

## The Piscator Experiment

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Apart from Engel's crucially important production of *Coriolanus*, experiments in epic theatre were undertaken in dramatic writing only. (The first drama to construct this epic theatre was Brecht's dramatic biography *Baal*, the simplest was Emil Burri's *American Youth*, and the most accomplished so far – because it comes from an author with a quite different perspective – was Bronnen's *East Pole Train*.) Now theatre, too, is bringing grist to the mill: the Piscator experiment.

The essential features of this experiment are as follows:

Film is incorporated to pre-empt those parts of the dramatic action that contain no conflict, so as to take the strain off the spoken word and make it absolutely decisive. The spectator has the opportunity to see and judge for himself certain processes that constitute the preconditions for the decisions of the protagonists, without having to view these processes from the perspective of those who are motivated by them. As the characters no longer have to provide objective information for the spectator, they can express themselves freely: their expression becomes striking. Moreover, the contrast between flat photographed reality and the word placed vividly in front of the film, jumping back and forth thanks to special effects, can also be used to intensify linguistic expression beyond all control. The word, which is full of pathos and simultaneously ambiguous, achieves enhanced status through the calm, photographic display of a real background. Film makes drama's bed for it.

Because the milieu is photographed in its entire breadth, the speaking characters become disproportionately large. Although the milieu has to be compressed or enlarged to fit the unchanging size of the same surface, namely the screen, as, for example, when

Mount Everest constantly changes size, the characters always remain the same size. This is where Engel has collected points for epic theatre. He presented the story of *Coriolanus* in such a way that each scene was self-contained, and only its outcome was used for the whole. In contrast to dramatic theatre, where everything rushes towards a catastrophe and so almost everything functions as an introduction, here the totality was present, immobile, in each scene. The Piscator experiment will be completed once a series of crucial deficiencies have been removed (for example, thanks to the unexploited transition from word to image, which still takes place quite abruptly, the number of spectators in the theatre is simply increased by the number of actors still busy on stage who are standing in front of the projection screen; for example, the over-emotional operatic style which is still usual today is unmasked dreadfully, ostensibly through carelessness, by the beautiful *naïveté* of photographed machines, technical errors that imbue the Piscator experiment with some of that aroma without which a naive theatre is inconceivable).

Epic theatre still has to put to the test the deployment of film as a pure document of photographed reality, as conscience.

[‘*Der Piscatorsche Versuch*’, BFA 21/196–7.]

Written 1927. Brecht was one of Piscator’s collaborators at the Piscator-Bühne in 1927–8, and made numerous allusions to Piscator’s work in his writings on theatre from the mid-1920s through to the 1940s (see *Brecht on Theatre*). Erich Engel’s production of *Coriolanus* was premiered at the Deutsches Theater, Berlin, on 27 February 1925. Brecht also refers to the 1926 production of his radically revised version of his first major play *Baal*, *Life Story of the Man Baal*, which is a classic instance of the cooler, more matter-of-fact mode of presentation that characterises his experiments in epic theatre in the mid-1920s.

### Piscator Theatre

Not the attempt of politics to seize the theatre, but of the theatre to seize politics . . .

Nowadays, people tend to see Piscator’s attempt to renew theatre

as revolutionary. But it is revolutionary neither in terms of production nor in terms of politics, but only in terms of theatre. This becomes clear if one considers the history of the theatre in the last hundred years. In this period bourgeois theatre has not fundamentally changed. To take one example: thirty years ago, Naturalism was taken to be a revolutionary transformation. And yet, it was simply a superficial, and at root inconsequential, therefore non-committal, process of drama being influenced by the international bourgeois novel. I saw nothing of this (except its consequences) and today I cannot distinguish this style of stage production from that of the Burgtheater in bygone days. And that's without mentioning Expressionism at all, which was a merely inflationary phenomenon and changed absolutely nothing.

[*'Piscatortheater'*, BFA 21/197-8.]

Written c. 1927. The Burgtheater was the major theatre in Vienna, and a bastion of tradition in terms of repertoire and theatrical style.

## 17

### Primacy of the Apparatus

In a special supplement of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the theatre critic Diebold has written about 'Piscator drama'. In this essay, which displays a striking interest in new theatre rare these days, he alludes to a new opportunity for dramatic writing. He asserts, namely, that the Piscator Stage makes a new type of drama possible. This viewpoint is further proof of the extraordinary confusion that bourgeois aesthetics is in. We can assume that Piscator's experiments in directing aim to electrify the theatre and bring it up to the technological standards that most institutions have reached today. Film makes it possible to make the backdrop more realistic and let the scenery play a role. The conveyor belt makes the stage floor mobile, etc. This puts the theatre in the best position to perform modern plays or put on modern performances of older plays. But

does this stage, *and this stage alone*, make it possible for new plays to emerge? Do new plays have to be written for this stage?

We can assume that new plays must be written. It was a revolutionary decision of the new dramatic writing to write new plays, come what may. These plays were not stageable. It was not possible to make it clear to anybody that they were not stageable. Why this could not be made clear to anybody was beyond the capacity of aesthetics. Who amongst our critics, schooled only in aesthetics, would be capable of understanding that the self-evident practice of bourgeois criticism, whereby in every single case in aesthetic questions it agrees with theatres rather than producers, has a *political* cause? Here, as everywhere else, the employer gains the upper hand over the worker, the owner of the means of production is assumed to be productive, *eo ipso*. For years, dramatic production has insisted that it is being wrongly staged, that the dominant theatrical style is incapable of coming to terms with it, that, however, it requires and makes possible a completely new theatrical style. Silence in the forest. As ever, because, of course, nothing of note has happened, because no means of production are behind it, because there is no influence to be gained here and no power to fear, the critic judges the new dramas in terms of their suitability for the contemporary theatre, he shakes his magnificent head at everything that is incompatible with an obsolete, worn-out, unimaginative style of staging, and he assumes at best that dramatic writing lacks any really intellectual commitment and has no sense of its own duties. Who is supposed to make him realise that his duty, probably unbeknown to him, is to supply the existing institutions and means of production with material? If a more up-to-date institution emerges, which has just started to replace paraffin lamps with electric light, then dramatic writing does have a duty, namely to supply this institution. Then electricity would at last appear in plays! Nevertheless, not much has been achieved with this modest technological advance; Piscator has his hands full if he is to get any further, and the new dramatic writing that has already appeared is still not stageable.

Piscator has made it possible for us to grasp new materials. It is

his duty to make the new materials old. Until they are old, they cannot be grasped by drama.

[‘*Primat des Apparates*’, BFA 21/225–7.]

Written 1928. Ernst Diebold was a leading theatre critic in Germany in the 1920s and is best known for his books on *Georg Kaiser* (1925) and contemporary German Expressionist theatre, *Anarchie im Drama* (1925).

18

## New Dramatic Writing

HARDT . . . why sociology?

BRECHT My dear Mr Hardt. If you sit in a theatre today, and it started at eight o’clock, then at about eight thirty – whether they are playing *Oedipus* or *Othello* or *Carter Henschel* or *Drums in the Night* – you will feel a certain spiritual depression, and by nine o’clock at the latest you will feel that you have got to leave immediately. You will feel this way not because what’s being done is not very nice, but despite its being very nice. It’s just not right. Despite that, you hardly ever leave – you don’t, I don’t, nobody does, and it’s very difficult even in theory to somehow object to this type of theatre, because the whole of aesthetics, in other words our theory of beauty, is no help to us in this. With the help of aesthetics alone we cannot do anything about the existing theatre. In order to liquidate this theatre, i.e., dismantle it, get rid of it, sell it off at a loss, we must call on science, just as we have called on science to liquidate a whole lot of other superstitions. In our case, this means sociology, i.e., the theory of human beings’ relationships to one another, in other words the theory of the unsightly. Sociology is to help you and us, Mr Ihering, to bury as completely as possible as much as possible of today’s dramatic writing and theatre.

IHERING What you mean by that, if I understand you correctly, is that so-called modern drama is basically no different from the old

drama, and therefore also needs to be got rid of. For what reason? Do you want to dismantle all dramas that deal with individual fates, that are thus private tragedies? Incidentally, that would mean that you no longer think Shakespeare is valid, on whom all our contemporary drama is based. Because Shakespeare also wrote dramas of the individual: individual tragedies such as *King Lear*, plays that virtually drive human beings into loneliness, showing them in the end in tragic isolation. So you would deny that drama has any *eternal value*?

BRECHT Eternal value! To bury eternal value as well we similarly need only to call on science for assistance. Sternberg, what's all this about eternal value?

STERNBERG There are no eternal values in art. Drama, which was born in a particular cultural milieu, hardly embodies eternal values, just as the epoch in which it was created does not endure for all eternity. The content of drama is made up of conflicts between human beings, conflicts of human beings in their relationships to institutions. Conflicts between human beings are, e.g., all those that are produced by the love of a man for a woman. But these conflicts are not eternal, certainly not, just as certainly as relationships of men and women are fundamentally different in every cultural epoch. Other conflicts are those of human beings in their relationships to institutions, e.g., to the state. But these conflicts are not eternal either; they depend on the radius of each human being as an individual, and the radius of state power. And so the relationships of the state to human beings, and thus of human beings to one another, are also absolutely different in different cultural epochs; they are different in antiquity, whose economy was based on slavery – that's why in this respect even classical drama is not eternal for us – they are different in a modern, in a capitalist economy, different again, of course, in an epoch to come which will recognise no classes and no class differences. So we should not speak of eternal values, especially nowadays, as we stand at the turning point of two epochs.

IHERING Could you apply these general statements of yours to Shakespeare in particular?

STERNBERG European drama hasn't gone a step further than

Shakespeare. He stood at the turning point of two epochs. What we encapsulate with the term Middle Ages had its effect on him, but Medieval Man had been released from his bonds by the dynamics of the epoch; the individual had been born as an individual, as an indivisible entity that wasn't interchangeable. And that's how Shakespearean drama became the drama of Medieval Man, as well as the drama of human beings who began to discover themselves more and more as individuals and, as such, were involved in dramatic situations with their own kind as well as with superior powers. In this context Shakespeare's choice of materials for his great Roman dramas is significant. He didn't present us with a single drama about Rome's great Republican era, when an individual name didn't yet mean anything and the collective will essentially decided things, *senator populusque romanus*, but chose the period before and after that. The great mythological age, when the individual still opposed the masses in *Coriolanus*, and the age of the empire in dissolution, whose expansion contained the seeds of its downfall (and thereby produced great individuals), in *Julius Caesar* and in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

BRECHT Yes, the great individuals! The great individuals were the material, and this material produced the form of these dramas. It was the so-called dramatic form, where drama means: furiously turbulent, passionate, contradictory, dynamic. What was this dramatic form like? What was its purpose? In Shakespeare, you can see this exactly. In the course of four acts, Shakespeare drives the great individual, Lear, Othello, Macbeth, out of all his human bonds with family and state on to the heath, into complete isolation, where he has to show his greatness in his downfall. This produces the form, let us say, of an oat field in the wind. The first movement of the tragedy is only there for the second, and all the movements are only there for the final movement. Passion is what keeps this machinery going, and the purpose of the machinery is the great individual experience. Later times will call this drama a drama for cannibals, and will say that Man was devoured at the beginning with contentment as Richard III, and at the end with pity as Carter Henschel, but either way Man was devoured.

STERNBERG But Shakespeare still embodied the heroic age of drama, and hence the era of heroic experience. The heroic passed away, and the quest for experience remained. The more we approach the nineteenth century, particularly its second half, the more monotonous bourgeois drama became; the entire circle of experience of the bourgeois – in drama! – essentially revolved around the relationship between men/women and women/men. All the variations that can be produced by this problem have been turned into bourgeois drama at one time or another: whether the woman goes to her husband, to a third party, to both or to nobody, whether the men should shoot themselves, and who should kill whom: most of nineteenth-century drama can be reduced to this parody. But what is to happen now, as once again in reality the individual as individual, as individuality, as an indivisible entity that's not interchangeable, is disappearing from view more and more, because with the onset of the capitalist era the collective is the determining force again?

IHERING In that case one must give up the entire technique of drama. Those theatre people and critics are wrong who maintain that all you need to do is learn your trade with Parisian dramatists, polish up the dialogue, improve scenic structure, refine your technique, and then we'd have drama in Germany again. As if this type of drama hadn't been taken to its conclusion by Ibsen and the French long ago, as if it could somehow still be developed. No, it's not a question of refining an existing serviceable technique, of improvement, of following the Parisian school. That's the big mistake, and the small mistake made, say, by Hasenclever and his comedy *Marriages Are Made in Heaven*. No, it's a question of needing a fundamentally different type of drama.

BRECHT Yes, epic drama, in other words.

IHERING Yes, Brecht, you have developed a very specific theory in this area, your theory of epic drama.

BRECHT Yes, this theory of epic drama is indeed our initiative. We've also tried to put together a few epic dramas. *My Man Equals Man*, Bronnen's *East Pole Train*, Fleisser's Ingolstadt dramas, were all composed using epic techniques. But attempts to put together

epic drama have been around for a long time. When did they begin? They began at the time when science really took off in a big way, in the last century. The beginnings of Naturalism were the beginnings of epic drama in Europe. Other cultural areas, China and India, had this more advanced form a good two thousand years ago. Naturalist drama grew out of the bourgeois novel of Zola and Dostoevsky, which, for its part, indicated the incursion of science into the precincts of art. The Naturalists, Ibsen, Hauptmann, tried to put on stage the new material of the new novels, and could find no other form for this than that of these novels: an epic form. When they were at once accused of being undramatic, they abandoned the form at once, together with the material, and their advance faltered; it appeared to be an advance into new areas of material, but in reality it was the advance into epic form.

IHERING So you are saying that epic drama has a tradition that people generally know nothing about. You maintain that the entire evolution of literature for fifty years has been leading up to epic drama. In your opinion, who's the last representative of this evolutionary trend?

BRECHT Georg Kaiser.

IHERING But I don't quite understand that. Georg Kaiser of all people seems to me to signify the final stage of individualist drama, in other words, of a type of drama that is diametrically opposed to epic drama. Kaiser, in particular, is the most short-term of dramatists. He has exhausted his themes through style, and overtaken reality through style. What is the utility of this style? Kaiser's style is a personal signature, is a private style.

BRECHT Yes, Kaiser is also an individualist. But there is something in his technique that doesn't fit his individualism, and so does suit us. The fact that one can observe technical progress where one otherwise observes no progress at all doesn't happen only in drama. From a technical point of view, a Fordist factory is a Bolshevik organisation; it doesn't fit the bourgeois individual and suits Bolshevik society better. Similarly, Kaiser develops his technique by abandoning the great Shakespearean expedient of suggestibility, which comes about as in epilepsy, where the epileptic carries along

with him everyone disposed to epilepsy. Kaiser does appeal to rationality, but with individualistic contents and, moreover, in an exaggeratedly dramatic form, as in *From Morn to Midnight*.

IHERING Yes, to rationality. But how do you want to complete the long journey to epic drama starting from here?

STERNBERG The distance from Kaiser to Brecht is short. It's not a continuation, but a dialectical shift. The rationality that in Kaiser was still used to give dramatic form to the spheres of experience of opposing individual fates, this rationality is used in Brecht intentionally to dethrone the individual.

BRECHT Of course, the pure epic drama, with its collectivist contents, is better at provoking an attitude of discussion.

IHERING Why? At the moment an active, and hence a dramatic, drama is being performed in Berlin, the *Revolt in the Approved School* by P. M. Lampel. But this dramatic drama has a similar effect, the audience discuss it, not its aesthetic values but its content.

BRECHT Oh! In that play, public conditions are put up for discussion, namely the intolerable medieval conditions in various approved schools. Such conditions, no matter what form they are reported in, must of course provoke outrage. But Kaiser went a lot further: he made it possible to develop in theatres that quite new attitude of the audience, that cool, investigative, interested attitude, namely the attitude of the audience of the scientific age. In the case of Lampel, we are not, of course, talking about some major transportable dramatic principle.

IHERING Now you are suddenly claiming that epic drama is an eternal principle, yet we'd agreed after Mr Sternberg's comments that there was no such eternal principle. What is his position on this question, now?

STERNBERG The epic drama can only be independent of its relationships to contemporary events and thus endure for a while, if the central attitude it adopts anticipates the experiences of future history. Just as it was possible for the journey from Kaiser to Brecht to be short because a dialectical shift had occurred here, so, too, epic drama can endure as soon as a shift in economic relationships creates the situation, the relationships that correspond to it. Epic

drama, like any drama, depends in that way on the evolution of history.

IHERING [the text breaks off here]

[‘*Neue Dramatik*’, BFA 21/270–5.]

Written 1929. This essay is incomplete, and based on a radio broadcast on 11 January 1929, which involved a discussion between Brecht, Sternberg, Herbert Ihering and Ernst Hardt. Hardt was the artistic director at Radio Cologne, and the broadcast introduced a radio production of Brecht’s *Man Equals Man*, directed by Hardt with music by Edmund Meisel. No recording of the programme exists, and Brecht’s essay is a retrospective reconstruction which incorporates material from other sources. The words attributed to Sternberg, for example, are drawn primarily from newspaper correspondence published in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* in May 1927. Brecht’s initial response to Sternberg is published in *Brecht on Theatre* (‘Shouldn’t We Abolish Aesthetics?’, pp. 20–2). Herbert Ihering was a leading critic, who edited the theatre section of the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* and was one of Brecht’s staunchest advocates from the early 1920s onwards.

In the course of the discussion, Brecht refers to *Carter Henschel*, written by the German Naturalist dramatist Gerhart Hauptmann, the post-Expressionist dramatist Arnolt Bronnen, and Marieluise Fleisser, the author of *Fegefeuer in Ingolstadt* (*Purgatory in Ingolstadt*, 1924) and *Pioniere in Ingolstadt* (*Pioneers in Ingolstadt*, 1926). Georg Kaiser was the most important Expressionist dramatist in the Weimar Republic; Brecht discusses his work in ‘On Expressionism’ (no. 4).

## 19

### The Individual’s Experience of the Apparatus in the Foreground

*Fine* literature puts the individual’s experience of the apparatus in the foreground. The strongly developed belief in the personality was revealed in its funniest light when the problem of war was presented as a psychological problem (in considerations about the adequacy of Czernin’s intelligence, or what was going on in Kaiser Bill’s mind on the evening of the 14th), according to which personalities had

‘succumbed’ to a psychosis, war psychosis, in fact. Without psychosis, nothing could be explained, as of course certain commercial differences could have been ‘settled’ in a ‘different’ way (by which was meant: more cheaply). The ‘philosopher of history’, Ludwig, was able to imagine an intelligence of such power that it could have avoided war, e.g., his own intelligence.

Fine literature put the personality utterly and completely in the foreground, and depicted the experience of the apparatus. (Those with the most powerful experiences experienced print runs of up to a million. They demonstrated how awful it was not to have been a personality for four years.) Each one of them felt that the war wasn’t his own war, was not the consequence of his deeds, nor the logical outcome of his thoughts (since when had his thoughts had any logic to them?): *nobody had ever asked them!* They had said ‘two times two’ aloud, and nobody had ever asked them if they also meant ‘equals four’! They were primarily psyches and they excused themselves with a psychosis. Did they know where the grain grew that they ate? Did they know the name of the bullock they dined on as fillet steak? They didn’t know, yet their heavenly father still fed them. They hadn’t realised that they were capitalists (even if they personally had no capital) and that capitalism’s time had come, its biggest and most stupendous collectivisation so far, its most consistent and almost impersonal achievement! They didn’t realise that this was a societal phenomenon and not an intra-personal one. They saw the individual person being negated by the war, and so they rejected war. But the war was a reality, and the individual person had disappeared. But they hadn’t wanted that. So the war was a chance event, and the individual person was there. Couldn’t war be avoided, say, through the League of Nations? So war had come about because there hadn’t been a League of Nations! The truth was that they couldn’t see law-like regularities because they couldn’t see the causes of events, and they couldn’t see these because they couldn’t eliminate them. They couldn’t eliminate their actions, and hoped that the consequences of those actions could be avoided! The dualism between their opinions and their actions meant that their literature had no consequences and was absolutely

undialectical, thus turning it into the unreal, and hence irrational, side effect which it is. Not only the war, but all the other major capitalist events had to appear to them as being natural in the metaphysical sense, events which human beings confronted as objects by 'experiencing' them. But the war hadn't come about, it had been made, it hadn't only befallen human beings, it had also been waged by human beings, and if the individual was powerless, the sum of all human beings did not constitute humanity, and hence was also powerless. But amongst these, the people who took action did not think, and the people who thought took no action; instead, thinking and acting were diametrical opposites.

[*'Apparaterlebnis des einzelnen im Vordergrund'*\*, BFA 21/306-7.]

Written 1929. Count Czernin was Austrian Foreign Minister from 1916 to 1918, forced to resign after it was revealed that he had been conducting secret peace negotiations with France. Emil Ludwig was the author of a war novel entitled *Juli vierzehn* (*July '14*), published in Berlin and Vienna in 1929.

## 20

### Conversation about Classics

BRECHT My dear Mr Ihering, when I recently got hold of your pamphlet about the classics – *Reinhardt, Jessner, Piscator or the 'Death of the Classics'* – I thought at first that it would probably be an attack on the classics, and that's probably what our listeners are expecting from us now, an attack, a sort of murder of the classics. However, when I read your pamphlet, I saw that you weren't committing murder, but were simply observing that the classics are already dead. But if they are dead, *when* did they die? The truth is, they died in the war. They are amongst our war victims. If it is true that soldiers going off to war had *Faust* in their kitbag, then the ones who returned from war no longer did. You didn't write your book against the classics any more. The classics are not being killed, or

rather they were not killed by books. You wrote your book, and we are talking about the classics, not because the classics are in crisis, but because our theatre is in crisis.

IHERING This is not an arrogant, superficial craving for modernity, but a conclusion based on the facts. Theatre directors in Berlin and in the Empire are having enormous difficulties in putting together their programmes. There are so many theatres that new plays are quickly worn out. So it's self-evident that theatre directors would fall back on the classics again and again, and more and more frequently, if the audience still needed them or related to them.

BRECHT So you think that the classics have turned from being an intellectual problem into an economic one. Our theatres are interested in this problem in economic terms. But what has become of *intellectual* interests? The friends of classicism will say that these have just disappeared, that our age utterly lacks intellectual interests. And that, we must admit, is difficult to refute entirely. The middle class had to more or less liquidate its purely intellectual efforts in an age when pleasure in thinking could mean that its economic interests were directly endangered. Where thinking wasn't completely suspended, it became more and more culinary. People did use the classics, but only in a culinary way.

IHERING Yes, it was abuse. In the age of learning, in the nineteenth century, the classics were considered to be the intellectual furniture of the well-to-do middle class. They ornamented its parlour, they were as much part of the middle class as its plush furnishings, they were applicable and available in all situations. Classical drama served to confirm a world *against* which it had emerged. People used classical verses when they got engaged, brought up their children, watered the garden and went bowling. 'That is the fate of beauty on earth,' declaimed the bearded man and pinched the waitress.

BRECHT Fine, that was abuse. People shouldn't have overtaxed the classics and called on them at every wedding and christening!

IHERING They managed to pervert revolutionary works such as *The Robbers* and *Intrigue and Love* into an innocuous ideology. The petty bourgeoisie decontaminated all rebellious thoughts by identifying with them. The philistines appropriated the revolution,

and therefore were able to disclaim it in real life all the more smugly. They plundered the contents of the classics and wore them out. There was no tradition, just consumption. But all this consumption was simply the expression of a false, intellectually sterile, conservative reverence.

BRECHT This deferential attitude has avenged itself on the classics a lot, they were tarnished by deference and blackened by incense. It would have been better for them if people had adopted a more liberated attitude towards them, such as the attitude science has adopted to discoveries, even great ones, which it continually corrected or even rejected, not out of a desire for opposition, but in accord with necessity.

IHERING Yes, the ownership complex prevented that. Almost the entire nineteenth century was geared towards a feeling of intellectual ownership. Schiller and Goethe belonged to the individual. Everybody spoke of barbarism if the classics weren't performed as they imagined they should be. Everybody was outraged if lines were cut which they did not even know. Everybody thought the nation had been offended if their favourite author was slighted. Nobody identified with the people; everybody identified the people with themselves.

BRECHT The craze for ownership blocked the advance towards grasping the material value of the classics, which after all could have served to make the classics useful once again, but this was always prevented because people were afraid that it would destroy the classics.

IHERING This arrogance was fed by schools and universities. German teaching in grammar schools emphasised the orgiastic nature of ownership. The classics were cultivated as a literary nature reserve. Touching them was forbidden; any modification of borders was disapproved of; any transplantation was punished. People hardly knew any more what Goethe and Schiller *meant*, or what went on in Shakespeare's plays, because they knew it all too well, because they uncritically parroted what had been taught for decades; because the words went into their ears and out of their mouths, taken in and returned according to how they sounded,

worn-out sequences of notes, hackneyed groups of sentences, like the tunes of bad pop songs: ‘The lovely days of Aranjuez . . .’, ‘I kiss your hand, Madame . . .’

BRECHT People shouldn’t have been so afraid of being accused of vandalism. Fear of vandalism turned people into philistines. People ought to be much more careful when they pass judgement on the Vandals. They probably burnt those wood carvings not simply because they disagreed with their style artistically, perhaps not even because they were against wood carvings as such, but because they needed wood for the fire. People should have approached material value in a relaxed way. For a while, our vandalistic efforts promised quite a lot, even though they were fought against every step of the way. There was already the prospect of saving the classics for our repertoire, not for the sake of the classics, but for the sake of our repertoire.

IHERING Erwin Piscator tried that with his production of *The Robbers* at the Berlin State Theatre. This experiment exposed the present’s relationship to Schiller in a problematic way. In the first two acts of *The Robbers*, Piscator weakened the revolutionary from private sentiment, Karl Moor, in favour of the systematic revolutionary, the revolutionary from conviction, which is what he turned Spiegelberg into. To do that he needed to change the text in the most brutal fashion. That was certainly dangerous and un-Schillerean; nevertheless, this interpretation didn’t particularly bring out the high-handedness of the director so much as signify the defeat of the director experimenting with form. This performance, whose second part was simply a bad rendering of Schiller, supplied the theatre not with aesthetic trimmings, but with content, substance, in other words, with material.

BRECHT Yes, it was a promising experiment. Suddenly another opportunity had come into view. Schiller really flourished again; true, Piscator said, ‘150 years, that’s no small matter’, but in the footlights things looked pretty good.

IHERING Its effect was strange. Instead of being glad that Schiller’s play had been plunged back into the river of time, the friends of the classics erupted into howls of rage. Again and again, people wanted

human greatness. Human greatness, which had once been an intellectually valid idea, had long since come to refer to everything that was bloated, vague, ideological. Whenever people no longer knew a term for kitsch and histrionics, they said 'that is sublime'. Every charlatan and every reactionary rejected the re-engineering of the classics with the words that the greatness of the characters had been diminished and the greatness of the form had been destroyed. In reality, this greatness was undermined in every conservative performance, and in every pathos-ridden rendering, because they discredited the human content with a colossal form. This dilemma could not be escaped, either by way of a subtly nuanced realism that spelled everything out, or by way of an ecstatic panegyric style that solemnised everything. In an age when the greatness of the individual had itself become doubtful, pedestals were of no help. A different concept had to be put in place of greatness. You, my dear Brecht, were in the vanguard. In place of greatness, you put: distance. That is your contribution to theatre history. The pivot and turning point in all this was your production of *Edward II* in Munich. You created an example here of how this old work by Marlowe could be rewritten as drama by cooling it down, and brought closer by distancing it. You did not diminish human beings. You did not atomise the characters. You distanced them. You took away from the actor that vivaciously ingratiating cosiness. You called the events to account. You demanded simple gestures. You imposed a clear, cool delivery. No emotional fraud was tolerated. This produced the objective, epic style.

BRECHT I abandoned those efforts. We tried once again with one of Shakespeare's most magnificent works, when Erich Engel directed *Coriolanus*.

IHERING That was an attempt at a methodical solution. Now we come to Goethe. There is a difference between form and mellow-ness, between clarity and calm. The rift between the stage and the masses, the false assessment of drama as a cultural affair – how are these to be explained, if not in terms of the overemphasis on Goethe? Goethe, who was the most private of all German creative writers, became the yardstick for art and humanity. His personal

experiences were investigated, his personal actions were followed, tributes were paid to his lovers' trysts. But even when it was not only a question of Goethe's private experiences, it was still a question of the private experiences of the rising social stratum to which he belonged, the middle class. The Goethe cult of the Scherer school had a fateful impact on the development of German literature, German theatre and German criticism. This was the source for the spread of an uncontrollable art based on personal experience. Goethe was rich enough to derive knowledge from his experiences, and to give them literary shape. But theatre and criticism were put back by a century because this unique art was held to be exemplary, because an aesthetic was derived from it, and critical standards extracted from it. It turns out to be the case, you see, that, particularly in a critical age which is finding new bearings, it is still possible to stage or interpret material originating from a century with firm views and forms, even if the latter have no longer been valid for a considerable time. This does not apply, however, to material which, lacking binding and generally valid laws, signifies the beginning of a dangerous private art, and hence the beginning of the isolation and alienation between theatre and audience, even if it is much closer to us in time. Investigations were still being conducted into Goethe's most discreet secrets at a time when an industrial age had long since generated a different perspective, and a different world-view. Germanists prattled on about Goethe's love affairs and Goethe's lifestyle, they preened themselves with insignificant details, whilst, in the outside world, events were germinating in relation to which any personal fate would become meaningless, and any emphasis on private life, ridiculous. Hence, German drama, German theatre, German criticism were unprepared when the great upheaval came to pass. Gerhart Hauptmann had veered off into the affectations of Goethe's old age. No criticism and no aesthetic had built a reception point. The collapse came about like a catastrophe.

BRECHT The purpose makes the style . . . And the worst thing you can do is hold on to something that no longer has a purpose, just because it used to be beautiful.

IHERING Fine, you don't think ornaments are useful. But in your opinion, what would the classics have to be in order to be useful? What ought to constitute their value?

BRECHT In order to establish this value, we must do an intellectual experiment. Let's simply imagine that some classical work, say *Faust* or *William Tell*, is being performed by boys, by a class of schoolkids. Do you think this would have a value for these boys? Would the thoughts they have to express represent education to them? Would they, or other human beings, gain any benefit from the movements they had to carry out, the attitudes they had to adopt? Would these boys be better able to survive than others, or would the society that they constituted be better able to survive? Answer the question seriously: what would these boys have done differently, if this experiment had been carried out, apart from saying a few nice words and performing a few noble gestures; alternatively, what situations would they have encountered that they would encounter again in real life? Our classical works have been made just to be looked at, and not to be used.

[*'Gespräch über Klassiker'*, BFA 21/309–15.]

Written 1929. Ihering had published a short monograph entitled *Reinhardt, Jessner, Piscator or the Death of the Classics* in 1929. On 28 April 1929 Radio Cologne broadcast a discussion of the issues Ihering had raised, which forms the basis for Brecht's essay. Brecht wrote several versions of this piece, and the version reproduced here is a reconstruction which takes account of Ihering's own notes regarding the broadcast. However, several of the passages Brecht attributes to Ihering were in fact drawn directly from *Reinhardt, Jessner, Piscator or the Death of the Classics*.

The controversy surrounding critical approaches to the cultural heritage had been provocatively sharpened by Piscator's production of Schiller's early play *The Robbers* at the Staatliches Schauspielhaus, Berlin, on 11 September 1926, which Jessner – the artistic director of the Staatliches Schauspielhaus – had commissioned him to produce. Apart from the fact that Piscator had drastically cut and rewritten Schiller's play, conservative critics were outraged by the fact that Piscator had presented Spiegelberg, one of the robbers, as Leon Trotsky. Brecht's discussion with Ihering contains several quotations from and references to Schiller's plays. Wilhelm Scherer, whom Brecht refers to in the context of Goethe criticism,

had published a major *History of German Literature* between 1880 and 1883, and is generally regarded as the founder of the positivist school in German literary scholarship.

## Defence of the Lyric Poet Gottfried Benn

German intellectuals are in a difficult position.

Although the war turned out to be a failure (which wasn't exactly their fault) they have been at the mercy of attacks on people who put their energies in the service of a *hopeless* undertaking. We must not forget that losing this war in no way means that they did no business. It was during the war that *the commodity character of the intellect* was established, in an unbecoming manner. On the other hand, the attitude of German intellectuals in the war proved that when their feelings are engaged in a cause, intellectuals can put their own 'ideas' 'in the service of the cause', as well as the ideas of other intellectuals – for example, dead ones – even, where particular effort is required, with a modest mark-up. They demonstrated that ideas are by no means superfluous just because it is impossible to act according to them; on the contrary, they showed that ideas are very useful if they can provide a justification for action. Harmony can emerge in that way, too. And this is precisely the sort of harmony that pays off.

The above-mentioned certification presented by intellectuals, to confirm that they had made themselves useful in the class struggle, should be taken entirely seriously by the proletariat (of course, whether or not their intellect was up to realising this, intellectuals only made themselves useful in the national struggle, in which otherwise they were of no use, by distinguishing themselves in the class struggle). It is not necessary, for the purpose of evaluating intellectuals, to employ the same intellectuals who have already supported the war effort, although this would be possible too, by

simply 'engaging their feelings in the cause' (they are capable of anything when it's a question of having feelings – feeling itself is sufficient reward). Intellectuals can simply be taken to be a single group with a stable composition which, constituted on the basis of material conditions, reacts in an entirely predictable way. Thus, the proletariat may use different intellectuals, but they will work to the same conditions and achieve the same effect.

The function which they might serve (this can be determined purely on the basis of their behaviour during the war) must not be mistaken for a function which, as history shows, the proletariat has already conferred on intellectuals, a quite indispensable function of the utmost importance: that of leadership. (The importance of this function arises from the fact that in historical cases it is at least very difficult to decide whether individuals such as Marx, Lenin, etc., had a function ascribed to them by the proletariat, or whether they, for their part, ascribed a function to the proletariat. Luxemburg gave Lenin, for instance, a black mark for a series of remarks and, more significantly, actions which seem to prove that Lenin, whose usefulness for the proletariat is beyond dispute, tended to the latter viewpoint.) The proletariat proves its strong fighting instincts by treating intellectuals with extreme suspicion, keeping in mind as it does so a series of historical instances of their usefulness. Intellectuals, who obey by giving up their thinking processes and are readily available to the ruling class, are also readily available to the proletariat in a different sense: let the proletariat have the intellectuals who think.

The proletariat's justified suspicion puts intellectuals in a difficult position. They often attempt to merge with the proletariat, and it is precisely this which proves not that there are different types of intellectuals, two types of intellectuals, those who are proletarian and those who are bourgeois, but that there is only one brand of intellectuals, because in the past didn't they always try to merge with the ruling class? Wasn't this the reason why the intellect took on its commodity character?

If intellectuals want to take part in the class struggle, then it is necessary for them to grasp intellectually that their sociological

constitution is homogeneous and determined by material conditions. The view they often air, that it's necessary to submerge oneself in the proletariat, is counter-revolutionary. Only evolutionaries believe in overturning the societal order by 'joining in'. Those intellectuals who do join in, for example, because they think it would be monstrous not to join in, play the role of voting fodder in parliamentary democracies, in other words they play an evolutionary role. Real revolutions (as in bourgeois historiography) are not produced by feelings, but by interests.

The proletariat's interest in the class struggle is clear and unequivocal, whereas the interest of intellectuals, which is of course a matter of historical record, is more difficult to explain. The only explanation is that intellectuals can only look to the revolution for a development of their (intellectual) activity. That is what determines their role in the revolution: it is an intellectual role.

The revolutionary intellect differs from the reactionary intellect in that it is a dynamic and, politically speaking, a liquidating intellect.

In a non-revolutionary situation the revolutionary intellect appears as radicalism. Its effect on every party, even a radical one, is anarchistic, as long, at least, as it doesn't manage to found a party of its own or is compelled to liquidate its party.

I am not saying that a revolutionary party might give up its suspicion of real intellectuals during a non-revolutionary situation. Because its liquidations, as long as they cannot be realised, because they don't concern any economic interests [*the text breaks off here*]

[*'Die Verteidigung des Lyrikers Gottfried Benn'*, BFA 21/337–40.]

Written c. 1929. The material presented here forms the opening part of an essay which Brecht did not complete. Gottfried Benn was a leading Expressionist poet and prose writer.

## Suspicion of a New Tendency in Modern Philosophy

In this respect, it is hard to withhold a certain natural suspicion towards a particular tendency in modern philosophy, that of Unger. It adopts an ambiguous attitude towards Marxism. It tries to persuade Marxism that Ungerian theories are implied by Marxism, but Marxism itself does not draw these implications. The Ungerian tendency draws these implications on a purely intellectual level, however; it skips over things and its effect is absolutely counter-revolutionary; moreover, its views are purely aesthetic, though it tries, of course, to stretch aesthetics as far as possible. Its attitude towards art typifies that of our intellectuals and is therefore not without interest: it is completely influenced by those theories which think art is now bankrupt, and which have had such a big influence on Marxists too. And by art it appears to understand more or less the same artistic trend which it then generalises in a meaningless way. What is clear in all this is that nobody can doubt the ruination of art, if they really take art to be what functions as art at present. But it is interesting to note that precisely those people who overrate creativity in such a ridiculous way (not least because they are suffering from a true-blue Prussian achievement complex) never distinguish the creative from the creative (just as anti-Semites continually take pure Aryans to be Semitic). What these people take to be art, whose in their view typical development they contemplate with such interest, is nothing but the degenerate (incidentally, it is of course the ruling) sub-section of art, whose perspective is purely Romantic. This is the art that is built on pity and longings. These longings are, however, the remnants of anguished pangs of conscience that have no practical effect at all, which certain sated or otherwise impotent pensioners on low incomes carefully preserve for themselves. How ridiculous it is, then, completely to misconstrue the inner purpose of these 'longings' by taking them to be creative, and by suggesting that they should

finally be dealt with seriously, not be used any more to produce works of art, but be ‘put into action’ – not least as these longings constitute long-winded myths, etc., whilst their inner purpose consists solely in trying to evade simple, crude and minimally intellectual measures. This is one of those comical suggestions which, though they lay claim to the designation ‘revolutionary’, are best judged simply by referring to their *triviality*. From the standpoint of art, what else can these people do but get embarrassed, if they are told that these longings are simply not present in the part of art that’s really alive today. It’s necessary to deal with this concept of ‘creativity’ particularly carefully. The activity of great art is reproductive; just as the act of procreation is reproductive, and proves not that something is lacking but that something is present, so too the presence of art proves not that human consciousness contains something inadequate which could somehow be made adequate by the imagination, but that if inadequacy plays a role in this at all, then inadequacy is complete chaos, not a remnant that is still lacking. It is indeed creative to reproduce real chaos, but the process of making art does not tend to shape anew the elements thus obtained according to a new image of the whole, but tends merely to put them together again in the old way. That is how the artist, and through him the spectator made artist, comes to make the pleasure of creation his own, and so art is the perpetually necessary inspection of the creative process, and not the repeatedly undertaken attempt to attain in the imagination a final image inherent in humanity which is not attained by reality (a process which, according to Unger, could then be corrected merely by the words ‘in the imagination’ being organised out of existence in order that the Third Reich should materialise, which is what this is all about, of course). The Ungerians’ view of art differs from a correct view just as their attitude differs from a really philosophical one. Real philosophers have got beyond the stage of wanting-to-attain-something, whenever they began, their activity does not prove the presence of something unattainable.

[‘*Misstrauen gegen eine Richtung der modernen Philosophie*’\*, BFA 21/345–7.]

Written c. 1929. Brecht had come into contact with Erich Unger through

Walter Benjamin. Unger was a philosopher and political theorist who argued that philosophy was dependent on economics. He also led a philosophical discussion group whose participants included Brecht, Benjamin and Korsch.

## 23

## Theory of Pedagogies

**The Major and the Minor Pedagogy**

The Major Pedagogy completely changes the role of acting. It abrogates the system of actors and spectators. It only recognises actors who are simultaneously students. According to the Basic Law – ‘Where the interest of the individual is the interest of the state, the gesture which is understood determines the individual’s mode of action’ – imitative acting becomes a major part of pedagogy. Compared with this, the Minor Pedagogy merely carries out a democratisation of theatre in the transitional era of the first revolution. In principle, the division remains; however, the actors should as far as possible be amateurs (and the roles should be such that amateurs must remain amateurs); professional actors, together with the existing theatre apparatus, should be used in order to weaken bourgeois ideological positions in the bourgeois theatre itself, and the audience should be activated. Plays and production style should turn the spectator into a statesman; that’s why one should appeal not to the emotion in the spectator which would permit him to abreact aesthetically, but to his rationality. *The actors must estrange characters and events from the spectator so as to attract his attention.* The spectator must take sides, instead of identifying.

[‘*Die Grosse und die Kleine Pädagogik*’\*, BFA 21/396.]

Written c. 1930. Like the following text, this was one of several essays that Brecht produced when working on his *Lehrstücke* between 1929 and 1932. The term ‘estrange’ is rendered in the German text by ‘*entfremden*’, a term which Walter Benjamin and Brecht pick up again in 1934 and 1935

prior to Brecht's introduction of '*Verfremdung*' in 1936.

### Theory of Pedagogies

Bourgeois philosophers draw a major distinction between those who are active and those who are contemplative. Those who think do not draw this distinction. If one draws this distinction, then one leaves politics to those who are active and philosophy to those who are contemplative, whereas in reality, politicians have to be philosophers, and philosophers have to be politicians. There is no difference between true philosophy and true politics. This insight entails the thinker's suggestion that young people should be educated by play-acting, i.e., by turning them into people who are simultaneously active and contemplative, as is suggested in the rules and regulations for the pedagogies. Pleasure in contemplation alone is detrimental to the state; but so is pleasure in action alone. By virtue of the fact that young people, when performing, carry out actions which they themselves scrutinise, they are educated for the state. These performances must be invented and executed in such a way that the state benefits. What decides the value of a sentence, or a gesture or an action, is thus not beauty, but whether the state benefits if the performers speak that sentence, carry out that gesture and proceed to take that action. The benefit that the state is to enjoy could certainly be very much reduced by blockheads, if, e.g., they let the performers carry out only such actions as appear socially minded to them. However, it is precisely the representation of antisocial behaviour by the state's developing citizens that is very beneficial to the state, particularly if that representation is enacted according to exact and magnificent models. The state can best improve upon humanity's antisocial drives – which derive from fear and ignorance – by forcing them out of everybody in the most complete form possible, a form which is almost unattainable by the individual on his own. This is the basis for the idea of using play-acting in pedagogies.

[*Theorie der Pädagogien*, BFA 21/398.]

Written c. 1930.

## On New Criticism

The splitting-off of so-called fine literature, and its separate treatment as 'true literature', has turned literary history into a stomping ground of tastes, and criticism is atrophying into mere description. This bourgeois literary history is one big blurb from which nobody can learn anything.<sup>1</sup> 'Literature' is treated as an autonomous individual, obeying its own laws (which ones?), and maintaining either no relationships at all, or rather vague ones, with other individuals. The idea of its 'organic character', of course, nips any interventionist criticism in the bud. Interventionist criticism is as out of place here – indeed, it is ridiculous – as it would be in relation to a plant; in fact, it is even more out of place, because a plant allows criticism by experiments in cultivation. This 'history' as tradition merely assigns to the writer yellowing standard works of fine literature, instead of orientating him towards *contemporary* works of other literary genres, say those of law, philosophy, history, natural science, etc. That is why it concedes to the writer of fine literature the educational level of the readers of fine literature, a level which is the lowest of all readers. The 'man of letters' need not be acquainted with the achievements of sociology, which compartmentalise public life according to quite unusual, yet infinitely illuminating, perspectives. In his own subject area, he does not have to concede that there is 'progress', i.e., new methods of representation, ignorance of

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<sup>1</sup> And, of course, no history emerges either; as no use is made of sociology, it is not possible for historians to make use of those works which, in their own age, were utterly dominant thanks to their success and impact, and also influenced those works which then remained, but which also includes [*sic*] consideration above all of readers, who are an essential part of a history of literature! I mean so-called pulp fiction.

which makes all further writing ‘old-fashioned’. Construed as a movement, specific to himself, of his hand and his arm, his writing is considered to be beyond influence, peculiar to him (in the sense of ownership and in the sense of strangeness), and criticism here cannot be interventionist, but merely descriptive or retrospectively ‘promotional’. As no usability corresponds to value, i.e., as value does not have to be usable, and usable values are never even cited, value is entirely without obligation and has no value itself. The consequences for fine literature itself are dreadful. These are the *consequences of having no consequences*. How is a sentence supposed to have force if, no matter how well it turns out, it can have no consequence apart from the fact that, if they are distanced from their usual mode of thinking, people consider it to be a sentence and ‘enjoy’ it on that basis. By way of comparison, let us cite the sentences with which physicists communicate their perceptions or record their experiments, or the sentences of lawyers! As every word here has practical consequences, every word is carefully considered. *At the root of every word there is a decision!* And the reader only gains by making decisions! But these are literatures that are intended to be usable.

[‘Über neue Kritik’, BFA 21/402–4.]

Written 1930.

## 25

### Ideas and Things

#### Ideas are Use Objects

Specific ideas (ideologies) are the products of specific relationships insofar as they each produced, or were produced by, the behaviour that was the most opportune. Thus, behaviour largely determined actual utility. It was therefore possible, on the other hand, for all forms of behaviour towards the ideas themselves – such as merely

pretending to possess them in the way the faithful do – to be adopted by the various classes according to utility. So, e.g., you had to behave as if God existed. Really having this idea was only useful for particular social strata, etc.

It is quite wrong to consider the sum of all the ideas of a specific class in a specific epoch to be indivisible, even if they once appeared as a whole, hence as more than a sum. Reality itself divides those relationships that did not make ideas useful, by making some ideas last longer than others. So, if the function of an idea has been determined, it can easily be used in today's world – namely, by being reinforced or made conscious in places where it is still facilitated by reality, but is only weakly present in an unconscious way. Ideas are use objects.

[‘*Vorstellungen sind Gebrauchsgegenstände*’\*, BFA 21/406–7.]

Written 1930.

### On the Process of Knowledge

In the process of knowledge, apart from organising what has been experienced or is (yet to be) experienced, the intellect also has the function of making events conspicuous, of confronting them with the thought of their negation. The ‘that’s how things are’ is understood *with astonishment* as a ‘so things aren’t different, then’.

Hence it’s almost always the case that truths are only obtained relatively.

Even the statement ‘*Cogito, ergo sum*’ has a dissimilar (and relative) truth. A lot more statements need to be added in order to support it. Being, like thought, is relative and dissimilar (comparative). The statement is only intended to be the foundation stone of an entire building. It does not validate itself.

What does the *cogito* mean? Does it mean: we must doubt everything as long as we have no proof. We must begin by doubting our own person (the thing we are most sure of). We may only believe in it, because we can prove it. Its proof is: it thinks. Is that what the *cogito* means? As many beings exist which (at least comparatively

speaking) do not think, these beings could never verify their existence. Thus, the statement means: I am proved by the ego, even if I couldn't think I might still exist, but I couldn't verify that to myself. The verification and the assimilation-of-the-verification is a thought. Has the self-verification of the person succeeded? It has simply been asserted that thought is a kind of being; but there are many more kinds of being.

Doubt really ought to be applied to all things together, because as all things are interconnected, I cannot of course demarcate individual things at all, and basically I don't, of course, doubt things, but only my senses, which communicate things to me in a way which may be inaccurate or false. In reality, however, I do exactly what I cannot do: I doubt one thing more than another, or: I know more about one thing than another, and moreover: I know varying amounts about one and the same thing; that is to say, I can learn more and more about it. And this 'more than' and this 'more and more' are very important operations or categories.<sup>1</sup> So we basically agree with Descartes when he doubts whether he can know things, that is to say, things which are nominalised, fixed and unchanging. However, we don't assume that this depends on the nature of the human mind, but are of the opinion that this sort of thing does not exist in the way that, e.g., Kant claims, if we are to know it, or not know it.

[*'Über den Erkennungsvorgang'*\*, BFA 21/410–11.]

Written c. 1930.

<sup>1</sup>Brecht's footnote reads, 'Operating with these concepts enables us to dissolve Kantian doubt and fructify Cartesian doubt.'

### On 'the Thing in Itself'

1 The question about the thing in itself is posed in an era when, on the basis of socio-economic developments, the *utilisation* of all things is set in motion. The question did not, however, aim only to discover new practical uses in things, but also indicated the contradiction of contemplating things only in terms of usability:

things exist not only for us, but also for themselves. Though they are still usable even in this absolute condition . . .

2 We must not forget that the feeling of ownership began to play an enormous role. Feudal property was a consequence of power. Now power became a consequence of property. Even knowledge was power, because it was property or could become property. Bacon, the person who made this assertion, explicitly defined knowledge as 'knowing how to utilise'. People no longer simply took what they needed from things, but once they owned a thing they sought to find new practical uses in it. It was now a case of utilising what others needed. The thing was pressurised enormously into yielding as much as possible.

3 The thing as a commodity, on the other hand, became unusually opaque, all the more so when human beings themselves became commodities in their capacity as workers, with the result that the thing's substantive character began to dwindle. From the observer's point of view, things came into being that were really relationships, and relationships between human beings or things assumed the character of things. It is not possible today for any thing to be named in the way Kant dealt with it: anything other than the Kantian thing is unknowable.

4 Things are not knowable for themselves, because they also cannot exist for themselves.

5 The tree knows human beings to at least the same extent as it knows carbonic acid.

6 For human beings, using oxygen forms part of knowing the tree. The concept of knowledge must therefore be construed more broadly.

7 Epistemology must be, above all, critique of language.

8 Life itself is a process of knowing. I know a tree by living myself.

[*'Über "das Ding an sich"'*, BFA 21/412-13.]

Written c. 1930. In this and the next essay, Brecht refers to the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant's doctrine of the thing in itself (*das Ding an sich*), according to which we do not know things as they are in themselves, but perceive them as phenomenal forms only. The

slogan that ‘knowledge is power’ derives from Francis Bacon’s treatise *Meditationes Sacrae* of 1597.

### Kant’s Unknowable Thing in Itself

The distinction drawn in Kant between knowable and unknowable ought to be turned by us into the main object of our critique. It’s not without good reason that our critique always applies where the thing in itself causes perceivable phenomena. Shouldn’t we simply say that we cannot know anything that we cannot change, nor anything that doesn’t change us? Then there always do in fact emerge aspects of a thing which we cannot know (as we cannot or need not change them), so a thing in itself does indeed come into being that is not knowable (as it is not entirely knowable), but this thing in itself, being unusable, is uninteresting, it really does have no impact on the perceiver and, on the contrary, it even becomes (even if never entirely, and so never really perceivably, nevertheless) perceivable where it was not perceivable; in other words, it becomes *more* knowable, in that it is exactly its perceivable aspects, perceivable because they are changeable, which for their part can change the thing (in itself).

[‘Kants unerkennbares Ding an sich’, BFA 21/413.]

Written c. 1930.

### Who Needs a World-View?

For these inexpert people who think to no purpose, asserting the dependency of the great intellectual systems of Plato and Kant on economic factors is tantamount to casting suspicion upon them. Apart from the fact that ‘economic factors’ are being invested with that contempt which they certainly deserve these days – in this

contempt is revealed, quite unconsciously, the deep dissatisfaction, untouched by thought, with economic factors that cannot be changed by thought – why do people not see that the dependence on economic factors which we assert was in no way capable of hindering those intellectual systems whose greatness we do not deny? We would go further: even if economic dependence did not produce these ideas, it certainly made them great, that is to say, interventionist. Intervening in what? In economic affairs. Why not prove their greatness with reference to the extent of their intervention?

Depriving thought of any deeper influence means construing it in defeatist terms. In order to grant thought influence – requiring thought to exert influence means making demands of thought – it is necessary, of course, to abandon the idea which has Leonardo painting even without his arms. The idea that someone in chains, muzzled in a hole in the ground in the company of worms, might in no way be prevented from thinking whatever he likes, may well console those who see being in chains as an unalterable destiny. In reality, people muzzled by the economy can only think freely, however, if they can free themselves in thought, that is, from the economy. And they can only do this if their thought changes the economy, in other words, makes the economy dependent on it, and so depends on the economy.

The recognition that thought has to be of some use is the first stage of knowledge.

The majority of those who have reached this stage give up thought (thought which is simply playful) in view of the impossibility of thinking in an interventionist way.

Interventionist thought is not only thought that intervenes in the economy, but primarily is thought that intervenes in thought with respect to the economy.

Kant made it possible for bourgeois science to work in a materialistic way (which is what bourgeois society needed) by allowing it to retain a world-view (which society needed just as much) independently of society and of the results of its work, but by

and large this simply gave free reign to materialism, because this same separation of knowledge from faith also separated the sciences from one another, as, of course, they were no longer permitted to pool what they had in common. If the natural scientists had gone into the sociology department next door after work, instead of going to church with the sociologists, then they would have destroyed the bourgeois world-view in theoretical terms as well. By acting the way they did, they destroyed it in practical terms.

Humanity defined in bourgeois terms must give up its bourgeois features if it is to maintain its humanity.

There is a widely held view that the bourgeoisie has lost the strength to establish a real world-view, that this is very bad for the bourgeoisie which is, therefore, eagerly and desperately occupied with achieving a new totality. It is indeed the case that bourgeois science displays tendencies towards this. Everywhere people talk of the great epochs that will lie ahead if physiology and chemistry, or this subject and that subject, finally merged. And, indeed, these tendencies are close to ruining bourgeois science. They are tendencies that originate outside the threatened class position of the bourgeoisie. Unrealisable demands such as these are being made of science from a quite specific quarter.

World-views are working hypotheses. And so, without being particularly damaged in the process, the proletariat may create and employ such a thing; the proletariat's work is important. Such a world-view may also be used by those bourgeois intellectuals who need working hypotheses of a similar kind, but in their case this will certainly be very dangerous.

A Romantic wave which is definitely on the horizon (Voltaire is quite right to speak of an irreconcilable antagonism between Reason and Romanticism) is not the only factor that might compel us to present our studies in a form that corresponds to classical form; the other factor is the necessity of deploying formal qualities as weapons in a hostile environment (at which point one should investigate where quality can still manifest itself as quality, if it is fighting hostile

interests). Individual realism, we might note in passing, would hardly be necessary there, as the collusive intent of bourgeois ideologies is directed more towards interpersonal processes. Relationships between human beings are to be disguised, that is to say those relationships which have something to do with social existence. And, what is also to be disguised is the enormous extent to which these relationships are involved in structuring the person. What is needed, then, is a realism of human functions.

Classicism is certainly not, as later observers realise, a particularly high level of perfection within a self-regulating artistic genre, nor is it a mode of expression that merely reflects a self-contained and thus 'classical epoch', in other words, an outcome; no, classicism is something much more intentional (even though it may not necessarily be consciously constructed), and its intentions concerned societal conditions. The attempt to give lasting shape to specific proposals of an ethical and aesthetic nature, and to confer on them a final, definitive character, in other words, the attempt of a class to give permanence to itself and to give its proposals the appearance of finality.

World-view, this remarkably acquisitive, firm structure of moral maxims, perspectives, methods of conduct [*the text breaks off here*]

The notion that human beings behave differently in different conditions (related to class) presupposes – if it is to be believed – the belief that they behave in a similar way in similar conditions. If they did not do so, this circumstance would no doubt have to be brought about. If it is possible to think of them behaving in a different way (we must do this; it is precisely in the everlasting contradiction thereby produced in the masses that their evolutionary potential resides) then the probability calculus is sufficient, where, formerly, causality was striven for. This is because, from the standpoint of the masses, probability can be almost limitlessly reinforced.

No matter how (by which socio-economic necessities) the separation of the sciences was brought about – it is a creation of capitalism

– it can be evaluated. – Whether it was carried out by capitalism in its constructive phase, or as it went into decline – for us this separation is positive. It will help people to bury capitalism once and for all, and construct socialism. Only their separation enabled the individual sciences to work in a materialist way, and hence to develop methods that really can be used. This separation will not be retained in its mechanical bourgeois form, but once the sciences have mutually pervaded one another, this will not have happened for the purpose that the connoisseurs of a world-view have posited for this pervasion (just as this purpose will not have achieved that pervasion): the Heideggerian bird’s-eye view located within the individual will not be the greatest show on earth.

If Planck’s constant is no longer much use for our sketch of Being (it may have been partly calculated in terms of the latter, i.e., when it was corrected by empirically perceived reality), then this does not only prove that we need to correct our sketch of Being until Planck’s constant fits again; in fact, it is already the case that Planck’s constant (which only generates behaviour and wishes to remain anonymous) will render impossible and unnecessary any sketch of Being that has a similar function. No matter what has already changed, or will change in the future, in Engels’s statement ‘Life is the mode of existence of protein’ – the perspective which underlies it can be retained amongst people who, on the basis of a societal order certainly very different from ours, will be able to generate and maintain sufficient insight into themselves through their behaviour.

[‘*Wer braucht eine Weltanschauung?*’, BFA 414–17.]

Written c. 1930. This essay is a composite based on a series of individual pages of text whose precise sequence is uncertain. The sections of the printed text correspond to pages of the typescript. Brecht refers implicitly to the German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s notion of ‘being-in-the-world’, as articulated in *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) in 1927, and his perception of Heidegger may have been influenced by a critical reading group on Heidegger which Walter Benjamin intended to convene in the summer of 1930. Brecht’s comments on Max Planck, the founder of quantum theory, reflect his intense interest in sub-atomic physics and the theory of relativity in the early 1930s. The quotation from Engels may be

found in *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft* (*Mr Eugen Dühring's Scientific Revolution*).

## 27

## On the Function of Thought

It occurred to nobody to cultivate this authentic philosophy, because its cultivation seemed to be quite impossible in the prevailing circumstances. It seemed to be an undertaking which, for the time being, lacked all the necessary preconditions. Everyone seemed to be waiting for something, in the absence of which any efforts would have to remain pointless. Indeed, what was one to expect a mode of understanding to contribute to clarifying actual human relationships, when it had, for centuries on end, been trained only to disguise such relationships, and moreover, had to be able to disguise something which, for this purpose, it did not even have to recognise itself! Because this was the function which reason had in practical life, this was how the head fed its belly. Or, how was one supposed to adapt to a world that was in no way complete, or come to terms with changeability? It was certainly wise to adopt a particular attitude when receiving a blow that could not be warded off, but what about the blow that could be warded off? Philosophy seemed to be unsuited both to knowing relationships and to changing them, without somehow ceasing to exist because of that. The fact that philosophy still existed in such circumstances was almost the worst evidence against it. It was relatively easy to assert that thought was independent of the ways in which people secured their existence, with and against one another, as long as these ways were reasonably stable, i.e., they didn't seem to change and there was something fateful about them. But now they were changing with every year and every hour, and, where once a statement had sufficed, now a prophecy was needed, just as, during the Inflation, businesses had to build in calculations of the presumed drop in the

value of money up to the very day when their assets were realised. And the prophecies kept on being criticised by realities in such a cruel way! You could also pride yourself on the fact that thought was supposed to be independent of the economy, but where was the benefit in the fact that the economy was independent of thought? The economy, that is, was not only independent of a particular type of thought, to be precise philosophical thought, in other words it was something absolute, a thing in itself; it was independent of any thought. The fact that the economy itself was supposed to be independent of the thought of captains of industry, which was not subject to any violent restriction by the state – this was unthinkable, mainly because these few individuals did make profits. Little was known about the circumstances and powers that determined your own fate, but people could be seen pulling the strings everywhere. Were you supposed to assume that these people had no idea? Indeed, they had no idea, and this was the source of their profits. One person could only profit from another person's ignorance, this was the nature of the system. Even for the captains of industry, grasping the whole was neither possible nor necessary, though disguising the parts was. Differences of opinion only existed on the basis of differences of interest, and it was a question of devising not arguments, but threats. Ultimately, all thought was held to be no more than the expression of the persons doing the thinking, with no obligation for everyone else, unless it involved discovering methods of violence. Of course, word soon got out that people only thought in the service of interests, but even in this form, the statement wasn't true. Because large strata of peoples, even with the best will in the world, were incapable of thinking in their own interests; because they were worse at thinking than others, and were in a situation that was worse for thought. These strata were backward, and this backwardness was, of course, exploited, all the more so in that there was of course not really any progress, but simply an advance in exploitation. Basically, in such circumstances, it was the cleverer members of these strata who declared that thought generally was superfluous (in their case it really did lead to nothing!). As the economic process simultaneously brought about so-called rational-

isation – a pervasion by reason, which imposed heavy sacrifices on these strata, as they were seemingly excluded from the production process by means of reason – they were now completely against the rational and for the irrational.

[*Über die Funktion des Denkens*\*, BFA 21/418–19.]

Written c. 1930.

28

What is Progress?

Is it possible, in the case of a progressive work, to be positive about the form and negative about the content?

*Answer:* Yes. If, that is, the concept of progress is built into a view of the historical sequence of ‘artistic trends’ according to which merely action and reaction exist, in other words, purely formal changes, which each assimilate fashionable new material, to be sure, but assimilate no more than is required by the opaque principle of wear and tear, and taking one’s turn. Then you have the reactionary sequence of Impressionism being succeeded by Expressionism, and Expressionism by New Objectivity (the heating up of music succeeded by its freezing over) *without the overall function changing or rather: solely in order that the latter doesn’t change*. Progress such as this would merely take place in people’s brains, which for their part are connected to nothing apart from other brains.

Is progress such as this progress?

*Answer:* No. Because it is the consequence of *nothing*, and has *nothing* as its consequence. It doesn’t derive from a new need, but only gratifies old needs with new stimuli, and so has a purely conservational function. We thus remain trapped in the realm of fashions, artistic trends, novelties and sensations, and unceasing efforts to respond with constantly ‘new’ stimuli to reactions and

appetites that dwindle increasingly time and again, and if there is no alternative, we even incorporate elements that are as yet unknown ‘in this place’, because, when ‘this place’ was occupied, they were unknown in other places too. (Locomotives, engine rooms, airplanes, etc., then serve as a distraction. The better ones are completely negative about content, and present it, or rather carry it off, in Latin.) This sort of progress only demonstrates that something [the text breaks off here]

[‘Was ist Fortschritt?’, BFA 21/518.]

Written c. 1931. Compare Brecht’s previous discussion of Expressionism in no. 4.

## 29

### Dialectics

#### Dialectic

The fact that socialists, given their experiences, have a very dynamic concept of progress can be explained psychologically. Progress exists in socialism and, without progress, socialism is not possible. This concept of progress is very advantageous in political terms, but it has had detrimental consequences for the concept of dialectic. Viewed from the perspective of progress, dialectic is (has always been) a property of nature, a characteristic which, however, was only discovered by Hegel and Marx. Before this discovery, the world could not be explained and, wherever some aspect of the world had been explained after all, people had simply stumbled on its dialectic without realising and without noticing. What is reflected in the heads of dialecticians, in other words, is simply this thing dialectic, which is the characteristic feature of nature. Made mindful in this way of the peculiarities of earthly phenomena, dialecticians – in an enormous advance on other people – are able to take precautions. The adherents of this simple but inspiring viewpoint lapse into

sullen and aggrieved muttering if their attention is drawn to the similarity of their viewpoint with that of some palmists, who believe that they could of course now prevent the imminent events read in somebody's palm, once they had ascertained them. In reality, dialectic is a method of thinking, or, rather, an interconnected sequence of intellectual methods, which permit one to dissolve certain fixed ideas and reassert praxis against ruling ideologies. It may be possible, by making daring deductions, to prove with some success that nature behaves dialectically; but it is much easier to refer to the palpable and indispensable outcomes of dialectical behaviour that have already been achieved, i.e., of applying dialectical methods to societal conditions and occurrences, in other words to the nature of society, our society, in fact. I can imagine that one equals one, and I can imagine that one does not equal one. Is it not enough to say that thinking the latter is more advantageous, namely, if I have to act in a particular way?

[*'Dialektik'*, BFA 21/519.]

Written c. 1931.

### Dialectical Critique

If, on the basis of their results, opinions are now to be critically investigated (put into a state of crisis) rather than merely the results of these opinions, then it is essential that the latter also are not examined in a way that suggests we might possibly want to assimilate them. This mode of observation is very difficult to avoid, because the entire structure of the society in which we live is such that we are dependent on assimilating things, and thus on methods that specifically turn all things into objects of assimilation. This approach of ours does things no good. Opinions which are separated from the people who hold them, and thus from the standpoints these people occupy, have absolutely no force any more, and it is mainly because our opinions are removed in this way from specific people with specific standpoints that our opinions have so little influence on our attitude. We merely exhibit them. It is there-

fore wrong to approach opinions from the position whereby they can be adopted (or rejected) in the above sense. Let us therefore consider people's attitude on the basis of their opinions, and let us remind ourselves that this attitude only agrees with those opinions in a conditional way, which means that we have yet to investigate the degree to which people's actions are beholden to their opinions. Because, at the end of the day, we must get to the point of indicating how people will act when it is a question of changing the world. To that end we must divide them all into groups, and divide them up in such a way that interests become visible which are sufficiently strong and influential to make themselves noticeable, in other words make themselves visible.

[*'Dialektische Kritik'*, BFA 21/520.]

Written c. 1931.

### On Dialectic: 6

To be investigated: what assertions (ideas, what intellectual procedure) are needed to act (as a member of what class)?

It is also necessary to seek out the metaphysical element, in every statement. In the statement in question, e.g., it is concealed in the concept of 'necessity'. The 'necessity' of a given historical process is an idea which lives off the conjecture that every historical event must come about on the basis of sufficient reasons. In reality, however, there were contradictory trends that were resolved by argument, and that is much less. Moreover, the aforementioned idea is underpinned by the tacit conviction that, after enumerating all possibilities, motives, dispositions, inclinations, etc., there still exists a necessity as such, a secret power that is not completely expressed in the aforementioned observed and observable events and relationships. Whenever large groups of people, whether individual faces or collectives are visible in them, fight over their interests one against the other and amongst themselves, there initially emerge specific observable outcomes in the form of legal

practices, societal customs of every sort, and for these various decisions sufficient reasons can, of course (at least in theory), be discovered; but beyond that, in accordance with old metaphysical tendencies, *another* 'necessity' is often discovered or suspected, a hidden hand: the 'higher power' of religions.

In reality, processes do not reach conclusions. It is observation that requires and imposes conclusions. By and large, of course, decisions are made (and encountered), certain formations change or even lose their functions, qualities decay and the overall picture changes jerkily.

Seek out the situations in which the statements in question might appear. From what quarter might they appear, and for what purpose might they be uttered.

Application of dialectic to destroy ideologies. Axiomatic tables: what are the consequences, what lies behind it.

Asocial behaviour.

[*Über Dialektik: 6\**, BFA 21/523-4.]

This is one of a series of fragmentary notes on dialectics from c. 1931.

### 30

## On the Critique of Ideas

Kant-Goethean aesthetics postulate that the person enjoying art is liberated from his or her interests. That is to say, the person is determined by his or her interests too unequivocally (too firmly) to adopt all the attitudes he or she could adopt (without being determined by interests). Because, in principle, nothing human is alien to human beings. Art allows human beings to act in a universally human way, which they otherwise cannot do. And so it really does allow them to persevere with (their) interests, which are not

universally human, namely ‘in real life’. The world of the artist thus basically contains everything which is necessary to a world. It can be enjoyed as a whole, and – after individual interests have been given up – it can be enjoyed safely. On the basis of empathy (mimesis), the enjoyer can attain behaviour not conditioned by interests. At any rate, this is what is promised.

This involves a gross deception.

In order to be able, above all, to attain knowledge himself (e.g., of certain events and attitudes), the artist himself must have ideas, quite specific ideas indeed, and, in any case, ideas opposed to other ideas; and, in order to turn his depiction into knowledge, the enjoyer must likewise have interests which are equally specific. These interests which are necessary for the attainment of knowledge give events their *specific* interpretation, however, and rule out many attitudes. It is true that the enjoyer enjoys in art, say, a house which does not belong to him burning down, together with the feelings he would have if he were the owner, but the attitude of ownership is one that serves his interests. And so, interests crop up again in artistic pleasure; indeed, they are what make it possible in the first place. That is the gross deception.

[‘Über Vorstellungskritik’, BFA 21/533–4.]

Written c. 1931.

31

## Theses on the Theory of Superstructure

(*Purpose: the revolutionary significance of superstructural work*)

1 Culture, in other words superstructure, is not to be regarded as a thing, a possession, a result of evolution, as revenue converted into an intellectual luxury, but as an autonomously evolving factor (ultimately, however, not *only* revenue-creating) and, above all, as a process.

2 One expression of the cultural needs of the masses are the morals and customs which constantly evolve under the pressure of the economy and politics, and which in our day are attaining a revolutionary function with the class-conscious proletariat.

3 Amongst the antagonistic factors that come into being in the womb of a specific society and lead to it being revolutionised, technology plays a decisive role as one of the forces of production. As part of this technology, we must also count the technology of thought, which cannot be restricted without more ado to the area where it initially develops. Dialectical thought, which emerged in the area of the economy and owes its existence to the existence of the proletariat, is spilling over increasingly into other areas, but it remains a proletarian mode of thought.

4 In the age of imperialism, no culture is defined any more in an essentially national way. Even bourgeois culture is essentially international – and how much more is this true of proletarian culture! The cultural institutions of the first proletarian state are not limited by its political boundaries, and, once taken over by the proletariat of bourgeois states, they have a revolutionary effect, precisely because their impact and evolution are being violently impeded. These are not by any means the institutions of a classless society, on the contrary: they are measures taken by the proletariat in the class struggle.

5 The way in which superstructure comes about is: anticipation.

6 What is rational becomes real, and what becomes real is rational.

7 The dialectical infusion of all categories of thought is unavoidable, and every area that has been dialectically infused leads to revolution, *as long as the political dimension is inferred.*

8 It is the duty of dialecticians to dialectically infuse the various areas of thought, and to infer their political dimension.

9 What is 'foreseen' (in both meanings of the word!) for the classless society is real, and it forms part of the superstructure of this classless society, if it is necessary for the latter's emergence and consolidation. People must build the classless society themselves – for the time being, it is itself an anticipation.

10 Superstructure comes about at the moment when it is most needed: when material relationships make it necessary, so that they can change (burst apart!). At the moment of revolution, superstructure experiences qualitative change. Humanity undertakes nothing that it cannot achieve – but it has to undertake everything!

[‘Thesen zur Theorie des Überbaus’, BFA 21/570–2.]

Written c. 1932. This essay and the one that follows demonstrate the impact of Karl Korsch’s work on Brecht in the early 1930s. Brecht first met Korsch in late 1928 or early 1929, and there is some evidence that Brecht and Korsch participated in philosophical discussions led by Erich Unger (see also no. 22). It has also been suggested that Brecht attended lectures given by Korsch at the ‘Marxistische Arbeiterschule’ (Marxist Workers School) in Berlin from 1929 onwards, and he participated in Korsch’s discussion group on Marxist dialectics in 1931. The issue of Korsch’s influence on Brecht has been notoriously controversial in Brecht criticism, because it goes to the heart of the key problem in Brecht’s work at this time: the precise nature of his Marxism (see Steve Giles, *Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory*, pp. 81–112). The term superstructure is taken from Marx, and Brecht’s theses may be seen as a response to Marx’s classic Preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*.

32

Key Points in Korsch, pp. 37 and 54

In order to gain intellectual credibility for their experiments – itself no easy task – the Naturalists excavated pity from the Aristotelian formula for tragedy. But Aristotelian pity is triggered by absolute conformity with natural laws. It is the aspect, turned towards humanity, of consent with those things humanity cannot change. Illicit pity is authorised here. – The interconnection between the tragic and the religious (which also derives from terror) can be seen most clearly in mythologies, which, according to Marx, overcome natural forces in and through the imagination (and, once we have achieved mastery over natural forces, mythologies disappear). In our day, struggling against tragedy, just like struggling against

religion, is a revolutionary task, because we have yet to wrest their ideological position from the laws, established by us, which underpin reality. The bourgeoisie is wrong if it believes the proletariat has a tragedy. The tragic does not only characterise a stabilised society, but also presupposes the concepts of high and low. The inescapability which is required to initiate the tragic process of sublimation must be an assertion which is opposed by another assertion (namely that of escapability). The tragic fall presupposes the possibility of its negation. The utterly hopeless fall, in which there is no higher interest, presents, of course no possibility of sublimation. The tragic, like the religious, is a historical phenomenon, interest in it is the yardstick for a society's revolutionary or counter-revolutionary character.

My [view] is: the fate of Rose Bernd, the weavers, etc., can no longer be found tragic, and thus cannot be passed off as tragic either, in an age which can account for these catastrophes in terms of a mere lack of civilisation, for whose remedy it has already worked out eminently practical suggestions. How far the depredation has advanced that comes about through plays like this, or through which plays like this come about, is demonstrated by the idea, alive in some people today, that humanity is well on the way to completely getting rid of the tragic by merely taking civilising measures. Which tragedy? Rose Bernd's? Definitely.

[*'Korsch Kernpunkte, S. 37 und 54', BFA 21/574-5.*]

Written c. 1932. This essay responds to Korsch's monograph *Key Points in the Materialist Conception of History*, published in 1922. Korsch quotes an extract from Marx's 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse* on p. 54 of *Key Points* which forms the basis for Brecht's critique of tragedy: 'Is the perspective on nature and societal relationships which underlies the Greek imagination and thus Greek [art] possible in a world of self-acting mule spindles and railways and locomotives and electric telegraphs? [...] All mythology overcomes and controls and shapes the forces of nature in the imagination and through the imagination, and therefore mythology disappears with real control over natural forces. [...] Greek art presupposes Greek mythology, in other words the popular imagination *has already processed nature and societal forms in an unconsciously artistic manner.*'

Rose Bernd and the weavers are the protagonists in Gerhart Hauptmann's plays *Rose Bernd* and *The Weavers*, which were classics of German Naturalism.

33

Use of Truth

In an age when capital, in its desperate struggle, is summoning up all its enormous means to stamp as truth any idea it finds useful, truth has become a commodity to such an extent – such a questionable, tricky thing, dependent on buyer and seller, themselves dependent on many things – that the question 'what is true' can no longer be resolved without the question 'whom does this truth benefit'. Truth has entirely become a functioning thing, something which doesn't exist (above all in the absence of people), but which must in each case be created, a means of production, no doubt, but one which is produced!

In view of its enormous use for the prevailing disorder, what are we to make of the metaphysical standpoint that Engels describes thus: 'N.Z.', 8/357.

That context of crises must be generated, and even if nothing else compelled us to give up the metaphysical perspective, it would still be completely justified by the need to arrive at an understanding of this deeper, incurable overall crisis. This crisis certainly demands an activity; it is an activity.

Led by the suspicion that, in this world of commodities, our ideas had long since turned into commodities (they could not remain as goods), let us now investigate these ideas, in particular in relation to their commodity character. For almost too long, when speaking of such things as the new attitude to life, the post-war perspective, the world-view of a new generation, we have let almost all novelty stand as a presupposition, and have used it as such. It's about time we gave substance to these presuppositions. And so, regardless of readers or

writers who can only be interested by something interesting, and building solely on bare necessity, new methods for criticising ideas are to be deployed, and new ideas are to be constructed which are legitimised by their usefulness (weapons do not need to be charming for the person who needs them), and their use is to be measured in terms of their power to transform our societal world.

[*'Nutzen der Wahrheit'*\*, BFA 21/580–1.]

Written c. 1932. The Engels citation to which Brecht refers ('N.Z.', 8/357) forms part of an essay published by Georgi Plekhanov in *Die Neue Zeit* (*The New Age*) in 1890. Engels is critical of what he terms the 'metaphysical' view that things and their concepts are intrinsically isolated and independent entities rather than being dialectically interconnected.

### 34

## Einstein–Freud

Einstein assumes that humanity has a dark drive which, embodied from time to time in appalling acts of violence called wars, leads humanity to forget its entire civilisation and besmirch the community which it has taken such efforts to establish. According to Einstein, this drive is unleashed by relatively little printed paper and wild talk. Its outbreak does not require real reasons. As a real, sober, discursive interest in war is not usually visible – how could one suspect a people of thinking that it might improve its material conditions in war? – the reason for war must be sought in the realm of darkness, impulsive, uninterested behaviour.

What prevents Einstein from seeing that the real reasons for war lie in material interests? The answer is as follows: class struggle, of which he is oblivious. What he perceives as the mass of a people's lack of interest in war is the oppressed classes' real disinterest in war. This actual real disinterest of the overwhelming majority of a warring people in war leads Einstein to make the desperate supposition that there are dark and appalling drives whose outbreak

does not require any reasons worthy of discussion. In reality, however, it is not the overwhelming majority that determines the destinies of a nation in capitalism; their interests do not form a basis for large-scale campaigns: these masses are compelled to act without reason and ‘without interests’. They are in the hands of the leading stratum, subjected to it through violence and ideology, compelled by the force of its organisation as well as by printed paper and wild talk to act as if they, the oppressed majority, had a real interest in war. The readiness to engage in bloody initiatives is not the same as bloodthirstiness; bloodthirstiness is simply its degenerate form. So, real interests are there, but only those of a relatively small stratum, which compels the entire nation to act in a way that serves those interests. The struggle of classes, consequent on the discrepancies between the material interests of the various classes, conceals the true, always utterly real, material reason for war (which belongs to the ruling stratum); on the other hand, class struggle actually provides that reason. As long as the oppressed class cannot get rid of its tormentor, war offers its only prospect for improving its lot – and sometimes even offers it the prospect of getting rid of its tormentor itself. After all, it hopes that it will be able, by and large, to share in the potential booty, even if it is the partner who will, of course, be deceived. (It is encouraged to have such hopes by printed paper and wild talk, and intellectuals are interested – materialistically and idealistically – in printing paper and talking wildly.) Above all, however, that real economic oppression by other competing states which causes wars is felt more painfully and directly by the oppressed class than by the leading stratum itself. The oppressed class can always be persuaded that a major part of its oppression is oppression from abroad. Its readiness to go to the utmost extremes can be explained by its appalling situation. Its situation is always intolerable. It must try any means, and must not shirk any expense, however large it may be. The unceasing, predatory attacks of the ruling class on the ruled produce in the latter a certain nihilism which attracts the attention of intellectuals who no longer notice this constant war.

[‘Einstein–Freud’, BFA 21/588–9.]

Written 1933. This essay comments on a pamphlet entitled *Why War?* produced by Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud. In 1931, the 'Comité permanent des Lettres et des Arts de la Société et des Nations' invited the International Institute for Intellectual Co-operation of the League of Nations to encourage leading thinkers to engage in collaborative projects. Einstein was invited to contact an interlocutor of his own choosing, and he invited Freud to engage in a consideration of the inevitability of war. Einstein wrote a letter on 30 July 1932 in which he posed the question as to whether humanity could be freed from the fate of war, and Freud replied in September of that year. Both letters were published in Paris in March 1933 in *Why War?* and are reprinted in Sigmund Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion*, The Penguin Freud Library (Volume 12), Harmondsworth, 1991 (pp. 343–62). Brecht's essay responds to Einstein's ideas only; the reference to 'printed paper' relates to Einstein's claim that intellectuals are particularly susceptible to mass hysteria because they work on the basis of printed texts instead of being firmly grounded in direct experience.

## Extracts from 'Unpolitical Letters'

After a series of disappointments, caused by enemies within and without, the lower-middle classes of my home country, the numerous cast of small businessmen, shopkeepers, subaltern officers, painters and decorators, students, etc., decided it was time for great deeds. Some of their own people had explained to them that their miserable situation – they were all more or less bankrupt – was the product of an all too materialistic attitude to life; and so they now hoped to construct an existence worthy of a human life by means of a powerful effort of idealism, that is to say, by an unlimited eagerness for self-sacrifice. They did not doubt that something was to be gained from this, for each individual. They recognised that, without leadership, they were just a flock of sheep. 'If we're not firmly bullied, yelled at, slapped across the face, we'll stay as we are, miserable snivellers,' they said, 'it just won't do.' Luckily, a Führer was to hand and they handed power over to him. Every expectation was now directed towards the question, what did he have in store for them? The Führer had so far only mentioned his programme in passing, in part because otherwise unworthy rogues might have pilfered it, in part for other reasons. His followers had not asked him, on the one hand because that might have damaged the Führer principle, on the other because they reckoned: what use is the finest programme if you don't have the power to put it into practice! As soon as the Führer had the power he announced the programme: it turned out to be a very festive programme. To a large, very large, extent it consisted of ceremonies and celebrations, but there were other events as well, of two sorts: above all the unity of the people was to be manufactured. This unity had left something to be desired for a few decades, more precisely a few centuries, since things had not been going equally well for all parts of the nation: some earned

too much, others a little and the rest hardly anything. That had caused disunity. It was to be stopped. According to the Führer's grand idea, it was *no longer* to cause disunity. The other, substantial, part of the Führer's programme consisted in draining a few marshes. (Since, unfortunately, there were no marshes in the country, they had to be created first before this great cultural deed could be undertaken.) In addition, in order to give the finances a boost, the houses were to be repaired. The Führer had originally been a house painter, so this idea occurred to him almost naturally; every painter knows that there's nothing so profitable as house repairs. The execution of this vast programme in its three parts demanded, of course, huge efforts on the part of the entire populace, as well as that idealism I mentioned. Without that kind of idealism you cannot embark on programmes like this.

These developments, accompanied by a few little incidents, rendered my own presence in the country problematic. In my nature I am incapable of surrendering myself confidently to great and inspiring feelings, I am not up to energetic leadership, so I began to feel quite superfluous. Asking around in my immediate circle, and on a couple of visits, I became aware that now, as happens from time to time in the life of a nation, a truly great epoch was dawning, where people like me would just mess up the bigger picture. They promised, it is true, to protect me against the rage of the people in a camp specially constructed for the purpose, and even to give me a *völkisch* re-education, but I felt, nonetheless, that such offers were no evidence of a real love for me or for my sort. Besides, I wanted to pursue my studies on human progress and culture, and so I left the country and took to the road.

On my travels I came first to Vienna. [. . .]

At the time everyone was talking about the events in my home country. People reacted with horror to the persecution of the Jews and the book burnings. There was a consensus that a new age of barbarism was approaching. The horrors were the consequences of a despicable warlike spirit which had, in some mysterious way, achieved the upper hand. It was a natural catastrophe, comparable with an earthquake. Some nineteen years previously something

similar had occurred, another natural catastrophe; the whole world, at least insofar as it was civilised, had attempted for four long years, not without some success, to butcher one another, following yet again some dark, barbaric urge. Today, as then, the voice of reason, common sense and humanity was drowned out by a terrible, bestial voice, the voice of barbarism. In one part of humanity, perhaps the young, or the uneducated, a quite particularly warlike spirit seemed to slumber, which, awakened, was fit to turn the continent into a slaughterhouse. There were, however, guilty ones. Certain wealthy types and parties had not undertaken enough to banish this spirit and to maintain the rule of the nobler spirit. Their weakness and corruption was generally recognised and deplored. However, even if the consequences of the petty bourgeois revolt were painted in the blackest colours, and a long reign of terror prophesied, people were generally still convinced that now, as in the great war nineteen years ago, a few lone voices of reason in the coffee houses would prevail, the mild, the sublime, the incorruptible voices of humanity. These voices, it was said, could never be fully silenced, not by any earthly power. Some of the owners of such voices had already carefully transported them abroad, so that they could continue to be heard. I myself was recognised by some, and congratulated on my departure. [ . . . ]

I should not, however, wish that my, possibly unhappy, depiction [of the dealing in opinions in the Viennese coffee houses] should lead people to conclude that I despise these people. I know very well that their inaction proves little against them, and I don't believe they can be reproached with more than this. The society in which they live does not allow a substantially more useful occupation. Should they be judges and sit in judgement over poor devils who steal bread out of hunger, or doctors who write out useless (if cheap) prescriptions, or architects who build houses in which some human hyena can live in sixteen rooms, or those where twelve people huddle in the kitchen in order to finance that luxury? Some of those who sit here collecting opinions may well have the frailties which are required to occupy public office, and may even be prepared to do the deals which are demanded, it may be but trivial reasons which

hold them back; but others here are better people all the same, and even those I've mentioned were prevented by a generous fate from committing real acts of shame. What I objected to in their ideas was, briefly, the lack of prospects. The images these good folk made of reality were perhaps authentic, but they were no help. One might well describe the appearance of these new masters as barbaric, and call that which drove them a dark urge, but what was gained by such explanations? These explanations sufficed perhaps to induce a certain melancholy, but were hardly designed to teach how we should overcome the situation. People may judge me as they will, but in the thought processes of the banished and endangered I increasingly felt the absence of any radical advantage over the thought processes of the banishers and persecutors. Indeed, the one was the raw voice of barbarism, it was raw and stupid, the other was the voice of culture, it was mellifluous but also stupid. The one lot had many weapons and used them, the others had only reason as a weapon, and did not use it. I departed from the land of culture more depressed than I had arrived – from the land of barbarism.

[‘*Unpolitische Briefe*’, BFA 22/11–17.]

This is part of a larger, uncompleted piece (a surviving plan lists eleven parts of which this is a shortened version of just one). Brecht spent some time in Vienna in March 1933 and then moved on to Switzerland and then Denmark. The essay probably dates from the autumn of 1933 and may be one of the first pieces he wrote in Denmark. Many subsequent projects go over similar ground, in terms both of themes and of motifs.

A satirical nickname for Hitler, in reference to his one-time artistic pretensions, was ‘*der Anstreicher*’, the house painter. Brecht makes frequent allusions to this and to Hitler’s ability to ‘paint over the cracks’. A programme of repairs was indeed a part of the early Nazi work creation programme. The ‘marshes’ are likewise a recurrent Brechtian image for the economic morass into which capitalism and Nazism led the German people (compare *Round Heads and Pointed Heads*, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, etc.).

## Fascist Slogans

**What Does the Sentence 'Economic Thinking is the Death of All National Idealism' Mean?**

1 One has to realise clearly that here the word 'idealism' has nothing to do with the great and ancient doctrine which shows how all real things depend on eternal spiritual laws, nor with the behaviour which strives to change real existence by changing consciousness; instead, the word 'idealism' must be understood here in its vulgar meaning, that used primarily by the petty bourgeoisie. Here it means the will and the ability to subordinate certain material interests to others, mostly described as spiritual but always as 'higher'. Understood in these terms, examples of an idealist would be a national leader who suffers persecution because of an idea, or at least shares out his salary, an inventor who invents something without consideration for his physical well-being, a servant or vassal who, unconcerned with recompense, serves his master out of 'loyalty', a factory owner who ruins himself for the sake of the fatherland, the owner of a large estate who settles poor farmers on his land without demanding any rent, a general who rushes to the front line without being commanded to do so by the rule book, a businessman who makes sure that his customers have money left over for their savings accounts and then, composed and cheerful in the knowledge that he has done his duty, waits for the bailiff. In short, 'idealism' here means the willingness to make sacrifices.

2 If the sentence were '*Economic thinking is the death of all idealism*', then it would, of course, be pointless, for then it would only be a primitive interpretation or paraphrase of the word 'idealism' itself. Then it could only mean 'idealism is when one does not think in material terms', so 'if one thinks in material terms, then one is not an idealist'. The word 'national' gives the sentence its meaning. It means: behaviour directed primarily towards material

concerns destroys the kind of idealism (willingness to make sacrifices) which seeks to preserve the interests of the *Volk*.

[‘Was meint der Satz “Das wirtschaftliche Denken ist der Tod jedes völkischen Idealismus”?’], BFA 22/57–8.]

The slogan ‘*Das wirtschaftliche Denken ist der Tod jedes völkischen Idealismus*’ appeared in an article entitled ‘Adolf Hitler’s Answer to Chancellor von Papen’ in the Nazi newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, on 21 October 1932. Brecht was using this and other sources in 1934 as a basis for reworking the language of his play *Round Heads and Pointed Heads* as a critique of Fascist demagogy. In this piece we have rendered the German nationalist term, *völkisch* (i.e., ‘pertaining to the *Volk*’), as ‘national’.

### On the Slogan ‘Common Interest Takes Precedence Over Self-Interest’

The slogan ‘Common interest takes precedence over self-interest’ is now said to have appeared on high denomination banknotes. This is a rumour circulating amongst the people. Of course, no one knows anything about it for certain. No one has ever seen a banknote with a high denomination, so perhaps it is all just a folk tale. If it were true, however, then it would be a great honour for the slogan.

It is one of the National Socialists’ most popular slogans, a true feast for the ears. Many people even consider it a genuinely socialist slogan.

In a socialist system there is no contradiction between self-interest and the common interest. There is no fundamental difference between the interests. There are no groups fighting each other with knives because one group can only live well if the other lives badly. In the socialist system, the general public does not build motorways on which only a few individuals can drive, so that expensive motorways are finished whilst cheap cars are not. Nor does the general public drive on these motorways one day after all, namely in tanks, so that a few individuals can make their war profits. In the socialist system, the individual’s work benefits both himself and the general public simultaneously, in fact, he helps the public

precisely by helping himself. This system is designed so that anyone who helps himself also helps the general public and so that the general public helps itself by helping the individual, and this is precisely what makes it a socialist system. In the socialist system, the slogan 'Common interest takes precedence over self-interest' is therefore surplus to requirements, and what counts instead is the slogan 'Self-interest is the common interest'.

For the popular, honest-sounding, pithy sentence 'Common interest takes precedence over self-interest' is a trickster. It screams incessantly that it is full of the noblest intentions, that its great concern for the general public prevents it from sleeping at night, that it is just not held in sufficient regard, in sufficiently general regard, that everything will turn out well if, at last, it is introduced, namely into high society. It is correct that it has not been introduced into high society, amongst the well-to-do, for they do not take it seriously; there it plays no role, even the Party big shots want nothing to do with it. But even if it were introduced there, still nothing would improve. The many millions of individuals would still have to slave away, until eventually they were herded into the tanks and trenches. People would tell them, possibly for 30,000 years, that this benefits the general public, without them ever discovering who this mystical general public is. Each individual would know, when he looked at his wage packet, that he had not gained anything from all of his long week's work, and when a family received the short official letter saying that their father or son had died in battle, then they would know that he had helped neither himself nor them, but people would still say that the general public had benefited.

So who is this general public, which is supposed to benefit from the individuals, whose public interest is supposed to have priority over their self-interest? Is it perhaps just that bunch of people who spread this slogan, 'Common interest takes precedence over self-interest', and who each year devour 20 thousand million marks out of the 60 thousand million mark national income: the National Socialist Party?

[*'Über den Satz "Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz"*', BFA 22/58–9.]

Written 1934. Possibly a sketch for a planned encyclopaedia of Fascist language. The slogan was used to promote the idea of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (the Nazi ‘classless’ community of the nation) and was the title of a later speech by Hermann Göring. The phrase actually goes back to Montesquieu. See also no. 40, below.

37

On Restoring the Truth

In times when deception is demanded and errors are encouraged, the thinker strives to correct whatever he reads and hears. Whatever he reads and hears, he says aloud quietly, and as he says it he corrects it. Sentence by sentence, he replaces the false statements with true ones. He practises this for so long that he is no longer able to read and hear differently.

The thinker proceeds from sentence to sentence so that, slowly but utterly, he corrects what he has heard and read in its full coherent form. In this way he leaves nothing out. At the same time, however, he places correct sentences alongside incorrect ones, without concerning himself with their context. He thus ruptures the context of the incorrect sentences, in the knowledge that a context often gives sentences an illusion of correctness, an illusion which comes from the fact that, in context, proceeding from one incorrect sentence, one can still deduce several proper conclusions. The process of deduction is then correct, but the sentences are not correct.

The thinker does not act like this simply in order to establish that deception and errors are being perpetrated. He wishes to master the nature of the deception and of the errors. When he reads: ‘A strong nation is less easily attacked than a weak one’, he does not need to alter it but to augment it: ‘but it attacks more easily’. When he hears that wars are necessary, then he adds under which circumstances they are necessary, as well as: for whom.

1 *General Göring on the triumph over Communism in Germany*  
(quoted from the *Nationalzeitung*, Basel, 12.12.34)

*Verbatim report of the speech*

It is precisely in an account of the defence against and ultimate triumph over the Communist threat, that the methods of National Socialism, which are opposed to those of Communism in every respect, will be most clearly recognised.

The German government must reserve for itself the total freedom

to use the means which it considers appropriate,

and in so doing it can take no consideration of the advice of others.

I refuse to deal yet again with the accusations which have been levied against the

*Restoration of the truth*

It is precisely in a public representation of the defence against and ultimate triumph over the threat that, under the rule of the working sector of the population, the abuse of property for the purposes of exploitation might be abolished, that the methods of National Socialism, which, since they are mendacious, are entirely opposed to those of Communism, will be most clearly recognised.

The German government must reserve for itself the total freedom – from the moral demands of other capitalist states and also of capitalist groups at home – to use the means which it considers appropriate, namely means like the arson attack on the Reichstag building designed to imply the guilt of the Communists, and in so doing it can take no consideration of the advice of others.

I refuse to deal yet again with the charges which have been levied against the government

government and against me personally in connection with the Reichstag Fire, especially in view of the fact that the High Court of the Reich

has examined the events surrounding the Reichstag Fire with painstaking care and has made its decision.

I characterise the alleged testament of the former squad leader Ernst as a crude forgery.

We were completely determined, after our seizure of power

to strike Communism in such a way that it should never again recover in Germany from this blow. To this end we needed no Reichstag Fire.

To implement our measures

and against me personally in connection with the Reichstag Fire, especially in view of the fact that the High Court of the Reich, which has since been relieved of responsibility for such trials, has examined the events surrounding the Reichstag Fire with anguish and has made its decision: that the Communists accused by me did not set fire to the Reichstag and that it could not produce the evidence that we did this ourselves.

I characterise the testament, the authenticity of which has been attested, of the former squad leader Ernst, whom I had shot, as a crude forgery and thereby act in total freedom from all moral demands, using all the means which are necessary to overcome Communism.

We were completely determined, after our seizure of power in the interest of the property owners,

to strike Communism in such a way that it should never again recover in Germany from this blow. To this end we needed a Reichstag Fire.

To implement our measures against the starving

we needed the instrument of a police force which was utterly reliable and as forceful as possible.

I have created this instrument through the reorganisation of the state police and the establishment of the Gestapo.

we needed the instrument of a police force which was utterly reliable and as willing as possible to use force.

I have created this instrument through the reorganisation of the state police and the establishment of the Gestapo, with the aid of the claim that the Communists and Social Democrats were preparing an uprising.

*Commentary*

As at the Leipzig trial, General Göring argues in connection with the Reichstag Fire that a sensational task is needed to activate the police and, in so doing, confesses openly to his arson. It seems that he must have enemies within the government.

2 *Christmas message of the Führer's Deputy (Hess) in the year 1934*  
(quoted from the *Nationalzeitung*, Basel)

*Verbatim report of the speech*

With justified pride  
in the spirit of selfless sacrifice

and the willingness of our  
German *Volk*-comrades to help

one may say today:  
This Christmas and this winter  
Germany will not let a single

*Restoration of the truth*

With pride  
in the attitude of the propertied,  
who have sacrificed a little of  
that which had been sacrificed  
to them already by those  
without property,  
and in their willingness to  
appear as helpers to those who  
are kept by them in misery,  
one may say today:  
This Christmas and this winter  
Germany's propertied classes

## Nazism and Anti-Fascism 1933–1939

one of its children go hungry,

the selfsame children,  
who just three years ago  
were forced into rabble-rousing  
demonstrations  
against  
*Volk*,

nation,

and faith,

in support of  
Bolshevist chaos.

Today they gratefully accept  
their  
Christmas gift

from the hands of those who  
were once presented to them as  
enemies.

Hundreds of thousands, indeed  
millions, of German workers,  
male and female,

will not let a single one of those  
without property starve  
completely.

This is how Germany's  
propertied classes behave  
towards the selfsame people,  
who just two years ago  
were forced by their need into  
demonstrations  
against  
that sector of the population  
which exploits the others,  
the talk that people would do  
well to defend something which  
does not belong to them,  
and religion, which sanctifies  
the use of property for the  
purposes of exploitation  
in support of  
a Bolshevist social order in  
which the exploitation of man  
by man is impossible.

Today they gratefully accept  
their  
Christmas gift, without which  
they would starve,  
from the hands of those who  
were once presented to them as  
enemies, because they are  
enemies.

In reality, however, it was  
mainly poor people who made  
the sacrifices. Hundreds of  
thousands, indeed millions, of  
German workers, male and  
female,

who once gave up their hard-  
earned pennies for the idea of  
an international community of  
classes,

sacrifice them today

for a socialism which is eager to  
act and to help,

which embraces a nation.

I know that you Germans, at  
home and abroad,

do not expect a political address  
from me on Christmas Eve;  
indeed, that you do not want  
that at all.

And I feel far too full of the  
Christmas spirit to want to  
concern myself today with  
everyday politics and statistics.  
But I also know that precisely  
the German abroad  
can receive no better Christmas  
joy than to be made conscious  
of this: he needs no longer to be

who once gave up their hard-  
earned pennies for the idea of a  
community of all people,  
without distinctions of fortune  
or estate, which would extend  
to all the countries of the world,  
sacrifice them today, although  
they are just as hard to earn,  
for a state of affairs in which,  
for all eternity, there will be the  
great masses of those who need  
help and for whom all that is  
left over are pittances earned  
with difficulty by the exploited,  
which only embraces the  
population of a single country,  
but which threatens all other  
countries.

I know that you Germans, as far  
as you have property at home  
and abroad,

do not expect an address on  
Christmas Eve about how we  
intend to protect your property;  
indeed, that you do not want  
that at all.

And I have dined far too well to  
want to concern myself today  
with everyday politics and the  
falsification of statistics.

But I also know that precisely  
he who has his property abroad  
can receive no better Christmas  
joy than to be made conscious  
of this: he needs no longer to be

## Nazism and Anti-Fascism 1933–1939

ashamed of his German homeland; indeed, he should be proud of it.

And when foreigners come to Germany as guests, they are full of admiration for what has been achieved here in such a short space of time, not only in the internal and external transformation of the German people, but also in terms of the tangible and evident works,

which have already resulted from the co-ordination

and reorganisation of the labour power of the *Volk*.

ashamed of his German homeland; indeed, he should be proud of it.

And when foreign exploiters come to Germany, they are full of admiration for what has been achieved here in such a short space of time, not only in the internal and external impoverishment of the German people, but also in terms of the tangible and (in the business section of the newspapers) evident dividends, which have already resulted from the theft of the fruits of their labour and the destruction of the social organisation of the larger section of the population.

### *Commentary*

When one has skimmed the speech and the restoration of the truth, reading from left to right, one should recall that the National Socialists needed to praise the Winter Aid Project, and indeed that was very necessary in view of the immense difficulties which are expressed in the right-hand column (in the restoration). Now, reading from the right column to the left, one can study how the individual concerned carried out his task. Then one sees what sort of a man he is, which class he belongs to, which task this class has taken on itself to solve, and how it is solving it.

[‘Über die Wiederherstellung der Wahrheit’, BFA 22/89–96.]

Written December 1934. In the left-hand columns Brecht quotes, almost verbatim, the original newspaper reports of the addresses by Göring and Hess. The reference near the beginning of Göring’s speech is to one SA-

Gruppenführer Ernst, who is suspected of having been involved in the execution of the Reichstag Fire. The authenticity of his testament is disputed. The Winter Aid was a collection, and subsequently a direct tax, established by the Nazis in 1933 to help the needy. It was later used to finance rearmament.

38

In the Fight Against Injustice Even Weak Weapons Are  
of Use

In the year following the war I, like many others, thought that institutions like the League of Human Rights were defunct. I did not go as far as some, who accused this organisation of being downright harmful by awakening the illusion that its methods could actually control the monstrous, unnecessary misery which stems from the wrong system of production, and which can therefore only be eradicated if this system is changed completely. I did not want to go this far, but I too believed that pacifism would achieve nothing, for even though it had no prospect of changing the causes, it still undertook to combat wars, which were only consequential phenomena, and to do so directly, with no beating about the bush, but using only the weakest weapons, such as individual conscientious objection to military service. Then, when Germany began to transform itself into a Fascist state, we saw how both the large and small organisations committed to fighting injustice mobilised. I did not go as far as many, who claimed to be observing a wholesale, long-term collapse of the large-scale organisations which aimed to change the social structure completely, but I too saw the tough and important small-scale activities of frequently disparaged organisations like the League of Human Rights, which actually saved many people, which constantly and untiringly exposed injustice with its small voice, and which galvanised many to return to the struggle. So we saw that the fight against injustice must not only be waged in the most ultimate way, addressing all of its causes, but also in the most general way,

i.e., using all the means available, even the most feeble. For even worse than the illusion that it is possible to eradicate unnecessary misery without removing its causes is the illusion that we can fight the causes without their consequences, separately, without recourse to the weakest and most feeble of means. I have seen how knowing about these terrible causes actually prevented many people from combating their terrible consequences.

How can someone who places himself in the hands of the police be surprised, they asked, when he is beaten with cudgels, or when injustice triumphs over someone who appeals to courts like ours? They forgot entirely that one does not need to be surprised in order to complain, and that one's own opinions about the police and courts are not shared by everyone else, and that opinions are certainly not enough to change the police and courts. The slogan still applies: he who wants to resist unnecessary misery cannot afford to relinquish even the weakest of weapons.

[*'Man muss das Unrecht auch mit schwachen Mitteln bekämpfen'*,

BFA 22/61–2.]

Typescript c. 1934. The International League of Human Rights was founded in 1898, the German League in 1919. It was criticised by groups on the left for focusing on Utopian aims and individual rights, without concerning itself with the sort of social order which might make those rights meaningful. It was banned by the Nazis in 1933.

## 39

### Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth

Today anyone who wants to fight lies and ignorance and to write the truth has to overcome at least five difficulties. He must have the *courage* to write the truth, even though it is suppressed everywhere; the *cleverness* to recognise it, even though it is disguised everywhere; the *skill* to make it fit for use as a weapon; the *judgement* to select those in whose hands it will become effective; the *cunning* to spread

it amongst them. These difficulties are great for those who write under Fascism, but they also exist for those who were driven out or have fled, indeed, even for those who write in the lands of bourgeois freedom.

1 *The courage to write the truth*

It appears self-evident that the writer should write the truth in the sense that he should not suppress it or hush it up and that he should write nothing which is untrue. He should not give in to the powerful, he should not deceive the weak. Of course, it is very difficult not to give in to the powerful, and very advantageous to deceive the weak. Displeasing the property owners means renouncing property. Relinquishing the payment for work you have done may mean relinquishing the work, and rejecting fame amongst the powerful often means rejecting fame in general. That takes courage. Times of the most extreme oppression are mostly times when the talk is often of great and noble things. It takes courage to speak at times like this of such base and petty things as the food and housing of the workers, right in the middle of a mighty hullabaloo that it is sacrifice that counts. When the farmers are being showered with honours, it takes courage to speak of machines and cheap fodder which would make their honoured work easier. When from every radio station the message screams out that a man without knowledge and education is better than a knowledgeable man, then it takes courage to ask: better for whom? When the talk is of perfect and imperfect races, it takes courage to ask whether hunger and ignorance and war do not produce terrible disfigurements. Equally, it takes courage to say the truth about oneself, the defeated. Many who are persecuted lose the ability to recognise their flaws. To them persecution seems the greatest injustice. The persecutors are, by definition, the bad guys; they, the persecuted, are persecuted because of their goodness. But this goodness has been beaten, defeated and frustrated, and so it was a weak goodness, a poor, unsustainable, unreliable goodness; for it won't do to grant goodness its weakness, like rain its wetness. *To say that the good were defeated, not because they were good, but because they were weak, that takes courage.* Of course, in the struggle with

untruth the truth has to be written, and it must not be something general, high-flown, or ambiguous. Indeed, this general, high-flown, ambiguous quality is precisely that of untruthfulness. When it is said of someone that he has spoken the truth, that must mean, in the first place, that several, or many, or just one, have said something different, a lie or something general, but *he* has said the truth, something practical, factual, undeniable, which went to the heart of the matter.

It takes little courage to lament in general the wickedness of the world and the triumph of brutality, and to threaten that the spirit will triumph in the one part of the world where this is still allowed. Many take this as their text and make their entrance as if cannons were trained on them, whereas in fact only opera glasses are trained on them. They yell their universal demands into a world of friends of the harmless. They demand universal justice, for which they have never lifted a finger, and the universal freedom to share in the loot which has long been shared with them anyway. They think only that which sounds beautiful can be true. If the truth is numerical, dry, factual, something which requires effort and study, then it is not truth for them, not something which can bewitch them. They only have the outward demeanour of those who tell the truth. The wretched thing with them is: they do not know the truth.

## 2 *The cleverness to recognise the truth*

Since it is difficult to write the truth because it is suppressed everywhere, most people think that whether or not the truth is written depends on convictions. They believe that it only takes courage. They forget the second difficulty, that of *finding* the truth. There can be no suggestion that it is easy to find the truth.

First of all it is not even easy to find out *which* truth is worth saying. For example, at this time, in full view of the whole world, one after another of the great civilised states is sinking into the most extreme form of barbarism. Moreover, everyone knows that the internal war, which is being waged with the most terrible means, may turn any day into external war, which may reduce our part of the world to a heap of rubble. That is without doubt one truth, but

there are of course more truths besides. Thus it is not untrue, for example, that chairs have seats and that rain falls down from above. Many poets write truths of this kind. They are like painters who cover the walls of sinking ships with still lifes. Our first difficulty does not exist for them, and yet they have a clear conscience. Undeterred by the powerful, but at the same time not deterred by the screams of the ravaged, they dab at their pictures. The non-sensical nature of their actions produces a 'profound' pessimism in them, which they sell for good prices, and which would actually be more justified in others – in the face of these masters and their sales. And yet it is not even easy to recognise that their truths are the sort which concern chairs or rain; they usually sound quite different, just like truths about important matters. For artistic treatment consists precisely in bestowing importance on something.

It is not until you look more closely that you recognise that they are only saying: a chair is a chair, and: no one can do anything to stop rain falling down from above.

These people have not found the truth which is worth writing about. Others in their turn really do concern themselves with the most urgent tasks, fear neither the powerful nor a life of poverty, but they still cannot find the truth. They lack knowledge. They are full of the old superstition, of famous prejudices often beautifully shaped in the olden days. The world is too complicated for them, they do not know the facts and do not see the connections. Apart from convictions, what is needed is knowledge, which can be acquired, and method, which can be learned. What all writers need in this time of complexity and great changes is a knowledge of the materialist dialectic, of economics, and of history. This can be acquired by means of books and practical instruction, so long as the necessary diligence is there. One can discover many truths by relatively simple means, parts of the truth or evidence which leads to the truth. If one wants to search, then it is good to have a method, but one can also find without a method, indeed, even without searching. But with this haphazard approach one will scarcely achieve a representation of truth such that, on the basis of that representation, people will know how they should act. People who

only write down little facts are not in a position to make the things of this world manageable. But the truth has only this purpose, none other. These people are not up to the challenge of writing the truth.

If someone is prepared to write the truth and capable of recognising it, there still remain three difficulties.

### 3 *The skill to make the truth fit for use as a weapon*

The truth must be spoken because of the consequences which follow from it for behaviour. One example which shows us the kind of truth from which no consequences or the wrong consequences can be drawn is the widespread view that in some countries terrible conditions prevail, which originate in barbarism. According to this view, Fascism is a wave of barbarism which has descended on several lands with the force of a *natural disaster*.

According to this view, Fascism is a new, third power next to (and above) capitalism and socialism; not only the socialist movement, it is argued, but capitalism also could have continued to prosper, had it not been for Fascism. This is, of course, a Fascist claim, a capitulation to Fascism. Fascism is a historic phase which capitalism has entered into, and in this sense it is both new and at the same time old. In Fascist countries capitalism only survives as Fascism, and *Fascism can only be resisted as capitalism, as the most naked, brazen, oppressive, and deceitful form of capitalism*.

How does someone propose to speak the truth about Fascism, to which he is opposed, if he does not propose to speak out against capitalism, which produces it? What are the practical consequences of his truth supposed to be?

Those who are against Fascism without being against capitalism, who wail about the barbarism that comes from barbarism, are like people who want to eat their share of the calf without the calf being slaughtered. They want to eat veal, but they can't stand the sight of blood. They are satisfied if the butcher washes his hands before he brings out the meat. They are not against the conditions of ownership which produce barbarism, just against the barbarism. They raise their voices against barbarism, and they do so in countries in

which the same conditions of ownership prevail, but where the butchers still wash their hands before they bring out the meat.

Loud accusations against barbaric measures may work for a short time, for as long as the listeners believe that these sorts of measures would be out of the question in their own countries. Certain countries are in a position to uphold their conditions of ownership with less violent measures than others. For them democracy still performs the services for which others have to call on violence, namely the guarantee of ownership of the means of production. The monopoly capitalism of factories, mines and estates creates barbaric conditions everywhere; however, these are not so immediately visible. Barbarism becomes visible as soon as that monopoly can only be protected by open violence.

Some countries which do not yet need, for the sake of the barbaric monopolies, to renounce the formal guarantees of the rule of law, or such comforts as art, philosophy and literature, particularly enjoy listening to their guests when these accuse their homeland of having renounced such comforts, since they will profit from this in the wars which are expected. Are we to say that such people have recognised the truth, those, for example, who demand loudly: an unrelenting fight against Germany 'for this is the true home of evil in this age, the branch offices of hell, the abode of the Antichrist'? We should rather say that they are foolish, helpless and harmful people. For this gossip would lead to the conclusion that the country should be eliminated. The whole country with all its people, for poison gas does not seek out the guilty ones when it kills.

The thoughtless man, who does not know the truth, expresses himself in generalisations, in high-flown and vague language. He blathers on about 'the' Germans, he whinges about Evil, and even with the best will his listener cannot know what to do. Should he decide not to be a German? Will hell disappear, if he is good? The talk about the barbarism that comes from barbarism is also of this ilk. According to this view, barbarism comes from barbarism, and comes to an end by means of civilised behaviour, which comes from education. That is all terribly general, not said for the sake of the consequences for action, and essentially said to no one.

Such accounts show only a few links in the causal chain and depict certain motive forces as uncontrollable forces. Such accounts contain a lot of obscurity, concealing the forces which cause catastrophes. Cast just a little light on the matter, and suddenly human beings appear as the perpetrators of the catastrophes! For we live in an age where man's destiny is man.

Fascism is not a natural disaster which can simply be understood from human 'nature'. But even in the case of natural disasters there are methods of depiction which are worthy of man because they appeal to his ability to resist.

After a great earthquake which destroyed Yokohama, many American magazines published photographs depicting a field of rubble. Underneath was the caption 'steel stood', and indeed, anyone, who at first glance had only seen ruins, noticed – now that the caption had drawn attention to them – that several tall buildings had remained standing. Of all the possible depictions of an earthquake, the ones of unparalleled importance are those by the construction engineers, those which take note of the shifts in the ground, the strength of the tremors, the developing heat, etc., and which lead to constructions which withstand earthquakes. Anyone who wants to describe Fascism and war, the great disasters which are not natural disasters, must produce a practicable form of truth. He must show that these are catastrophes which are brought on the huge masses of working people, who lack their own means of production, by the owners of these means of production.

If one wants to write the truth about terrible conditions successfully, one has to write it in such a way that the avoidable causes of these conditions can be recognised. Once the avoidable causes are recognised, the terrible conditions can be resisted.

#### 4 *The judgement to select those in whose hands the truth becomes effective*

Owing to the centuries-old customs of trading written goods on the market of opinions and descriptions, so that the writer was relieved of the worry over what to do with the written text, the writer had the impression that his client or patron, the middleman, was

passing on his written work to everyone. He thought: I speak, and those who want to listen will hear me. In reality he spoke; and those who could pay heard him. What he said was not heard by everyone, and those who did hear it did not want to hear everything. On this subject a lot has been said already, although it is still too little; I only want to emphasise here that 'writing for someone' has turned into simply 'writing'. The truth, however, cannot simply be written; you absolutely have to write it *for someone*, someone who is able to use it. Recognising the truth is a process shared by writers and readers. In order to say what is good, you need to be a good listener and to hear what is good. The truth must be said with calculation and listened to with calculation. And for us writers it is important whom we tell it to and who tells it to us.

We have to tell the truth about the terrible conditions to those for whom these conditions are worst, and we must learn it from them. We need to talk not only to the people who have particular convictions, but also to those people who, by reason of their situation, should share these convictions. And your listeners change continually! Even the hangmen can be spoken to, when the payment for hanging stops coming in, or when the danger becomes too great. The Bavarian peasants were opposed to any revolution, but when the war had lasted long enough and their sons returned home and no longer found a place in the farmyards, then they could be won over for the revolution.

It is important for writers to hit the right tone of truth. Usually you hear a very soft, melancholy tone, the tone of people who could not hurt a fly. Anyone who hears this tone and is in a wretched state becomes more wretched. People who talk like this may not be your enemies, but they are certainly no fellow fighters. The truth is war-like, it does not only fight against untruthfulness, but also against certain people who spread untruth.

##### 5 *The cunning to spread the truth amongst many*

Many, proud that they have the courage to tell the truth, happy to have found it, perhaps tired from the work which it costs to put it in a serviceable form, waiting impatiently for those whose interests they

are defending to take hold of it, do not consider it necessary on top of all of this to use especial cunning when spreading the truth. Thus the whole effect of their work often comes to nought. In every age when the truth was suppressed and disguised, cunning was used to spread it. *Confucius* falsified an old patriotic calendar of historical events. He only changed certain words. When it said, 'The ruler of Kun had the philosopher Wan killed because he said this and that', Confucius replaced killed with 'murdered'. If it said that such-and-such a tyrant had been assassinated, he replaced this with 'executed'. By these means Confucius paved the way for a new assessment of history.

Anyone in our times who says *population instead of 'Volk' and land ownership instead of 'soil'* is already denying his support to many lies. He divests the words of their lazy mysticism. The word *Volk* implies a certain unity and hints at common interests, so it should only be used in reference to several *Völker*, for only then is a commonality of interests conceivable. The population of an area of land has different, even opposing interests, and this is a truth which is suppressed. Thus anyone who says 'soil', and describes the fields to nose and eyes by speaking of their earthy scent and their colour, is supporting the lies of the rulers; for what matters is not the fertility of the soil, nor man's love of it, nor his diligence, but instead principally the price of grain and the price of labour. The people who draw the profits from the soil are not those who harvest the grain, and the scent of the clods of earth is unknown on the stock exchanges. They reek of something different. On the contrary, 'landownership' is the right word; it is less deceptive. For the word 'discipline', wherever oppression rules, the word 'obedience' should be used, because discipline is possible even without rulers and so has a more noble quality than obedience. And better than the word 'honour' are the words 'human dignity'. So that the individual does not vanish so easily from our field of vision. After all, we know what sort of lowlife will rush forward to be allowed to defend the honour of a people! And how wastefully those who are well-fed distribute honours on those who, in feeding them, go hungry. Confucius's cunning can still be used even today.

Confucius replaced unjustified assessments of national events

with justified ones. In *Utopia* the Englishman *Thomas More* described a country in which just conditions prevailed – it was a very different country from the one in which he lived, but it resembled it closely, except for the conditions!

*Lenin*, under threat from the Tsar's police, wanted to describe the exploitation and oppression of the island Sakhalin by the Russian bourgeoisie. He replaced Russia with Japan and Sakhalin with Korea. The methods of the Japanese bourgeoisie reminded all the readers of those of the Russian bourgeoisie in Sakhalin, but the work was not forbidden, since Japan and Russia were enemies. A lot of things which may not be said in Germany about Germany may be said about Austria.

There are many kinds of cunning which can be used to hoodwink the suspicious state.

*Voltaire* fought against the Church's belief in miracles by writing a gallant poem about the Maid of Orleans. He described the miracle which must doubtless have occurred for Joan to have remained a virgin in an army and at court and in the company of monks.

By the elegance of his style and the fact that he described erotic adventures, derived from the opulent life of the rulers, he enticed them into exposing the religion which secured them the means for their lax lifestyle. Indeed, by these means he created the possibility that his works would reach those for whom they were intended by illegal routes. The powerful among his readers encouraged or tolerated the circulation of these works. They thus exposed the police, who defended their pleasures on their behalf. And the great *Lucretius* expressly emphasises his high hopes that the beauty of his verses would aid the dissemination of Epicurean atheism.

A high literary standard can indeed serve to protect a message. Often, however, it also arouses suspicion. Then it may be necessary deliberately to pitch it a few notches lower. That happens, for example, when descriptions of poor social conditions are smuggled into the despised genre of the detective novel at unobtrusive points. Such descriptions might entirely justify a detective novel. Far lesser considerations led the great *Shakespeare* to lower the tone in the speech of Coriolanus's mother, in which she opposes her son who is

marching against his home city, a speech which he deliberately fashions so that it lacks force – he wanted Coriolanus to be stopped from carrying out his plan, not by real reasons or by being profoundly moved, but by the lethargy with which he succumbs to an old habit. In Shakespeare we also find a model of cunningly spread truth in Antony's speech at Caesar's corpse. He emphasises unceasingly that Caesar's murderer Brutus is an honourable man, but he also describes his deed, and the description of this deed is more impressive than the description of its perpetrator; the orator thus allows himself to be defeated by the facts themselves; he lends them a greater rhetorical force than he grants 'himself'.

An *Egyptian poet*, who lived four thousand years ago, used a similar method. It was a period of intense class struggle. With enormous difficulty the hitherto ruling class was fending off its greatest adversary, the section of the population which until then had served it. In the poem a wise man appears at the ruler's court and issues a warning to fight against the enemy within. He describes at length and with urgency the disorder which has arisen as a result of the uprising of the lower classes. The account reads as follows:

*'For so it is: the rich are full of complaints and the poor full of joy.*

*Every city says: let us drive the powerful out of our midst.*

*For so it is: the public offices are opened and their lists taken away; the serfs are becoming masters.*

*For so it is: the son of a respected man is no longer recognised; the child of the mistress becomes the son of her slave.*

*For so it is: the burghers have been set to work at the millstone. Those who never saw the day have emerged into the light.*

*For so it is: the ebony chests of sacrifice are broken; the precious sesame wood is hacked up to make beds.*

*Behold, the palace has collapsed in one hour.*

*Behold, the poor of the land have become rich. Behold, he who lacked bread now owns a barn; his granary is filled with the goods of another.*

*Behold, it does a man good to eat his meal.*

*Behold, he who had no corn now owns barns; he who lived on alms of corn now distributes them himself.*

*Behold, he who had no yoke of oxen now owns herds; he who could not come by animals to pull his plough now owns whole herds of cattle.*  
*Behold, he who could not build a shelter for himself now owns four walls.*  
*Behold, the councillors seek shelter in the granary; he who was barely allowed to rest against the walls now owns a bed.*  
*Behold, he who never before built a boat for himself now owns ships; when their owner comes looking for them, then they are no longer his.*  
*Behold, those who owned clothes are now in rags; he who never wove for himself now owns fine linen.*  
*The rich man thirsts in his sleep, he who once begged him for dregs now has strong beer.*  
*Behold, he who understood nothing of harp music now owns a harp; he for whom no one sang now extols the music.*  
*Behold, he who was forced by poverty to sleep unmarried, now has ladies; those who looked at their faces in the water now own a mirror.*  
*Behold, those in high places in the country run about but have no business to attend to. The great receive no messages. He who was once a messenger now sends out someone else . . .*  
*Behold, there are five men, sent out by their masters. They say: go yourselves, we have arrived.'*

It is transparently clear that this is the description of a kind of disorder which must appear to the oppressed as a very enviable state. And yet the poet is difficult to pin down. He expressly condemns these conditions, even if he does so badly . . .

*Jonathan Swift* suggested in a pamphlet that, in order for the country to achieve prosperity, the children of the poor should be pickled and sold as meat. He made precise calculations which proved that you can save a great deal if you shrink from nothing.

Swift acted as if he were stupid. He defended a particular mode of thinking, which he detested, with great fire and thoroughness, and in a discussion of an issue where all its nastiness would be fully recognisable to anyone. Anyone could be cleverer than Swift, or at least more humane, particularly anyone who until then had not investigated certain opinions with an eye to the consequences which followed from them.

*Propaganda for thinking, irrespective of where it occurs, is useful to the cause of the oppressed.* This kind of propaganda is very necessary. Thinking is considered base under regimes which serve exploitation.

Whatever is useful for the downtrodden is considered base. Constant worry about filling your stomach counts as base; as does spurning the honours which are promised to those who defend the country in which they starve; doubting the Führer when he leads the way into a disaster; being averse to work which does not nourish its worker; rebelling against the compulsion to senseless behaviour; being indifferent towards the family, whom interest could no longer serve. The starving are cursed as greedy, those who have nothing to defend as cowards, those who doubt their oppressor as those who doubt their own strength, those who want wages for all their labour as lazy, and so on. Under governments like this, thinking in general counts as base and falls into disrepute. It is no longer taught anywhere and, wherever it surfaces, it is persecuted. Nevertheless, there are still areas where one can point unpunished to the successes of thinking; namely those areas where the dictatorships need thinking. So, for example, one can prove the successes of thinking in the field of the science and technology of war. Stretching out wool supplies by more efficient organisation and by the invention of wool substitutes also calls for thinking. The deterioration of foodstuffs, the training of young people for the war, all of this calls for thinking; and we are allowed to describe it. Praise of war, that is: of the unconsidered purpose of all this consideration, can cunningly be avoided; so the thinking which issues from the question of how a war can best be waged may lead on to the question of whether this war makes sense and may contribute to the question of how a senseless war can best be avoided.

It is difficult, of course, to pose this question in public. So is it not possible to exploit the thinking which has been propagated, that is to say to shape it for the purpose of intervention? On the contrary.

In a time like our own, in order for the oppression which serves the exploitation of the one (larger) section of the population by the other (smaller) section to remain possible, a very particular kind of basic attitude is necessary in the population, an attitude which must

extend into all areas. A discovery in the field of zoology, like that of the Englishman *Darwin*, was suddenly a threat to exploitation; nevertheless, for a while only the Church was concerned about it, whilst the police had not yet noticed anything. The research of physicists in recent years has had consequences in the field of logic, which could be a threat to a series of doctrines which serve oppression. The Prussian state philosopher Hegel, concerned with difficult investigations in the field of logic, supplied Marx and Lenin, the classics of the proletarian revolution, with methods of inestimable value. Developments in the sciences are interrelated but not simultaneous, and the state is unable to keep an eye on everything. The champions of truth can select battle arenas for themselves which are relatively unobserved. Everything depends on the right kind of thinking being taught, a thinking which questions all things and all processes, and is intent on discovering their transient and changeable nature.

Our rulers have a great aversion to major changes. They would like everything to stay the same, preferably for a thousand years. It would be best of all if the moon stood still and the sun stopped in its tracks! Then no one would ever get hungry and want to eat their supper. Once they have fired, their enemies should not be allowed to carry on shooting, their shot should be the last. A way of thinking which particularly emphasises the transient is a good means of encouraging the oppressed. Also, the fact that in each thing and in each condition a contradiction makes itself felt and grows, that is something which must be used to oppose the victors. This way of looking at things (like the dialectic, the doctrine that things are in flux) can be practised when investigating the subjects which escape the rulers for a while. It can be applied in biology or chemistry. But it can also be practised in describing the fates of a family without arousing too much attention. The fact that each thing depends on many others, which are constantly changing, is a dangerous thought for dictatorships, and it can surface in many guises without offering the police a lever. A complete description of all the circumstances and processes which affect a man who wants to open up a newsagent's can be a harsh blow against dictatorship. Everyone who reflects a little on this will realise

why. Governments which lead the masses into misery must ensure that people do not think about the government during this misery. They talk a lot about destiny. This, rather than they themselves, is responsible for the distress. Anyone who tries to find out the cause of the distress is arrested long before he thinks of the government. But it is possible, in general, to counter this talk of fate; one can demonstrate that the fate of man is the work of men.

Again this can occur in a variety of ways. For example, the history of a farm can be told, such as that of an Icelandic farm. The entire village is talking about how this farm is cursed. One farmer's wife has thrown herself down the well, one farmer has hanged himself. One day a wedding takes place, the farmer's son marries a girl who brings a couple of fields into the marriage with her. The curse leaves the farm. The village is unable to agree in its assessment of this happy turn of events. Some attribute it to the sunny nature of the young farmer, others to the fields which the young farmer's wife brought into the marriage and which made the farm viable for the first time.

But it is possible to achieve something even in a poem which describes a landscape, namely if the things created by human beings are incorporated into nature.

Cunning is necessary for the truth to be spread.

### *Summary*

The great truth of our age (recognition of which does not yet achieve anything, but without recognition of which no other truth of importance can be found) is that our part of the globe is sinking into barbarism because the conditions of ownership of the means of production are being held on to with violence. What use is it here to write something courageous which shows that the state into which we are sinking is barbaric (which is true), if it is not clear why we have ended up in this state? We have to say that people are being tortured so that the conditions of ownership will remain the same. Of course, if we say this we lose many friends who are against torture because they believe that the conditions of ownership might also be preserved without torture (which is untrue).

We have to tell the truth about the barbaric conditions in our country, that the measures which will make them disappear can be taken, namely those which change the conditions of ownership.

Moreover, we must tell it to those who are suffering the most from the conditions of ownership, who have the greatest interest in changing them, the workers, and those whom we can bring to them as comrades-in-arms, because they likewise do not have any share in the ownership of the means of production, even though they have a share of the profits.

And we must, fifthly, proceed with cunning.

And we must solve all of these five difficulties at one and the same time, for we cannot investigate the truth about barbaric conditions without thinking of those who are suffering from them, and whilst, always shaking off every last vestige of cowardice, we search for the true causal links with an eye to those who are prepared to use their knowledge, we must think about how to convey the truth to them in such a way that it can be a weapon in their hands, and at the same time with such cunning that this conveyance cannot be discovered and prevented by the enemy.

This much is demanded, when it is demanded that a writer should write the truth.

[*‘Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit’*, BFA 22/74–89.]

Written December 1934, first published in the anti-Fascist journal *Unsere Zeit*, Paris/Basel/Prague, 1935, no. 2–3 (April), pp. 23–35. It was also published as a leaflet to be smuggled into Nazi Germany (some copies apparently camouflaged with the title *Practical Tips for First Aid*). There seems to have been little response at the time, although Walter Benjamin accorded it high praise in a letter to Brecht: “Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth” has the dry wit and hence the limitless durability of a true classic. It is in a kind of prose which is new to the German language.’ In due course it was recognised as one of the most important of Brecht’s essays on political aesthetics, and it has established itself as something of a Marxist classic.

Amongst the several references to the language and policies of contemporary National Socialism and of anti-Fascism, it is perhaps worth picking out that Brecht’s analysis in section 3 of Fascism as ‘the most naked, brazen, oppressive and deceitful form of capitalism’ is consistent with the statement by the Communist International in December 1933, that Fascism

is 'the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinistic and imperialist elements of finance capital'.

Notes on the catalogue of examples are contained in BFA 22/906–9. The 'Egyptian poem' is Brecht's own construct pieced together from six separate 'Admonitions of a prophet' by Ipu-wer (c. 2500 BC), and quoted more or less according to the versions in an anthology by Adolf Ermann, *Die Literatur der Ägypter* (Leipzig, 1923). In 1944 Brecht used some of the same material again in the 'Song of Chaos' in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

40

### A Necessary Observation on the Struggle Against Barbarism

In order to achieve profits, in our times cereal crops and cattle are destroyed. The destruction of culture has no other purpose.

Comrades, I would like, without wanting to say anything particularly new, to say a few words about the struggle against those powers which are now bent on suffocating Western culture in blood and dirt, or, more precisely, those remnants of culture which a century of exploitation has left us with. I would like to draw your attention to just one single point, on which I believe that clarity must prevail if we are to resist these powers effectively and, most importantly, to the moment of their utter destruction.

Writers who experience the atrocities of Fascism at first or second hand, and who are outraged by them, are not therefore in a position to resist these atrocities simply by virtue of their experience and sense of outrage, without further ado. Some people may believe that it is enough to describe the atrocities, particularly if great literary talent and genuine anger lend the description urgency. And, indeed, such descriptions are very important. Atrocities are taking place. This cannot be allowed. People are being beaten. This should not be happening. What long explanations could be needed? The reader will surely leap up and restrain the torturers. But comrades, explanations are essential.

The reader may leap up, that is not so difficult. But then comes the little matter of restraining the torturers, and this is considerably more difficult. The anger is there, the opponent is clearly identified, but how can he be brought to his knees? The writer may say: my task is to denounce injustice, and leave the question of what to do about it to the reader. But then the writer will make a strange discovery. He will notice that anger, like sympathy, is something quantitative; it is present in this or that quantity and can run out. And the worst thing is: the more it is needed, the faster it runs out. Comrades have said to me: when we reported for the first time that our friends were being slaughtered, there was a cry of horror and many came to our aid. That was when a hundred were slaughtered. But when a thousand were slaughtered and there was still no end to the slaughter, silence descended, and only a few came to our aid. That is the way it is: 'When the crimes mount up, they become invisible. When the suffering becomes unbearable, the screams are no longer heard. One human being is beaten, and the person watching faints. It is only natural. When wrongdoing falls from the skies like rain, no one any longer cries out "Stop!"'

So this is how matters stand. How can they be remedied? Is there no way of preventing man from turning his back on atrocities? Why does he turn away? He turns away because he sees no possibility of intervening. No man lingers in the presence of another man's pain if he is unable to help him. You can fend off the blow if you know when it will strike and where it will strike and why, for what purpose, it will strike. And if you can fend off the blow, if any, even a faint chance of doing so exists, then you can feel sympathy for the victim. You can feel it anyway, but not for long, in any case not for as long as the blows rain down on the victim. So: why is this blow being struck? Why is culture being thrown overboard like so much ballast, those remnants of culture which are left to us; why are the lives of millions of people, of the vast majority of people, so impoverished, denuded, half or completely destroyed?

Some of us are eager to answer this question. They answer: out of brutality. They believe that they are experiencing a terrifying outbreak amongst a large and ever increasing section of humankind, a

horrifying phenomenon without discernible cause, which has appeared suddenly and may perhaps, with luck, disappear again just as suddenly, a monstrous emergence of a long suppressed or dormant barbarism, an instinctual urge.

Those who give this answer naturally realise themselves that it does not help very much. And they also realise that it is wrong to give brutality the appearance of a force of nature, of the invincible powers of hell.

So they speak of the neglected education of the human race. Something was left out or could not be done in all the rush. We must make up for it now. Goodness must be brought to bear against brutality. We shall have to summon up the big words, the magic formulae which have helped us of old, the enduring concepts of love of freedom, dignity, justice, whose efficacy is historically proven. And so they employ these great magic formulae. What happens? On being told it is brutal, Fascism answers with a fanatical paean to brutality. Accused of being fanatical, it answers with a paean to fanaticism. Charged with violating reason, it proceeds cheerfully to a condemnation of reason.

For Fascism also believes that education has been neglected. It has high hopes of its ability to influence minds and fortify hearts. To the brutality of its torture chambers it adds that of its schools, newspapers, theatres. It educates the entire nation and it educates it all day long. It has not very much to offer to the vast majority, so the important thing is to educate them a great deal. It cannot provide food, so it has to teach self-discipline. It cannot manage production and it needs wars, so it has to teach physical courage. It requires sacrifices, so it has to teach the spirit of sacrifice. These too are ideals, demands on humanity, some of them are even high ideals, high demands.

Now, we know what purpose these ideals serve, who is doing the educating and whom this education is intended to benefit – not those being educated. How do matters stand with our own ideals, which are so much more humane? They are certainly different, but is it not possible that, when we set up our ideals, we nonetheless have something in common with our opponents? Even those of us

who see the fundamental evil in brutality, in barbarism, speak, as we have seen, only about education, only about intervening in people's minds – not about any other kind of intervention. They speak about educating people to be good. But goodness will not come from the demand to be good, to be good under all circumstances, *even the most severe*, just as brutality cannot come from brutality alone.

I myself do not believe in brutality for its own sake. Mankind must be defended against the accusation that it would be brutal even if the rewards were not so handsome; it is a witty inversion when my friend Feuchtwanger says that meanness takes precedence over self-interest, but he is not right. Brutality does not come from brutality, but from the business deals which can no longer be made without it.

In the small country from which I come, less terrible conditions prevail than in many other countries; but every week 5,000 of the best animals reared for slaughter are destroyed. This is a terrible thing, but it is not a sudden outbreak of bloodthirstiness. If this were the case, then the matter would be less terrible. The destruction of animals reared for slaughter and the destruction of culture are not caused by barbaric instincts. In both cases a *part* of the goods, into which so much effort has gone, is destroyed because it has become a burden. In view of the hunger which governs all five continents, such measures are doubtless crimes, but they have nothing to do with wantonness, by no means. In most countries on earth today we have social conditions in which all kinds of crimes are highly rewarded and in which virtues carry a high price. 'The good man is defenceless, and the defenceless man is clubbed to the ground, but with brutality you can procure anything. Meanness is preparing for a 10,000-year reign. Goodness, on the other hand, needs a body-guard, but there's none to be found.'

Let us take heed against simply demanding goodness of people! After all, we too have no desire to demand the impossible. Let us not expose ourselves to the reproach that we, we too, came appealing for human beings to achieve the superhuman, namely to use great virtue to endure terrible conditions which, although they could be changed, should not be changed! Let us not talk only on behalf of culture! Let us have mercy on culture, but let us first have mercy on

mankind! Culture will be saved when mankind is saved. Let us not get carried away and claim that man is there for culture, and not culture for man!

Comrades, let us reflect on the roots of this evil!

One great doctrine today, which is taking hold of ever-increasing masses of people on our planet, which itself is still in its youth, teaches that the roots of all evil lie in the conditions of ownership. This doctrine, simple like all great doctrines, has seized the masses of people who are suffering the most under the existing relations of property ownership and the barbaric methods used in their defence. In one country, which makes up a sixth of the surface area of the earth, where the oppressed and propertyless classes have seized power, it is being translated into action. Food is no longer destroyed there, and nor is culture.

Many of us writers who have experienced the atrocities of Fascism and are horrified by them have not yet understood this doctrine, have not yet discovered the roots of the brutality which so horrifies them. For them the danger persists that they will regard the cruelties of Fascism as unnecessary cruelties. They cling to the conditions of property ownership because they believe that the cruelties of Fascism are not necessary for their defence. But if the prevailing conditions of property ownership are to be upheld, then these cruelties are indeed necessary. In this particular the Fascists are not lying, they are telling the truth. Those of our friends who are just as horrified about the cruelties of Fascism as we are, but who want to preserve the conditions of property ownership or are indifferent to their preservation, cannot put up a sufficiently forceful or sustained fight against barbarism, which is so much in the ascendancy, because they can neither name nor help to create the social conditions in which barbarism would be redundant. Those, however, who in their search for the roots of this evil have stumbled upon the conditions of property ownership, have descended deeper and deeper, through an inferno of ever more fundamentally underlying atrocities, until they have arrived at that point where a small part of humankind has anchored its merciless rule. They have anchored it in individual property rights, which serve them to exploit their

fellow men and which they defend tooth and nail, and at the cost of a culture which has ceased to offer any defence, or is no longer equipped to defend itself, at the cost of every single law of human co-existence for which mankind has fought so long and so courageously and so desperately.

Comrades, let us talk about the conditions of property ownership!

That is what I wanted to say on the subject of the struggle against the rise of barbarism, so that here too it should be said, or so that I too should have said it.

[*'Eine notwendige Feststellung zum Kampf gegen die Barbarei'*, BFA 22/141-6.]

There are several different drafts and versions of this speech, which Brecht gave at the First International Writers' Congress for the Defence of Culture, in Paris in June 1935. This is the version subsequently published in *Neue Deutsche Blätter*, Prague, 1934-5, no. 6 (August 1935), pp. 341-3. Some 250 writers from 37 countries attended the Congress and there were speeches by E. M. Forster, André Gide, Heinrich Mann, Robert Musil, Anna Seghers, amongst many others. Brecht expressed his dissatisfaction with the conference in a letter to George Grosz: 'We have just rescued culture. It took 4 (four) days, and then we decided that we would sooner sacrifice all else than let culture perish. If necessary, we'll sacrifice ten to twenty million people. [. . .] Fascism was unanimously condemned. What for? For its *unnecessary* cruelties' (*Letters*, p. 208).

His own contribution caused offence above all by its famous penultimate sentence, to liberals for its direct insistence on economics, and to socialists for its failure to recognise the current strategy of the Comintern, who were seeking to propagate a broad anti-Fascist front. Brecht felt he had gained nothing, except further material for his satirical studies of the intellectual in bourgeois society. In §10: 'Common interest takes precedence over self-interest' was a popular saying amongst Nazi ideologues (compare no. 36); Feuchtwanger changes one syllable to create his pun: '*Gemeinheit* [instead of *Gemeinnutz*] *geht vor Eigennutz*'. In §11 the 'small country' is Denmark, where Brecht had lived since the summer of 1933.

## On the Question of Whether Hitler Is Being Honest

1 The question of whether Hitler is honest is often raised, and many people behave as if a lot depended on the answer.

Of course, one might just as well question the honesty of a negro medicine man who pronounces that there will be no more rain until a certain man has been eaten. In general, the medicine man will only be considered dishonest if he has no personal connection with the man he says should be eaten, if they are neither relations by blood or marriage, nor business associates, nor any other kind of enemies. Even then, however, the man in question will not consider him honest, and even if he does, he will be eaten all the same, although no rain may come of it.

The general belief is that one should turn a blind eye whenever someone is striving for high goals. At any time he may say: in order to save the ten thousand of you, right now I need ten people to kill. Of course, the goal has to be really high. The highest goal anyone can name, when he wants to kill someone, is that of saving the fatherland. A lowly goal, in fact the most lowly there is, is money. Now in this lamentably imprecise world there are, however, peculiar combinations. The banker Morgan, for example, saved the fatherland (and earned 200 million dollars); Henry Ford did not save the fatherland (and also earned 200 million dollars). When Morgan sacrificed several hundred thousand human lives and saved the fatherland, there was a by-product: 200 million dollars. When he had earned these 200 million dollars, the fatherland was saved. Ford, on the contrary, earned his money without saving the fatherland, since Morgan had, after all, already saved it when he earned his money. On the other hand, for not saving the fatherland, Ford also did not need 100,000 human lives in order to earn his money. Morgan could not manage to earn his money and save the fatherland without

human losses. Ford could not come to us and want to kill 100,000 human beings in order to earn his money, since in his case the fatherland would not be saved if the 100,000 were killed. Were Ford to demand the 100,000 human beings from us in order to earn his money, in our opinion he, in contrast to Morgan, would not be being honest.

2 One ought never to grant one's opponent something which he does not deserve, for example, in order to seem generous and thereby to show that one can beat him at his own game, at a higher level. One must stick to the truth, even when it is improbable. And one ought not to present a falsehood as the truth because at the present time its stigma is not needed at all in order to defeat the enemy. If I begin: Hitler may be honest subjectively, but there still remains . . . , then I have only 'admitted that even I do not dare to dispute Hitler's honesty, I, the opponent'. Certainly, Hitler could be honest and mean well, and yet still objectively be Germany's worst enemy. But he is not honest.

### Chauffeur Schicklgruber Holds Forth

When Hitler went against France and undertook the military occupation of the Rhineland he delivered a great speech in which he cried out, sobbing, that he had no country estate and no bank account. This sentence left a deep impression on his hearers.

All around, people saw how Hitler's retinue were thoughtlessly filling their pockets, how governors in recognition of their services granted each other country estates etc., and yet the Führer himself walked off empty-handed? Under his rule a class of robbers had taken over, and everyone had been given the possibility to enrich themselves, but he himself would not accept it? In the face of such ethical stature people's eyes filled with tears.

General Göring, who was, after all, subordinate to the Führer, owned several country estates and laid on banquets like Nebuchadnezzar, and yet his Führer he allowed to wander, with no supper and no roof over his head, through night-time Berlin; God knows if a shelter for the homeless would take him in if he were to

say, I am the Führer? Of course he could always, if the worst came to the worst, call up the SA . . .

The Führer of a great Reich should, without doubt, have an income, even if only a modest one. It is quite possible that Mr Hitler does not actually achieve all that much, but what sort of an impression does it give if, as happens in Berlin, the Reich President, who has renounced the salary of a Prime Minister, has to cadge a dime off every porter in order to take a tram?

Many believe, or so I hear, that Mr Hitler does indeed have an income, and quite a decent one too, he just doesn't know it. According to these people, he just thinks he hasn't got a bank account. Is that possible?

I think it is. It is even likely. You only have to ask yourself: how is the Führer supposed to have learned that he's got a bank account? At night he sleeps in the Wilhelmstraße or in his pretty villa in Berchtesgaden, or he lies awake and thinks about how he can keep Germany out of the war: you can't suddenly come and disturb him with the news that he's got a bank account. In the morning he has his breakfast, and at that hour you can't disturb him either, he's got to make himself strong, otherwise we're all for it. And then come the affairs of government: for example, the Führer inspects one of his great building projects. It's well known that his heart is set on a few huge stadia where he can talk to the Germans about all the other things he wants to give them. When he's immersed in plans and projects like that, of course you can't drag him away just to tell him that the money for his beloved buildings is already there. And so it goes on, the whole afternoon and evening, when he visits the Propaganda Minister who tells him in detail what he's doing for Germany and what he has to say in public, in short, does a bit of propaganda . . . If it goes on like this the Führer will never learn that he is provided for, and when he's preparing such an important speech as the one we're just talking about, you can't just shout out the news in the middle. And how are we supposed to know he would talk about it? No one, not even the Führer, has a clue what he is talking about.

All the same, I was kept awake by the Führer's statement that he

has no bank account. I even began to understand his own sleepless nights, that he's always telling us about, better. Because it really is a great carelessness to keep so much money at home wrapped up in a sock. It's a habit common amongst the petty bourgeoisie, but it's not a good habit. Although, mistrust of the banks features in the National Socialist Party programme too . . .

It must be a lot of socks. The income of the Führer is no longer so meagre as when he was an army spy in Munich, a miserably paid job (especially miserable when you remember what a hard job it is, winning people's trust, and then betraying them).

You just have to consider the new decree, according to which every couple who marry have to receive a copy of *Mein Kampf* from the community, and you begin to realise what is stuffed in the Führer's money sock. Every year some 700,000 couples get married in Germany. They won't dare offer the Führer less than 50 pfennigs per copy. This little calculation alone demonstrates that at least *his Kampf* was a profitable one.

If the Führer really doesn't have a bank account, not even without being aware of it, and if he keeps his money at home – for he has got a home, surprising though that may seem, a palace in Berlin and an estate in Bavaria – then that is very careless of him. For, even in spite of his Gestapo, one day all sorts of folk might come to visit him on the hunt for his money socks; and what will he live on then? Since he cannot expect to hold on to his office for ever, in these restless times.

['Über die Frage, ob es Hitler ehrlich meint' and 'Auslassungen des Chauffeurs Schicklgruber', BFA 22/184–8.]

Spring 1936. These two pieces together provide a response to Hitler's speech to the Reichstag on 7 March 1936, when the German army marched into the Rhineland (demilitarised since the Treaties of Versailles and Locarno of 1919 and 1925). Brecht later turned part of the material into a dialogue for radio broadcast: 'The Führer's Bank Account' (BFA 18/335–7).

The first piece refers to the 'patriotic' achievement of John Pierpont Morgan in extending the American rail network (which cost many lives), as well as the steel and shipping trusts, and compares it with Henry Ford's foundation of the Ford Motor Company (1903). The idea of types of

'productive capitalist' seems to be derived from a piece by H. G. Wells in the *New Statesman and Nation*, London, 27 October 1934, which is in Brecht's personal archive.

In the title to the second piece, Schicklgruber was the name borne by Adolf Hitler's illegitimate father until he was able to prove his real name; to German ears it has a comic Austrian peasant flavour and it was widely used by Hitler's early political opponents.

The satirical tone is reminiscent of Brecht's 'German Satires' from the *Svendborg Poems* of these same years, or of the later play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*.

42

From the English Letters

People reproach barbarism, because they are not permitted to participate in it. In truth, it is a screaming injustice that some people, just because of the shape of their noses, should not have the right to take part in the exploitation of their fellow human beings, just at a time when exploitation is so in vogue. Are they to be excluded from war profiteering as well, just because their hair is black? What reasons are these to prevent them from feeding off the labours of others. Should only Germans, at the expense of Germans, be allowed to have it so good?

I read Mr Baldwin's most recent speech with some amazement. His Majesty's Prime Minister had to defend their feeble policies in the Abyssinian and German questions. He complained that one could expect no concessions from Mr Mussolini, unless one was prepared to use violence. In his unctuous address there was an unmistakable undertone of 'Didn't I always say so' which I simply could not explain, until I found out that Mr Baldwin is a steel manufacturer. At the end of his speech he remarked that the horizon was dark, but he could now just see some light . . .

\*

The attitude of the English middle classes to Hitler is very odd. Generally, they defend him. Some of his enterprises, especially those of a more private nature, are loudly disapproved of. It is held against him that he had his friend Röhm shot, although they also maintain that the fact that he had him shot proves, after all, that he wasn't a friend (because you don't have your friends shot). It is even worse that he was there. From a social point of view, it is quite impossible for a head of state to barge into an old friend's house, pistol in hand, before seven o'clock in the morning, especially if there's an orgy going on. What Mr Hitler was forced to witness at Röhm's place, if Mr Goebbels is to be believed, is, according to local sensitivities, nothing like so bad as the fact that Mr Hitler witnessed it at all. By being there he got caught up in a scandal. Your Englishman does not like it if there's too much about the private lives of his ministers in the newspaper. He was educated in a college, after all, and he knows that you can't just go barging in at any time of day or night, if you want to avoid a scandal . . . On the other hand, your Englishman is used to having to do business with wild natives. Often enough he may have had to force an advantageous deal out of some chieftain, who perhaps has just eaten his uncle. It is perfectly clear that one would not shake the hand of such a man if one could expect no financial advantage. Such considerations have a lot of sense in them; or at least you can see what it is they call sense in this country. Still, it remains a fact, there are things to object to about Mr Hitler. There's a suspicion that he is not a gentleman. On the other hand, they know that a gentleman won't last long in respectable society. If he does last: then he is [not] a gentleman. And Mr Hitler has lasted quite a while. So when you talk about Mr Hitler with the middle classes you quite soon get to hear: OK, so now we've talked about what we don't like about him; let's talk about what we do like. Fine, Mr Miller poisoned his first wife, but now let's talk about something else, namely that he is ready to marry my eldest daughter.

What the English like best about Mr Hitler: the French, they do not like the French. [*the text breaks off here*]

[*'Aus den englischen Briefen'*, BFA 22/192-4.]

This typescript dates presumably from the summer of 1936 when Brecht was in London, and is possibly part of a larger plan towards which he was collecting newspaper cuttings.

Stanley Baldwin was British Prime Minister from 1935 to 1937 and leader of the Conservative Party. In 1935 Italian troops attacked Abyssinia (Ethiopia), and in May 1936 Italy declared the annexation of the country; the League of Nations lifted the sanctions they had previously attempted to impose (long since undermined by Germany and others). Röhm was the leader of the SA, killed in June 1934 when Hitler reasserted his control; Hitler accused his one-time ally of having planned a putsch, and of homosexuality and moral degeneracy.

Brecht's image of the English middle classes seems to have been derived in some part from Swiss newspapers, and in particular from a piece in *Der Bund*, Bern, 6 May 1936, which reported the views of H. G. Wells: that, while Mussolini's methods should not be approved, he had brought stability to Italy; German Fascism, on the other hand, was to be condemned for its expansionism and anti-Semitism (compare Wells, *The Shape of Things to Come*, London, 1933). This is not the only place where Brecht engages with Wells's ideas.

43

Speech at the Second International Writers' Congress  
for the Defence of Culture

It is now four years since a series of terrible events in my country demonstrated that culture, in all its manifestations, had entered a zone of deadly danger. The Fascist revolution aroused, immediately and in much of the world, passionate protests, its acts of violence provoked revulsion. But still the larger picture remained obscure to many of those who were so filled with disgust. Some of the individual events, although they were noticed, were not at all recognised in their essential implications for the survival, or not, of culture.

The monstrous events in Spain, the bombardment of defenceless towns and villages, the slaughter of whole populations, are now opening the eyes of more and more people to the fundamentally no

less monstrous, but simply less dramatic, events which happened in my own and other countries, where Fascism fought victoriously for power. They can now discover the terrible common cause of the destruction of Guernica and the occupation of the German Trades Union buildings in May 1933. The screams of those who are now murdered in public squares reinforce the muted, anonymous screams of those who are tortured behind the walls of the Gestapo cellars: the Fascist dictatorships have begun to turn the methods they have used on their own proletariats against the proletariats of foreign countries; they treat the Spanish people as if they were the German or Italian people. When the Fascist dictatorships build up their stock of aeroplanes, their own people get no butter, and those of other countries get bombs. The Trades Unions stood for butter and against bombs, and they were closed down. Who can now doubt the similarity between the way the dictatorships lend each other their military battalions, and the way they stimulate trade in the commodity of labour by providing civilian battalions for finance capital in their so-called 'voluntary' labour programmes?

When the all-out attack was launched against the economic and political status of the German and Italian workforce, when the workers' freedom of association, when the freedom of the press, when democracy was strangled, then culture itself came under all-out attack.

It was not immediately that people saw the equivalence of the destruction of the Trades Unions and the destruction of the cathedrals and other monuments. And yet this was now an attack on the core of culture.

When their political and economic position was wrested from them, the German and Italian people lost any opportunity for cultural productivity – even Mr Goebbels got bored in his own theatres – the Spanish people, however, by defending their land and their democracy with arms, reconquered and defended their own cultural production: with every hectare of land another square centimetre of canvas in the Prado.

If that's the case, if culture is something inseparable from the whole productivity of a people, if one and the same aggressive

intervention can rob people of both butter and the sonnet, if culture is something so material, what must be done for its defence?

What can it do itself? Can it fight back? It is fighting back: so it can. And its campaign has several phases. The individuals who are culturally productive distance themselves from the terrible events in their country, in the first instance merely impulsively. But to describe barbarism as barbarism is itself already the first blow. Then they join forces against barbarism, that too is necessary in the struggle. They proceed from protest to appeal, from complaint to a call to arms. They don't just point out the criminal deeds, they name the criminals by name, and demand their punishment. They recognise that the condemnation of oppression must lead in the end to the destruction of the oppressors, that their desire for mercy for the victims of violence must lead them to the merciless pursuit of the perpetrators, that sympathy must become rage, and disgust at violence must itself become violent.

The power of individuals, as of the privileged classes, must be confronted with the power, the uttermost, the shattering power of the people.

For their wars show no signs of ending. The Italian air squadrons, which fell upon luckless Abyssinia, rose up again into the air, their engines still hot, and joined forces with the German squadrons, in order to fall together upon the Spanish people. That battle is not yet over, and already the squadrons of imperialist Japan have taken to the air over China.

We must declare war on these wars, as on every other war of which we have spoken, and our war must be prosecuted as a war.

Our culture, which for so long we have defended only with intellectual weapons, although it was attacked with material weapons, which is itself not just an intellectual, but also, and even especially a material matter, must now be defended with material weapons.

[*Rede zum II. Internationalen Schriftstellerkongress zur Verteidigung der Kultur*\*], BFA 22/323–5.]

First published in *Das Wort*, Moscow, 1937, no. 10 (October). The Second

International Congress for the Defence of Culture began in July 1937 in Valencia and continued in Madrid. Brecht was reluctant to travel to Spain because of the Civil War, and he sent this speech with Ruth Berlau to Madrid. In the event the Congress held a closing ceremony in Paris, and Brecht was able to deliver his speech. The text was published in *Das Wort* along with contributions by many others, including Lion Feuchtwanger, Heinrich Mann, Ludwig Renn, Romain Rolland, and César Vallejo.

In the Spanish Civil War (1936–9) the Spanish Fascists received support from both the Germans and the Italians. On 26 April 1937 German bombers, providing air support for the march of General Franco's troops on Bilbao, destroyed the town of Guernica (this event providing the subject matter for Picasso's great painting). The Prado museum in Madrid houses many of Spain's great art treasures.

The Japanese invaded northern China on 7 July 1937 and provoked the Japanese–Chinese war.

## 44

## Platform for Left-wing Intellectuals

1 The prerequisite of all effective efforts on behalf of culture, whether they be of a literary or of any other kind, whether their desire to civilise is conscious or unconscious, is that they must concern *everyone*, that is: all human beings within their reach, that is how they may exercise influence.

2 We may recognise one of the reasons for the alarming ineffectiveness of our cultural initiatives in the fact that we again issued an all too vague appeal to *everyone*, in the same way as we aimed our work at 'everyone' and intended it to serve the interests of 'everyone'. Developments in Germany teach us that by no means everyone is concerned for everyone else, and that only a very specific class of people, distinguished precisely by this from all other classes, is prepared to represent the interests of *everyone*. This is the class which, under the threat of ruin – or rather because the social order condemns it to perpetual ruin, since precisely this produces the prosperity of the *others* – *must* represent the interests of everyone.

But in order to be able to do so, this class must first be organised and put in a position to act. It is the class of the proletariat.

3 Such a choice of the class which can be mobilised for the interests of *everyone* might be disputed, for it is based on economic criteria. One might want to make the selection on the basis of other criteria, so that this fighting group would be recruited from all social classes. For example, the distinction between the barbaric and the humane has been suggested. We reject this distinction, however, because it does not have any organising power. We prefer to assume that both barbarism and humanity can be produced and organised by humans. If this were not the case, then indeed, only the extinction (the physical annihilation) of whole sections of the population would be able to put an end to barbarism – and it is clear that only the removal of barbarism makes humanity possible: the ideal of an island of humanity surviving in the midst of barbarism is infinitely dangerous. Everyone has always been able to recognise, but recently they have had particular occasion to do so, that barbarism will on no account tolerate such islands, and that it most certainly has the power to annihilate them. The selection of the class which alone can be entrusted with saving the whole of civilisation must be made on economic grounds, because only a class of people constituted in this manner harbours the strength and can be given the organisational form needed to create conditions in which *everyone* has a stake and which can therefore provide the basis for a real culture.

4 National Socialism is also an attempt to produce a universality. It tries to embrace *everyone*, to be precise: in the form of the *nation*. We are not in favour of seeing it simply as a metaphysical phenomenon, of regarding it as a natural disaster, with the timidity and awe with which one greets volcanic eruptions, events which one cannot influence. And which in turn do not have any purpose. However elementary this may be: in order to be able to act, and act we must, we need to regard this phenomenon as a human undertaking, and this is easier if social criteria are used. So we see a petty-bourgeois class, which has seized state power for itself and is striving, by violent means, to unite *everyone* under the banner of a nation. Given the current historical structure of the world economy,

this class sees a unified nation as being in a position to represent the interests of the group of people gathered under its flag, provided that it is equipped to do so in war. The perception that it is possible to use force to dispossess other people and groups of people, to exploit them and to beat them out of the competition etc., is derived from the private sphere of perception of the lower and upper-middle class. Our economy is indeed based on precisely this sort of behaviour.

5 The National Socialist attempt at unification includes the annihilation, exclusion or subordination of those groups of people who are detrimental to national solidarity, the Jews and the workers. A National Socialist Germany is effectively stronger than a Germany which does not believe that it actually has to wage wars, but which clings to a form of economy and society which produces wars. It is also stronger and more logically consistent internally than a Germany which clings to the capitalist form of the economy but, for political reasons, protects its workforce, something for which the economy is not equipped. From the point of view of the existing (capitalist) social order, the National Socialist state is stronger than the liberal one, and it makes no difference here whether the owners of the means of production and of the land govern by direct means, i.e., politically, or indirectly, without visible political power, or even politically ravaged, allowing their economic power to function like a force of nature.

6 Whether one supposes that capitalism wants to preserve its economic power by drawing in the mobilised middle class, or whether one supposes that in National Socialism the middle class establishes itself as the *state* on a capitalist basis, i.e., that a class has, in a manner of speaking, pushed itself between the classes which are engaged in economic struggle against each other, perhaps due to the insolubility of the land issue within this system (the two suppositions are not mutually exclusive) – it is only possible to fight National Socialism by fighting the capitalist economic system. Only the working class can be a comrade-in-arms in the fight against National Socialism. To fight Fascism and to want to preserve capitalism is impossible: this would mean returning capitalism to a

weaker position which it had already abandoned as untenable. It is not in its nervous liberal form, which tends to relent to the 'black-mail demands' of its proletariat, but now only in its most brazen and brutal state form that capitalism can attempt to withstand the crisis, which has indeed now been stabilised. Within the shortest possible span of time the entire bourgeoisie will have to realise that Fascism is the best form of capitalist state in this epoch, just as liberalism was the best in the previous epoch. Fascism can only be resisted by those who renounce private ownership of the means of production, and everything which goes with it, and who want to fight together with the class which fights most passionately against private property.

7 Hitler is completely right to describe Marxism, the other far-reaching attempt to unite *everyone*, as the enemy of the National Socialist attempt at unification. But of course it is not the Marxist doctrine which is the reason for the disunity, but rather the cause of this doctrine: an economic and political system which uses the want of the many for the advantage of the few; for capitalism does not survive in spite of the want of the many, but rather as a result of their want; capitalism would not be improved through *general* well-being, but rather it would be destroyed.

8 The most dangerous, the only real enemy of Fascism is, as Fascism itself knows, Communism. It is not a question of assessing whether Communism is now indeed strong enough: what matters is to strengthen it. After Fascism, and in this too Fascism is right, can only come Communism, nothing else. Culture will have fallen, or will stand with it.

[*'Plattform für die linken Intellektuellen'*, BFA 22/326–9.]

Typescript from c. 1937. Probably conceived in relation to the speech Brecht delivered at the Second International Writers' Congress for the Defence of Culture (above).

## Speech on the Power of Resistance of Reason

In view of the stringent measures, both methodical and violent, being taken against reason by the Fascist states, it seems appropriate to ask whether human reason will be in any position to resist such a violent assault. It is, of course, not enough to fall back on optimistic generalisations, like 'in the end reason will always triumph', or 'the human spirit demonstrates its greatest freedom in violent adversity'. Such assertions are themselves hardly reasonable.

In fact, the human capacity for thought can be damaged to a surprising degree. This is true of the rationality of individuals and of whole classes and peoples. The history of human rationality has great periods of partial or total infertility, examples of appalling regression and decay. Given the right means, apathy can be organised on a grand scale. Mankind is just as capable of learning, in the right conditions, that two and two makes five, as that two and two makes four. The English philosopher Hobbes remarked, back in the seventeenth century, 'If the rule that the angles of a triangle together add up to two right-angles were to contradict the interests of commerce, then the men of commerce would set to and burn the geometry textbooks.'

One must assume that individual nations never produce more reason than they can use (if more were produced, it would simply not be used), but that they often produce less. So if we cannot give a specific use for reason, a quite specific and immediate necessity for the maintenance of the status quo, then we cannot claim that reason will necessarily survive the current period of severe persecution.

When I say that reason has to be necessary for the maintenance of the status quo if we are to give reason any decent chance, then this is something I have thought about carefully. There are good reasons why I don't say, reason should be necessary for the *transformation* of the status quo. Just because reason is necessary in order to improve

the appalling status quo, does not, in my opinion, mean that we can hope reason will be summoned into being. Appalling conditions can persist for an unbelievably long time. One should say: the worse the conditions, the less reason there is, rather than: the worse the conditions, the more reason is produced.

Nevertheless, I do believe, as I've said, that as much reason is produced as is necessary for the maintenance of the status quo. So the question arises, how much reason is that? For, once again, if we ask how much reason will be produced in the near future, then we have to ask how much of that reason will be necessary to maintain the status quo.

One can hardly doubt that conditions in the Fascist countries are appalling. The standard of living is falling, and they need, all of them, wars in order to keep going. But one should not assume that the maintenance of such poor conditions requires especially little reason. The rational effort that needs to be employed here, and which must be produced in an almost uninterrupted stream, is substantial, even if it is of a particular variety.

One might say: it must be a crippled rationality. It must be a rational capacity which can be regulated, more or less mechanically increased or diminished. Reason must be able to run far and fast, but it must be possible to whistle it to heel. It must be able to whistle itself to heel, to intervene against itself, to destroy itself.

Let us investigate the sort of reason which is required. The physicist must be able to construct optical instruments for war which permit him to see into the distance, but at the same time he must be able *not* to see threatening developments in his immediate environment, for example, in his university. He has to construct defences against the attacks of foreign nations, but he is not permitted to think about what is to be done against the attacks on himself by the authorities. The doctor in his clinic seeks treatments for the cancer which is threatening his patient; but he is not permitted to seek treatments for the mustard gas and bombs which threaten him in his own clinic. For the only treatment against gassing would be a treatment against war. The brain workers have to continue to develop their logical skills all the time in order to work

on their specialist questions, but they have to be able *not* to apply these logical skills to the fundamental questions. They have to make sure that war is terrible, but they have to leave the decision, war or peace, to people of clearly lesser intelligence. In these fundamentals they have to observe the use of methods and theories which, in their own spheres of knowledge (like physics or medicine), would be positively medieval.

The quantity of reason which the ruling classes need in order to continue their business is not just something they can freely decide; in a modern state the quantity is substantial, and it becomes even more substantial if business has to be continued by other means, in other words by war. Modern warfare devours a huge amount of reason.

The introduction of the modern primary school did not come about because the then ruling class, out of idealism, wanted to perform a service for reason, but because the education level of the broad mass of the population had to be raised in order to service modern industry. If the education of the working class were to be scaled down too much, industry would not be able to keep going. So, whatever might seem desirable to the ruling classes, for whatever reasons, it cannot be scaled down too much. One cannot conduct a war with illiterates.

So if the quantity of rational effort required is not simply up to the ruling classes to decide, then nor can this requisite and guaranteed quantity of reason be unproblematically translated into the quality of reason which the ruling classes would prefer.

The vast spread of reason brought about by the introduction of the primary schools did not only raise the performance of industry, it all raised the level of demands and expectations, in every respect, within the broad masses of the people. Their claim to power rests firmly on the foundation of education. One can establish a general principle: the ruling classes demand, for the purposes of the oppression and exploitation of the masses, such great quantities of reason, and of such quality, that oppression and exploitation themselves are threatened. By cool calculations such as these, one may arrive at the conclusion that the attacks on reason undertaken by the

Fascist governments will turn out, once again, to be so much tilting at windmills. They are *compelled* to preserve great quantities of reason, indeed, even to develop them themselves. They may curse at rationality all they will. They may present it as a sickness, they may denounce intellect as bestial; but even for the speeches in which they do this they need radio transmitters (themselves products of rational endeavour). In order to maintain their rule, they need just as much reason amongst the masses as is necessary to overcome their rule.

[‘Rede über die Widerstandskraft der Vernunft’, BFA 22/333–6.]

Typescript dated by Margarete Steffin to November 1937. Brecht treats a similar theme in a scene of *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* and again in *Life of Galileo*. The Hobbes quotation appears not to be genuine; Brecht may have known Hobbes by way of Descartes.

In this essay Brecht makes extensive use of the German word *Vernunft* and its derivatives, which may cover a range of meanings in English: reason (the power of reason, not in the sense of a cause), sense (good sense, common sense, sensible), rational thought, rationality, even intelligence. See also the next essay.

46

### Speech on the Question Why Such Large Parts of the German People Support Hitler’s Politics

Intelligent foreigners often remark: it is unthinkable that such large parts of the German people would support Hitler’s politics, if there were not something sensible in it for them. Clearly these people only say this because they have such a high opinion of the rational good sense of the German people, for they themselves don’t consider this politics to be at all reasonable.

The question, what is there that’s reasonable in Hitler’s politics, can be answered if you make a clear distinction between the act of comprehending an untenable position which demands urgent

measures, and the act of discovering what those measures should be; and if you treat both acts as proofs of good sense. This distinction can be made, and it is often made. There is nothing particularly sophisticated about it. There are scientific studies of great value, in which certain matters may be opened up to new understanding, although no measures are proposed or, perhaps, even false measures are proposed. Medicine, for example, is quite familiar with work the value of which is correctly to describe certain illnesses, although the cures proposed may be quite wrong. Indeed, it may be understood as an act of intelligence to define a real problem at all, and to demand its solution; that requires intelligence, even if the solution is itself unintelligent.

In the two areas implied by its name, National Socialism has, beyond question, tackled real problems in Germany, and with great energy. After the war, German industry – which before the war had been, in accordance with the whole economic structure of the country, dependent on imperialist advances – was developed, with the help of other countries, so unrestrainedly that its imperialist political drive could only be intensified. The unhappy Treaty of Versailles did away with the German army, but left German industry intact, even strengthened by various other profitable contracts; and, in so doing, the Treaty perpetuated, indeed intensified, the necessity for an army. It is clear that Germany today, by its acts of violence, threatens the peace of Europe, but it is just as clear that it is not just the raging stream which commits violence, but also the bed which contains the stream.

There is enough logic in Hitler's remarks about the national state of emergency in Germany, even if the remarks themselves are riddled with grammatical and other errors, and even if the measures he proposes are so fateful: enough logic that one can grasp why his politics in this respect have the power to interest large parts of the German people.

The attempt to discover logical elements in Hitler's politics – that is, elements which are more or less convincing and have something to do with real needs in Germany – becomes rather more intrepid if we turn to his views on social matters. At the latest, three years after

his coming to power it became clear to most people that the work creation programme was a contribution to war; the numerous attempts at a planned economy openly served the preparations for war. The disadvantages for Hitler which might follow from this recognition were widely overestimated. Admittedly, many now recognised that this sort of work creation would slide eerily over from the feeding of people to the feeding of cannons. And yet the whole way the social issue was approached achieved a certain sort of logic; the basic fault of all measures used to alleviate real social need was further obscured. The treatment of social problems was justified by the necessities of war, and so the larger truth was hidden again from view: namely that wars are only necessary if effective social measures are not employed. And if we allow that that large part of the German people which accepted National Socialism happily, or at least uncomplainingly, was able to discover in it something logical, reasonable, then our critique must start here.

Only a nation with a particular social structure has need of war. The Russian example demonstrates that the ownership and development of a large industrial sector does not by any means entail wars with other nations. Only if the interests of particular property-owning classes are valued above the interests of the overwhelming majority of the people does an imperialist politics of war become necessary. The businessmen profited demonstrably more from the German programme of work creation than did the workers. War itself is a business, even a war which is lost.

Today the extraordinary number of projects and enterprises itself lends National Socialism the appearance of a logic which has to be taken seriously. An extraordinary amount of rational effort is invested, simply because it has been forcibly invested, in all this planning and organisation on such a grandiose scale. The outsider will be less easily impressed by this appearance, but even he will not have an easy job, as the many examples of foreign observers prove, to recognise the nonsensical and ultimately deeply purposeless nature of all these measures. And this phenomenon is a consequence of the fact that here problems are being tackled in such an utterly wrong way, although they are indeed real problems which

require logical thought and real solutions, if the whole continent is not to collapse into misery and barbarism.

[*‘Rede über die Frage, warum so grosse Teile des deutschen Volkes Hitlers Politik unterstützen’*, BFA 22/338–40.]

Written 1937.

In another essay written at about the same time, ‘Fascism and Youth’ (BFA 22/348–50), Brecht acknowledged the impact of Nazi propaganda on young people, but insisted: ‘It is of great importance what is said to young people, but it is not the crucial thing. Of crucial importance is where they are, in social terms, when they are addressed. Cut off from the processes of production, liberated from the need to earn a living, they are exposed to a propaganda, the impact of which can only be diminished within the sphere of social production. [...] National Socialism has the opportunity to influence young people as long as they are young. When they get older they enter the sphere of production, they gather in the factories and offices, and take an active role in the massive schooling of outlook and the apprenticeship in the social life of the nation, a schooling and apprenticeship which generate powerful ideas contrary to those of National Socialism. Rather paradoxically, one might say, that it would be the best chance for National Socialism if it had to do only with the young, if there were no adults at all, i.e., if there were no production and no struggle for profits in the capitalist manner.’

## 47

### On My Attitude to the Soviet Union

For many intellectuals the struggle against the Soviet Union goes under the slogan *For Freedom!* They point accusingly at the great unfreedom in which both individuals and the mass of the workers and peasants allegedly live in the Union. The oppression is said to be the work of a number of powerful and violent people, at whose head stands just one man, Joseph Stalin. The word goes around and this image is propagated, not just by Fascists, bourgeois democrats and Social Democrats, but also by Marxist theorists who stand in

honest opposition to the Fascists, bourgeois democrats and Social Democrats. These theorists give voice to the feelings and opinions of a great many intellectuals. If their opponents, the Fascists, bourgeois democrats and Social Democrats, were to describe them as allies, they would contest that they are engaged in a struggle against the Soviet Union; they would say that they are just against the 'conditions in which the Soviet Union currently finds itself', against a number of powerful and violent people there, against one man, Joseph Stalin. But if the Soviet Union were to get involved in a war, this distinction would make great difficulties for them, for they would only be able to defend the Soviet Union conditionally, only if it were to split itself from Stalin, and they could not welcome a victory of the Soviet Union if that was a victory under Stalin, in other words, in their opinion, a victory for Stalin. Nor can they deny that the preparation of war against the Soviet Union is made easier by their arguments, which are 'only directed against Stalin'.

The main reason why their arguments make the preparation of war against the Soviet Union easier is that the opponents of the Soviet Union can say, on the basis of their arguments: what you want, you socialists, has been realised in Russia. You shouted about freedom. You said what had to be done to achieve freedom. Well look, it has been done, and now you say yourselves: that's not freedom. Where they have done exactly what you propose, there is no freedom. You have upturned the whole economy, you have changed all the conditions of ownership. You always preached that there would only be freedom when the economy was upturned and private ownership abolished, and now that's happened, and there's still no freedom.

When they hear that, the anti-Stalinists do not answer directly; instead they turn, furiously, on the 'Stalinists' (since for them everyone who is for the Soviet Union these days is a Stalinist, that is: paid, or oppressed, by Joseph Stalin) and say: there you have it. Thus far [the text breaks off here]

[*'Über meine Stellung zur Sowjetunion'*, BFA 22/297–8.]

Unfinished typescript of c. 1937. The reference to anti-Stalinist theorists

may refer to Leon Trotsky, or possibly also to Karl Korsch and Fritz Sternberg (compare Part Two). The terms of this debate amongst European left-wing intellectuals were established to some degree by André Gide's disillusioned report *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* (1936) and by Lion Feuchtwanger's riposte *Moskau 1937*, in which he is critical of the Stalin cult but far from dismissive of political progress of the Soviet Union.

## 48

## On the Moscow Trials

As far as the discussion of the trials is concerned, to adopt an attitude in opposition to the government of the Union, which is staging these trials, would be quite wrong – since this would automatically, and in no time at all, be transformed into an attitude of opposition to the Russian proletariat, which stands under the threat of war from global Fascism, and to the process of the construction of Russian socialism. The trials have demonstrated with total clarity, even in the minds of convinced opponents of the Soviet Union and of their governments, that there is an active conspiracy against the regime, and that these nests of conspirators have not only committed acts of sabotage internally, but have also had dealings with Fascist diplomats regarding the attitude of their governments to a possible change of regime in the Union. Their politics was grounded in defeatism and had the spread of defeatism as its object. The accused, insofar as they present political arguments, all confess to doubts about the possibility of the construction of socialism in one country, to firmly held beliefs about the endurance of Fascism in other countries, and to the notion that it would prove impossible, without capitalism, to develop economically the undeveloped territories at the margins. In the meantime, the psychological aspect of the trials has, more and more, become a political matter. Sympathetic intellectuals are honestly shocked by the confessions. They think it impossible that the accused, who are known as great

revolutionaries, should confess to such crimes as industrial sabotage, espionage (for money!) and murder (especially that of Gorky!), unless they had been subjected to some sort of inhuman 'pressure' by the investigating authorities. Especially since the latter are almost unknown, as far as their own revolutionary past is concerned. There is as little evidence for, as against, the existence of such pressure. The case for is made by pointing out that the confessions exceed by far the sensible and likely level of misdemeanours, and that they presuppose a degree of remorse which itself implies a full awareness of one's own false notions. So the question arises whether we can conceive a political frame of mind which might motivate the deeds to which the accused have confessed. A frame like this is indeed possible and imaginable. The essential fundamental assumption of such a conception would be: an unbridgeable gulf between the regime and the masses; and, in order to motivate a politics like that of the accused, this gulf would have to be understood, not just as a gulf between an elevated body of functionaries and the masses of the workers and peasants, but as a gulf between these masses and the Communist Party as a whole (for the Party apparatus alone would hardly be able to bring about the loss of every war). Such a development can, in turn, only be conceived on the basis of the emergence of unreconcilable differences of interests on the part of workers and peasants. One would have to assume the utter impossibility of the control of production by the workers, and so the impossibility of the control of the army by the workers. If one were to assume this impossibility, one might be tempted into a politics of sabotage: in order to unmask the Utopianism of the experiments currently in progress, before the proletariat was utterly enfeebled. In terms of a policy towards the outside world, one would have to be prepared for confessions of the sort which have been heard in these trials. The whole framework is almost what we have come to expect of a Social Democrat. Just as such a train of thought is imaginable, so too we can easily conceive that it may be false. Especially since social life, on the basis of the violent progress and extension of production, is changing so very rapidly. Co-operation with capitalist general staffs,

which is such an incriminating charge against a revolutionary, might turn out to be 'merely' co-operation with individuals in the pay of foreign authorities: that, ultimately, makes no difference, either for the accused or for the prosecution. They find themselves surrounded by every rabble with a passing interest in such defeatist notions. There is no point in even entering into the question of whether the Soviet Union, in its present condition, is able, while unmasking and denouncing life-threatening conspiracies, at the same time to meet the demands of bourgeois humanism. In the course of the great Revolution, Lenin himself, when he insisted on the necessity of terror, protested time and again against the purely formalistic demand that a humanism be implemented, which could not meet the actual social circumstances and was in effect counter-revolutionary. That is not an argument for physical torture; it is quite wrong to assume that, and also quite unnecessary to assume it.

In the matter of the trials, the mood in Scandinavia, not only amongst the intellectuals but also to a great extent amongst the working classes (who are guided by social democracy), is deeply opposed to the Union. Everyone's interest is once more concentrated on the psychological, on the plausibility or implausibility of the *confessions*.

People react like this: if I were to hear that the Pope had been arrested for stealing a sausage, and Albert Einstein for murdering his mother-in-law as well as for the invention of the theory of relativity, then I would expect the two gentlemen to deny the charges. If they confess, then I have to assume they have been tortured. I do not mean to say that the charges are similar to my caricature, but that's what it feels like here. What we have to do is to make them comprehensible. If the politicians accused in the trials have descended to the level of common criminals, then this has to be explained to Western Europe as a political career; that is to say: their politics has to be shown to be one which leads to common crimes. We have to make visible, behind the actions of the accused, an imaginable political concept which would lead them into the morass of common criminal acts. And, of course, such a concept is easily described. It is defeatist through and through; it is, metaphorically

speaking, suicide motivated by the fear of death. But it is illuminating to consider how it came into the heads of these people. The immense natural difficulties in the construction of a socialist economy, alongside the rapid and serious exacerbation of the condition of the proletariat in several large European states, induced panic. The political idea behind this panic can be traced back to political attitudes which are evident in the history of the Bolsheviks. I am referring to Lenin's attitude in the Brest-Litovsk question and in the question of the *New Economic Policy*. Of course these attitudes, as justified as they were in 1918 or 1922, are now completely anachronistic, counter-revolutionary, criminal. They are neither necessary, nor even possible. In just the few years since the concept has come into being, the anachronistic nature of the concept has revealed itself even to those who did the conceiving. They cannot uphold their own opinion any more, they reckon it to be a criminal weakness, an unpardonable betrayal. A false political concept has led them deep into isolation, and into common criminality. All the vermin, domestic and foreign, the parasites, professional criminals and spies have lodged with them: they formulated their goals in common with all these rabble. I am convinced that this is the truth, and I am convinced that this truth must sound plausible, even in Western Europe, even to readers who are our enemies. The vulture is no pacifist. The receiver is all in favour of bankruptcy. The politician who can only be helped to power on the back of defeat, is all for defeat. He who would be a 'saviour' must be concerned to engineer a situation in which he can save, in other words a bad situation.

In contrast, the following account is implausible: that, already during the Revolution, agents paid by capitalism insinuated themselves into the government of the soviets, with the intention of reintroducing capitalism to Russia, by whatever means. This account sounds implausible because it lacks the element of development, it is mechanical, undialectical, rigid.

That is my opinion about the trials. Sitting in my isolation in Svendborg, I am relaying it only to you; and I should be grateful if you would tell me whether such an argumentation seems to you, in

our current situation, politically correct or not. In Copenhagen there has been some unrest because of the resignation from the Party, which I've heard about, by the Dutch writer Jef Last. He is said to have hinted at a similar attitude on the part of Malraux, of whom he is a good friend. Do you know anything about this?

[*'Über die Moskauer Prozesse'*\*, BFA 22/365-9.]

This is a typescript, corrected by hand, from the spring of 1938. It was cut into pieces in order to rearrange the sections, and is presumably the draft of a letter. Other correspondence from this period refers to the Moscow Trials, though nowhere at such length and so explicitly (compare *Letters*, nos 305, 328, 375 and others).

The trials had begun in August 1936, but it was a while before international concern became widespread. Brecht refers here to the trial against an 'anti-Soviet, right-wing Trotskyite bloc' in March 1938, in which politicians like Bukharin, Rykov and Jagoda were condemned (and immediately executed). The accusations of conspiracy with Fascist diplomats, espionage, defeatism and so on were common to all the trials. It was Genrich Jagoda who was accused of involvement in the murder of the great Soviet writer Maxim Gorky.

In the negotiations over the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, Lenin overruled a majority in the Party leadership and agreed to the Soviet Union's concession of sovereignty over Poland and Lithuania. The 'New Economic Policy' was similarly forced through in the face of opposition within the Party.

Jef Last and the French novelist André Malraux, like many other intellectuals and writers, left the Communist Party and turned against the Soviet Union in the wake of the Moscow Trials and, subsequently, the German-Russian pact of 1939.

## The Greatest of All Artists

*'Stammtischlein, deck dich!'*

The little old continent is being shaken once again by the marching step of mass armies and the din of threatening speeches. Its peoples listen in to what the leader of the second German Republic, the Bayreuth Republic, has to say to them. He has moved the annual festival to Nuremberg, and it is there he is currently speaking. The subject of his first speech is: culture.

As he has already repeatedly mentioned, he is building a thousand-year Reich complete with every accessory, including culture. Of course, he has his own opinion on the subject. The most important thing is art and he is an artist himself: according to his Propaganda Minister, the greatest. He is not due to speak to the Workers' Front until tomorrow and then he will be, in truth, a worker, but today it is the turn of culture and art, and so he was, in truth, a painter. His talent was not recognised, the Jews never gave him a chance, because he wasn't sufficiently decadent, so he had to take a detour and fight the Jews, and various other people besides. But he has remained an artist, he likes talking about art, especially now that no one can stop him any more, not even the generals. He claims that all 'respectable epochs' have produced art.

He only touches on science. Scientists are the people who produce *Ersatz*. They use wood not just for tables, but also for the food on the tables. The technicians win the great art prizes for building military roads and bomber planes. But he only touches on this. Nor does he talk about the second greatest artist after himself, Schacht (he hasn't won a prize; in fact, he has even had the occasional failure recently; he is currently experiencing a lull in his creative activity).

Of all the arts, his least favourite is literature. He does not even

mention it. He demands of music, which he cannot live without, that it leave out the words. It doesn't need words. The listener can make them up himself. Music must manage with sound alone. After all, even as a speech maker, he just about manages with sound alone. In any case, when words start creeping into music, then all hell breaks loose. Used without due care, words result in meaning, and then one just has to intervene. But music is an art and should not demand intervention, but empathy. He notes with pleasure that good pitch and reason are rarely united in *one* body. Nice people, musicians, they can stay as they are. This time he does not waste many words on painting. He already said last year what there was to say. Art criticism has been abolished (by the way, even his festivals no longer have anything to fear from it, no one could, for instance, pass criticism on what he is saying now!), and the doctors have stepped into the critics' shoes. Instead of tearing things to shreds, they opt straight away for sterilisation. That'll make people think twice about whether they want to continue painting in the wrong way!

Back in the past, they even misappropriated war! Nothing is sacred to them. But let us move on to architecture.

Architecture is his favourite among all the arts. No words.

No words *and* it looks good. Stone like that can last millennia. And it keeps its mouth shut. His Minister for Road Construction, the prize-winning artist, reports that all his digging has created a bigger dust storm than three (or is it four?) Egyptian pyramids. The pyramids were also built in a respectable epoch. That was work creation on the grandest scale! His own work creation project is three (or is it four?) times greater, in this one area. And besides, he is building all these barracks, gigantic buildings. Later generations will stand before them and marvel, just as we stand before the medieval cathedrals. What actually gets built depends on the age; now barracks (and ministries) are being built. Churches are no longer being built, the people are not to be trusted with them. They would just use them to read out words.

Yes, the future will have something to say about his buildings. That is for certain. His tone is upbeat. As for the sentence to end all

sentences, ‘What an artist perishes with me!’, he doesn’t seem to have started the rehearsals for that one yet.

[‘*Der grösste aller Künstler*’, BFA 22/469–70.]

A response to the 10th NSDAP conference in Nuremberg, September 1938, first published in the exiles’ journal *Die neue Weltbühne*, Prague/Zürich/Paris, no. 38, 22 September 1938.

The motto is an ironic variation on the magic spell of the fairy tale *Tischlein, deck dich!* (*The Little Table*) from the Grimm brothers’ collection. A *Stammtisch* is a table for regulars in the pub; Brecht implies that this is about the level of Hitler’s opinions. The reference to the ‘Bayreuth Republic’ is a play both on the Weimar Republic and on the love of the Nazi leadership for Wagner (whose festival takes place in Bayreuth). As a young man, Hitler was twice refused admission to the Vienna Academy of Art. One of the constant endeavours of Nazi industrial science was to discover substitutes (*‘Ersatz’*) for products which were scarce or which might not be available to Germany in time of war. In 1938 Goebbels awarded the National Prize for Art and Science to the minister in charge of the road-building programme, Fritz Todt, as well as to the Volkswagen manufacturer Ferdinand Porsche and the aeroplane manufacturers Willy Messerschmitt and Ernst Heinkel. Hjalmar Schacht was president of the Reichsbank and Economics Minister. The quotation in the last lines is from Suetonius’s account of the death of Nero.

The satirical tone compares again with the ‘German Satires’ in the *Svendborg Poems*.

## 50

### Why are the Petty Bourgeoisie and Even the Proletariat Threatening to Turn to Fascism?

Because the approaching world war throws up the national question, that of defending the nation against impending military and economic incursions. Because Social Democracy sacrifices the nation (in order to save business, although it is common knowledge that when the nation is sacrificed, so is business). Social Democracy preaches neutrality in war, forgetting that you can only enforce