyond Brecht in showing psychic conflict not necessarily in tandem with sociological determinants, but also not shunning them. On the other hand, he

seemed uninterested in exploring the spiritual dimension in Döblin's novel (of which he was quite aware), limiting its meaning entirely to the social and the psychic. It would be a toss-up if one had to decide whether Freud or Marx was more important for Fassbinder. He insisted that *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was the first attempt to transpose Freud's discoveries into art. At the same time he stressed that the book does not allow anyone to become lost or submerged in it and that it forces readers to analyze their own reality and that of others as well.

A similar balance between identificatory and distancing impulses is achieved on the level of representation in Fassbinder's film. Much of Döblin's montage of events from Biberkopf's life, embedded in fragments of myths, biblical stories, nursery rhymes, scientific discourse, advertisements, and so on, is reproduced by a voice-over narrator (Fassbinder mostly) who comments on and distances the dramatic action, sometimes by directly addressing the character or the action and at other times by reciting completely unrelated texts that contrast ironically or function as thought-provoking supplements in other ways. The extent of the interference with the action is kept exactly on the cutting edge between surrender and resistance to the narrative. In comparison with the novel, this results in some reduction in the diversity of separate elements in favor of a more unified plot and a protagonist more accessible to identification. Fassbinder reported, for example, that he wanted to translate the interior monologue of the novel into concrete behavior of the characters so that the audience would be able to translate it back into their own unconscious.

Fassbinder's cutting-edge strategy can be observed on other levels as well. Some of these, such as the slightly unorthodox shot-reverse shot, Fassbinder attributed directly to Sirk.<sup>51</sup> Instead of the customary over-the-shoulder close-up of faces (in the case of two characters confronting each other), Sirk's shot-reverse shots quite frequently include the back and shoulder of the partner. The effect of this strategy is to prevent the total camera/character identification, which allows the viewer to get a close look into the event without being completely absorbed. Clearly, to exhaust all the examples of this strategy and the different levels it involves—lighting, music, acting,

and costumes, to name but a few—a separate study is needed. The points made here are merely meant to illustrate how Fassbinder succeeded in applying enough of Brecht's (and Döblin's) distancing to infuse melodrama with the necessary bite and reflection to make it a politically viable genre once again.

The temptation arises to end this Fassbinder/Brecht comparison by moving it into the orbit of the modernist/postmodern debate. It must be resisted, however, mainly because such categorizing would obscure more than it would elucidate. Part of the point of this investigation into the forms of melodrama and Fassbinder's appropriation of them after brushing shoulders with Brecht was to show that these differences are not polar opposites, but gradations on a sliding scale. Brecht's insight that aesthetic forms cannot be descriptive of certain political attitudes for all times but must be chosen carefully with the demands of a specific time and place in mind can be brought to bear on this comparison as well. If this regard for historical specificity can be considered crucial for Brecht's theory, Fassbinder was a Brechtian filmmaker indeed.

## Notes

### CHAPTER I

1. Rudolf Arnheim, *Kritiken und Aufsätze zum Film*, ed. Helmut H. Diederichs (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1979), p. 10. This and all subsequent translations from original German texts are my own unless otherwise stated.
2. Hans Richter, *Der Kampf um den Film*, ed. Jürgen Römhild (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1979), pp. 68–69.
3. Walter Benjamin, "Der Autor als Produzent," in *Versuche über Brecht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 111.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
5. Heinrich Goertz, *Piscator* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1974), p. 24.
6. Erwin Piscator, *Schriften*, vols. 1 and 2, *Das politische Theater* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1968), p. 50.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
10. Friedrich Wolf, *Aufsätze über Theater* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1957), p. 23.

11. George Grosz, cited in Piscator, *Schriften*, 1:200.
12. Ibid.
13. Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 15:284.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 15: 134. Literally, "film makes the bed for drama."
17. Käthe Rühlicke-Weiler, *Die Dramaturgie Brechts* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1968), pp. 109-17.
18. Leo Kuleshov, "Quotes from Interviews and Letters," *Film Culture* 44(Spring 1967): 6.
19. Dziga Vertov, "Film Directors, a Revolution," *Cinema* 11(1971): 28.
20. Jean-Paul Fargier et al., "'Ne copiez pas sur les yeux' disait Vertov," *Cinématique* 15(1971): 72.
21. Seth Feldman, "Cinema Weekly and Cinema Truth," *Sight and Sound* 43, 1(1973-74): 36.
22. I am using the terms "communication" and "discourse" interchangeably in this text. The reference is both to Foucault's notion of an enlargement of the existing field of discourse and to communication theory based on Habermas's "ideal speech situation," that is, the distribution of power in a given group in such a way that each participant has an equal chance to speak. More important than Habermas are Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, who developed Habermas's theory of communicative competence in a direction even more congenial to Brecht's intentions. Their concept of the "pro-

letarian public sphere" addresses the problem as Brecht saw it more directly, namely, as the attempt by excluded and marginalized groups to demand representation.

23. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 221.
24. Ibid., pp. 223, 226.
25. Brecht, *GW*, 18:158.
26. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 232.
27. Brecht, *GW*, 20:326, 60.
28. Ibid., 17:1005.
29. Ibid., 15:138.
30. Ibid., 15:136.
31. Ibid., 17:1005, 1006.
32. Siegfried Unseld, ed., *Bertolt Brechts Dreigroschenbuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1960), p. 74.
33. Wolfgang Gersch, *Film bei Brecht* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1975), p. 52.
34. Unseld, *Dreigroschenbuch*, p. 108.
35. Ibid., p. 112.
36. Ibid., p. 113.
37. Ibid., p. 112.

## CHAPTER 2

1. Brecht, *GW*, 17:1016.
2. Ibid., 17:1006. "Taste" for Brecht has overtones similar to those it had for Benjamin. Benjamin thought that the increase in commodity production meant a decline in the quality of the products. Consumers must be kept ignorant of this process, for their expertise declines in the same measure as the importance of their taste increases. Taste corresponds to the loss of familiarity with the process of production.

3. Ibid., 17:1015.
4. Ibid., 17:1007.
5. Unseld, *Dreigroschenbuch*, p. 98.
6. Brecht, *GW*, 15:222. *Literarisiert* could best be translated as "equipped with the necessary background information" for the theatrical scenes at hand.
7. Dieter Prokop, ed., *Massenkommunikationsforschung*, vol. 1, *Produktion* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1972), p. 304.
8. Ibid.
9. Brecht, *GW*, 15:172.
10. Brecht, *GW*, 2:584.
11. Bertolt Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal*, vols. 1 and 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 2:912.
12. Ibid., 1:41.
13. Brecht, *GW*, 15:129.
14. Ibid., 17:1026.
15. Steinweg suggests a parallel usage in Marx's and Engels's *German Ideology*.
16. Brecht, *GW*, 17:1028.
17. Reiner Steinweg, *Das Lehrstück: Brechts Theorie einer politisch-ästhetischen Erziehung* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche und Carl Ernst Poeschel, 1972), p. 61.
18. Ibid., p. 118.
19. Ibid., pp. 23-24.
20. Benjamin Wacker, "Program for a Proletarian Children's Theater," trans. Susan Buck-Morss, *Performance* 5(1973): 29.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 31.
23. Asja Laci, "A Memoir," trans. Jack Zipes, *Performance* 5(1973): 27.
24. Benjamin, "Program," p. 30.
25. Brecht, *GW*, 17:1024.
26. Benjamin, "Program," p. 32.
27. Brecht, *GW*, 18:126.
28. Steinweg, *Lehrstück*, pp. 20, 21.
29. Brecht, *GW*, 2:636.
30. Steinweg, *Lehrstück*, p. 21.
31. Bertolt Brecht, *Die Massnahme: Kritische Ausgabe mit einer Spielanleitung von Reiner Steinweg* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 238.
32. Brecht, *GW*, 2:629.
33. Steinweg, *Lehrstück*, p. 22.
34. Ibid., p. 16.
35. Ibid.
36. Brecht, *GW*, 18:171-72.
37. Vladimir Bechtereve, *General Principles of Human Reflexology* (London: Jarrolds, 1933), p. 81.
38. Ibid., p. 98.
39. Ibid., p. 235.
40. Brecht, *GW*, 17:1024.
41. Benjamin, "Program," p. 32.

## CHAPTER 3

1. Bertolt Brecht, *Kuhle Wampe: Protokoll des Filmes und Materialien*, ed. Wolfgang Gersch and Werner Hecht (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), p. 89.
2. Brecht, *GW*, 18:172.
3. Brecht, *Kuhle Wampe*, p. 173.
4. Ibid., p. 96.
5. Ibid., pp. 18-19.
6. Ibid., p. 93.
7. Ibid., p. 96.
8. Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, ed., *Die Expressionismus-debatte: Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 128.

9. Walter Benjamin, *Versuche über Brecht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 132.
10. Schmitt, *Expressionismusdebatte*, p. 186.
11. See Eugene Lunn's characterization of Brecht as "plebeian" and Lukács as "patrician" in "Marxism and Art in the Era of Stalin and Hitler: A Comparison of Brecht and Lukács," *New German Critique* 3(Fall 1974): 12-44.
12. Schmitt, *Expressionismusdebatte*, p. 225.
13. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 242.
14. Schmitt, *Expressionismusdebatte*, p. 196.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
16. Brecht, *GW*, 19:355.
17. Heinz Brüggemann, *Literarische Technik und soziale Revolution* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1973), p. 83.
18. Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 85.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Brecht, *GW*, 20:77.
22. Benjamin, *Versuche*, p. 130.
23. Schmitt, *Expressionismusdebatte*, p. 199.
24. Georg Lukács, "Writer and Objective Truth," in *Writer and Critic* (London: Merlin Press, 1970), p. 34.
25. Brecht, *GW*, 19:291.
26. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), p. 4.
27. Brecht, *GW*, 19:368.

28. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, p. 4.
29. David Bathrick, "Concerning Legends," *New German Critique* 9 (1976): 140.
30. Brecht, *GW*, 16:671.
31. Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal*, 1:241.
32. *Ibid.*, 2:906.
33. Brecht, *GW*, 18:195.
34. *Ibid.*, 19:298.
35. Jan Knopf, *Bertolt Brecht: Ein kritischer Forschungsbericht* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1974), pp. 23-24.
36. Brecht, *GW*, 15:360.
37. Quoted by Knopf, *Forschungsbericht*, p. 26.
38. Brecht, *GW*, 18:163.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
40. Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal*, 1:224.
41. *Ibid.*, 1:228.
42. Brecht, *GW*, 17:1010.
43. *Ibid.*, 16:581.
44. *Ibid.*, 15:360.
45. *Ibid.*, 17:1145.
46. *Ibid.*, 16:924.

#### CHAPTER 4

1. Rainer Friedrich, "On Brecht and Eisenstein," *Telos* 31(Spring 1977): 156.
2. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 73.
3. Roland Barthes, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," *Screen* 15, 2(1974): 34.
4. Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1947), p. 32.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
7. Jacques Aumont gives an interesting account in his book *Montage Eisenstein* (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1979) of Eisenstein's perspective on the notion of unity. Far from making the customary break between the early Eisenstein, whose concept of dialectics was primarily dynamic (the struggle of contradictions), and a later Eisenstein whose preoccupation with organicity and unity has wiped out the dynamic concept, Aumont argues that in Eisenstein the "struggle between a conception of the conflict and a demand for unity, for organicism, is constant" (translated in *Discourse* 5[Spring 1983]: 85).
8. Brecht, *GW*, 16:693.
9. Benjamin, *Versuche*, p. 20.
10. Brecht, *GW*, 16:689-90.
11. *Ibid.*, 15:483.
12. *Ibid.*, 16:753. *Absonderbar* is a coined word. *Absonderlich* simply means "strange," but the suffix *bar* gives the word a sense of purposeful strangeness, as in "estranged."

Brecht distinguishes *gestus* from *Gestik* (gesturing), which is the everyday version of *gestus*, and from the individual *Gesten* (gestures), those expressions that replace language (e.g., nodding or shaking the head) but that are, like language, based on convention.

13. Brecht, *GW*, 12:459.
14. *Ibid.*, 18:157.
15. *Ibid.*, 18:171.
16. *Ibid.*, 18:157-58.
17. *Ibid.*, 15:398.

18. *Ibid.*, 16:541, 614-15.
19. *Ibid.*, 15:405.
20. *Ibid.*, 15:404.
21. *Ibid.*, 16:697.
22. Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 198.
23. Brecht, *GW*, 16:694.
24. *Ibid.*, 16:696.
25. *Ibid.*, 15:340.
26. *Ibid.*, 16:693.
27. Quoted in Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 68. Hermann Warm was one of the three expressionist painters who designed the backdrops and sets for *Caligari*.
28. Brecht, *GW*, 15:283.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. Masha Enzensberger, "Dziga Vertov," *Screen* 13, 4(1972-73): 97.
32. Christian Metz, *Film Language*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), chap. 5.
33. The script of *Kuhle Wampe* has not been found to date. This transcript by the editors of *Kuhle Wampe. Protokoll des Films und Materialien*, is based on a copy of the film from the state film archive of the German Democratic Republic.
34. Jean Mitry, "Problèmes fondamentaux du montage au cinéma des années vingt," in *Collage et montage au théâtre* (Lausanne: Cité d'Homme, 1978), p. 79.
35. Benjamin, *Versuche*, p. 31.
36. Brecht, *GW*, 15:496.

37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 15:492.
39. Ibid.

## CHAPTER 5

1. John Willett has written a whole chapter, "Brecht and the Motion Pictures," in his book *Brecht in Context* (London: Methuen, 1984), based primarily on the minutely researched account given by Wolfgang Gersch in *Film bei Brecht*. My synopsis of Brecht's years of exile is also based on Gersch's book.
2. Quoted in Gersch, *Film bei Brecht*, p. 189.
3. Gersch gives as complete a list as possible of all known projects in note 6 of his chapter "Brecht's Filmarbeit im Exil." He claims it is hard to know the exact number, since many of them are known only through word of mouth or from entries in the *Arbeitsjournal*.
4. Reinhold Grimm and Henry J. Schmidt first tried to investigate, based on script analyses, Brecht's contribution to the film. See "Bertolt Brecht and 'Hangmen Also Die,'" *Monatshefte of the University of Wisconsin* 61, 3 (1969): 232-40.
5. Bertolt Brecht, *Film-Texte, Drehbücher Protokolle, Exposés, Szenarien* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), p. 617.
6. Gersch, *Film bei Brecht*, p. 249.
7. Ibid., p. 271.
8. Quoted in ibid., p. 277. Originally from Bertolt Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal*, 2:913.
9. Quoted in Gersch, *Film bei Brecht*, p. 277, from Bertolt Brecht Archive, Mappe 282, Blatt 17.
10. Brecht, *GW*, 15:283.
11. Quoted in Gersch, *Film bei Brecht*, p. 281, from Bertolt Brecht Archives, Mappe 382, Blatt 11, 37.
12. Bertolt Brecht Archives, Mappe 372, Blatt 12.
13. The following account of Brecht's reception in France is based on the excellent study by George Lellis, *Bertolt Brecht, "Cahiers du Cinéma" and Contemporary Film Theory* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982).
14. Bernard Dort, "Pour une critique brechtienne du cinéma," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 114 (December 1960): 34, quoted in Lellis, *Bertolt Brecht*.
15. Lellis, *Bertolt Brecht*, p. 76. Cited from "Le 'Groupe Dziga-Vertov,'" *Cahiers du Cinéma* 240 (July-August 1972): 5.
16. Groupe Lou Sin d'Intervention Idéologique, "Les luttes de danse en France; Deux films: *Coup pour coup*, *Tout va bien*," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 238-39 (May-June 1972): 20-21, quoted in Lellis, *Bertolt Brecht*.
17. Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 74-75.
18. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyll Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Gurretti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 45.
19. Ibid., p. 49.
20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., p. 66.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 65.
24. Ben Brewster, "Editorial," *Screen* 16, 4 (1975-76): 4.
25. Colin McCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," *Screen* 15, 2 (1974): 24.
26. Stephen Heath, "Lessons from Brecht," *Screen* 15, 2 (1974): 105.
27. Ibid., p. 107.
28. Ibid., p. 111.
29. Ibid., p. 115.
30. Colin McCabe, "The Politics of Separation," *Screen* 16, 4 (1975-76): 49.
31. Brecht, *GW*, 20:70.
32. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 78.
33. Ibid., p. 83.
34. Ibid., p. 86.
35. Ibid., p. 85.
35. Martin Walsh, "The Complex Seer: Brecht and the Film," in his *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, ed. Keith M. Griffiths (London: BFI, 1981), p. 20.
37. Ibid., pp. 20-21.
38. Ibid., p. 71.
39. Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1976), pp. 72-75.
40. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur*

- Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 14.
41. Oskar Negt, "Mass Media: Tools of Domination or Instruments of Liberation?" *New German Critique* 14 (Spring 1978): 74.
  42. Rainer Lewandowski, "Literatur und Film bei Alexander Kluge," in *Alexander Kluge*, ed. Thomas Böhm-Christl (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), p. 239.
  43. Miriam Hansen, "Cooperative Auteur Cinema and Oppositional Public Sphere," *New German Critique* 24-25 (Fall/Winter 1981-82): 49.
  44. Alexander Kluge, *Die Patriotin* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1979), p. 41.
  45. See B. Ruby Rich, "She Says, He Says: The Power of the Narrator in Modernist Film Politics," *Discourse* 6 (Fall 1983): 31-46.
  46. Brecht, *GW*, 18:10.
  47. Ibid., 18:63.
  48. Ibid., 18:64-65.
  49. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).
  50. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, "Die Städte des Menschen und seine Seele," *Die Zeit*, March 14, 1980.
  51. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, "Imitation of Life," *Fernsehen und Film* 2 (February 1971): 9-13.

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tion?" *New German Critique* 14(Spring 1978): 61-80.

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