WAGNER AND BRECHT AS MAJOR THEORISTS OF AESTHETIC DISTANCE IN THE THEATRE

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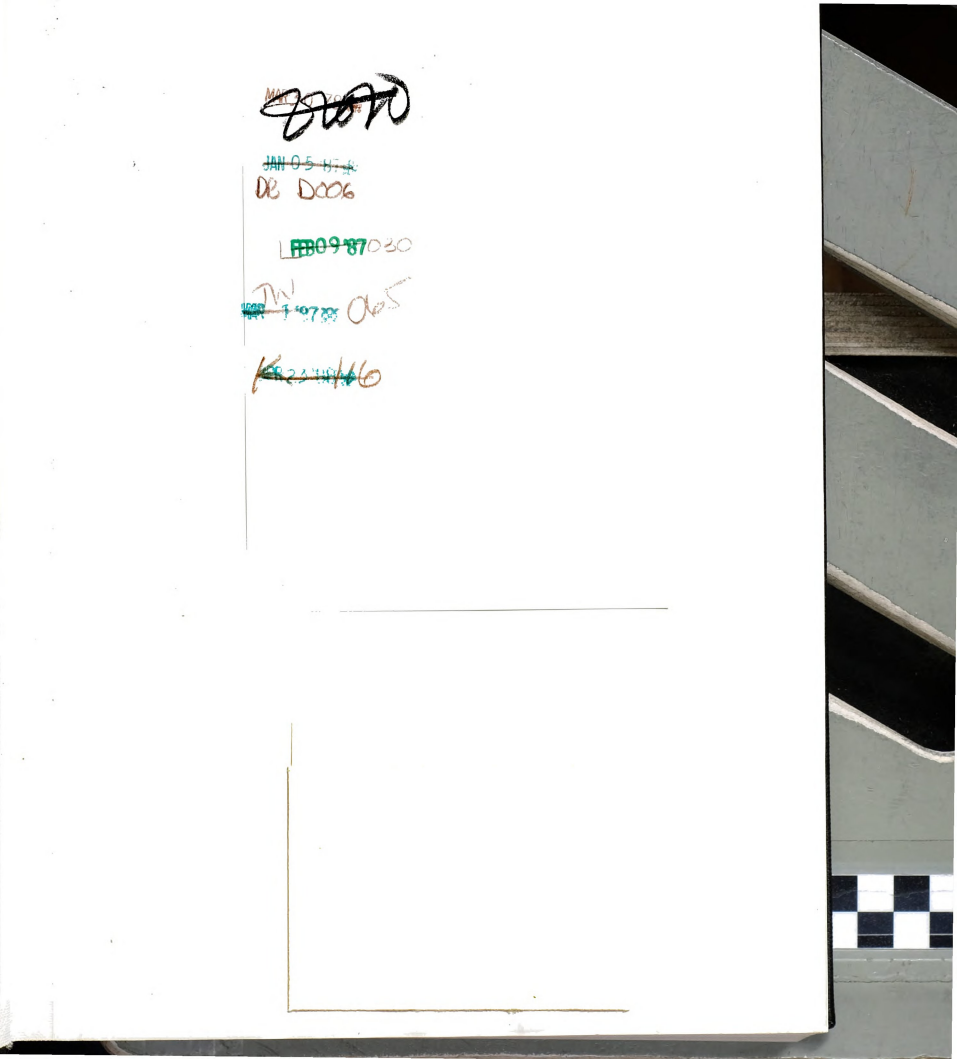

ABSTRACT

WAGNER AND BRECHT
AS MAJOR THEORISTS OF AESTHETIC DISTANCE
IN THE THEATRE

By

Donald Ralph Cain

This study explores and clarifies Edward Bullough's theory of Aesthetic Distance as a valuable analytical tool in the theatre and, then, through the use of the single vocabulary provided by the principle of Aesthetic Distance, seeks a greater insight into the theatrical and theoretical achievements of Richard Wagner and Bertolt Brecht.

Both Wagner and Brecht were vitally concerned with the degrees of Aesthetic Distance necessary to a proper appreciation of their dramatic productions; both had very specific states of mind which they sought to induce in the spectators of their works. Wagner wanted an almost total subjection of the viewer to the spectacle and Brecht tried to create a cool, detached, analytical consideration of the facts depicted--diametrically opposed points of view--but both were intended to lead the audience to a clear perception of the conditions necessary to the restructuring of society along more 'ideal' lines. Each was sure that his art-works could lead to a more perfect human condition but they differed completely in their choice of techniques by which to achieve the understanding and cooperation of the playgoer. Wagner chose to work with the most empathic attitude, while Brecht stressed abstraction as no other author has.

In the theories and works of these men, devoted to exactly the same object (using a modified theatre to alter society) but employing the most

radically different methods and striving to create opposing conditions of mental activity, the outer limits of the Distanced attitude can be clearly perceived and defined. There is, then, in this work, a definition of a critical technique, by theory and example, and an application of that tool to the work of the men who exemplify in their dramas the most extreme states covered by the theory.

In terms of the method employed

> We can not hope to prove aesthetic theories definitely true or false by recourse to concrete instances; but there is a middle course between that and pure dialectic. One can, in a broad sense, test a given theory in practice by going directly to a variety of relevant objects of art with that one theory uppermost in mind, and by noting the extent to which that theory is borne out by one's own experience of the objects.[1]

That, of course, is the procedure used here: a direct examination of the dramas and theories in the light of Aesthetic Distance.

The conclusions reached include the following: (1) Aesthetic Distance is a valuable theory by which to study the work of theatrical theorists and practitioners; (2) it includes, but limits the effects of, empathy; (3) Aesthetic Distance is primarily a matter of attending to all aspects of an art creation to a proper degree and to none of them in an excessive manner, that is, it is a restatement of Aristotle's Golden Mean concept; (4) both Wagner and Brecht improperly tried to stress only one aspect of the Distanced state, to the exclusion of all other possible reactions; (5) their artistic intuitions led them, in practice, into paradoxical violations of their own theories but into a closer conformity to the requirements of Aesthetic Distance; and (6) they each sought practical end results from the artistic theory of Aesthetic Distance and its techniques and, consequently, were foredoomed to a certain degree of failure.

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[1]Thomas Munro, Scientific Method in Aesthetics (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1928), p. 27.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The intent of this study will be to explore and clarify the theory of Aesthetic Distance as a theatrical force, and, secondly, through the use of the single vocabulary provided by the principle of Aesthetic Distance, to seek a greater insight into the theatrical and theoretical achievements of Richard Wagner and Bertolt Brecht. These two authors were vitally concerned with the degrees of Aesthetic Distance necessary to a proper appreciation of their dramatic productions. Many parts of each of their respective theories deal with this principle in clearly recognizable, but differing, terminology; this study will attempt to clarify the relationship of Wagner's and Brecht's theories by using the broader concept of Aesthetic Distance as an analytical tool. An attempt will also be made to point out, in their plays, operas and productions, just how Distance was used by each.

This study, then, will be concerned with the following three theories and their applications: (1) Edward Bullough's *Psychical or Aesthetic Distance*,[1] (2) Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* or "Total

[1]This theory presupposes the existence of the theory of empathy and defines the limits within which, and the conditions under which, empathy functions. Therefore it will be necessary to clarify the relationships of these two concepts and to make frequent reference to empathy.

Art-Work," in which all elements are fused into a unified production of high emotional content, and (3) Bertolt Brecht's *Epic Theatre*, an attempt at creating a highly rational, socially critical style of theatre.

These latter two authors were selected for a comparative study because they were playwrights who stressed opposing aspects of Aesthetic Distance. For further reasons, one could also point to their theatrical importance (each established a new kind of drama) and to the volume of their theoretical explanations of the new forms. Each offers a valid opportunity for comment in terms of aesthetic theory.

Bertolt Brecht was selected for investigation because he was one one of the most conscious and consistent users of a form of Aesthetic Distance in the whole of theatrical history. He was simply the author who sought, deliberately, to bring this principle into the theatre, not only as an evaluative tool but also as the keystone doctrine in the whole system of Epic Theatre. Brecht's basic idea of Alienation was nothing more than a stressing of one degree of Aesthetic Distance and it dominated his methods of writing, rehearsing and performing.

Richard Wagner was chosen because, in making equally extensive use of some aspects of Aesthetic Distance, his work, nevertheless, represents the most striking embodiment of the type of stage art against which Bertolt Brecht rebelled. Though he purposely used many Distancing devices, Wagner still probably represents the dramatist who deliberately massed the greatest emotional assault upon the spectator; the intent behind the fantastic scope and power of the "Total Art-Work" was simply to overpower

and subject the auditor-viewer to such a numbing effect that his senses[1] and critical faculties were cancelled and he could then be exposed to the 'mystical revelations' buried in the music.[2] Wagner's music-dramas were intended to be a form of theatre into which the audience members would be absorbed completely; there were to be no coldly critical, evaluative awarenesses left in the audience during a performance.

Wagner and his followers (among them Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig) succeeded in promoting the basic ideas in the theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to the point where they became a standard method of theatrical production. "Popularized Wagnerism is probably the most

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[1]Among Wagner's comments on this point are, "we no longer are really conscious . . . but for all our open eyes, have fallen into a state essentially akin to that of hypnotic clairvoyance. And in truth it is in this state alone that we immediately belong to the musician's world." Richard Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama, A Compendium of Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. H. Ashton Ellis, ed. Albert Goldman and Evert Sprinchorn (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1964), p. 186. And "fine performances of ideal works of music may make this evil [the visible orchestra] imperceptible at last, through our eyesight being neutralized, as it were, by the rapt subversion of the whole sensorium." *Ibid.*, p. 365.

[2]". . . we have clearly to define the capacity for speech possessed by the orchestra as a capacity for the announcement of that which cannot be conveyed by articulate speech." Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, trans. Edwin Evans (2 vols.; London: William Reeves, n.d.), p. 566. And further: "music is itself a world's-idea, an idea in which the world immediately displays its essence . . ." *Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 184. There is an obvious paradox between the perception of world thoughts through the sensuous medium of music when the senses have been depotentiated by the music, but Wagner never commented upon this problem. Another paradox of sorts exists in relation to both of these authors: they each, theoretically called for one state of mind on the part of their auditors and then wrote works which forced the adoption of another attitude or mental set during the perception of some of their works. This opposition of theory and practice was used in the case of both of these men and resulted primarily from their attempts to deny a part of this audience's normal methods of perception, to deny, on the part of each, one half of the Aesthetically Distanced State. What Wagner theoretically desired as a state of mind on the part of the auditor may perhaps be clearer following the discussion of the ecstatic empathic condition explained in Chapter II.

widespread dramatic theory--or the most widely held preconception--of our day."[1] If this statement is true and Wagner's unified production approach is a dominant force in the conventional theatre, then any break with the conventions of the normal production system, such as Brecht's Epic Theatre, means rebelling directly against the Wagnerian empathy-based theory. These men are thus linked by representing a current norm and the rebellion against it.

The basic difference between these men lies in their answer to the question, "How should a spectator be brought to react in the best possible manner in the theatre?" From that question, and the answer to it, almost the whole of each of their theories can be derived. And both of their theories can be explained most easily through the use of the principle of Aesthetic Distance, a theory of audience response.

Many aspects link these authors:

1. Both felt that the dominant style of either operatic or dramatic writing and presentation in use when they began their careers was artificially bound by convention and consequently ineffective.

2. Both were sure that plays and operas could be used for serious, social purposes, rather than just for entertainment.

3. Both had a strong desire for, in their eyes, a better society and both chose to prepare the way for the new social structure through the theatre.

4. Both created an art form which they felt would eliminate the unnecessary aspects of the florid, conventional opera or of the realistic-naturalistic drama and focus the audience's attention upon the socially beneficial aspects of their art works.

5. Both worked throughout the latter part of their lives to have their ideas become the standards by which

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[1]Eric Bentley, *The Playwright As Thinker* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1946), p. 282.

either opera or theatre work should be done or judged. Wagner, for instance, created untold numbers of enemies by suggesting that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was "The Art-Work of the Future" (in the article of the same name), while, according to the critic Martin Esslin,

> Brecht claimed that the 'epic' theatre alone could present the complexity of the human condition in an age in which the life of individuals could no longer be understood in isolation from the powerful trend of social, economical, or historical forces affecting the lives of millions.[1]

Thus both wanted their ideas, the only ones complex and organized enough to faithfully reflect the modern era, accepted as the norm.

6. Both had to adopt the role of philosopher-aesthetician-apologist to clarify the nature of their form of theatre. Few dramatists have worked out such elaborately detailed and comprehensive theories or taken such pains to evolve and state comparable sets of theatrical techniques. This large body of explanatory theory from each man deals, to a remarkable degree, with the methods and effects of Aesthetic Distance.

7. Both explained their new methods of creating and staging as means of determining the audience's degree of involvement and non-involvement. Wagner and Brecht, at different times, stated a need for various degrees of both conditions in the audience and planned specific devices and techniques to achieve the precise balance of these moods which they felt was essential to their purpose.

8. In theory each of these men proposed adopting an extreme position in relation to Aesthetic Distance but, in practice, their artistic intuitions led them continuously toward more moderate and balanced creations. The theory of Aesthetic Distance is one of moderation and the inclusion of all factors to an appropriate degree. Therefore, if it did play an important part in their creative work, it could not have failed to lead them toward a compositional technique in which there was 'nothing too much' in any one direction.

9. Both men were not only theoreticians of great consequence but also practical men of the theatre who embodied their concepts in actual work for the stage. Each functioned in most of the creative areas of the theatre in some degree.

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[1]Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1959), p. 111.

10. Both felt that their works were not adequately presented by others.

11. Each had a theatre, during the last few years of his life, in which he could stage his works.

12. Both created radical, influential forms of theatre.

13. Each modified his theory continually, and, in their later stages, the theories are less radically divergent than in their earlier formulations.

14. Both have earned a place in theatrical history and theory even if their dramatic works should someday fail to hold the stage.

In spite of these points of similarity, there were many other areas in which Wagner and Brecht clearly differed:

1. Every aspect of Wagner's "Total Art-Work" was to be completely integrated, while Brecht consciously chose to fragment his presentations.

2. Wagner wrote grandiose tales of gods and demi-gods in circumstances which never existed, while Brecht, even in his most fanciful tales, elected to work on an entirely different scale and with, perhaps, a more obvious practical orientation.

3. Wagner hoped to elevate art to the status of a new, redeeming, unifying religion; Brecht to inculcate a desire for a better state by showing the inherent evils in current conditions.

4. Theoretically, Wagner sought an almost total subjection of the viewer to the spectacle (allowing him only enough Distance so that he could respond to the artistic nature of the word-tone drama), while Brecht wanted a spectator who only rarely and intermittently became empathically involved in the work beyond the arousal of his interest in the problem of the play.

Surely, in the theories and works of these men, devoted to exactly the same object--using a modified theatre to alter society--but employing the most radically different methods and striving to create opposing conditions of mental activity, the outer limits of the Distanced attitude can be clearly perceived and defined. In turn, that definition should clarify their theories and their relationships.

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To keep this study within reasonable limits, certain limitations had to be imposed upon it. Because there have been no significant modifications in the theory of Aesthetic Distance since its first concrete formulation, this work will proceed from the definition of that principle formulated by Edward Bullough in 1912. It will, however, be necessary to clarify and develop the relationship of the theory of empathy to that of Aesthetic Distance.[1]

This study will concern only the theoretical writing, dramas and productions of Richard Wagner and Bertolt Brecht, two voluble and consistent exponents of the theory in the modern theatre.

The Wagnerian dramas primarily considered here will be those beginning with *The Flying Dutchman* (1841), laying less stress on the earlier works which were not created in conformity with Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept. To reduce Brecht's body of work, some fifty odd plays, to a group of dramas which may be handled in a single study, the plays will be grouped according to periods and types, and a representative play from each group chosen for discussion and analysis.

In terms of its structure, this dissertation will consider: (1) the definition and elaboration of the theory of Aesthetic Distance; (2) Wagner's development of the theories of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or "integrated work of art," as related to that theory; (3) a discussion of the Distancing and empathic techniques used in Wagner's operas, taken in chronological sequence; (4) Wagner's staging of his own works at Bayreuth, including references to the design of the theatre itself; (5) Brecht's

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[1]See Chapter II for the explanation that Distance is a measurement of empathy.

development of the theories of the Epic Theatre; (6) a discussion of Brecht's specific methods of "alienation" as they appear in selected plays and operas in chronological sequence; (7) Brecht's staging devices used primarily with the Berliner Ensemble; and (8) a summary and conclusion.

To establish the validity of this new examination of these men and their works, it should be noted that only two previous pieces of doctoral research on Wagner seem to have any bearing on the intent behind his compositional and performance techniques. Charlotte Farrow Liddell's dissertation[1] deals with the object of Wagner's creative efforts, but not with his Distancing or empathy techniques. Marie H. Graves's "Schiller and Wagner--A Study of their Dramatic Theory and Technique"[2] deals only with Wagner's revolt against the principles of neo-classicism.

There are numerous volumes either by or about Richard Wagner and his works, among the most important of which in relation to this study are the source works *Wagner on Music and Drama*[3] and the *Art Life and Theories of Richard Wagner*,[4] both collections and extracts from his theoretical writings; *Opera and Drama*,[5] Wagner's theoretical *magnum opus*

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[1]Charlotte Farrow Liddell, "Music as Religion: An Inquiry into Wagner's Concept of the Function of Art" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Music, U. of Michigan, 1964).

[2]Marie H. Graves, "Schiller and Wagner--A Study of their Dramatic Theory and Techniques" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Speech, U. of Michigan, 1938).

[3]As cited above in footnote 1, page 3.

[4]Richard Wagner, *Art Life and Theories of Richard Wagner*, trans. Edward L. Burlingame (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1875).

[5]Cited in footnote 2, page 3.

and the most detailed explanation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*; and the collections of Wagner's letters to different people,[1] letters in which he often touches upon his theatrical work in illuminating ways.

The many biographical works, including Richard Wagner's,[2] Ernest Newman's[3] and William Ashton Ellis',[4] have often proved helpful in supplying necessary background information for a proper understanding of Wagner's methods and intentions. However, the most valuable volumes leading to an understanding of the works themselves are Ernest Newman's volumes *The Wagner Operas*[5] and *Wagner as Man and Artist*,[6] along with Albert Lavignac's *The Music Dramas of Richard Wagner*,[7] all of which provide relatively detailed analyses of the poems and music or background data on the operas.

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[1]Among the many such collections are *Letters of Richard Wagner: The Burrell Collection*, trans. Hans Abraham, Henry Lea and Richard Stoehr, ed. John N. Burk (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950); *Letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. M. M. Bozman, ed. Wilhelm Altmann (2 vols.; New York; E. P. Dutton and Co., 1927); *Richard Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck*, trans. and ed. William Ashton Ellis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905); *The Letters of Richard Wagner to Anton Pusinelli*, trans. and ed. Elbert Lenrow (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932); *Correspondence of Wagner and Lisat*, trans. Francis Hueffer, ed. W. Ashton Ellis (2 vols.; London: H. Grevel and Co., 1897); etc.

[2]Richard Wagner, *My Life*, authorized translation (2 vols.; New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1911).

[3]Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner* (4 vols.; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933).

[4]William Ashton Ellis, *Life of Richard Wagner*, the English version of C. F. Glasenapp's *Das Leben Richard Wagner's*, (6 vols.; London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., Ltd., 1900).

[5]Ernest Newman, *The Wagner Operas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949).

[6]Ernest Newman, *Wagner As Man and Artist* (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1941).

[7]Albert Lavignac, *The Music Dramas of Richard Wagner and his Festival Theatre in Bayreuth*, trans. Esther Singleton (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1898).

However, these works proceed from a descriptive, musiocological point of view, not from the more general aesthetic approach adopted here.

There are several hundred magazine articles which refer to Wagner and his works but most of them are simply critical reviews of specific productions of one or another of his operas.

The only relevant dissertation on Brecht, one by Ralph John Ley,[1] is oriented toward other philosophical or economic theories, not toward Aesthetic Distance.

The basic sources for Brecht's theories include: *Brecht on Theatre*,[2] the largest single collection of his theoretical writings in English translation; *The Messingkauf Dialogues*,[3] *Poems on the Theatre*[4] and *A Short Organum for the Theatre*.[5]

The critical works include Martin Esslin's *Brecht: The Man and His Work*,[6] which supplies much biographical data and commentary about

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[1]Ralph John Ley, "The Marxist Ethos of Bertolt Brecht and Its Relation to Existentialism: A Study of the Writer in the Scientific Age" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Languages and Literature, Rutgers, The State University, 1963).

[2]Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. John Willett (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1964).

[3]Bertolt Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, trans. John Willett (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1965).

[4]Bertolt Brecht, *Poems on the Theatre*, trans. John Berger and Anna Bostock (Northwood, Middlesex, England: Scorpion Press, 1961).

[5]Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," trans. John Willett, ed. Eric Bentley, *Playwrights on Playwriting*, ed. Toby Cole (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960).

[6]Martin Essling, *Brecht: The Man and His Works* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books [Doubleday and Co., Inc.,], 1961) and its earlier form *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, cited above on page 5. Both are referred to in this study.

Brecht's relations with the Communists but includes only a single chapter on his theories; John Willett's *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht*[1] analyzes Brecht's life, personality and work from eight different aspects, among the last and least important of which Mr. Willett places his theories; and Peter Demetz' *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*,[2] which, again, allots one essay to Brecht's dramatic theories.[3] This last book also includes Oscar Budel's "Contemporary Theatre and Aesthetic Distance,"[4] the only essay specifically associating Brecht and the basic theory of this work. However, it is of a generalized survey nature and considers Brecht as a major exponent of the theory, but only as one among many who manipulate Aesthetic Distance. Of course, in an essay dealing with contemporary theatre, no mention is made of Wagner.

Periodical materials about Brecht are numerous and often helpful though almost never specifically directed toward the concept of Aesthetic Distance. The most informative of these, dealing with the historical development of the overall theory, is Werner Hecht's "The Development of Brecht's Theory of the Epic Theatre, 1918-1933."[5]

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[1]John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* (New York: New Directions Books, 1959).

[2]Peter Demetz, *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962).

[3]Hans Egon Holthusen, "Brecht's Dramatic Theory," *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), pp. 106-116.

[4]Oscar Budel, "Contemporary Theatre and Aesthetic Distance," *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), pp. 59-85.

[5]Werner Hecht, "The Development of Brecht's Theory of the Epic Theatre, 1918-1933," trans. Bayard Q. Morgan, *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1, September 1961, pp. 40-97.

While there are references to various degrees of empathy and detachment in the works of Wagner and Brecht, and in some half a dozen of their expositors, no one has previously attempted to describe (with a single vocabulary) their practices in terms of the single, consistent theory of Aesthetic Distance. Nor has anyone yet utilized a comparison and contrast method of exposition in regard to these two men. In both of these ways, this study will complement those already extant.

CHAPTER II

AESTHETIC DISTANCE

This chapter will be devoted to an explanation of the basic theory of "Psychical" or "Aesthetic Distance"[1] together with the theory of empathy:[2] these complimentary theories will then be used in the subsequent examination of the work of Richard Wagner and Bertolt Brecht.

In order to begin the study of Aesthetic Distance, let us consider first the different manners in which humans react to practical and artistic perceptions. As the critic Roger Fry noted, in *Vision and Design*,

> The whole of animal life, and a great part of human life, is made up of . . . instinctive reactions to sensible objects, and their accompanying emotions. But man has the peculiar faculty of calling up again in his mind the echo of past experiences of this kind, of going over it again, "in imagination" as we say. He has, therefore, the possibility of a double life; one the actual life, the other the imaginative life. Between these two lives there is this great distinction, that in the actual life the processes of natural selection have brought it about

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[1]These two terms are, of course, synonymous in the same sense that empathy and *Einfühlung* will be shown to be. The term "Psychical Distance," the first name applied to the effect, has since largely been displaced by the apparently broader title "Aesthetic Distance." The two are used interchangeably in this work, along with the shortened form "Distance." The capitalization is intended to distinguish the aesthetic form from the literal meaning of the word distance, but not all sources quoted observe this distinction.

[2]"The ascription of our emotional feelings to the external object which serves as their visual or auditory stimulus; . . . the imaginative identification of oneself with another person or with a group." *Funk & Wagnalls New College Standard Dictionary*, ed. Charles Earle Funk (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1950), p. 382. A discussion of empathy is necessary here because the theory of Aesthetic Distance presupposes the theory of empathy but imposes a limit on it.

> that the instinctive reaction, such, for instance, as flight from danger, shall be the important part of the whole process, and it is towards this that the man bends his whole conscious endeavor. But in the imaginative life no such action is necessary, and therefore, the whole consciousness may be focussed upon the perceptive and the emotional aspects of the experience. In this way we get, in the imaginative life, a different set of values, and a different kind of perception.[1]

It is the imaginative life, the contemplative, non-active kind of living which is under study here, even though both Wagner and Brecht sought a practical result from their work.[2] While the value of the plays and operas written by these men may be questioned if one thinks in terms of the political and economic reforms their authors desired, both men did produce works of art. Works of art may be said to stimulate or to convey the special values of the imaginative life and are certainly susceptible to analysis through aesthetic theory.

The special values which Fry mentions as being a part of the imaginative life or which emerge only in the imaginative, "double" life are precisely those which are stripped of a life-preserving function. They serve no immediately practical purpose but, rather, exist on their own accord and are self-justifying. These 'different' values are the intrinsic values of art objects, the intrinsic qualities of form, of color, of sound, the qualities of things which are ignored when they are treated merely as signs or signals for action. Along with the perception of the intrinsic qualities of things, there are emotional reactions, in the imaginative life which are noted purely for themselves, reactions which are otherwise never

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[1]Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics," *Vision and Design* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., n.d.), pp. 17-18.

[2]To understand the practical nature of the results these authors wanted from their work, see the chapters dealing with the theories of Wagner and Brecht.

brought into being except as cues for emergency actions. It is the awareness of such emotions, in isolation, which produces the different kind of perception mentioned by Fry.

> . . . all will admit that the need for responsive action hurries us along and prevents us from even realising fully what the emotion is that we feel, from co-ordinating it perfectly with other states. In short, the motives we actually experience are too close to us to enable us to feel them clearly. They are in a sense unintelligible. In the imaginative life, on the contrary, we can both feel the emotion and watch it. When we are really moved at the theatre we are always both on the stage and in the auditorium.[1]

We see and understand the emotions presented in the theatre more clearly because, in the imaginative life, we are somewhat detached, disengaged, disinterested; we view these presented emotions as 'spectators' of them, not as 'actors' in the emotional circumstances.

It is precisely this Distanced kind of perception which Edward Bullough, a Professor of Italian Literature at Cambridge University, analyzed in his article "Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle."[2]

DEFINITION OF PSYCHICAL OR AESTHETIC DISTANCE

The best statement of the theory to be found in Bullough's article reads as follows:

> . . . Distance is produced . . . by putting the phenomenon, so to speak, out of gear with our practical actual self; by allowing it to stand outside the context of our personal needs and ends--in short, by looking at it 'objectively,' as it has often been called, by permitting only such reactions on our part as emphasise the 'objective' features of the experience, and by

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

[2] The article first appeared in *The British Journal of Psychology*, Vol. V, Part 2 (1912-1913), pp. 87-118, but was reprinted in Bullough's *Aesthetics*, ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1957), pp. 91-130. All references in this work to page numbers will be those of the book.

> interpreting even our 'subjective' affections not as modes of our being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon.
>
> The working of Distance is, accordingly, not simple, but highly complex. It has a negative, inhibitory aspect--the cutting-out of the practical sides of things and of our practical attitude to them--and a positive side--the elaboration of the experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action of Distance.[1]

This single quotation contains virtually the whole of the concept of Psychical Distance. The statement is compact and contains a number of implications which require explication.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEFINITION

Distance is achieved through a mental readjustment of the perception of something. A person's way of looking at things varies on different occasions and the change in attitude, from occasion to occasion often depends upon precisely what is being sought.

> To see a thing we must adjust our visual apparatus in a certain way. If the adjustment is inadequate the thing is seen indistinctly or not at all. Take a garden seen through a window. Looking at the garden we adjust our eyes in such a way that the ray of vision travels through the pane without delay and rests on the shrubs and flowers. Since we are focusing on the garden and our ray of vision is directed toward it, we do not see the window but look clear through it. The purer the glass, the less we see it. But we can also deliberately disregard the garden, and, withdrawing the ray of vision, detain it at the window. We then lose sight of the garden; what we still behold of it is a confused mass of color which appears pasted to the pane. Hence to see the garden and to see the windowpane are two incompatible operations which exclude one another because they require different adjustments.
>
> Similarly a work of art vanishes from sight for a beholder who seeks in it nothing but the moving fate of John and Mary or Tristan and Isolde and adjusts his vision to this. Tristan's sorrows are sorrows and can evoke compassion only in so far as they are taken as real. But an object of art is artistic only in so far as it is not real.[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

[2] Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art* Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1956), pp. 9-10. In this and later chapters, an exploration will be made of the antirealistic nature of art, a characteristic which Bullough developed and which both Wagner and Brecht used in a highly conscious manner.

Beyond this, any time the focus of interest is altered, the perception of a thing varies. Any time there is a concentration upon one aspect of an art work or a natural object, with an acute awareness of one unit within it, it will not be possible for the spectator to view the scene in precisely the same way as he did previously; he will be more conscious of that portion which has been singled out by his mind for particular attention, and this intimate knowledge of some part will color his perception of the whole.

In illustration, who has not blindly hurried past a small but intense bit of beauty such as a single growing flower? And how many times is it possible to pass the same way, preoccupied with the problems of the moment, seeing nothing of the surroundings, so far removed from what is near that one could as well be in a literal vacuum? This lack of attention is, in part, due to the particular 'practical' frame of mind which each of us brings to bear. That ignored flower for the florist is an object for sale, for a scientist is the sexual organ of a plant, for a lover is a token of admiration to his beloved, etc. Yet, to alter this inattentative, 'using' frame of mind all that is needed is a consciousness of another's attention turned that way, a chance remark about the color of the flower, a sentimental mood within oneself, or any of a countless number of other possible alterations in that practical mental state to suddenly be vividly aware of this potentially aesthetic object. This change in the way of looking at something results from the elimination of practical concerns and the freeing of energies in pure contemplation, or, in short, in the creation of a Distanced attitude.

> As a rule, experiences constantly turn the same side towards us, namely, that which has the strongest practical force of

> appeal. We are not ordinarily aware of those aspects of things which do not touch us immediately and practically, nor are we generally conscious of impressions apart from our own self which is impressed. The sudden view of things from their reverse, usually unnoticed, side, comes upon us as a revelation, and such revelations are precisely those of Art. In this most general sense, Distance is a factor in all Art.[1]

On the other hand, if one should alter the physical distance or scale involved in a perception, as Aristotle suggested,[2] or insert mechanical aids such as scientific instruments between the observer and the observed then the attitudes held toward the thing perceived may be greatly altered in a non-aesthetic and non-pleasing manner, as was noted by Lemuel Gulliver during his voyage to Brobdingnag:

> This made me reflect upon the fair Skins of our English Ladies, who appear so beautiful to us, only because they are of our own Size, and their Defects not to be seen but through a magnifying Glass, where we find by Experiment that the smoothest and whitest Skins look rough and course, and ill coloured.[3]

Or offer a man of common means five hundred dollars for the primitive painting by his Grandfather--for that sentimentally cherished but not really valued crudity--and watch the shift in mental attitude on his part from one of mild appreciation to one of purely practical intent. Such a resultant attitude has nothing whatsoever to do with the artistic properties of the painting. The owner's interest has been focused away from the objective characteristics of the painting and toward practical ends in which the object is involved as a 'tool' for the acquisition of money.

Thus, the aspects of things upon which the attention is focused does alter the attitude toward those phenomena.

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[1]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[2]S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th ed., (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1927), pp. 31 & 33.

[3]Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (New York: Heritage Press, 1960), p. 91.

". . . this Distanced view of things is not and cannot be, our normal outlook."[1] It is neither practical nor logical in the normal sense of those terms, for

> . . . if we will have aesthetic activity, we must stand aloof from all other activity as best we can. Neither must we think logically, saying, "this picture is (or is not) astronomically (or zoologically) exact"; nor . . . must we connect it with morality, saying, "this is a bad statue, for it will tend to produce sadism in those persons who contemplate it" . . .[2]

Moreover, the Distanced attitude will not be the usual reaction pattern for the simple reason that it will involve a greater awareness than is usual. Most people seem to save themselves a great deal of time and unnecessary effort by developing standard, habitual reactions to everyday occurrences.

> . . . habit helps to blunt his [a man's] perception; and his practical concerns, by dint of repetition, cause him to become almost unaware of their banality. We live then at an unaesthetic distance from things; in a state of artistic annihilation, or non-being.[3]

After all, why should one have to devote thought to such mechanical processes as tying shoe laces and lowering bread in a toaster? These things are quite rightly reduced to such set patterns that one is really only aware of them when the strings are knotted or the toaster refuses to function. But when such mishaps occur we become aware of what a large portion of life is given over to unconscious activity of a repetive nature. Everyone allows so much of his daily routine to slip into this 'locked' sort of pattern that it might be truthfully said that people are seldom aware of

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[1]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[2]Geddes MacGregor, *Aesthetic Experience in Religion* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1947), p. 200.

[3]P. A. Michelis, "Aesthetic Distance and the Charm of Contemporary Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. XVIII (1959-60), p. 36.

what they are doing. To be shocked, stimulated or driven away from the usual reactions, to be forced into a state of acute consciousness is certainly a novelty, whether it is painful or pleasant. It is one of the miracles connected with great art that it has the ability to promote just such a liberation from habit patterns; an art work asks the viewer to live vividly and consciously, not in his usual half-conscious state.

A Distanced object is not to be used to satisfy practical[1] needs and ends; it is not a tool. While in the inattentive state described above, people seldom react strongly to anything unless it calls for emergency action. Art is perhaps the most obvious exception to this idea, for in art

> . . . emergency action is no longer required. . . . To be able to reflect freely upon the profoundly moving work of art, to be freed in its experience from compulsion to practical action while yet behaving typically and experiencing the discontent induced by the relation of emergency action to disequilibrium--action to some extent beyond our control and to that extent dangerous--these are the antinomic factors in aesthetic experience which now assume primary significance.[2]

If something in the environment obviously threatens a person's comfort or safety, he will make the effort to adjust to it or avoid it but in the process he will utilize the offending object, person or condition as a 'lever' by which to 'move' himself. He will use them as tools by which to effect the changes necessary to restore his equilibrium with the environment and, in the process, will tend to forget the true nature of the things he is manipulating; they no longer appear to him as things in their own right but simply as means to desired ends.

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[1]"A practical interest is always one which looks to an end beyond, whereas a disinterested interest is one in which there is appreciation of the evolving order on its own account." Bergram Morris, *The Aesthetic Process* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1943), p. 16.

[2]Milton C. Nahm, *Aesthetic Experience and Its Presuppositions* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1946), p. 479.

Just so long as the characteristics of the thing are of no interest unless they will serve other ends, just so long as there is no wish to cease activity when one becomes aware of the object, but instead to see it and immediately begin considering how it may be applied to something else, for just so long is one assuming a practical and not a Distanced, aesthetic attitude.

An art object does not lead one to react to something beyond or external to itself. It simply is. It exists, and that is sufficient.

Since the art object is made to stand 'outside the context' of normal behavior, any reactions toward it are unusual or abnormal in some degree, when considered from a practical point of view. Since the observer should only wish to contemplate the nature of an art object, the abnormality connected with his reaction consists in the fact that he will tend to ignore any possibilities the object may have for practical use. This kind of unusual, purely mental reaction may be seen in our relationships with the objects enshrined in museums.

If anyone should consider picking up an exhibited Indian pot and using it to carry water from one end of the building to another, the chances are very great that the guards of the museum would be called upon to enforce a non-practical attitude, to make it clear to the offender that that pot was not to be used, even for the purpose for which it was originally made. Its function has changed and, as a result, he must never again, so long as the pot is deemed a work of art, expect it to be useful. It is to be appreciated, not used.

The guard in this case functions in a rather novel manner since his object is not to prevent theft or damage but, rather, to enforce a non-practical attitude.

In the case of consciously created art objects not intended to have a single practical justification, the reactions can still be most strange. In a myth, a Pygmalion can fall in love with a sculptured Galatea. In painting, a representation of the most agonizing of deaths may not produce revulsion, but instead inspire a true religious exultation. In music, a totally abstract pattern of sound may force one to seek some other means of expressing the emotional states which it inspires, ranging from a tapping of the toes to a joining in the performance. Or, as a spectator at a play, one may be willing to accept any number of outrageous proposals as though they were true simply in order to preserve and foster the aura of theatre which these premises can generate, given the spectator's willing cooperation. All of these reactions, and dozens of other possible ones, are somewhat irrational when viewed from a strictly practical point of view.

To achieve a Distanced perception, one deliberately assumes an attitude of active concentration toward art objects. A full awareness of a work of art does not just happen to come into being; it is seldom possible to gather a complete impression of something simply through the process of being exposed to it. Rather, such a complete conception and understanding of the work depends upon some degree of technical training beforehand and an intense activity, focused upon the single source of sensation, during the period of observation. An understanding of something as complex as most art objects requires an active exertion; not simply a willingness to be affected, but a deliberate concentration of energies, emotions and intellect so that the observer may be as conscious of the art object as possible.

In gathering his forces for the effort of understanding and participating in an experience, the percipient must evaluate the kind of sensations offered and determine what percentage of them are sensuous and what part intellectual. Everyone makes decisions of this sort on an unconscious level continuously because not everyone will react to all art works in the same manner. However, the more consciously the spectator performs the act of perceiving and reacting to a work of art, the more likely he is to experience an intense pleasure on several levels of appreciation. Such a spectator is simply more awake to the possibilities in art and in himself.

> Now what is the state of mind of the ideal spectator. . .? It is a rather complicated state, a state of double consciousness. . . . he is not only taking in pleasure with a complete self-surrender, he is also commanding himself so as to estimate the quality of his pleasure--while it is coming in. . . . This by no means easy mental process requires not only an effort of the will, a special motive, but training and special aptitude.[1]

The knowledgeable person, the sophisticate in the better sense of that word, brings to the critical act not only his superior fund of information and his particular sensitization to the nuances of performance or form but also a consciously adopted attitude made up of a desire to experience nothing but the best and a pardonable pride in his ability to perceive this new experience on all possible levels. This attitude is one which those who are aware of it deliberately assume because of the rewards it offers.

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[1]A. B. Walkley, *Dramatic Criticism* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1903), p. 34.

The Distanced attitude is achieved by two stages, negative and positive or inhibitory and elaborative.[1] The first stage is an inhibitory one. It is necessary to concentrate upon the work under consideration to the point of excluding everything else, in so far as this is possible with a human's constantly shifting focus of attention. "Contemplation . . . is selective; and when an object is attended to, whatever is not relevant to it must be suppressed and excluded from it."[2] One must deliberately and drastically reduce the number of objects to which he attends and pinpoint his mind upon the thing under consideration. It must assume such primary importance to the viewer that, for the moment, it is the only thing he wishes to observe or ponder.

The work itself must be strong enough to suggest that it is fascinating, complex, and complete enough to reward contemplation if one will but remain within its sphere of influence. The art object must force the spectator to accept it, itself, as marking out logical boundaries within which his mind and emotions may function and the areas to which the percipient's thoughts may fly must all be encompassed by the object in some manner. Only if this is true, only if the art work dictates to what the viewer may attend and how the viewer must perform that act, and prescribes the only allowable emotional reactions toward what is observed, only then may it be said to be a fully organized and completely realized effort. In a field of such power, one can react only within the frame of reference supplied by the work.

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[1]The inhibitory phase will be discussed in some detail first, then the positive aspects of Distancing will be examined beginning on page 28.

[2]Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

However, there are many lesser creations which are still worthy of perpetuation but which do not grip a spectator with such an overpowering force. To these works (and, of course, they are in the majority among art efforts), the observer must bring a desire to react in the proper manner, he must adjust his thought processes until he grants the work the respect due to it at whatever level of perfection it exists.

Regardless of whether one is forced into the proper reaction by the strength of the art creations or whether he consciously chooses to adopt the sophisticated attitude which grants those necessary concessions, he still must isolate the art objects from the many possible distractions which surround and pervade them and approach them as ends in themselves, not as means to accomplish ends other than themselves. ". . . the aesthetic attitude consists in treating objects as terminal, as ends rather than as means."[1]

The art consumer must not be swept away by the emotional content of the work. How easy it is, in the surging operatic-symphonies of Wagner, in the lush roundness of a Rubens figure, or in the climactic scene in a Tennessee Williams play, to relax and merely respond to the immediate, emotionally based appeal of the works. How easy it is to derive such great and yet such obvious delight from what the artist is doing to one's emotional stability. If the auditor-spectator reacts only in an emotional manner, even when there is so great an opportunity for such a response, he does the artist an injustice. For the percipient here uses the work; he does not contemplate it. He regards it as a substitute stimulus and makes of it a mere means to emotional release, like the scratching of an itch.

[1]Lester Longman, "The Concept of Psychical Distance," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. VI, (1947), p. 34.

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Of course the creator is appealing for an emotional involvement and honestly desires it, but since each of these artists offers at least something beyond emotional stimulation, it is a part of the respondent's duty in experiencing these creations to remain sufficiently objective so that he may be aware of the additional elements included in the work.

> To enjoy a play as a play, at the same time we enjoy it for the story which it tells or for the manner in which it is being performed, means only that we admit the dramatist's presence by being neither incurious about, nor unconscious of, the playwriting which has gone into his script. It does not mean that we are deaf to what the play has to say, that we lessen our absorption in its human values, that we fail to respond to the persuasion of its action, that we subtract from its pleasures as entertainment, or that we prattle off dull technical terms in an arbitrary fashion as if we were embryonic Freytags. It merely implies that when we see a play we are as prepared to appreciate the dramatist's contribution to the story he is advancing in his chosen medium as we would be to admit the importance of Leonardo's contribution as a painter to the coloring, composition, and quality of such a picture as "The Last Supper," which is quite another thing from the story that it tells.[1]

To say that one has experienced and now understands the efforts of even the most emotional of artists, like Wagner, it is necessary for the spectator to think about the creations so that he may see how the intricately interwoven strands lead to such stunning emotional effects. Without a grounding in the elements being manipulated, without being able to state the formal aspects of these works, without understanding the careful pyramiding of details which force one to the solution which the artist has selected for his basic problem, the viewer has no right to say that he knows or understands a given work or artist.

Of course there is an emotional content inherent in many art works but it is neither the sole nor the sufficient cause for considering

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[1]John Mason Brown, *The Art of Playgoing* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1936), pp. 109-110.

a thing to be artistic; emotion is only one of the raw materials of the arts and, as such, it must be kept from exceeding its proper place in the scheme of the whole. One has to experience the emotions involved in the piece but it is equally necessary to control the degree to which one responds and temper such reactions with a touch of intellectual appreciation. A work of quality can withstand unemotional scrutiny.

One can block the emotional power in the work by concentrating upon those aspects of it which are not emotion-laden, those aspects which serve as the reservoir for the emotional force. It is also possible to insure that these objective features of the experience are not distorted by the emotional states suggested by the work. One can be aware, in a clear and lucid manner, of the aspects, conditions and features which actually exist in the piece without assuming the existance of any of them where they are not, and without enlarging them beyond their normal limits when they are a part of the work.

It is a familiar experience to most people to have much of the emotional content of a work supplied by themselves from a strictly personal and private backlog of experience. Who has not, at one time or another, visualized various activities and mentally attached them to a totally abstract piece of music? Who has not selected, with the approval of a sweetheart, 'our song' and forever after attached more meaning and value to the composition than perhaps it really deserved on the basis of its intrinsic merit? This list of misunderstandings and improper reactions could be greatly extended, to the point where it could be demonstrated that every art is subject of such distortions, but it hardly seems necessary, the consciousness of such activities, even if they are not recognized as being inartistic and unaesthetic, is too universal to warant

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further commentary or illustration. The point to be made is that all of these self-conscious, private and petty reactions have nothing to do with the real nature of the art work which triggered them. They were neither a part of the artist's intention nor were calculations made, by the artist, to accommodate them within the actual framework of the artistic experience. They represent intrusions into the artistic transaction which, because they are foreign matter, pose a definite threat to the real art object; it may not be able to retain the balance and poise provided by the artist if it is burdened with all of these extraneous associations and the end result may be the total failure of the object or experience to stimulate the viewer artistically. This result, then, would occur neither because of the nature of the thing observed nor because of the failures of the artist, but simply because of what the spectator allowed to happen both to himself and to the art work when it stimulated him. This is grossly unfair both to the creator and to his work.

The only answer to this problem is to prevent it from arising by the spectator refusing to be swept away into fantasy, drawn into revery, etc., or, in short, by concentrating all of his being upon the problem of observing and reacting to exactly what, and only what, the artist prepared for his perception: the objective aspects of the work. The perceiver has to think about the work, not just feel about it.

The second phase of Distancing consists of the elaboration of the experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action of Distance,[1] of developing a consciousness of the nature of the art work as an art object. Once one has succeeded in eliminating the external distractions

[1]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

and in mastering his unreasoning reactions toward the work of art, he can hardly be said to have understood and appreciated it fully. The first phase in the establishment of a Distanced attitude is largely preparatory, only a prelude to the development of a true and full awareness of the piece. The second phase--the realization of the content, the form, the manner of presentation, etc., in a discriminating way (an act which is possible only because of the preparation afforded by the first phase)--is, at least, equally important. This is the reason for desiring to experience a Distanced relationship, not just because Distance is a necessary condition for art but because a reduction of emotional impact frees him, as a spectator, as a critic, and co-creator with the artist, to respond in so many other ways, to develop so many varying perceptions of the art object. By Distance, one is released to explore and savor every aspect of a work, not just its emotional content. The respondent's mind is released from the over-powering assault of the emotions and permitted to function so that he may understand the work and thus appreciate it rather than just experience it.

The elaboration mentioned is the development of a high degree of awareness of the specific elements which belong to the work, particularly of the formal aspects: there should be a consciousness of the implications which properly belong to the work and a comprehension of the standards of value proposed by the object or experience, standards which will form the only valid bases upon which the work may properly be judged. And, rather than an intense involvement in the emotional aspects of the piece, the spectator should strive for the conscious cultivation of a rational aloofness which underscores; the differences which set an art work apart from both the viewer and the rest of the world, what

aestheticians are fond of calling the 'over-against' attitude. The only way to become aware of all of these elements is simply by addressing the attention to them, not in an inventorial manner, but recognizing that they do exist and realizing the part they play in the spectator's reaction.

This concentration upon technique, upon formal, organizational means, and upon the things which may correctly be imputed to the art piece is not intended as a disparagement of the often[1] emotional content of the thing observed. It is intended to stress the fact that form is a vital contributory factor in conveying the content of the work. Yet of these mutually interdependant elements, form may well be the more important for all of those theories in aesthetics which recognize some sort of 'significant form' for the art work ultimately arrive at the conclusion that the form itself is the distinctive artistic element, the thing which has shaped the content into an artistic expression. A good and a quite bad art work could result from the manipulation of the very same content by two different artists. If the content is not the deciding factor which determines the quality of the piece, then the manner in which it is formulated must be the specifically artistic factor. The artist's particular emphasis within the material, his organization of such things as the unity, variety, harmony, contract, etc.,[2] and his skill and technical

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[1]The content of an art work may or may not be highly emotional in nature. Most Romantic art can generally be said to be emotional in its content while Classic art tends toward greater reserve, toward conventionality, abstractness, idealization and, consequently, Distance.

[2]While the author acknowledges that discussion of such factors may be no more frequent in artistic circles than the consideration of representational content in paintings, these factors are still the basis even for the free and intuitively derived forms of modern art. Analysis of any art work is impossible without reference to such terms.

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perfection in the presentation of the content become the primary things to be observed and to which the observer will respond.

All of these factors come under consideration in the Distanced attitude along with the content which they mold. Because of the release from the emotional bondage of the content which is afforded by Distance, one can attend to all parts of the work and can realize a totally synthesized interpretation of the object. This multiple consciousness is the very essence of Distanced contemplation.

As in the theory of empathy, to be discussed below, any subjective reactions which are still permitted to function are interpreted, by a process of 'objectification', as characteristics of the thing viewed. The observer's ego is not the real point of interest when viewing an art work. What is needed is an awareness of an emotional state, preferably as an apparent characteristic of the object rather than as having anything to do with the spectator. If the onlooker refuses to concentrate his attention on his emotional states, but, instead, assumes an objective attitude toward them and projects these emotional states outside of himself and into the art object which stimulated them, he will have the center of interest properly located.

There, then, is an initial exposition of the paragraphs which contain the concept of Psychical or Aesthetic Distance.

DEFINITION OF EMPATHY

Obviously, the last point made about Bullough's definition of Aesthetic Distance is the juncture at which the idea of empathy actually enters this discussion. A clear-cut definition or two would seem to be the first requisite to demonstrating the relationship of these theories.

Empathy, or *Einfühlung*, for they are the same idea, the former being simply an artificial English word coined from the Greek elements "em-pathein" (in-feeling) as a rendering of the German *Einfühlung*,[1]

> . . . denotes the subconscious act of projection by which we attribute to an object our own kinesthetic sensations, motor impulses, moods, emotions, attitudes, and thoughts, perceiving these mental features as if they belonged to the object and formed what has been called its "tertiary qualities."[2]

Or, using another definition: "Empathy is the tendency to regard kinaesthetic reactions and incipient reactions that are a part of the observer's bodily condition as if they were perceptual aspects of the object."[3]

When one experiences an empathic reaction to anything in the external world, he consciously desires to attend specifically to that thing, thereby gaining a clear and distinct perception of the object or entity and there is also an emotional state generated in the observer which, immediately and through a process of 'projection,' is transferred to the object with such vividness and clarity that it seems, to the observer, to be a part of the thing perceived. This transference of physical tension or of emotion from one person to either another human (where it is ascribed as the emotional state of the person observed)[4] or to an inanimate object or conceptual scheme (where it will then impart a degree of animation

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[1]The word "empathy" was created by the Cornell psychologist Edward B. Titchener. See his *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought Processes* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1909), pp. 21-22.

[2]Dagobert D. Runes and Harry G. Schrickel (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Arts* (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1946), p. 320.

[3]Harold Newton Lee, *Perception and Aesthetic Value* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1938), p. 91.

[4]Note the importance of this ascription to the art of the actor.

and 'humanization') occurs automatically and on an unconscious level, so that the observer is never aware of the fact that he is supplying the emotion. Instead, the emotion, say the fierceness of an African ceremonial mask, seems to reside in the object itself, only to be perceived by him.

Not only do difficulties arise in any discussion of empathy because all of the original statements of the theory seem designed to explain the animation of inanimate objects, thus making it awkward to transfer the intent of quotations from the original sources to a consideration of stage performances, but also the process is further complicated by the fact that there is not one, but rather, several equally valid 'schools' of empathy. A reference back to the two quotations with which this section began will clearly show that they are explanations of what Ruskin described as the 'Pathetic Fallacy,' of a process of anthropomorphisation, of the projection of a viewer's own vitality and inner essence onto specific objects in the external world in order to humanize and activate those objects. A close examination of the two quotations will also reveal that they are derived from the two most widely acknowledged 'schools' of empathy, the "objectified ego" (or mental form) and the "inner mimicry" (or physical form), and differ radically in what they are describing as the mechanism involved in an empathic activity.[1]

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[1]The varying explanations of empathy are usually blended in most modern definitions. Both types must be included in the definition adopted in this study also, with perhaps the greater emphasis placed upon the "objectified ego" form. The necessity for the inclusion of a discussion of both forms will become apparent when Richard Wagner's use and Bertolt Brecht's partial rebellion against empathy are discussed.

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SCHOOLS OF EMPATHY THEORISTS

In spite of a number of small groups of psychologists and aestheticians which consider empathy to be (1) normal recollection based on association by similarity,[1] (2) ordinary fused association,[2] and various other readily identified mental activities,[3] the empathy theorists may generally be divided into those who believe that it is a projection of the objectified ego and those who believe it to be a matter of muscular mimicry.

The chief psychologists-turned-aestheticians of the objectified ego theory are Theodore Lipps and Johannes Volkelt. The inner mimicry group is best represented by Karl Groos, Victor Bosch and Vernon Lee. Vernon Lee, unlike the others, is not a psychologist but a theorizing painter.

THE OBJECTIFIED EGO THEORY OF EMPATHY

From his studies of optical illusions,[4] Theodore Lipps came to the conclusion that a spectator's pleasure in aesthetic objects was, in reality, an enjoyment of his own activity as he observed it in those objects, that the spectator projected his self's movement, striving and willing into those inanimate things he observed closely. As Lipps put it in his widely repeated catch-phrase: "Aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment," that is to say, Lipps believed that

> The aesthetic enjoyment is not enjoyment of an object, but enjoyment of a self. It is an immediate feeling of a value that

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[1]Examples of men who adopt this position are Lotze, Fechner and Siebeck.

[2]For this type of exposition, see Kulpe, Stern and L. A. Reid.

[3]The most prominent variations appear in Meumann, Langfeld, Bartlett, Freud, Sterba, Winterstein and Arnheim.

[4]MacGregor, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

> is lodged in oneself. But this is not a feeling that is related to an object. Rather, its characteristic consists in this--that there is no separation in it between my pleased ego and that with which I am pleased; in it both are one and the same self, the immediately experienced ego.[1]

Or, to reduce this concept to individual phases, empathy

> . . . consists on a closer analysis, of two essential factors; on the one hand, there is a feeling such as pride, melancholy, or longing in our own minds, our inner auto-activity, and on the other, a projection of this feeling into an object which expresses our spiritual life and in which it unmistakably lies.[2]

Once this projection has been accomplished, the spectator attributes the sensations which he experiences entirely to the artistic object under observation. At the same time he naturally experiences these sensations with such a degree of intensity that he feels himself to be living through the characteristics of emotional states presumably embodied in the art object. An empathic state in which the observer's feelings, desires, and emotional reactions find another home in an external object, a condition in which he seems to find his personal characteristics reflected back to him from a thing is the very essence of this projective, spiritual form of empathy. In it, as Lipps says, "the antithesis between myself and the object disappears, or rather does not yet exist."[3] Lipps ". . . makes

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[1]Theodor Lipps, "Einfühlung, innere Nachahmung, und Organempfindungen" was originally published in the *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie*, Vol. I (1903) but is quoted here in the translation given in *A Modern Book of Esthetics*, ed. Melvin Rader (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), pp. 375-376. An alternative translation of this key article appears in E. F. Carritt (ed.), *Philosophies of Beauty from Socrates to Robert Bridges* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[2]Theodore Lipps, *Asthetik: Psychologie des Schönen und der Kunst*, (Vol. I; Hamburg and Leipzig: L. Voss, 1903-1906), p. 368. The translation was made by the present author.

[3]Lipps, "Einfühlung," p. 376.

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the essence of the matter the immediate and unreflective objectification and transfer of the sense of activity."[1] When that transfer is accomplished, one can say that "empathic feelings are those I have in the object, not those I have about it."[2]

To the basic emotional, projective reaction involved in empathy, Johannes Volkelt added a sense of abstraction:

> . . . the object as a rule acquires a symbolic significance by analogy with something else it resembles, and then we have symbolical *Einfühlung* [*symbolische Einfühlung*]. . . . this variety applies to the whole realm of nature,--with the exception, of course, of our fellow-men--wherever, in fact, we animate and humanize the sub-human, as well as to the greater part of art. . . .[3]

Thus, Volkelt, while generally agreeing with Lipps explanation of the experience, also finds in it some degree of association with other objects and experiences outside of the immediate transaction. This element distinguishes his version of the objectified ego theory from that of Lipps.

THE INNER MIMICRY THEORY OF EMPATHY

The second main principle of empathy mentioned earlier can be exemplified clearly in the writings of two people: Karl Groos and Vernon Lee. In contradistinction to Lipps' imaginative 'feeling into' the work of art, these authors would maintain that empathy is based almost wholly upon the physical changes which the observer experiences within his own

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[1]Elizabeth Kemper Adams, *The Aesthetic Experience: Its Meaning in a Functional Psychology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1907), p. 83.

[2]E. M. Bartlett, *Types of Aesthetic Judgment* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1937), p. 46.

[3]Johannes Volkelt, *System der Ästhetik* (Munich: C. H. Beck [Oskar Beck], 1905), Vol. I, pp. 202-208, as translated in Earl of Listowel, *A Critical History of Modern Aesthetics* (London: George Allen and Urwin, Ltd., 1933), p. 73.

body while reacting to an art work, upon his consciousness of his "inner mimicry," of the positions and forms of the art work.

As Groos puts it:

> There is . . . activity, and that in the common sense of the word as it relates to motor processes. It is manifested in various movements whose imitative character may not be perceptible to others. In this instantaneous perception of the movements actually in progress I find the central fact with which blend, on the one hand, imitation of past experiences, and on the other the perceptions of sense.[1]

So Groos conceives of the empathy process as an extremely complicated one in which there are physical adaptations occurring at the same moment that sense perceptions blend and fuse with associations and develop symbolic overtones. He does not wholly discount Lipps' version of the theory; he merely feels it to be incomplete, to be lacking a recognition of the fact that the spectator feels "a tendency to be or to do what the object seems to be or to do."[2]

The English artist Violet Paget, writing under the pen name Vernon Lee, is one of the outstanding, and certainly one of the clearest, exponents of the inner mimicry theory. Essentially, she does not extend the theory but merely clarifies the muscular reaction involved in inner mimicry through the use of extended descriptions of the process by which an observer experiences such relatively uncomplicated aesthetic objects as Grecian urns and mountains. Here, for instance, is a part of her discussion of how a viewer might come to feel that a mountain rises before him:

> The rising of which we are aware is going on in us. But, as the Reader will remember also, when we are engrossed by something

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[1]Karl Groos, *The Play of Man*, trans. E. L. Baldwin, ed. J. M. Baldwin (New York: n.p., 1901), p. 328.

[2]Aram Torossian, *A Guide to Aesthetics* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1937), p. 23.

> outside ourselves, as we are engrossed in looking at the shape (for we can look at only the shape, not the substance) of that mountain we cease thinking about ourselves, and cease thinking about ourselves exactly in proportion as we are thinking of the mountain's shape. What becomes therefore of our awareness of raising or lifting or rising? What can become of it (so long as it continues to be there!) except that it coalesces with the shape we are looking at; in short that the rising continuing to be thought, but no longer to be thought of with reference to ourselves (since we aren't thinking of ourselves), is thought of in reference to what we are thinking about, namely the mountain, or rather the mountain's shape, which is, so to speak, responsible for any thought of rising, since it obliges us to lift, raise or rise ourselves in order to take stock of it.[1]

Lee's version of inner mimicry empathy, based as it is upon the physical tensions in the observer's body and his awareness of the soaring quality of the mountain only because he is forced to adapt himself physically by raising his eyes or his head, is developed and extended by reference to the association principle mentioned by Groos.

> That present and particular raising and lifting is merely the nucleus to which gravitates our remembrance of all similar acts of raising, or rising which we have ever accomplished or seen accomplished, raising or rising not only of our eyes and head, but of every part of our body, and of every part of every other body which we ever perceived to be rising.[2]

In this version of empathy, then, the viewer seems to be more affected by the transaction than is the object, whereas in Lipps' version of the act, the very meaning and nature of the object may be changed by the emotions projected by the spectator at the time of viewing. Inner mimicry appears to give a description of the means by which human beings grasp the nature of most of the objects which they observe in the external

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[1]Vernon Lee, *The Beautiful* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1913), pp. 62-63.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 64.

world[1] including art creations. Lipps' 'feeling into' seems to explain why a spectator should assume that certain objects are more valuable to him as reflections of his own nature. One theory is concerned with the physical and the other with the mental activities as a means of knowing and reacting to objects. While both concepts are known as empathy, they are diametrically opposed in their manner of operation and always have been acknowledged to be so.

While most present-day theatrical commentators seem to blend these two types of empathy in their explanations, it was necessary for the present purposes to differentiate them. As will be noted in the chapters dealing with the theories of Wagner and Brecht, Wagner consistently sought from his audiences that disembodied projection of the will or ego which is so closely identified with Lipps. On the other hand, Brecht took exception to and rebelled against the display of movements and states of being which could only be brought about by inner mimicry. Distinctions made among the various types of empathic responses will also be useful in clarifying the exposition of other parts of the theories of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and Brecht's theories of Epic Theatre.

DEGREES OF EMPATHIC RESPONSE

These degrees of empathic response represent various levels of absorption in the spectator's empathic contact with the outer world. These types or levels of participation, first noted by Groos, but named by

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[1]The concept of empathy explains more than just aesthetic reactions. "One must not conclude . . . that the theorists of empathy have not themselves recognized *Einfühlung* as transcending aesthetic experience in its explanatory scope. Nor have they stinted their efforts to differentiate aesthetic and non-aesthetic empathic experience." Nahm, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

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Richard Müller-Freienfels in his *Psychologie der Kunst*,[1] are usually called the "ecstatic," the "participator" and the "spectator." This arrangement, of course, represents a decreasing scale of involvement, ranging downward from the person who is so caught up in what he is experiencing that he is not conscious of anything else (he is virtually dominated by the observed thing), through the more moderate position of the person who projects himself properly, draws quite a sufficient degree of pleasure from his participation and yet does not become hypnotized by the object or event, all the way down to the person who is only vaguely and sporadically involved. A percipient who experiences the ecstatic state is empathizing to the point where he may not think at all; the whole of his being is directed toward sensing or experiencing, not analyzing or comprehending. The participant, or *Mitspieler*, while watching a play does not become entangled in the personality of, for instance, Othello, but rather, he will place himself imaginatively, first in the part of one actor and then in that of another. He samples all roles and experiences the play from a multiplicity of points of view. And finally, the spectator or *Zuschauer* is the character generally ascribed to the professional critic; it is that condition in which the empathizer (if he may truly be called one) retains a constant awareness of his own identity and only develops an intermittent and superficial similarity with the actors he watches so cooly.

Of all of these forms or degrees of participation, the first, the ecstatic, is what is generally meant when reference is made to someone

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[1]Richard Müller-Freienfels, *Psychologie der Kunst* (two vols.; Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1923), p. 132. This phase of the discussion can also be checked in Downey, Morris, Katz or Langfeld. While the terms chosen characterize the people in the audience who respond in varying manners, the descriptions are also used to indicate the intensity of the involvement.

experiencing a true empathic state or condition. This, again, is what Wagner desired from his hearers, a deep, all-encompassing commitment, and it is exactly what Brecht chose to oppose in his theories. Brecht's earlier formulations of his position presupposed that the best spectator attitude was that of the *Zuschauer*, though he later mellowed into an acceptance of the more moderate activity of the *Mitspieler*.

THE OPPOSING FORMAL ELEMENTS

From what has been said, it should be apparent that the empathic portions of an art work are those which vitalize and humanize the art object or activity; they are the elements which allow the audience members to feel that, for example, the play being presented, bears a real relationship to them. Empathy permits the viewer to find parts of himself reflected back from the stage, parts which prompt a clear fellow-feeling and a definite association of himself with the characters. Whether this close and perhaps vital connection with the thing viewed is a sufficient explanation of aesthetic phenomena depends, apparently, upon the group of aestheticians or philosophers with which one happens to associate oneself. This study, devoted to an explanation and application of still another aesthetic theory does not accept empathy as a sole and sufficient explanation of what happens during the perception of artistic activity. Empathy, here, can be regarded only as an incomplete or "an embryonic aesthetic."[1] It seems

> . . . to be the result partly of undue concentration on the visual arts, particularly of sculpture and architecture, and partly of mistaking what is undeniably at some times a

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[1]Nahm, *op. cit.*, p. 462.

> contributory factor in the appreciation of art for the essential and sole sufficing one.[1]

Empathy explains much but not all that a spectator may be aware of during his contact with anything artistic. This theory applies almost completely to some forms of art (those most concerned with content), and somewhat less successfully to other (to the abstract and form-conscious arts). Empathy describes the reactions expected of spectators during certain art periods (for example, the Romantic or naturalistic), but not in others (like the expressionistic or Brecht's sociological-economic-scientific phase). It will serve marvelously to describe many of the facets of the Romantic musician Wagner, but completely fails to convey all of the aspects of the more 'realistic' poet Brecht.

> The theory of empathy . . . seems to me to hold a certain validity for the manner and spirit in which a certain type of artist conceives his works and approaches his artistic activity. I refer to those artists and their works which are variously described as Gothic, romantic, Dionisian [sic], striving, sentimental and so on. It seems to me less adequate when applied to artists and works of art usually described as classic, Appolonian [sic], or to a primarily decorative art, or to the abstract and hieratic arts.[2]

Or, one might add, to arts such as Brecht's which are intended to be practical and political. In short, there is something missing if one accepts empathy as an explanation of art; something more is needed before a great number of art creations can be explained adequately.

> . . . this modern aesthetics, which proceeds from the concept of empathy, is inapplicable to wide tracts of art history.

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[1]Bartlett, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199. While Bartlett appears to be excluding such art forms as music, acting, etc., he is merely pointing out the fact that none of the original proponents of the empathy theory used examples of art forms which evolved the art product through a time span. They always mentioned concrete, visible, permanent artifacts, not processes.

[2]Pepita Haezraki, *The Contemplative Activity* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1954), p. 45.

> Its Archimedian point is situated at one pole of human artistic feeling alone. It will only assume the shape of a comprehensive aesthetic system when it has united with the lines that lead from the opposite pole.
>
> We regard as this counter-pole an aesthetic which proceeds not from man's urge to empathy, but from his urge to abstraction.[1]

What is this process of abstraction except the creation of "an abstract and general image, which conjures impressions into a law-abiding form"?[2] In other words, then, the super-sensual perception of things through the process of empathy is to be balanced by a manipulation of those factors which allow the spectator to isolate and define the thing to which he is to empathically respond. Even the one person who has done the most to establish the theory of empathy in the area of aesthetics, Theodore Lipps, recognized, at least at one period in his reflections, that the abstracted, formal elements were, and are, a necessary part of an aesthetic reaction.

> . . . at the very beginning of his *Ästhetik* he introduces surreptitiously a number of purely formal principles, the laws of uniformity, of unity within a manifold, of monarchic subordination, in spite of a persistent reiteration elsewhere that aesthetic *Einfühlung* or sympathy is the unique and uncontested source of aesthetic delight.[3]

There was, therefore, at least a momentary acknowledgment on the part of Lipps that the universally respected principles of unity, harmony, variety, contrast, rhythm, etc., play a valid and decisive part in our reactions to

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[1]William Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy, A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1953), p. 4.

[2]C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types, or The Psychology of Individuation*, trans. H. Godwin Baynes (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc., 1924), p. 368. The empathy process (extraversion) and Wagner's world-thoughts are also discussed by Jung.

[3]Listowel, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

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art objects and activities. It is necessary before the observer may claim a complete realization of the art thing that he form not only perceptual images (grounded on the act of empathy) but also conceptual images (through the abstraction and organization of its components) about it. A spectator learns to know the art object in many ways before he fully knows it, and the formal aspects of it are not the least important ones.

The abstractive or form-realizing process is offered here as a complementary and opposing process which also functions in aesthetic activities. These two processes, emotional involvement and non-involved cognition can be regarded as opposite poles of a single process.

DISTANCE IS A MEAN BETWEEN TOTAL IDENTIFICATION AND TOTAL ABSTRACTION

In this study, the concept of Distance, which according to Bullough admits of degrees, can and will be taken to be a method of roughly measuring the relative degrees of empathic involvement or abstractive dissociation desired as a response from the spectator of an art work.

If a continuum is visualized, then total involvement might be assumed to be on one end of the scale in the more emotional areas which the device can record, while the process of abstraction would tend to draw the spectator into the cooler, more intellectual regions at the opposite end. The name of this instrument of measurement is Aesthetic Distance.

It should be noted that readings of the relative intensity of either identification or abstraction can be made from either end of the scale. One can speak of more involvement or less abstraction and mean exactly the same thing. And conversely, a greater degree of abstraction will bring about a reduction in the empathic involvement and can be

understood to imply precisely that. The increased abstraction may be stated in degrees of lesser emotional response.

This approach, while it does represent an extension of Bullough's formulation of Aesthetic Distance, is not entirely without his support. He was well aware of the scale-like function of the theory and what he denotes as "Under-Distancing" is simply the extreme ecstatic state of empathy while his opposite concept of "Over-Distancing" represents an abstraction to excess. Bullough deals generally and throughout his article on Phychical Distance, just as this study will, with the form-giving processes of creation and the form-perceiving processes of appreciation. This is the end of the scale which is stressed since Distance in its every statement, tends to limit the emotional and emphasize the intellectual. This is an unfortunate semantic entanglement caused by the selection of the key word "Distance" which always implies a withdrawal from the emotions contained in, or a withdrawal from the work itself. Bullough does, though, specifically say that this theory provides the basis upon which empathy functions.

> It [Distance] is essential to the occurrence and working of 'empathy' (*Einfühlung*), and I mentioned earlier its connection with Witasek's theory of *Scheingefühle* which forms part of his view on 'empathy'. The distinction between sympathy and 'empathy' as formulated by Lipps is a matter of the relative degree of Distance. Volkelt's suggestion of regarding the ordinary apprehension of expression (say of a person's face) as the first rudimentary stage of *Einfühlung*, leading subsequently to the lowering of our consciousness of reality ('*Herabsetzung des Wirklichkeitsgefühls*'), can similarly be formulated in terms of Distance.[1]

As has been shown, and for the purposes of this work, empathy will be considered to be a complimentary theory to Aesthetic Distance, but

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[1]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

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one upon which Aesthetic Distance imposes boundaries and establishes the basis for its proper functioning.

UNDER-DISTANCING AND OVER-DISTANCING

This section will detail the problems created by the excessive poles of ecstacy and total abstraction mentioned above.

If the reader accepts the concept of Aesthetic Distance as establishing a scale which ranges between the attitudes of extreme involvement and excessive abstraction, then this scale appears to mark out those limits within which a viewer can perceive aesthetically. What would happen if the operational limits Aesthetic Distance should be exceeded? The result, regardless of how it happens, is a cancellation of the Distanced, the aesthetically correct, state.

> There are two ways of losing Distance: either to 'under-distance' or to 'over-distance'. 'Under-distancing' is the commonest failing of the subject, an excess of Distance is a frequent failing of Art, especially in the past.[1]

The beholder must develop a certain optimum Distance in relation to a work of art, a Distance which is neither too great nor too small. There is a strong tendency on the part of spectators to form empathic contacts with art works or elements within them and consequently to reduce the Distance beyond permissible limits; if this occurs, the reaction to the object or experience will be either too subjective or too practical. In spite of the time, effort and imagination expended upon them, few readers of *Playboy* magazine would regard the center-fold nudes as examples of artistic photography. The reaction to them typically is too practical for them to achieve the status of art. On the other hand, a good

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

percentage of the storehouse of art upon which the public can draw for aesthetic stimulation, particularly today, tends to be overly abstract, leaving them no point of contact with the piece. If the observer is Over-Distanced, either by the nature or content of the work (as in the sensitive spatial relationships of a Mondrian composition), or by his own particular preferences and background, he will be so unmoved by the work, so withdrawn from it, so objective about it that it will have no effect upon him. In either case, he has moved away from the proper aesthetic attitude necessary for true appreciation.

To begin an examination of these excessive states, attention will be given here first to Under-Distancing. This is more likely to be of importance in the conventional theatre than is the opposite possibility, Over-Distancing.

> There is, of course, no doubt that, speaking generally, theatrical performances *eo ipso* run a special risk of a loss of Distance owing to the material presentment of its subject-matter. The physical presence of living human beings as vehicles of dramatic art is a difficulty which no art has to face in the same way.[1]

That is, Bullough believed that the utilization of the actual, physical human being in order to present the story leads to a greater possibility of identification with the characters and, consequently, a much greater possible loss of Distance than in any other art form.

While the medium chosen as a vehicle for the art content may cause problems, it is the artist's particular function to force both the form and the content to assume a recognizably artistic condition, to establish a correctly Distanced state for the art work.

> It may be called part of the artist's job to help the beholder keep in mind that a work of art is a work of art, that is, a

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

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> specially created and therefore "artificial" something. If, on the other hand, in his enthusiasm for "realism" he gives us too convincing an illusion of nonart reality, the art suffers precisely because it has not invoked in us the beholders the kind of attitude that is necessary for art to function aesthetically.[1]

And to apply this to the present consideration, one might say that

> . . . theater art must be neither so "real" that it deludes or deceives the spectator, nor so "close" (physically or psychologically) that it jars him out of his imaginative illusion and brings him back to an actual world, with its everyday values, desires, and frustrations.[2]

Such a reaction is, of course, conceivable in any production which touches upon anything in the spectator's background with which he personally identifies himself quite closely. Bullough gives the illustration[4] of a man who has occasion to doubt the fidelity of his own wife attending a performance of *Othello*. Almost automatically such a spectator would be forced to lose his Distance, would be unable to view the play as an artistic whole but instead would relate it specifically to his own background and, in all probability would identify himself completely with the single character of Othello, thus obtaining a very unbalanced view of the whole work.

Not only can personal matters of this nature affect the spectator but many other possible elements in a production could cause a loss of Distance. For instance, again referring back to Bullough:

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

[2] James L. Jarrett, *The Quest for Beauty* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), p. 113.

[3] H. D. Albright, *Working Up A Part* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), p. 120. These quotations refer to conventional, representational staging, the form most likely to provoke Under-Distancing. Presentational Theatre on the other hand, has 'built-in' Distance devices which make this form of theatre tend toward Over-Distancing.

[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 99.

> To imitate nature so as to trick the spectator into the deception that it is nature which he beholds, is to forsake Art, its antirealism, its distanced spirituality, and to fall below the limit into sham, sensationalism or platitude.[1]

So the entire naturalistic-realistic style of a production could cause a failure of the very illusion for which it strives too strongly. There is a difference between the reality of the art object (as a self-contained unity) and the world outside the bounds of the object but when those artistic limits are broken even by the style of the production, then the art object ceases to be artistic.

According to the same author, it is also dangerous to touch upon many things having a practical relationship to the spectator's life. For instance,

> . . . it is safe to infer that, in art practice, explicit references to organic affections, to the material existence of the body, especially to sexual matters, lie normally below the Distance-limit, and can be touched upon by Art only with special precautions. Allusions to social institutions of any degree of personal importance--in particular, allusions implying any doubt as to their validity--the questioning of some generally recognized ethical sanctions, references to topical subjects occupying public attention at the moment, and such like, are all dangerously near the average limit and may at any time fall below it, arousing, instead of aesthetic appreciation, concrete hostility or mere amusement.[2]

But, regardless of the specific reason for the Under-Distancing, if this disastrous result occurs, the spectator's attitude will no longer remain one of disinterested contemplation of a recognized art work. Instead, the attitude will lose its objectivity and the viewer will become personally, emotionally involved or he will react to the art work in a practical manner.

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[1] Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102.

> More generally, when Distance is minimal the reaction to works of art is pragmatic rather than aesthetic. Art is transformed to pin-up and propaganda, magic and ritual, and becomes an important determinant of belief and action.[1]

This is not art's dominant function, therefore the emphasis in an Under-Distanced state is misplaced. "When this derealization is lacking, an awkward perplexity arises: we do not know whether to 'live' the things or to observe them."[2]

The explanations for this confusing state are many, but one of the clearest is the philosophical one offered by Susanne Langer. According to her, the content of a work of art, through its particular form,

> . . . has been symbolized for us, and what it invites is not emotional response, but insight. "Psychical Distance" is simply the experience of apprehending through a symbol what was not articulated before.[3]

Consequently Under-Distancing can be explained in this fashion: "It is, in fact, a confusion between a symbol, which lets us conceive its object, and a sign, which causes us to deal with what it means."[4]

Assuming that enough has been said at this point about Under-Distancing so that its definition is clear, it is now necessary to turn to the other end of this scale and examine the effect of Over-Distancing an art work.

The conditions which will typically be found to exist in this state are these:

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[1]Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952), p. 256.

[2]Gasset, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

[3]Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Mentor Books, 1951), p. 181.

[4]*Ibid.*

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> When psychic distance is maximal, the response is philistine or intellectualistic. At best, the experience is one of passive receptivity rather than active participation of the self. No contribution comes from the side of the audience because the interpretation follows the principle of the dictionary, as determined by the current conventions of the genre. Or, indeed, there may be no effort at interpretation at all, and the work rejected out of hand as unintelligible and worthless.[1]

Surely the reader will have noticed how apt a description this is of the audience reaction to a good deal of present day theatrical effort of an avant garde nature.

Over-Distancing can result from many causes, among which one might mention:

1. An extreme awareness of the technique used by the artist or incorporated in the art work.

2. A design which is too finished, too formal, too organized or too static.

3. "The concepts and legends of the past thus recalled are unrelated to the experiences of the age."[2]

4. There are no cultural ties between the audience and the art work, *i.e.*, it comes from an unknown background.

5. The conventions which operate within the work are not familiar ones to the viewer.

Regardless of the specific cause of the Over-Distancing, the primary thing to note is that the spectator sees nothing of himself reflected from the stage, he can find no point in the proceedings offered to him, or the art object presented for his inspection, with which he may identify himself or with which he can empathize. While the spectator may identify intellectually with an art object with no emotional experience at all,

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[1]Kris, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

[2]Michelis, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

such an Over-Distanced reaction does not represent a totally realized response because most art objects or acts involve some emotional content.

The ultimate effect of this process of abstracing to excess is identical with that of Under-Distancing: it destroys the relationship which should exist between the spectator and the art work.

In summation; one may roughly equate the extremes of the properly Distanced state with the terms affective and cognitive. Both of these reactions may be disrupted by any degree of excess.

> The consequence of a loss of Distance through one or the other cause is familiar: the verdict in the case of under-distancing is that the work is 'crudely naturalistic,' 'harrowing,' 'repulsive in its realism.' An excess of Distance produces the impression of improbability, artificiality, emptiness or absurdity.[1]

DISTANCE LIMITS

The idea of a Distance-limit, another of the basic concepts included in Bullough's statement of the theory, has virtually been defined in the exposition of Under- and Over-Distancing. Once these outer limits have been set, then the area which remains between these extremes is that area within which an art work should properly function and within which the viewer should be emotionally 'placed' while viewing the work. Both the object and the subject, then, are controlled by the limits of acceptable Distance. Violations of those limits will lead to Under- or Over-Distancing, as the case may be.

As this term Distance-limit is normally used by Bullough, it does not indicate the whole range of acceptable variation, but rather the very outer limits of that area, the point at which proper Distance would become Under- or Over-Distancing. As he explains it in terms of the viewer:

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[1]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

> The average individual . . . very rapidly reaches his limit of decreasing Distance, his 'Distance-limit', *i.e.* that point at which Distance is lost and appreciation either disappears or changes its character.
>
> In the practice, therefore, of the average person, a limit does exist which marks the minimum at which his appreciation can maintain itself in the aesthetic field, and this average minimum lies considerably higher than the Distance-limit of the artist.[1]

Presumably, an artist would also be able to follow pure abstractions much closer to the other limit, just short of Over-Distancing, more easily than could the average person. The artist, one assumes, is more likely to interest himself in an abstraction, in a work completely devoid of 'picturization' than is the typical viewer. While the Distance-limits, those defining outer edges of the properly Distanced state, may vary from person to person because of training, sensitivity, and many other factors, such limits do exist for each person in relation to each art work.

The Distance-limits mark off those points beyond which the artist may not go and expect the usual spectator to comprehend and control his emotions in regard to the work.

AESTHETIC DISTANCE AS A RESTATEMENT OF ARISTOTLE'S GOLDEN MEAN

As a result of the previous discussions of Under- and Over-Distancing and the Distance-limits, it should be clear that these elements describe and define an area of balanced emotionality and abstraction, an area in which all elements may function in a proper relationship. Thus, within this area, a state of balance results in which none of the elements are present to excess, to the point of dominating the others.

This idea that artistic objects or acts may incorporate elements derived from the extreme limits of the content and form used but that the

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art creation basically exists, as a whole, in the poised, balanced middle-ground of artistic creation and perception is a very ancient one. It harks back at least to Aristotle who proposed the "Doctrine of the Mean" as a guide in such diverse areas as medicine, morals and art. He said:

> . . . every art does its work well--by looking to the intermediate and judging its works by this standard (so that we often say of good works of art that it is not possible either to take away or to add anything, implying that excess and defect destroy the goodness of works of art, while the mean preserves it; and good artists, as we say, look to this in their work) . . .[1]

If we acknowledge that total identification or Under-Distancing is an excess of empathy, while total abstraction or Over-Distancing is a defect of empathy, then it becomes obvious that Aristotle anticipated Bullough's formulation of the Distance concept by several thousand years.

In his discussion of ethical considerations, Aristotle further developed his idea of 'nothing too much' by suggesting that when we find ourselves approaching too close to what we may now define, in aesthetic perception, as one of the Distance-limits,[2] "We must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error . . ."[3] This is precisely the method suggested by Bullough for achieving the rationally balanced perception which is the very heart of the properly Distanced state. This is the reason for all of the suggestions included in this study for blocking the power of the highly emotional and empathic parts of art works: by

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[1]Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," *The Works of Aristotle, Volume II, Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), p. 352.

[2]This is an aesthetic equivalent of Aristotle's comment in regard to ethics.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 355.

doing so, a spectator is removed from the aesthetic error of attending to only a portion of an art work and is released to savor and to respond to all aspects of the creation.

> So much, then, is plain, that the intermediate state is in all things to be praised, but that we must incline sometimes towards the excess, sometimes towards the deficiency; for so shall we most easily hit the mean and what is right.[1]

The mean or the Distanced state is the condition to be sought for the clearest and most complete understanding and appreciation of any art work.

The theory of Aesthetic Distance, then, is a generalization of Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean, as that doctrine applies to matters of art.

METHODS OF DISTANCING

How does one, beyond the hints which have already been given, actually achieve a properly Distanced relationship with an art object? There are many factors which will have a bearing upon this activity, some of which are under the direct control of the percipient and some of which have been manipulated already by the artist so that the spectator need only be conscious of them; still other factors are beyond the control of either the percipient or the artist. Some of the factors which would fit under each of these categories will be listed, reserving many other suggestions, evolved or stressed by Wagner or Brecht, for specific applications in later chapters.

Among the things which are not subject to the control of a single individual are (1) the sum total of the conventions of an art form in a given period and (2) the passage of time.

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[1] *Ibid.*

The conventions, which will be studied in connection with both the history of the styles against which Wagner and Brecht rebelled and the methods of staging of Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre, represent codifications of the sense of Distance which an era feels necessary for its appreciation of art; they are averages of the Distance used by the finest and most representative artists of a period, averages which, if they are applied to other art creations, ought to mold them to the perceptive abilities and tastes of that society in that period. No one artist or arbiter of taste alone, no matter how powerful or original he may be, can, by himself, completely alter such universal opinions concerning the proper methods and devices or art. Both Wagner and Brecht offer instructive examples in relation to this point.

Time, as has been noted, is a strong Distancing factor. Bullough acknowledges this by saying:

> . . . temporal remoteness produces Distance, and objects removed from us in point of time are *ipso facto* distanced to an extent which was impossible for their contemporaries. Many pictures, plays and poems had, as a matter of fact, rather an expository or illustrative significance--as for instance much ecclesiastical Art--or the force of a direct practical appeal--as the invectives of many satires or comedies--which seem to us nowadays irreconcilable with their aesthetic claims. Such works have consequently profited greatly by lapse of time and have reached the level of Art only with the help of temporal distance, while others, on the contrary often for the same reason have suffered a loss of Distance, through over-distancing.[1]

Those adjustive mechanisms under the control of the spectator--(1) a proper positioning in physical space, (2) a shifting of the point of view, either physically or mentally and (3) a transferral of interest

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[1]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

from the senses to the intellect--have all been discussed sufficiently in earlier sections of this study.

The artist's activities, since they determine the degree of Distance which is inherent in the work, deserve a more extensive treatment here as a prelude to the considerations which will fill the remainder of the work.

Not only does the artist directly influence the spectator's perception in all three of the categories just mentioned by arranging the formal elements so that the proper position must be assumed before the work will be intelligible, by inviting various perceptions of the content, and by consciously abstracting the content and ordering it so that the spectator is aware of a guiding intelligence behind the work, but he also imposes a specific style upon the thing which he has fashioned.

To be fully appreciative of a work of art, the spectators must be conscious of the fact that they are observing an art work. Again, the explanation that if they are not aware that they are observing an art creation, they may tend to react to it as though it were a part of reality, comes to mind. Bullough makes a specific point of just this idea,

> To say that Art is anti-realistic simply insists upon the fact that Art is not nature, never pretends to be nature and strongly resists any confusion with nature. It emphasises the art-character of Art: 'artistic' is synonymous with 'anti-realistic'; it explains even sometimes a very marked degree of artificiality.[1]

The artificiality of which Bullough speaks is that which is derived from the consciously selected style, manner and technique in which the art work is rendered. It is those very elements which the artist has contributed

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

to the art work which set it apart from the unaesthetic confusion of everyday life and thus make of this art work an entity which is more self-contained, more easily perceived than the average. Not only must the artist supply these characteristics in his creation but he must also force them upon the viewer's attention to such a degree that the spectator will realize that this is an art creation. If the artist does not impress the percipient with the artistic qualities of his work, he will fail to place the spectator in a properly Distanced relationship with the piece and his art is likely to fail as art.[1]

The artistic qualities are simply those which result from the art elements, the style, of the work. So this argument ultimately comes down to the fact that

> . . . "style" itself as well as "stylization" is a distancing factor: the singleness of the style of a work of art contrasts with the multiplicity of styles and the lack of styles in non-aesthetic life.[2]

An art work is recognized as such primarily because of the non-realistic, artistic style of the object. How does the artist give to his work that quality called style? In part at least, style is created by reducing the number of elements to be considered and then organizing what is retained. This process of cutting and paring away the extraneous connections and cross-references in a work has been mentioned above as a device for creating Distance.

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[1]Even a naturalistic play can be self-contained and thereby set apart from the 'real' world of the experiencer as much as a more abstract creation, but the naturalistic style always involves a greater chance of Under-Distancing and consequent loss of artistic character.

[2]Jarrett, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-116.

Once the selection suggested in the process of abstraction has been completed, then the artist faces the task of unifying what remains. Unity is generally held to be the first and perhaps the foremost of the formal elements in an art composition,

> . . . for, every kind of visibly intentional arrangement or unification must, by the mere fact of its presence, enforce Distance, by distinguishing the object from the confused, disjointed, and scattered forms of actual experience.[1]

The unification of all of the elements, since it may be effected by many different methods, is by no means a simple process. Bullough noted many of the means to accomplish this end:

> By unification of presentment are meant such qualities as symmetry, opposition, proportion, balance, rhythmical distribution of parts, light-arrangements, in fact all so-called 'formal' features, 'composition' in the widest sense.[2]

Beyond all of these formal elements and the unification which they create, an art work, in order to be successful, must contain percentages of the known and familiar and also percentages of the novel and the striking. The degree of balance achieved between these opposites, usually through the form given to the content, has a Distancing effect, as well. Bullough speaks of these opposing forces as the typical and the individual;[1] "Historically the 'typical' has had the effect of counteracting under-distancing as much as the 'individual' has opposed over-distancing."[2] He appears to feel that both of these factors contribute to establishing the proper Distance-limits within which the work may function and apparently regards

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[1]Bullough's choice of descriptive terms in this case is not as clear as it might be. What he means by the "typical" is that which is normally true in the experience of the average person, the universally true. See the next to the last paragraph in this section for a complete description of this generalizing attitude. His usage of the term "individual" implies the specific, discrete, concrete elements with which one may sympathize and identify himself.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 117.

both of them as somewhat restrictive. That is, they establish the proper degree of Distancing by their equal and opposite pulls in divergent directions. Both the individual, because of the spectator's greater ability to perceive a sharply etched, highly distinct entity, and the typical, because it creates a bond between the viewer and all other people, thus removing the emotions being considered from his particular life, are important in the creation of Distance.

Still other factors contributed by the artist and properly regarded as a part of his style might include the changing of a concrete object to an abstract concept and a reduction of the emotional intensity of the subject of the work. Few artists look at the world of physical reality in such a manner as to perceive only the physically tangible aspects of the things contained therein; instead, each artist usually tries to penetrate to the essence of reality. He sees not only what is actually present but what is implied or instanced by this object and it is this elusive referential aspect of reality which he attempts to convey through his work. If he did not capture the allusions of his subject then he would depict only the gross, earth-bound aspects of it and his work would be correspondingly flat and dull. If he grasps and communicates the content of reality which, as Langer says, can be symbolized through art, then he will succeed in transmuting objects into perceptions, things into thoughts, and art into abstractions. He will remove his audience from the literal reality of his subject to a Distanced mental state in which they can see his version of what exists; they will see the world filtered through his personality and brought into conformity with a single conception of reality. It is this over-mastering ordering of the universe according to the perceptions of one person which enables spectators to

distinguish one artist's work from another, solely by the style employed. It is this, which, in large measure, is the style of the artist: his particular way of changing real things into symbolic abstractions which conform to the key concepts of his mind.

If all of these methods of abstracting are utilized, the work cannot escape some degree of Distancing. Both Wagner and Brecht evolved or stressed specific versions of these concepts, versions which will be studied and explained in the chapters dealing with the theories of these men. Those factors which would cause a violent, unreasoning, completely emotional reaction are removed and the object or experience is subordinated, not to the iron rule of the particular emotion, but to the more general mood to which that emotion belongs and of which it forms a small subdivision. Or one can say that, by the process of universalization, by ascribing the reaction to a larger whole, by enlarging the scale and range of the piece, the spectators are sufficiently Distanced to be able to perceive the comforting knowledge of categories; they can see that this shocking, stirring, or upsetting event has its place alongside many another which is less disturbing and draw repose from their expanded awareness and from the solidity which the other, less extreme members of the same group can offer them.

In all of these ways can the work, the artist and the spectator create Distance.

SUMMARY

This chapter was devoted to a definition and exploration of some of the many aspects of the philosophical and psychological theory of Aesthetic Distance. That theory proposes that if one is to view an art creation with a maximum of profit, that a particular state of mind is necessary on the part of the spectator.

The attitude required of the viewer is a complex one, achieved in two phases. In order to isolate the art object for concentrated study, it is necessary first of all to divorce it from the hectic rush of normal life. One must disregard and suppress all external and causal relationships which might be prompted by the art work, ignoring all practical, logical uses of the object. It must be isolated from the remainder of the world in such a manner that the work is not assumed to have any purpose outside of its own existence. It should never be regarded as a means of accomplishing something; the work is an end in itself and must be valued to the extent that the viewer is willing to grant it an existence which does not require further justification.

At the same time and as a part of the process of isolating the work, it must be separated mentally from the viewer. The spectator must feel that he is not physically involved with the work, that it is not connected in any normal manner with his actual self. Carrying this isolating activity still further, the spectator should observe the art creation in an objective manner and concentrate upon the object exclusively. If the viewer should experience emotional reactions to the art work, he will project those emotional states onto the work itself so that the viewer's subjective reactions can be interpreted as characteristics of the thing. Since the emotional aspects of the artistic transaction are then assumed to belong to the object rather than the beholder, the observer is freed to cultivate a rational aloofness in regard to the emotions depicted. He can come to understand emotions which he can see given objective form in the art object. The viewer is divorced and removed from the emotions in some degree.

After this negative or inhibitory phase, in which control is gained over the distractions inherent in the viewer and the environment, then the positive elaboration of the art object as an artifact is begun. In essence, the audience members are asked to drop their habitual patterns of perception, those inexact generalizations of perception and really to look at the work as a single, individual, specific thing. If they bring to bear a certain amount of specialized knowledge and analytical understanding, they will grasp all aspects of the work. They will realize the particular content, form and manner of presentation. They will be aware of the artist's efforts to shape this thing into an art work; they will realize how this thing differs from any normal object and they will, therefore, grasp the anti-realistic nature of a piece of art. If they take their time looking at it, really contemplate it, but remain mentally active all of the time, sensing out the relevant associations but disregarding the irrelevant ones, noting the technical perfection of the work and watching the evolving order within the object, evaluating as well as perceiving it, then they will develop a highly conscious multiple awareness of all parts and ramifications of the art object. This is the point to be sought during the elaborative phase of the Distancing process.

The end result of this process, of the two phases of Distancing, is a highly sensitized and aware state of being for the viewer. This state is a more conscious one than most people usually adopt toward anything. If the beholder can achieve it, he will experience the art work on all possible levels rather than being caught up simply in the plot line of a play or the content of a painting. The personal and human aspects of the work, which invite empathic contact, are important in a complete comprehension of a work; they must be understood, felt and

appreciated--but they are not the whole of the creation. They are just a part of the work in the same manner that excessive empathy is one of the aspects of the Distancing process.

CHAPTER III

WAGNER'S THEORIES

Wagner found much in his country, in his period[1] of which to complain. In comments scattered throughout the whole of his writings at least up to 1851, he leveled his verbal weapons at the formal nature of the church; at the evil influence exercised upon music by the Jews; at the obvious inequality in the distribution of wealth; at the lack of truly human emotion in everyday life (a result, he felt, of the suppressive society); at the terrible state of the Court theatres; at the lack of training of singers; at the miserably bad translations of opera libretti; at the formal nature of the art creations and of the audience responses to them; in short, at virtually everything in society which had a bearing upon himself, his ideas, and his creations. He found conditions so bad, that there was, he felt, no hope for the execution of great art works.

In a day when musicians were still dependent upon the patronage of the nobility, when the majority of artistic efforts took place in the small, relatively ill-equipped royal theatres scattered throughout each principality, it did not take long for the multitude of irritations which Wagner felt in his everyday life to condense around the structure of the aristocratic state itself. And, indeed, this was precisely where he localized the troubles of the world. The social structure, Wagner thought, should exist to promote the proper conditions for valid living and creation,

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[1]Wagner's life span was from 1813 to 1883.

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> The state . . . far from being any such plastic pliable surrounding, was a dogmatic, rigid, enchaining and overbearing power, dictating to the individual:
> Thus have you to think and act![1]

A man as individual, as ego-centered, as Wagner had to oppose such a society. Feeling himself, an eminently individual and creative person, to be hampered by the State, and, like most Romantics, believing fully in Rousseau's 'noble savage' concept, it didn't take Wagner long to draw the obvious conclusion: "It is then essential for us to annul the State and create afresh the free individual."[2]

Hardly one to merely talk or write in a revolutionary vein, Wagner, like Brecht in a later generation, threw himself into the task of bringing about "the great and inevitably approaching social revolution."[3] He joined a Left-wing political organization in Dresden, worked himself into a position of power within the group and actively began planning and arming for the revolution.[4] The idea of Wagner ordering the manufacture of 1500 grenades[5] or taking a rifle to the barricades when the revolution did break out are startling images but, nevertheless, apparently true.

The reason ultimately given by most writers for Wagner's participation in the revolution of 1849, is that it, like his writings at a

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[1]Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, trans. by Edwin Evans (London: William Reeves, n.d.), p. 348.

[2]Ernest Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist* (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1941), p. 201.

[3]Richard Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama, A Compendium of Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. H. Ashton Ellis, ed. Albert Goldman and Evert Princhorn (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1964), p. 68.

[4]See Robert Giddings, "Wagner and the Revolutionaries," *Music and Letters*, Vol. 45, No. 4, October 1964, pp. 348-358.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 353.

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later period, was intended to bring into existence the conditions under which he, personally, could work and have his creations staged. Wagner said:

> . . . it was necessary, above all things, to aim at the destruction of that constraint which we find among the public, hampering the feelings, and fatally destructive for the artist's purpose. Since I was compelled to see that the reason of this constraint was deeply rooted in the elements of our political and social life; and that only a complete change in that life would bring about the natural birth of that art which I had in mind; . . . I had to make the demand for such a change, as the first thing to be striven for, and to lay special stress upon it, as I did in my earlier writings ("Art and Revolution" and "The Art-Work of the Future"). . .[1]

Assuming the success of the revolution prior to the event, "Wagner declares that real history will begin under a 'communist' new order when men will be governed by a genuine historical understanding and not by myths such as divine right and the sanctity of property."[2] He fully expected, through the destruction of the aristocracy and the monied class, that he could look

> . . . forward to the time when man shall be free from care for the material things of life, with which the collective wisdom of the community will supply him; and "then will man's enfranchised energy manifest itself in artistic impulse." Every man will become an artist, and the expression of the artistic emotion of the whole community will be the drama.[3]

> . . . then will theatrical performances be the first associate undertaking from which the idea of wage or gain shall disappear entirely.[4]

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[1]Richard Wagner, "Musical Criticism: Extracts from a Letter on that Subject to the Editor of the 'Neue Zeitschrift für Musik,'" *Art Life and Theories*, trans. Edward L. Burlingame (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1875), pp. 235-236.

[2]Eric Bentley, "Richard Wagner, Siegfried, and Hitler," *A Century of Hero-Worship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 174.

[3]Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, p. 184.

[4]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 68.

In order to bring about this state of things, Wagner was willing to risk his life in the revolution, was openly and avowedly a part of it. When the whole undertaking collapsed and the revolutionary authorities were branded criminals, Wagner was the only member of the ruling inner group who managed to escape across the border to safety, but political exile.

Settling in Paris and Zurich, where he was cut off from the German theatres and where he was also unable to secure productions of his work, it became necessary for him, once again, to begin rearranging conditions so that they would be more propitious. "When political action failed him, he immediately carried his rebellious spirit into the world of art, substituting an art revolution for a political upheaval."[1] "From attempting to reform the whole of society Wagner set himself the task of reforming the music drama and turning it from a mere entertainment into the expression of the social conscience."[2] Since he could not do this by example, not being able to gain a stage, it became necessary for him to explain, to theorize, to write and to debate the nature of the music or the artwork of the future, thus providing the majority of his formal essays. These articles were a means of livelihood during the five years from 1849 to 1854 and served to introduce him to a larger public. In addition, they allowed him to clarify his own thoughts about the creative process.

Since he continued the battle with society in his art theories,[3] his writings of this period carried many generalized attacks on elements

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[1]Albert Goldman and Evert Sprinchorn, "Introduction," *Wagner on Music and Drama* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1964), p. 19.

[2]Giddings, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

[3]"Human society must be thoroughly reconstructed, and this can only be done with the aid of art. . ." Houston Steward Chamberlain, *Richard Wagner*, trans. G. Ainslie Hight (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1900), p. 192.

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outside of the strictly artistic field. But after renouncing politics and active participation in revolutionary actions as much as he could,[1] most of his social concern was directed toward the evils of the operatic stage and what might be done about them.

EXISTING EVILS IN THE OPERA

Wagner summed up his objections to opera in a manner which clearly indicated how much a man of the theatre he was, as well as being a superlative musician. "The error in the art-genre of Opera consists in the fact that a Means of Expression (Music) has been made the object, while the Object of Expression (the Drama) has been made a means."[2] He felt that the ornate music of the period, the "naked, ear-tickling, absolute-melodic melody"[3] had usurped a position of power which it should not have if the highest ends of theatrical art were to be served. He wanted to demote music from its position of domination and restore the balance which he believed should exist among the arts in the theatre or opera. His bitterness at the condition of opera was apparent:

> In Italy, where the opera was first elaborated, no other task has ever been set before the musician than to write a number of airs for special singers, in whom dramatic talent was entirely a secondary consideration;--airs that should give these virtuosi an opportunity to bring into play their several specific vocal powers. All that poetry and scenery contributed to this exhibition of the performer's art, was an excuse for time and place for it; with the singers alternated the dancer, who danced precisely the same that the other sang; and the composer had no other task than to contribute variations on a certain selected type of tune. Here, therefore, there was complete agreement in

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[1] "I promise you to leave politics on one side as much as possible, and therefore shall not compromise you or any one else. . ." Richard Wagner, *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt*, letter of June 5, 1849, p. 25.

[2] Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, p. 193.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

> purpose, down to the smallest detail, because, while the composer composed for certain fixed voices and their individual characteristics, these, in turn, showed him the character of the variations he must make. In this way the Italian [opera] became an art-genre by itself, which, while it had nothing to do with the true drama, had also nothing to do with true music. . .[1]

He objected to an exaggerated awareness of the melody-line (in his view, music should only be used to underscore the emotional aspect of the drama) and he found fault in the closed song-form used for each aria. What, he asked, happens to the theatrical illusion

> . . . if a strikingly beautiful and noble musical phrase suddenly terminates in the regulation cadence with the two customary runs and the forced final note, with which the singer unexpectedly abandons his position toward the person to whom that phrase was addressed, in order to turn directly to the *claque* and give it the signal for applause?[2]

There were at least two objections here to the rigid and formal nature of the operatic set-piece: one was that the drama was continually broken by repetitive pauses at the conclusion of arias which were themselves, somewhat ridiculous when repeated over and over again throughout a two to four hour span and the other was that they permited the *prima donna* or the leading tenor to step outside of the role (breaking the Aesthetic Distance of the opera) to address the audience directly.

Beyond these basic problems of opera as a whole, when this form was transplanted from Italy or France (the two dominant operatic countries in the first half of the 1800's) to Germany, specialized difficulties compounded the faults, virtually assuring that no operatic drama could be intelligible.

> What had been arranged for the best Italian singers, with special regard to their individual capabilities, was sung by singers without

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[1]Richard Wagner, "The Music of the Future," *Art Life and Theories*, p. 135.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 186.

> instruction, without vocal flexibility, in a language entirely the opposite of the Italian in character,--and generally sung with laughable distortions.--French operas, dependent upon the pathetic declamation of pointed rhetorical phrases, were produced in translations which had been made by literary penny-a-liners at the lowest price, generally without regard to the connection between the declamation and the music, and with mistakes in prosody that were calculated to make one's hair stand on end; a circumstance which put an effectual end to the development of a healthful style in the performances, and made both singers and audience indifferent to the text of the operas. Awkwardness on all sides arose from this; there was nowhere an operatic theatre to serve as an example and to give the tone; the education of even the obtainable voices was faulty or entirely wanting; everywhere artistic anarchy prevailed.[1]

To correct all of these problems was the task Wagner set himself. It seemed obvious that the way to avoid mangled translations and to circumvent an inability of the German throat to adapt to a melodic line created in the more liquid Italian manner was to create a body of operatic literature in the German language.[2] No translations would be necessary and the musical phrases would fit the German singers as no others could. If the formal nature of the opera could be changed so that the story became all-important and, if the singer and the audience could be taught to listen to the words and to grasp the content of the tale, then the opera might be improved.

But there were other stumbling-blocks, or rather, other phases of this same problem which drew Wagner's fire. Foremost among these was the utter imbecility of most operatic libretti. One could never ask the audience to pay attention to a musical play in which the libretto was "a monstrous motley, historico-romantic, diabolico-religious, sacro-frivolous,

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 137.

[2] Of course there were other German operas such as those of Mozart and Weber, which Wagner regarded highly, but they did not dominate the operatic repertoire even in Germany.

mysterious-brazen, sentimental-humbugging, dramatic hotch-potch."[1] Yet, according to Wagner, that was the sort of plot which men like Scribe furnished for Meyerbeer. The basic faults here were: first, that allowances had to be made within the plotline for the insertion of the requisite number of arias, duets, quartets, ensembles and ballets, thus making the development of the action in a rational manner an impossibility; and secondly, since this irregular and impossible form was considered sacrosanct by the musician, the dominant member of the creative pair, he forbade the poet to alter it. Add to this that the musician felt fully justified in altering or treating the story or the specific poetry as he chose,[2] and one can understand why "real poets, with rare and unfortunate exceptions, have never had to do with the opera at all."[3]

Assuming that this sort of script ever managed to achieve the stage, it there underwent still another change for the worse in Wagner's eyes. Having lost all contact with the real world, the libretti of that day invited the display of marvels of staging in compensation for the lack of a real story.

> . . . the accusation may be brought against the opera, that in it a mere succession of effects, designed to work upon purely sensuous emotions, suffices, if there be only an agreeable variety of contrasts presented, to successfully conceal the absence of any intelligible or sensible action.[4]

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[1]Wagner quoted in Alphons Silbermann, "Wagner and the Creation of the Gesamtkunstwerk," . . . *Of Musical Things* (Sydney, Australia: The Grahame Book Co., 1949), p. 78.

[2]"The usual course is for the melody to do what it likes with the verse; to dislocate its rhythm, ignore its accents, and drown its end-rhyme, according to its own pleasure." Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, p. 254.

[3]Wagner, "The Music of the Future," *Art Life and Theories*, p. 150.

[4]Richard Wagner, "The Purpose of the Opera," *Art Life and Theories*, p. 208.

> Why, indeed, is the audience of a first-class concert in a much better state than the audience of an opera (lyric drama, or some other fabrication)? Why is an overture listened to with peaceful contemplation in a concert hall, whereas, at the opera, it is performed for people preoccupied with everything else but the music? Could it not be that in the transplendent opera house, the technical methods employed have created an atmosphere unsuited to any kind of contemplation whatever, while the hall dedicated to concerts leaves the responsibility for contemplation to each listener's soul?[1]

Wagner felt that such display would either have to be eliminated or somehow integrated into the story so that it made sense and served to further the action. It could not merely exist as a concession to an audience which had come to expect miracles in stage painting. Effects had to be justified by the purposes they served. They had to belong within the show. Never should they attract the audience's attention to themselves to the point of imbalancing the whole of the production.

Wagner became convinced that the basic problem underlying these objections was that each element in the opera was functioning solely for itself. He decided that not since the pristine period of the Greek tragedy had all of the arts of the stage really been used in a total synthesis; that, instead, each art had developed independently to the limits of its particular medium and that when each of them was forced to take a part within the opera or the drama, it did so grudgingly and without giving up its basic character in support of the over-riding function of drama. "Thus opera becomes the mutual compact of the egoism of the three related arts"[2] of music, poetry and acting. To correct the faults of conventional opera

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[1]Adolphe Appia, *Music and the Art of the Theatre*, trans. Robert W. Corrigan and Mary Douglas Dirks (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1962), pp. 182-183. Appia here amplifies some favorite concepts of Wagner.

[2]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 124.

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and to create "the true art-work--the 'art-work of the future'--[the only way] is to reunite these arts in the music-drama."[1]

THE GESAMTKUNSTWERK[2] (THE TOTAL ART-WORK)

Wagner announced his creation of a new art form, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, by defining the opera as "an art work complete in itself, in which all the parts and contributions of the related and utilized arts meet and disappear in each other, and, in a manner, form a new world by their own destruction."[3] A contemporary aesthetician's approach to the same basic concept may clarify Wagner's position:

> . . . the very terms of the subsidiary arts, as employed in the combined arts, are transformed by the aim of the particular composition, . . . the work of art as a case of complex or combined art, must have, in order to be clearly anything at all, its own transforming intention and expressiveness, its emotional tone, its specific character, its point, in short, upon which every subsidiary constituent, from aesthetically elementary patches of color, or single sounds or shapes, through all the structural possibilities to completed artistic wholes of the major or minor arts, must be focussed in a felt perspective which so transforms them all as to make them appear, separately taken or actually removed from this complex set of technically achieved and expressively dominated structural relations, tawdry, ugly, pointless, and deformed.[4]

Wagner sought an integration so complete that the imagined "egoism" of the arts would vanish and each would function only to the degree needed

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[1]Henry T. Finck, *Wagner and His Works* (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 295.

[2]Other synonomous terms include "music drama," "tone drama," "word-tone drama," "Allkunstwerk," and "Art-Work of the Future."

[3]Wagner cited in W. J. Henderson, *Richard Wagner: His Life and His Dramas* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1901), p. 175.

[4]D. W. Prall, *Aesthetic Judgment* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1929), pp. 277-278.

to achieve the desired end. And, rather than feeling this to be a restriction upon each sub-art, Wagner assumed that only in such a close relationship could each art really reach its ultimate development.

> Wagner speaks of the "changeful play" of the arts which goes on in the drama in a very fine passage in *das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*: "So, completing each other in changeful play, the sister arts will disport themselves together, in pairs or singly, as is required by the dramatic action, which alone prescribes the measure and intention. Now the plastic movements of the actors pause to follow the passionless musing of the thought,--now the thought comes forth to life, and finds direct form in the gesture; now the stream of feeling, the thrill of wonder, will be rendered by music alone; now all three in common embrace will carry out the will of the drama in direct and puissant action. For there is but one thing which all the arts here united must desire, if they would freely exert their powers, that is, the drama; their only concern must be to fulfil its intention.[1]

While the over-riding concept was of a blending of all arts, the reader undoubtedly will have noticed in the above quotation that emphasis was laid upon only three. The explanation for this was that in Wagner's eyes "the whole man is the man of intellect (speech), heart (tone) and body (gesture). Thus the three primeval intertwining sisters of art are Dance, Tone, and Poetry: and true art is a union of the three."[2] A union, it should be noted, which would have unspecified and varying emphases at different periods in Wagner's productive life. At first, Wagner laid stress upon the poetry and the music:

> . . . I had thought it possible to construct, by the equal and mutual mingling of poetry and music, such a work of art as must produce an irresistibly forcible impression in its scenic production,--and should produce it in such a way that voluntary reflection should disappear before it, passing into purely human emotion.[3]

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[1]Chamberlain, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-215.

[2]Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, p. 187.

[3]Wagner, "The Music of the Future," *Art Life and Theories*, p. 165. Note that in this, as in so many of his statements, Wagner is concerned with the generation of non-abstractive, highly emotional, empathic states.

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Only later did he decide that a perfect blending, in equal partnership, of words and music was not only unnecessary but impossible. Then Wagner shifted his attention to the relationship between action and the music to produce a definition of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* which still contains all three elements but in significantly altered proportions. The music drama was later regarded as "a dramatic-musical improvisation of perfected poetic value, embodied in a fixed form by the highest artistic thought."[1] From this point on, great emphasis was laid upon the acting, the 'miming' of the work. But, throughout the whole of the evolution of Wagner's theories, the one basic constant was the value of music. Sometimes it was only as important as the other arts, sometimes, as in the later phases when Wagner was under the influence of Schopenhauer, it was the dominant factor in the combination, but music was never less important than the other elements.[2] Whatever the shifts in theory, whatever the philosophical pressures which he felt outside himself, some of the modification of Wagner's theories probably resulted from the varied requirements which he found in different plots. Some of this shifting of theory was the result of facing tasks which called for varying balances of elements. After all, the basic concept called for the use of each factor only to the limit of its expressiveness within the drama and no further. Different dramas would mean different balances.

Some mention of the balance between the abstractive and empathic parts found in the *Gesumtkunstwerk*, as a whole, should be made before developing a more detailed consideration of the elements which comprised

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[1]Wagner, "The Purpose of the Opera," *Art Life and Theories, p. 226.*

[2]"Music stands in the same relation to the complex of other arts as religion stands in to the church." Wagner, cited in Chamberlain, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

the whole. Naturally Wagner had something which he wished to communicate to his audience in the music dramas; they do have an intellectual as well as an emotional content and therefore represent the end result of an abstractive process.

There was abstractive material present in large quantities in any one of Wagner's operas but this was not the primary factor in his calculation of effects. Theoretically, he stressed the empathic end of the Aesthetic Distance scale in every part of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* because he felt that

> . . . to the man of passion who is engaged in spontaneous action, nothing is intelligible but what addresses itself to his feeling; and that, were it to desire to appeal to this man's understanding, it would, by assuming something from him which itself can only acquire in course of its communication, be obliged to remain incomprehensible.[1]

This stress upon the emotional, empathic aspects of his work was repeated constantly until "thought entirely dissolve[s] into the feeling."[2] He felt that

> The mind will tell us
> So it is!
> but only when the feeling has told us
> So it must be![3]

Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, particularly as it was given its fullest and most complete explanation in *Opera and Drama*,

> . . . is predicated on the assumption that it can communicate only to the senses and through them exclusively to the emotions. Reason, the conceptual and intellectual, are to play no part. "The combining intellect must have nothing to do with the dramatic work of art. In the drama we must become knowers through feeling. . . . . This feeling, however, becomes

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[1]Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, p. 364.

[2]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 188.

[3]Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, p. 367.

> intelligible to itself only through itself; it understands no other language but its own. Things which can be explained only by the infinite accommodations of the intellect are incomprehensible and disturbing to the feeling."[1]

As was pointed out earlier, Wagner was theoretically among the most extreme in his reliance upon sheer emotion, but he was actually among the most consistent in his application of devices to achieve a properly Distanced response. Throughout the remainder of the discussion of Wagner's work, it will be apparent that he called for an ecstatically empathic condition on the part of the audience but, paradoxically, the involved musical structure he evolved to reinforce his dramas, required an extremely conscious and Distanced perception in order to be intelligible at all.

To remedy the faults which he found in the Italian opera, Wagner devised the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a blending and balancing of music, poetry, and acting in such a manner that none of them dominated the relationship and all contributed toward the understanding of the drama.

DRAMA

Wagner found much of the poetic writing for the stage of his day empty and meaningless. He felt that the poet wrote intellectualized poetry divorced from music, just as the musician composed without the aid of poetry. Each was completed separately and then forced to blend for the stage. In Wagner's eyes, the inevitable result was disaster. He proclaimed, in Chamberlain's paraphrase:

> The relation of music to poetry will cease to be illusory when there is no longer any trace of an endeavour to coerce the absolute language of the understanding and the absolute language of tones into an impossible "marriage," when rather both--

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[1]Jack M. Stein, *Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960), p. 68.

> word and tone--spring spontaneously from a single higher purpose; this creative purpose is the drama.[1]

What he meant by the word "drama" was the word-tone drama, a more complex and difficult form than a conventional play.

> . . . only that poet can succeed in it, who fully appreciates the tendency of music, and its inexhaustible power of expression, and therefore so composes his poem that it can penetrate into the finest fibres of musical texture, and completely dissolve the spoken idea in feeling.[2]

Wagner chose the subjects he would develop into the word-tone drama, quite predictably, on the basis of an empathic resonance:

> Nothing touches me seriously . . . save in so far as it awakes in me fellow-feeling, that is, fellow-suffering. This compassion I recognise as the strongest feature of my moral being, and presumably it is also the fountain-head of my art.[3]

There had to be an emotional note sounded within him by the topic and once a plot had occurred to him, it had to be of such a nature that he could immediately see the musical and the poetic aspects as parts of a single whole, a complete drama.

> I can conceive a subject . . . only when it comes to me in such a form that I myself cannot distinguish between the contribution of the poet and that of the musician in me; and its completion in word and tone is simply the ultimate realisation of something that had originally presented itself to me only in vague outlines. This is the foundation of all my productive and more particularly my musical-productive, power.[4]

In spite of the length of the operas which grew from these subjects Wagner did concentrate and was highly selective in the development of his dramatic ideas. All purposive writing is selective and it is the

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[1]Chamberlain, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

[2]Wagner, "The Music of the Future," *Art Life and Theories*, p. 160.

[3]Wagner quoted in Newman, *The Wagner Operas*, p. 666.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 190.

selective nature of playwriting that unifies it as an abstracting process, bringing into the play the other end of the Distance scale: the non-empathic portion. Extreme concentration[1] in a drama often leads to abstractive symbolism and it did in Wagner's case.

Wagner consciously abstracted in order to create the symbols which he employed. In his view,

> Only the purely human drama . . . is the perfect drama.
> The purely human is "that which constitutes the nature of the human species as such," "that which is freed from all convention, all historic formality"; it is that from which "all that is particularistic and accidental" has been removed. . . A purely human action is one from the motives of which all petty and indeterminate elements have been discarded, and from the substance of which all extraneous matter, everything of the nature of pragmatic history, of political convention and dogmatic religion has been removed.[2]

He was seeking a remarkably purified and basic concept upon which to found each of his music dramas. This kind of searching for essences and discarding of accidentals would almost have been forced upon Wagner the moment he chose to regard himself as a poet capable of writing his own libretti. As John Mason Brown put it, "essences rather than appearances are the preoccupation of the dramatist possessed, however slightly of the poet's vision."[3] Then, too, Wagner quickly realized that the time limitations in performance and his desire to say something of importance to his

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[1]"In a sense [the playwright] does for his selected materials what time and perspective might be expected to do: he brings to the fore the significant. It is this lifting out of its context of less meaningful events that makes a drama, especially a drama as we know it on the stage, because the restrictions of the theatre force the playwright to be the most selective of all storytellers." Frank O'Hara and Margueritte Bro, *Invitation to the Theatre* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. 4.

[2]Chamberlain, *op. cit.*, p. 204. All quotations within this paragraph are from Wagner himself.

[3]*Op. cit.*, p. 156.

audiences required a condensation which virtually forced abstraction and symbolization.

> A strong dramatic action, in which a chain of situations lead to a climax and a denouement, was best left to the spoken drama; music drama should deal with ideas rather than actions, should be concerned rather with eternal truths than with individual human destinies.[1]

Deleting the historical, factual material and eliminating the purely personal in order to strive for a more universal meaning probably would have led to symbolism even if Wagner's libretti had not been poetic drama; but they were and "the ground upon which the poetic drama rests is that of symbolism, and in the lyric play this, by reason of the flexibility of music, may reach its highest elevation."[2] Wagner, like every other artist

> . . . strives to preserve whatever suggestion of reality is necessary to the truth of his message and to the production of the proper empathic response, but no more. All superfluous elements of reality he tries to eliminate, lest they remind the observer too forcibly of his own affairs, and thus destroy his sense of detachment.[3]

In place of the deleted elements, Wagner offered through the power of his music the expansion of the retained, symbolic kernels of the situations.

In Wagner's libretti, then, one encountered basic situations stripped to their essentials which could be presented as complete symbols. This led to a concentration upon the perception of the detail of a situation rather than upon how this situation had to evolve.[4]

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[1]Geoffrey Skelton, *Wagner at Bayreuth* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1965), p. 28. It should be noted that Wagner actually sought both empathy and abstract ideas (both ends of the Distance-scale). His descriptions of his desires varied just as the proportion of these factors did in different operas.

[2]Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

[3]John Dolman, Jr., *The Art of Play Production* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1946), pp. 27-28.

[4]This idea, also, was to be a principle of Brecht's type of theatre.

> Wagner's most original contribution to dramaturgy in the nineteenth century was the perfection of the demotivated drama, a drama that speaks to us in anagogical terms and in which the story and characters are meant to serve as mediums between us and a larger, profounder, and truer world.[1]

Abstractive symbolism was more than just a compositional method with Wagner: it was also the means of projection for his "world-ideas," the method by which he communicated the philosophical concepts or universal elements which were to be instructive and regenerative for the German people.

> Aiming at interpretation rather than portraiture of life, Wagner's dramas, like the Greek, are made up of long scenes, generally between two or three characters who impress us as types rather than individuals. Far from being mere personifications of abstract qualities, they past through bitter agony and wildest ecstasy, yet convey a suggestion of universality.[2]

These universal, Distanced types were placed in simplified, highly selective scenes which were not expected to evolve rapidly into another forward-moving situation. The scenes, which placed before the senses typifying conditions, were so stripped of outward, motivated action that the majority of the time occupied by the scene could be spent exploring a single strong emotional situation, building it into such a psychologically rich thing that this one event became symbolic of a major aspect of life itself. All of the abstractions employed, stripping away layer after layer of accretions, provided just the essence, the core, of a situation which could be displayed with enormous precision. To have the symbol make its full impact upon the viewer, Wagner also felt it necessary to

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[1]Goldman and Sprinchorn, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

[2]Pearl C. Wilson, *Wagner's Dramas and Greek Tragedy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1919), p. 17.

to expand the symbol to its greatest possible magnitude, thus giving the viewer a condensation of life in a larger-than-life-size form.

> Actual life can only understand this condensed form of itself when it appears magnified, strengthened and extraordinary in comparison. It is just the diversity of action and the distribution over time and space which prevents man from understanding his own life's activity.[1]

Wagner worked quite consciously at the process of creating a framework for the word-tone drama. He spent much of his time while writing the sketches, the verses, the corrected verses, etc. seeking the proper symbol to represent his thoughts. Once found, though, he devoted himself to clothing that abstraction in such a sensuously rich verbal and musical fabric that its comprehension by the audience would be entirely empathic and intuitional.

> By casting his dramatic poem in a form in which it penetrates into the most delicate threads of the musical texture, the poet can so completely capture the emotional sympathy of the listener by the visible performance of a life-like action that the listener is transported into an ecstatic state in which he no longer feels his connection with the causal world and submits himself to the new laws which are revealed to him by the music. . .[2]

POETRY

Wagner created a distinctive, Distanced type of poetry by harking back to the poetic style of the prehistoric period of the Germanic myths which he selected as plots for his word-tone dramas. A good portion of *Opera and Drama*, the major theoretical statement of the principles of the

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[1]Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, p. 379. It should be noted that this is a clear statement of two of the principal factors involved in the process of Distancing: the clarity of the perception and the divorcement from normal activities.

[2]Wagner quoted by Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

Gesamtkunstwerk, is devoted to the exact relationship of individual vocal sounds and their musical setting in this 'new' type of poetry.

Wagner flatly rejected, for his purposes, both normal speech, as not being sufficiently emotional, and normal poetic forms, as being too mechanical.

> The language of today is the means by which intellect addresses intellect, and as such cannot be used in the ideal drama.
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> But if the art-work of the future cannot use the ordinary language of today, neither can it use modern poetic verse, because of its artificial rhythmic patterns, which are foreign to the genius of the language, and rhyme, which throws into relief, not the essential part of the phrase, but the last word in the line.[1]

Wagner's negative reaction toward the standardized Shakespearean blank verse form would probably have delighted Brecht, who shared Wagner's aversion for the metre used. Wagner said, in referring to his rejection of the standard beat: "We mean the so-called Iambic measure; in which it is usual for our speech to appear before our eyes (and unfortunately our ears also) like the apparition of some five-footed monstrosity."[2] He had two basic objections to the iambic, other than its artificiality and what he felt to be, its musically useless stress. Wagner pointed out[3] that actors either spoke iambics as simple prose if they wished to appeal to the intellect, or if they didn't grasp its meaning, they stressed the beat and the result was a kind of melody without either tone or intelligibility. Either way, the form did not serve its intended purpose.[4] The second

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[2] Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, ii. p. 426.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 428-429.

[4] The relationship of iambic metre to both poetry and music is, of course, far more complex than Wagner suggests here. In an effort to clear the way for his 'new' poetic form, he oversimplified this form in order to degrade it.

major objection was that when musicians set iambic verses to music, they could and did arbitrarily select a rhythm for the music, one which might have nothing to do with the iambic pattern; and the combination worked. If there were anything particularly sacrosanct about iambics, if they really were a vital form, then this imposition of a varying musical rhythm upon words presumably composed with another beat in mind would not be possible at all. The result would be cross-rhythms or chaos. Instead, one hears only the musical beat and even the idea of iambics could be lost. Thus, this pulsation was not a basic and overriding metre: any other could work as well. Since this style of verse-composition was the dominant one "the ideal perfecting of the opera that had hovered before many brilliant minds, could only be conditional upon an entire change in the character of the poet's part in this art-product."[1]

To find the precise nature of this required change in poetry, Wagner mentally plunged backward through time--just as he was to do when seeking story lines--to the poet of the ancient world, to his methods of composition and delivery, to his verse-form and to the presumed origin of his language.

Wagner managed to link several aspects of his all-embracing theory by a concept which was to be a basic principle of the later Brechtian theatre as well: the narrator,

> ". . . the narrator is the real poet." The narrator has at his disposal, not only language, which is the highest, but at the same time the most strictly conditioned faculty of the poet; his words are accompanied by rhythmic movements of the body, defining gestures; the words themselves too are sung, not spoken. Wagner calls this language of gesture:[2] "the

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[1]Wagner, "The Music of the Future," *Art Life and Theories*, p. 150.

[2]Note the parallel opinion when Brecht stresses both gesture and *gestus*. Both of these concepts will be defined and illustrated in the chapter on Brecht's theories.

> most realistic of all arts," and to the language of tones alone belongs, according to Shakespeare, the power "to hale souls out of men's bodies." It is thus that the primitive poet sings; he does not confine himself to words and concepts, he is at once singer and representer.[1]

The reader will see by the end of this chapter why this linkage of such diversified activities in a single myth-generating minstrel struck Wagner as being important. The point to be noted at the moment is that this narrative poet, this embryonic actor, according to Wagner, sang his primitive tongue. This assumed fact prompted Wagner to assert that singing was quite ancient; that, in fact, the evolution of language out of a type of singing was entirely possible.

In *Opera and Drama* Wagner developed the idea of language evolving out of an echoic beginning, based, in his mind, almost exclusively upon the vowel sounds.

> In these vowels, when we think of them as divested of their consonants, and imagine them as merely the expression of a manifold and graduated exchange of the various kinds of inner feelings, ranging from the painful to the joyful, we acquire a picture of that first emotional language of mankind which could certainly have only consisted of a joining together of expressive intonations; presenting themselves, entirely the character of melody.[2]

He assumed this to have been the point of origin of all emotional language because any involuntary expression of our inner conditions, he observed, was likely to call forth an inarticulate, vowel-based sound (the scream of fear, the wail of anguish) which "awakens a corresponding interior feeling in all men within reach of the sound of it."[3] If primitive man understood such sounds as well as we do, then here was an obvious point for the

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[1]Chamberlain, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200.

[2]Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, p. 397.

[3]*Ibid.*, ii., p. 473.

beginning of the transmission of the all-important feeling-states from one person to another. Language, Wagner said, was born in the sung vowel sound, but came to absolute distinctness only with the addition of the divisive consonant, that cold abstractive sound.

He then tried to combine his stressed-vowel language with the manner in which our relatively perfected (but emotionally cold) modern tongues display intense emotional states, and from the blending, to derive the length of his 'human' poetic line, the manner of its delivery, its accentuation, and all other necessary elements from which to build a poetic form.

> True attention to the mode in which we express any superior excitement of the feeling in ordinary life will provide the poet with a reliable standard for the number of accents in a natural phrase. At moments of outspoken passion we disdain those considerations upon which the drawn-out modern phrase depends, invariably seeking to express ourselves with a single breath, and in as short, concise and definite manner as possible.
>
> In this compressed mode of expression the strength of our emotion causes us however also to employ a force of intonation far greater than usual, simultaneously with which we group the accents together more closely. We also raise our voice animatedly to a higher pitch for the purpose of pausing upon those accents to which we wish to give special weight, so as to cause such accents to impress the feelings of others in the same degree that we wish them to express our own.[1]

One can see here an attempt at deriving a foundation for many of Wagner's melodic and musically rhythmic devices, as well as poetic ones.

When Wagner wished to write a poem as a basis for a music drama, his intention was always to achieve the maximum emotional effect. If he found a greater degree of emotionality in his vowel-language than in modern German, then it made perfectly good sense to him to adopt this

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 456.

primitive manner of speaking as his poetic mode, to eliminate as many consonants as possible, and to manipulate the word order so that most of the 'unintelligible,' but syntactically necessary, connective words were eliminated. This reduced the number of words, concentrated the emotional, immediately perceptible atmosphere and allowed the human voice to move from one vowel to another with relative ease and with an unbroken flow. The forcefulness of this style can be most clearly experienced, perhaps, in the first two acts of *Die Walküre*.

Wagner realized that this form of compressed language would seem poetic only to some elements of his audience, so he sought a form which would work with the other principles he had so painstakingly derived. To fit the nature of the speech, the poetic form had to come out of the ancient past when that type of speech was still common. He found the form he wanted in *Stabreim* or staff-rhyme.[1] "Wagner saw in the staff-rhyme the first attempt to systemise into poetry the elevated speech of emotion, and he discerned in it technical features admirably suited to his plan."[2]

The characteristics of *Stabreim* are easy both to state and to hear in a word-tone drama which employs this form. The basis of the form was alliteration or the rhyming of consonantal sounds and the particular patterning of the repetitions was specifically given for the older writers. Staff-rhyme such as was used in "Beowulf" or in the poetry of Caedmon had its initial sound repetitions

> . . . so arranged that in every couplet there should be two principal words in the first line beginning with the same

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[1]The attempt to use quantitative verse forms was obviously not a new development with Wagner. It had been tried in a number of languages.

[2]Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

> letter, which letter must also be the initial of the first word on which the stress of the voice falls in the second line. The only approach to a metrical system yet discovered is that two risings and two fallings of the voice seem necessary to each perfect line.[1]

Wagner did not follow the patterning consistently, often using more alliteration than the staff-rhyme form required, but also, on occasion using it precisely as defined and with great compactness of form. Turning to the libretti for an example, the eye lights first upon *Die Walküre* and the Act I, scene 3 disclosure of the presence of the sword Nothung by Sieglinda. She says:

> Eine Waffe lass mich dir weisen--
> O wenn du sie gewänn'st!
> Den hehrsten Helden
> Dürft' ich dich heissen:
> Dem Stärksten allein
> Ward sie bestimmt.
> O merke was ich dir melde!--
> Der Männer Sippe
> Sass hier im Saal... .[2]

In both lines three and four and in lines seven, eight and nine there are parallel pairs of alliterations employed in exact accordance with the rules. The apparent interlocking of these words, intended to suggest a relationship among them as well as an alliteration, was audible and always present, even when the music only supplied the rhythm which normally belonged to these spoken words. These were flexible groupings of words which retained their distinctive 'poetic' character (alliteration) while allowing the music the greatest latitude in all other respects.

> . . . these lines of staff-rhyme have no metrical domination over the music. . . . the lines of the verse do not set the

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[2] Richard Wagner, *The Authentic Librettos of the Wagner Operas* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1938), p. 151.

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> limits for the phrases of the music as they do in the old song forms . . . the composer is entirely free in his phraseology, while he can never quite obliterate the rhythmic basis of the verse. This plasticity was of inestimable importance in the Wagnerian system, with its endless melody, its independent accompaniments, and its disuse of the old forms.[1]

Having accepted the flexible staff-rhyme form, Wagner, with his usual thoroughness, developed it a step farthur, a step which was almost necessary for its employment in music. He harked back to his vital interest in the vowel sounds and required that they, also, should rhyme.[2] According to Wagner, the poet

> . . . could render this comprehension by the sensuous understanding more throughly practicable by binding the vowels, just as he had previously bound the consonants of the accentuated root-words in their turn, into a rhyme; thus opening up their intelligibility to Feeling in the most definite manner.[3]

Naturally, the open sound of the vowel would be important for the sustained quality of any vocal lyric but its maximal use in the Wagnerian style of composition was necessitated by the long-sustained lines of the melodies. The composer therefore laid particular stress upon the vowels being linked intimately with their surrounding consonants and upon changes in the vowel sounds following the repetitive consonants in the alliterative verse form. By continuous rhyming shifts of the vowels, the attention of the listener was brought back to these basic emotional sounds which were merely separated

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[1]Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 204. The old forms referred to are those of the conventional songs which are based upon the repetition or doubling of a one or two bar musical phrase to build the song to the proper length. This conventional form automatically determined the length of all prior Wagnerian melodies.

[2]To keep Wagner's contributions in reasonable perspective, it should be noted that assonance is as old and persistant as alliteration in poetic technique.

[3]Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, ii., p. 488.

into intelligible words and linked into groups by the consonants. With the rhyming vowels, Wagner had arrived at the last of his purely poetic requirements for a verse form.

> Thus it is by resolving the vowel of the root-word, as accentuated and subject to initial rhyme, into its natural element of musical tone, that the poet attains to certainty in commencing to apply the tonal language. From this moment he has no further need to arrange the relationship of accents according to a measure recognisable by the "eye" of the sense of hearing, because the vowels have now become musical tones and thus themselves present the necessary relationship required for the quick reception of sensations.[1]

To sum up this consideration of Wagner's poetry, one would say that

> The three most prominent characteristic features of his theoretical verse form are alliteration, condensation, and free rhythm. Alliteration, Wagner contends, can--and in more primitive times did--express an intuitive perception of the relationship between different objects or qualities (as in "Lust" and "Leid"). Condensation of the language permits a higher percentage of root syllables, which, according to Wagner's (and the Romantic) theory, derive from the early, intuitive stages of language development. It also eliminates to a large extent elements such as conjunctions and prepositions, which bear no emotional quality. Free rhythm replaces the regular rhythmic pulsation of most poetry with normal speech rhythm, thus making possible an endless degree of subtlety in accentuation for purposes of emotional shading.[2]

Poetry, because of its variance from normal speech, its concentration and its formality, is a Distancing device of great potency.

> Poetry has the advantage of prose in its formal appeal and consequently in the distance induced in the reader. The value of this for the aesthetic effect has been so clearly recognized that those modern writers who are in revolt against conventional forms of poetry have cast prose in a form which brings out the sound and rhythm values. . . .[3]

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 489-490.

[2] Stein, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

[3] Herbert Sidney Langfeld, *The Aesthetic Attitude* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company., 1920), p. 95

In essence, poetry is a method of divorcing and isolating these depicted events from the flow of everyday life. No one speaks poetry habitually, concentrating and coloring images and, perhaps, seeking emotional responses to the basic elements of the language. Once the ear is attuned to this type of speech, it may be charmed but the mind can never fail to be aware of the difference between this method of speech and all others. The peculiarity of the poetic patterning causes one to be aware that the thing perceived is an art creation. Poetry does not belong to the real world. "Peotry is life at the remove of form and meaning; not life lived but life framed and identified."[1] Thus, poetry is life which is Aesthetically Distanced through form.

THE MYTHS

Wagner had many reasons for believing that the legendary or mythological were proper subjects for his music dramas. He felt a need for such material as would be immediately intelligible, material either so simple that it could be grasped without strain or so basic and universal that it would have already been perceived by the viewer from his own life and background.

> In drama, therefore, an action can be explained only when it is completely vindicated by the feeling; and it thus is the dramatic poet's task, not to invent actions, but to make an action so intelligible through its emotional necessity that we may altogether dispense with the intellect's assistance in its vindication.[2]

Wagner, like Brecht and so many other dramatists, did not feel that his task as a poet and dramatist necessarily involved the generation of plots.

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[1]Richard P. Blackmur, "A Critic's Job of Work," *Problems in Aesthetics*, ed. Morris Weitz (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1959), p. 660.

[2]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 189.

He was content to reshape ideas which already existed, provided that they had the proper emotional increment. "The poet's attention has therefore to be principally fixed upon the choice of action. . . ."[1]

If Wagner had no intention of consciously constructing new plots, then there was a necessity for a return to the past, and to either what had historically existed or to what the people had formed in their racial myths. After his rather uninspired brush with historical material in *Rienzi*, Wagner turned emphatically away from this possible avenue of development. There was too much of a detailed nature involved in history; too many facts would have to be included: the drama would be crammed with the intellectually valid but the emotionally useless. Wagner had no use for

> . . . the vast mass of incidents and intricate associations, whereof no single link could be omitted if the connection of the whole was to be intelligibly set before the eye, [this] was adapted neither to the form nor to the spirit of drama. Had I chosen to comply with the imperative demands of history, then had my drama become an unsurveyable conglomerate of pictorial incidents, entirely crowding out from view the real and only thing I wished to show . . .[2]

Both history and the rather sprawling romance were too overburdened with detail. Both of them were unacceptable to Wagner.

This left Wagner free to respond to the temper of his time in which "The demand grew for the theatre as a refuge of 'the lost sense of myth,' a place to 'forget the incidental and cast memory once more back to the eternal.'"[3] His thoughts turned to the basic drama of our

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[1]Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, p. 367. The reference here is to plot detail which embodies a specific thought. This statement does not conflict with the earlier point of avoiding physical action in favor of ideas.

[2]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, pp. 265-266.

[3]Allan Lewis, *The Contemporary Theatre* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1962), p. 219.

civilization, the Greek plays, where

> . . . he found that Aeschylus and Sophocles had used the great myths of their people, and that by doing so they had brought their theatre into direct relation with the national life and thought. Why, then, could not he, by using the myths of the Teutonic races, create genuine works of art and re-knit the bond between the stage and the national heart?[1]

Not only did the myths go directly to the heart of human relations but they also had a timeless, Distanced quality which would strike an artist as sensitive as Wagner. In spite of the paradox of Wagner's desire for immediacy of emotional contact and the temporal distance of such subjects, the latter "is a strong factor in preserving the [Aesthetically Distanced] attitude. Pictures, plays, statues, which represent the life of the past generations hold the observer in the land of beauty with little difficulty."[2] The timelessness of these tales strongly suggested the eternal.

> Only the archetypal situation, which existed at the beginning of time and which would always exist, could serve Wagner's purpose of presenting life as the "resultant not of arbitrary forces but of eternal laws." And the archetypal situations could be found only in myths.[3]

Wagner was interested in using these tales for didactic purposes,[4] both for the inculcation of national pride and for the embodiment of basic problems of human life for which he felt he could point toward a solution. "This made his dramas interpretations rather than representations of experience, and his characters typical rather than individual."[5]

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[1]Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

[2]Langfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

[3]Goldman and Sprinchorn, *op. cit.*, p. 25. This was one of the points upon which Wagner and Brecht differed: Brecht denied eternal laws of this sort.

[4]"Only in the most perfect artwork therefore, in the drama, can the insight of the experienced one impart itself with full success . . ." *Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 188.

[5]Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

In the myth Wagner, along with many other artists of his period, found the ideal plastic substance from which to create anew.

> The rediscovery of myth provided the Romantic artist with an ideal solution to his problem, for myth arose from psychological depths even more profound than those plumbed by self-reflection, and myth likewise provided character, action, and locale of a kind suitable for epic or tragic treatment while remaining distinct from even the most idealized representations of actual life. Myth, as a symbolist critic has said, could "satisfy the intellect while safeguarding the rights of the dream."[1]

From *The Flying Dutchman* on, throughout the remainder of his career, Wagner relied upon the legendary, the mythological and the religious as the sources for his symbolic vessels of meaning.

The application of the concepts of empathy and Aesthetic Distance to mythological material is easily made. "In general it may be said that a play dealing with exotic or unfamiliar places and characters will bear stronger empathies than a play dealing with everyday life."[2] By removing the incidents of the drama from the normal sphere of everyday life, it is then possible to increase its empathic content without having the audience members project themselves into the situation too forcefully. The lack of contact with the period or location prevents the audience from reaching an ecstatic empathic state too easily. For this reason, the removal in time of the plot lines in the Wagnerian dramas allowed the composer to supercharge the emotional atmosphere of the poetic lines as well as of the musical lines. The gods, demi-gods, giants, dwarfs, dragons and other assorted creatures obviously did not dwell in this sphere, so if Wagner had them engage occasionally in adultery, incast and various other

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[1]Goldman and Sprinchorn, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[2]Dolman, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

empathically questionable activities, the Distancing helped the audience to maintain its emotional balance.

Other factors in the myths which helped to create Distance included these:

> . . . a play that is fancifully or idealistically treated will bear more empathy than one realistically treated. The material may be familiar enough, but if the spirit is one of idealization, that in itself helps to preserve aesthetic distance. All other things being equal, a costume play is less likely to break down under excessive realism than a play in modern dress; a play in verse is less likely than a play in prose; a play in the heroic mood is less likely than one in a plaintive or pessimistic mood. A little study of such contrasts will reveal a great deal about the balance of empathy and aesthetic distance.[1]

Wagner used every one of the Distancing devices mentioned above and then added the sheen of a new method of musical composition to an already complex and sophisticated art creation. In this massing of detail which produced an almost infinite number of aspects to which the audience might attend, Wagner seems a good example with which to support Bullough's statement, "In general the emphasis of composition and technical finish increases with the Distance of the subject-matter . . ."[2]

The works which Wagner created are so complex that

> The problem with Wagnerian stage art is how visually to present the different levels or planes on which it exists at one and the same time. Here the treatment of allegory and symbolism of Christianity or of classical myth was of course familiar to medieval audiences. A spectator of the "Ring" has no such levels or terms of reference. He has to bring, so to speak, his own contribution to a work of symbolic art.[3]

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[1]Dolman, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-223.

[2]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

[3]W. H. Haddon Squire, "Wagner's 'Endless Melody,'" *The Christian Science Monitor Magazine Section*, August 5, 1950, p. 7.

This multi-layered reality exists in large part because of the starting point in myths which had grown in complexity, profundity and references for hundreds or thousands of years. The Ring spectator who comes from a social background other than the Germanic does have to supply content which Wagner, and presumably most modern Germans, learned as children. But these nationalistic operas were written for the German people.

The Germanic myths were a perfect choice for his purposes: simple, emotional, symbolic, eternal, and strongly national.

THE MUSIC

The things which were radically different about the *Gesamtkunstwerk* flowed from Wagner's conception of music and of the relative importance of the various performing agencies. It was in his music, rather than in his dramas, that Wagner made his permanent contributions and where his theories have been most influential. The most important of these contributions was the Leitmotive which grew out of practices which the composer evolved while writing *The Flying Dutchman*.

> This first principle was that the musical expression of a particular mood, having been found, should be retained. "When a mental mood returned," he says, "its thematic expression also, as a matter of course, was repeated, since it would have been arbitrary and capricious to have sought another motive so long as the object was an intelligible representation of the subject and not a conglomeration of operatic pieces."[1]

This first principle of repetition was a step in the disposition of the set display-piece, the aria, since the aria was a complete musical entity which never reappeared in a conventional opera. At the same time this principle began the shaping of the musical form of the work and started the process of endowing a given theme or motive with many layers of

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[1]Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

meaning as it recurred in varying settings and consequently acquired different shadings of meaning. The "musical repetitions were bound to become numerous and to acquire from the text a direct and unmistakable significance . . ."[1]

When the rather lengthy themes used in the early works were shortened and were repeated often enough, they became Leitmotives, "the musical incarnation of a situation, a character, or a mood, from which all conceivable tonal and psychological mutations would follow later as a matter of course."[2] In short, the motives became "symbols, and hence arbitrary signs, but not more arbitrary than words. All language is arbitrary convention. Only the emotional elements at the bottom of it are real, absolute, universal."[3]

> The onlooker, who reads these symbols, will feel the emotions which normally accompany awareness of such symbols and their meaning and not the feeling which would have accompanied the events signified, were they actually taking place. . . . music symbolizes emotion; "music sounds the way emotions feel." Thus the listener's emotive set is that which accompanies awareness of music-as-symbol-of-such-and-such. The empathic responses to a work of art are, then, always elements within the larger whole response to the symbol.[4]

That final statement contains the link between the leitmotive and both elements of the Aesthetic Distance theory.

The Leitmotives of a Wagnerian opera

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[1]*Ibid.*, p. 188.

[2]Newman, *The Wagner Operas*, p. 195.

[3]Henry Edward Krehbiel, *Studies in the Wagnerian Drama* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1902), p. 21.

[4]Edward G. Ballard, *Art and Analysis* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957), p. 105.

> . . . are the easier to learn because they are repeated again and again; and the main ones are so emphatically impressed on the ear whilst the spectator is looking for the first time at the objects, or witnessing the first strong dramatic expression of the ideas they denote, that the requisite association is formed unconsciously.[1]

From these germinal motives, with their continually increasing increments of meaning, Wagner wove virtually the whole of the musical texture of his works. He bound the whole together through the repetitions of these motives in endlessly varied permutations and transformations, melodic, rhythmic and harmonic.

> So that this unity consists in a tissue of root themes pervading all the drama, themes which contrast, complete, reshape, divorce, and intertwine with one another as in the symphonic movement; only that here the needs of the dramatic action dictate the laws of parting and combining, which were there originally borrowed from the motions of the dance.[2]

If this kind of writing is properly done, the musical symbols or "leading motives serve simultaneously a psychological and a musical purpose . . ."[3] They become the most meaningful element in the drama and they allow a free but repetitive form for the musical portion of the music drama.

THE ORCHESTRA

The most startling thing about the motives to be used in Wagnerian operas was that, in the majority of their appearances, they were not given to the vocalists. Since Wagner's inspiration was symphonic in its origin, the obvious placement for the development of the motives was in the orchestra, not on the stage. Wagner had many reasons for this approach

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[1]Bernard Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the Nibling's Ring* (New York: Brentano's, 1929), p. 119.

[2]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, pp. 229-230.

[3]Newman, *The Wagner Operas*, p. 493.

but among the clearest were these:

> The poet's duty is to awaken in us a warning mood . . . so that, by means of its longing to become definite, we may be converted into his necessary co-workers in creation of the art-work. By causing us to feel this longing he acquires, as towards our excited sensibility, the conditioning power which alone can render it possible for him to give the required form to the characters he has in view, in full correspondence with his intention. It is in evoking such moods as the poet finds necessary for the purpose of securing our cooperation that absolute instrumental speech has already proved itself all-powerful; for it was precisely in the excitement of indeterminate and warning sensations that its peculiar effectiveness consisted . . .[1]

> If we must regard that artistic form as the highest which can be comprehended entirely without reflection, and by which the conception of the artist is most clearly communicated to the emotions, then, if we desire to find this form in the musical drama . . . , the orchestra of the symphonist is the marvellous instrument that alone can make a presentation of this form possible.[2]

The purpose of the augmented, Wagnerian, symphonic orchestra was to absorb and manipulate the motives, with all of their abstract, symbolic implications, thus granting to the orchestra the ability to participate in the development of the drama. If it possessed the power of utilizing the symbolic language of the motives, then the orchestra could comment on the action taking place on the stage, could overlay this action with still further implications by cross-reference to the qualities, attributes, conditions and personalities denoted by the motives. The orchestra could speak, saying precisely those things which the characters were unable to or would never commit themselves to saying. ". . . we have plainly to denote this speaking faculty of the orchestra as the faculty of uttering the unspeakable."[3]

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[1]Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, ii., p. 590.

[2]Wagner, "The Music of the Future," *Art Life and Theories*, p. 181.

[3]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 217.

He expected the orchestral transmutations of the motives to supply not only the musical fabric but references back to the motives' points of origin and, through the tendency of one phrase to lead inevitably to another, foreshadowings of the necessary development of the drama, musically and dramatically.

> We have already acquired from the orchestra the capability of awakening warnings and remembrances. We have conceived Warning to be the preparation for an appearance announcing itself finally in gesture and verse-melody. Remembrance, on the other hand, we have taken as derived from it . . .[1]

> It is quite clear to see that Wagner thought of these as complimentary and equally important functions of the orchestra, yet it is equally plain that the reminiscences could be much more precisely defined and that they were a far more effective integrating device. The motifs of reminiscence are the theoretical prototypes of what are now universally termed "Leitmotifs," . . .[2]

The key use for the motives was that of reminiscence. It is always relatively easy to cast the thoughts back to what has transpired; it is not always so easy to predict where the musical flow must go next, particularly in Wagner's later works where the transitions between any two motives might be most abrupt and justified only by what was occurring on the stage.

When a motive of reminiscence functioned in the prescribed manner,

> The sounding of this motif unites a non-present conditioning emotion with the present one conditioned by it.
>
> The genuine motifs of reminiscence, then, are a powerful device for binding together and tightening the structure of the musical drama . . .[3]

The orchestra could expound a motive of reminiscence, or one of premonition, at any moment within the score. The reason for its use

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[1]Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, ii., p. 602.

[2]Stein, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 77.

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might be that: (1) an object or a place was mentioned, or (2) a character might be thinking of things other than those under discussion (and the orchestra 'told' the audience of it), or (3) the orchestra, in an omnipotent manner, could inform the audience of the nature of something of which all characters on the stage might be ignorant,[1] or (4)

> . . . motifs of reminiscence [might] be used only at moments when the emotional level of the melodic verse falls to a point where its relationship with ordinary speech is most evident; that is to say, when it makes its appeal primarily to the intellect. At these moments, the motifs in the orchestra were to keep the emotional level high. His [Wagner's] exact words are, "The orchestra is the medium for maintaining the unity of expression at all times. Wherever, for the purpose of defining the dramatic situation more clearly, the word-tone language of the actors must . . . descend to the point where it reveals its kinship with the language of daily life as a medium of intellect, the orchestra compensates for this by its ability to convey the reminiscences and forebodings musically, so that the awakened feeling remains in its uplifted mood."[2]

In this manner, the orchestra, working with the motives, became the primary focus of attention and the primary generator of the Distanced form in a music drama.

MELODY

Since the normal operatic aria was banished from Wagner's later works and the bulk of the music was made up of two, three, and four bar motives, in infinite combinations, the question often posed was whether Wagner's operas were without melody. The answer to the question depended upon the nature of the definition one gave to the word melody. The

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[1]The first example of such a use of motives which comes to mind is in the conclusion of Act I of *Parsifal*. Neither Gurnemanz nor Parsifal realize that Parsifal is indeed the destined redeemer in the play. But if the audience knows the Redeemer motive, they can scarcely fail to hear it as the orchestra plainly says that Parsifal is the desired "pure fool."

[2]Stein, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97.

older, pattern-type melody, based upon the dance and its rhythms, was comparatively rare in the mature Wagner's creations; one thinks perhaps of the "Spring Song" in *Die Walküre*, of the "Quintet" or the "Prize Song" from *Meistersinger*, or of "Siegfried's Funeral March" from *Götterdämmerung;* these and some few other portions of various works function outside of the operas as independent musical creations. But this was not Wagner's primary concern. While he was perfectly capable of writing this type of melody, he was much more interested in evolving his melodies from the interplay of the motives of the drama. This led to a new type of melody, expressed in a different manner and with some rather surprising characteristics.

> . . . the Wagnerian melody is not subject to the laws of regular symmetrical construction, nor forced to move within the limits of one tonality, nor yet to end with a perfect cadence. Wagner's melody is free and infinite in the sense of not being finished, that is to say, never ending and always liking itself to another melody, thus admitting of all possible modulations. It is, if you prefer, an uninterrupted sequence of melodic contours, or broken bits of melody having more or less of a vocal character.[1]

Writing in this style one would seldom achieve a *bel canto* line such as the Italians or the French composed but, on the other hand, if the listener had the attention-span and pattern sense to recognize the repeated and distinctive elements, an entire act of one of Wagner's creations could be regarded as a single continuous melody. The precise nature of the melody depended upon no formal consideration, but rather upon the twists and turns of the plot line. Thus the melody and its sequence of parts would never be the same for any two Wagnerian works, even though they might deal with aspects of the same action, as in *The Ring*, and be

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[1]Lavignac, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-238.

composed of motives the audience had heard before. " . . . in following this method a richness and inexhaustibleness [sic] are added to melody and its form, of which, without this method, one can form no idea."[1] Here was a contrapuntal, polyphonic method at least as rich as that of Bach, and with the same demand for strict audience attention and recognition of technical mastery. To be fully aware of the nature of such a melody, the audience had to be highly Distanced at all times and, to derive the maximum of communication from the music, it had to be actively engaged in abstractive activity, rather than simply responding to the sensual aspects of the sounds.[2]

This conception of melody, growing out of the leitmotive and centered primarily in the orchestra, called for a number of realignments in the balance of the opera as a whole. The leitmotive has been "charged with having transformed the operatic score into symphony with declamatory and pantormimic accompaniment."[3] If the melody was to be located somewhere other than in the singer, then quite often "the singer . . . [was] allotted a form of recitative known as *Sprechgesang*; but this itself demands melodious delivery . . ."[4] Finally, with the involved melodic themes "became a descriptive essence of the drama itself; often so graphically indicating the nature of a character's thought that his

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[1]Wagner, "The Music of the Future," *Art Life and Theories*, p. 174.

[2]This is not what Wagner's theories indicate that he wanted but it is the inevitable response of the audience if it is to understand and respond to the music. There is an obvious conflict between Wagner's stated aim and the specific method he used to achieve his purposes.

[3]W. J. Henderson, *Preludes and Studies* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1894), p. 51.

[4]Audrey Williamson, *Wagner Opera* (London: John Colder [Publisher] Ltd., 1962), p. 72.

his words are almost superfluous."[1] But all of these shifts in emphasis were accomplished in a *Gesamtkunstwerk* and a balance was struck which can be felt if it cannot be formally described.

Not all of the music in a music drama was strictly derived from the motives; there was in this, according to Lavignac, the possibility of too much tension.[2] So, instead, there were occasional set-pieces (melodies which could be given to the organ-grinder, as Wagner said) and "purely scenic music, such as that of the sailors in the first scene of 'Tristan und Isolde,' or the 'Waldweben' of 'Siegfried.'"[3] These elements either eased the tension or painted mood-pictures with a few deft strokes of absolute music. It was in such scenic music and in his motive-based melodies that Wagner "found an agency for symbolism in the poetic drama far beyond the loftiest dreams of the poet of the spoken play."[4]

Here, again, one is made aware of the multi-layered, abstractive and symbolic activity pitted against the super-sensual and empathic technique which Wagner evolved. The tension generated between these activities pulling the viewer in opposite directions is half the fascination of Wagner's work. It is also the factor which positions the audience member properly in relation to the extremes of the Aesthetic Distance scale.

FINAL MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Three final points of importance to this study should be made in regard to Wagner's musical methods. They concern his special use of key

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] Lavignac, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

[3] Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 189.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 206.

relationships, the length of his operas, and the fact that his leitmotive system is based upon an abstractive use of the memory rather than upon mere emotion. "In the musical poetic verse, by means of key relationships expressed through modulation from one key to another, a more extensive alliteration is possible."[1] Indeed, Wagner used alliterative key relationships,[2] assigning like-natured themes to the same key in their original introduction or restricting the variations of a theme to given keys, in order to produce, for the musically minded, the same effects of linkage which he achieved through normal alliteration in the poetry. Secondly, for those who were capable of following such subtle matters, the composer again provided an abstract, symbolic method of perceiving relationships which could be stated in no other manner. Such perceptions could come only to the trained ear which was supported by a highly Distanced mind.

Since "Wagner conceived the music to be inseparable from the speech [the dialogue of his works] and therefore to be completed only at the end of the drama,"[3] he might well speak of continuous expression and boast: "We have shown it as a thing by all means possible . . ."[4] What is not generally remembered except by those who are bored by Wagnerian performances, is the actual length of time involved in this flow of continuous expression. *The Ring of the Nibelungen* is actually a single composition,

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[1]Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

[2]" . . . the Walhalla motiv affects keys abounding in flats; the Sword appears most often in C major; the Fire much prefers sharps; the Walkyrie sleeps in E major, etc." Lavignac, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

[3]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, pp. 186-187.

[4]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 230.

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[1]Haezrahi,

in four parts, a dramatic symphony which extends over fourteen hours of performance, with each sub-drama lasting around four hours, the prelude alone being shorter. The span of comprehension demanded of the auditor is almost unbelievable. Certainly no one could remain, as Wagner wished, in an ecstatic, empathic relationship with anything for such a period, not even a Wagnerian score. Somewhere during the performance, the time span in which the work is cast will prevent Wagner's intention of hypnotizing the audience throughout the performance and the auditor's attention is bound to turn to other things, usually to flaws in the performance: Fafner-dragons which are merely laughable, missed notes in the almost two-octave leaps, etc. When this sort of break occurs through sheer fatigue of the powers of perception, the auditor has to be lured back into the drama through means other than empathy, through ideas.

The part to be played in the perception of Wagner's works by abstraction and the generally Distanced attitude has been implied throughout this chapter but it can, perhaps, be summarized by two quotations:

> . . . if the listener does not remain conscious of the craftsmanship, the form, the art in the music he hears, then as he is more securely bound by the enchantment of sound and as the intensity of his enchantment grows it comes to owe less and less to the composer.[1]

This, of course, was what Wagner thought he wanted but, in reality, no artist wants his audience to drift away from the art work into their own private thoughts and pay no attention to the art object once it has stimulated a chain of reflection. The mutually contradictory nature of Wagner's demands are made quite clear here:

> Does the composition, as a whole, touch the emotions, quicken the fancy, fire the imagination?" If it does these things, we

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[1]Haezrahi, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

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> may, to a great extent, if we wish, get along without the intellectual processes of reflection and comparison, which are conditioned upon a recognition of the themes and their uses. But if we put aside this intellectual activity, we shall deprive ourselves, among other things, of the pleasure which it is the province of memory to give; and the exercise of memory is called for by music much more urgently than by any other art, because of its volatile nature and the role which repetition plays in it.[1]

The Distanced attitude is important in even this most designedly empathic and emotional music.

SUMMARY

An attempt has been made here to explain most of the aspects of Wagner's all-embracing *Gesamtkunstwerk* theory and to demonstrate how each of these parts referred in one way or another to the idea of Aesthetic Distance and its sub-divisions.

The history of Wagner's revolutionary activity and of its divergence into art channels and the history of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept were sketched in order to show that Wagner's ideas were firmly grounded upon the social and artistic ideas of his day and of the Romantic period as a whole. This section also clearly indicates attitudes and circumstances which Bertolt Brecht was to duplicate two generations later.

The central core around which the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was always centered, in Wagner's mind, was the Drama. The telling of a concentrated, emotional, symbolic tale was the sole purpose announced for a music drama. Unlike the conventional opera, music was not the focal point of interest: the drama was. Wagner refused to distort his plot line or to restrict it to the usual operatic form because this would have resulted in a lessenging of its dramatic effectiveness. He refused to give the audience

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[1]Krehbiel, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

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or the singers mere display pieces or to bow to their wishes in regard to the other standard aspects of opera. He was determined to tell a dramatic story.

> And it was this doing away with all "concession" in the matter of the subject, which made it possible for me to also do away with it in the musical execution; and in these things, taken together, you will perhaps find the best example of what my "innovation" really consists in . . .[1]

Wagner composed his dramas in poetic form because of tradition, the ease with which poetic lines, of the right sort, could be adapted to musical ends and because he thought he detected in the myth-generating minstrel-poet of the ancient world a basic prototype of what an artist should be.

His form of poetry was radically different from Shakespearean or neo-classical stage speech, growing, as it did, out of his sensitivity to particular vowel and consonant sounds. The form he finally gave to his poetic line was that of the alliterative *Stabreim* or staff-rhyme, modified somewhat in order to give more prominence to the vowels. The whole of his poetry was characterized by alliteration, condensation, free rhythm and vowel stress.

The sources for his plot-lines were ancient myths, legends, religious symbols and other artifacts of the long-vanished days which marked the beginnings of the Teutonic peoples. By drawing upon these orally preserved repositories of the folk-wisdom of the people, he could be sure of touching upon archetypal situations which would display basic human relationships. Wagner could deal with basic ethical problems and show how his people, in their aggregate wisdom, had decided that such things should be

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[1]Wagner, "The Music of the Future," *Art Life and Theories*, p. 188.

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handled. By so doing, he secured material which he could translate into a musical form easily and he felt that he would be fostering national pride at the same time. The myth was the most natural subject in the world for him.

The music with which he clothed his dramas was the most unconventional part of his creations. Wagner rejected the formal, pattern-style music since it lacked the flexibility which would allow it to follow the dramatic action and it was likely to lead into unnecessary ornamentation of a purely musical and non-dramatic sort.

In lieu of the usual sort of music used in operas, Wagner substituted a series of extremely short musical phrases, called leitmotives, which were intended to depict some aspect or characteristic of people, places and things which played important parts in the drama. These musical symbols, used to create forebodings and reminiscences, played primarily by the orchestra, and used in every conceivable manner and transformation, resulted, in their interweaving, in the generation of a continuous melody which could be sustained in unbroken emotional intensity for the entire length of an act. Because of its origination out of the intricacies of the plot of the drama, such a melody had no formal or symmetrical shape and avoided all unnatural repetitions. Its character and complexity were entirely dependent upon the requirements of the emotional states depicted on the stage.

The action of the dramas was clearly visualized by Wagner, often as a method whereby he could find points upon which to secure the further musical development, but he never theoretically explained the generation of a word-tone drama's action.

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The conscious intent on Wagner's part, in all cases, seems to have been the elimination of thought and the emphasizing of completely emotional, empathic responses. This was his announced goal; this was the apparent explanation of many parts of his theory and his practice. Yet that he was acutely aware of the necessity of Aesthetic Distance was amply shown by his selection of tales from other times, which, through a process of condensation and magnification could show types, not individuals, operating in a different time scale to present eternal truths in a poetic form. Nor could he have subconsciously escaped knowing that music of the complexity which he wrote and dependent as it was upon the conscious awareness of the audience of the associations and intimations of each motive, demanded a more specifically chosen Distance than did the formal nature of all previous operatic music. The audience must think during the performance of a Wagnerian opera or the whole point of the creation, musically and dramatically, will be missed. Aesthetic Distance, much as Wagner might have tried to deny it, was just as important to his works as it is to all other art. There was a balance struck between the abstractive and the emotional in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

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CHAPTER IV

WAGNER'S OPERAS

Having considered Wagner's extremely involved and exhaustive theories, even in the highly condensed form presented in the previous chapter, one might well come to the conclusion that the dramas which would result from the application of such detailed theorizing would be cold and forbidding. Of course, Wagner's works are anything but that. His sole purpose in evolving such highly intellectual and abstractive theories was just to put into concrete form the techniques and devices by which he subconsciously and instinctively wrote his major works.[1] The point of those works, as has undoubtedly been stressed enough, was to directly affect the emotions of the auditors, not to stimulate their intellectual participation.[2]

In Wagner's mind at the time he wrote his major operas, the play was the thing and those seeking some acquaintance with his work are well advised to begin their studies with the libretti. Even if the reader

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[1]" . . . I felt myself compelled to treat what had become certain and indubitable to me in my own artistic observations and production, as a theoretical problem, in order to make it entirely clear to my reflective consciousness." Wagner, "The Music of the Future," p. 161.

[2]"And it is only in the most perfect art-work, the drama, that the poet's insight into life can find complete expression, because this drama will address not the understanding, but the feeling, through the senses. It will present the poet's view of life physically to the eye; it will be a true emotionalisation of the intellect." Wagner quoted in Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, pp. 201-202.

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assumes, as most people seem to today,[1] that Wagner was primarily a musician and only secondarily a poet or a playwright, the study of the texts of his works is still important: "By the text the music must be measured. By the text the music must be understood. By the music the text is illuminated and made vital. But every measure of Wagner's music is explained by the poetry."[2] Therefore, it is proposed that this chapter be devoted to an examination of the texts, with attention paid to the music only as one element among many for the furtherance of the dramatic action.

If these works are to be regarded as dramas, then an assumption is made that they may be criticised and evaluated, much as any other play might be. As a result, a sketch of the plot of the work to be considered will be given and then it will be more closely examined on the basis of Aristotle's division of a drama into (1) plot, (2) character, (3) thought, (4) diction, (5) music and (6) spectacle. The comments offered here are in no sense to be regarded as a complete criticism, but rather as a discussion which is dominated by the idea of Aesthetic Distance.

Before considering the dramas individually, it may be well to stress to the reader certain aspects of these plays which apply equally to all of them; in this way a certain amount of repetition within each section will be avoided.

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[1]"The musician in Wagner ruled the poet is plain enough to us now, but the perception of this truth was always denied to Wagner himself." Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist,* p. 216. "Wagner the musician invariably prevails. He is better than his theories, better than his philosophy, better than his drama, essential as those are." Lawrence Gilman, *Wagner's Operas* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1937), p. 104.

[2]Henderson, *Richard Wagner,* p. 219.

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[3]Ballard,

There are stylistic features imparted to any work intended as either an opera or as a music-drama which will determine in large measure the spectator's reaction to the work.

> The inner means which art possesses do not, like its outward means, impose, but merely suggest, the aesthetic distance to the spectator. These means are rhythm, harmony, the dialectics of composition, symbolism, and chiefly, style.[1]

All of these apply quite clearly to Wagner's efforts, some of them being more obvious in their application to a musical work than to a normal stage play. All will be considered at various places throughout the following discussion, along with comments on the outward means, such as staging, scale, etc., but the factor which the author wishes to stress at the moment is that of symbolism, a definite and conscious method of producing Distance. While Wagner is regarded as a Romantic composer, he must be classified as a symbolist playwright. There is no one of his mature works which does not exist on two or more levels at the same time. Wagner was aware of this aspect of his work and used it for ethical and didactic purposes.[2] Whether Wagner consciously chose symbolism as a Distancing device is certainly debatable, but he did employ it and he spared no pains to point out how symbolic the works were. Most of his prose expositions of his ideas and methods are dominated by Wagner's own awareness of the symbolic nature of his work. Subconsciously he must have known that "Aesthetic distance is maintained when the symbolic status of the object is acknowledged."[3]

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[1]Michelis, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[2]"According to Wagner, then, true art possesses such a dignity that we may find the highest instruction even in its ruins; they teach us, not how to make works of art, but how to fashion our lives. Chamberlain, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

[3]Ballard, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

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This emotionally oriented artist fully acknowledged the intellectual purpose and the symbolic intent of his compositions.

To further indicate Wagner's awareness of the need for detachment or disinterestedness in order to comprehend the art work and its content, overt and covert, he said:

> Each manifestation in it [the art work] must be complete in itself in order that our feeling in respect of it may be pacified, for it is in this pacification of the feeling after extreme arousal to sympathy that the very rest is found which leads us to an instinctive understanding of life.[1]

This quotation does insist upon the emotional, sympathetic, and empathetic aspect of art works, but places their ultimate value, derived in Wagner's case from a dispassionate appraisal of the content after the conclusion of the production, in the aesthetic repose or the contemplative attitude which results from using the total range of Aesthetic Distance.

THE EARLY OPERAS

> It is customary to divide the artistic career of Wagner into three periods, the first embracing the production of the early works and "Rienzi," the second that of "Der Fliegende Holländer," "Tannhäuser," and "Lohengrin," and the third that of the remaining works.[2]

It is this plan which will be followed here.

In the first period there are four operas, all bearing many of the same characteristics. After a thumbnail sketch of the plot of each, the similarities of the pieces in the group will be discussed.

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[1]Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, p. 366.

[2]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 213.

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DIE HOCHZEIT (THE WEDDING, 1832)

This incomplete first attempt at an opera is a darker version of the Romeo and Juliet story. At a wedding feast, the son of one of the feuding families falls madly in love with the bride from the other family. When he climbs to the tower chamber where the bride waits for her new groom, she resists his advances and pushes him off the balcony to his death. While preparations for the funeral are going on, the boy's family prepares to renew the feud.

> When the avengers of the presumed treachery penetrate into the chapel and call upon the murderer to declare himself, the horrified lord of the manor points towards his daughter, who, turning away from her bridegroom, falls lifeless by the coffin of her victim.[1]

DIE FEEN (THE FAIRIES, 1833)

A human prince who loved a fairy failed the tests which would enable the latter to become a human and his wife. As a result she is taken to the nether world and turned to stone. When the Fates offer the prince a chance to rescue her or share her doom forever, he accepts the challenge and fights his way past the monsters of Hell to reach her. Once there, his song of love and longing moves the stone to tears and the fairy is released. While she cannot become a human now, the prince has earned the right to join her in fairyland.

DAS LIEBESVERBOT (THE BAN ON LOVE, 1836)

The plot of this work follows that of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, except that Wagner solved the plot complications through the use of a rebellion during a carnival.

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[1]Wagner, *My Life*, p. 83.

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RIENZI (1840)

Rienzi leads the people of Rome in a successful revolt against the corrupt nobles. Once the defeated nobles have pledged allegiance to Rienzi as Tribune, they are released. When they renew the revolution, Rienzi wins a second battle with them. But a former friend stirs up the people against Rienzi and they finally stone him and burn down the Capitol around him.

All of these works are conventionally operatic and reflect a desire to perpetuate the methods of the normal operas of the period. The young Wagner, the Wagner of his teens and twenties, was not the artistic rebel he was to become at a later period.

> His first artistic beliefs were founded on the theory that not the ground-plan, but the external treatment of the grand opera was at fault. He fancied that he could preserve the element which has been called "art-formalistic" and yet reach dramatic verity. He aimed at a consistent embodiment of character in his hero; he sought to give to all the factors of the opera, even such accessories as the ballet, a direct and powerful dramatic significance; but it had not yet come to him that he must, in order to make a consistent drama in music, sacrifice form to content, and get rid of the whole mechanical apparatus of the spectacular opera.[1]

As a result, every musical, and many of the staging elements against which Wagner was to rebel at a later period were retained here: the balanced forms of complete, separable melodies; the light, tripping melodies which were distinctive in and of themselves and which had comparatively little emotional molding to the action; stock effects such as mad scenes which permitted extravagant forms of melodic ornamentation; and the derivation of clearly recognizable melodic turns from other musicians rather than from the nature of the dramatic material.

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[1]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 227.

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While these works do contain some of the ideas (such as redemption through love) which were to dominate Wagner's whole creative life, basically these were nothing but artificial, Over-Distanced, perfectly normal examples of opera in that period. It was only when Wagner abandoned such greatly Distanced concepts and tried to replace them with wholly empathic alternatives that he started on the path toward his revolution in opera.

THE MIDDLE PERIOD

DER FLIEGENDE HOLLÄNDER (THE FLYING DUTCHMAN, 1841)

Act I. A storm drives the vessels of a merchantman Daland and Van der Decken, the Flying Dutchman, into a Norwegian bay. When Van der Decken sets foot on land, he soliloquizes in the first of the famous Wagnerian narratives. Trying to round the Cape of Good Hope against a wind, the Dutchman blasphemously swore that he would do it if it took him all of eternity. He was thereupon condemned to sail the seas forever unless he could find a woman who would be faithful to him until death. He is permitted to come ashore once every seven years to search for such a savior, but by now he despairs of ever finding a true woman. When Daland joins him, the Dutchman discovers that he has a daughter and immediately asks for her hand. The father, having seen some of the wealth on board the Dutchman's vessel, consents and they both sail to Daland's home.

Act II. At Daland's house, the girls of the crewmen are spinning and waiting for the return of the ship. Senta, Daland's daughter, does not join the work but dreams before a picture of the Dutchman and sings the ballad of his fate. Erik, the huntsman who loves Senta, arrives to report the return of Daland's ship and to tell of a dream of his about a mysterious stranger who carried Senta off to sea. Her delight at the

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idea of the dream-stranger being the Dutchman drives Erik away. When Daland and the suitor arrive, the Dutchman and Senta gaze at each other in hypnotic fascination. Senta hardly acknowledges Daland's presentation of the man as her betrothed, but in their duet, Senta swears to be true till death.

Act III. The Norwegian crew, celebrating the return and the engagement, can raise no sign of life on the Dutchman's ship until a terrifying chorus drives them away in superstitious fear. Senta comes down to the shore trying to escape Erik, who accuses her of deserting him. The Dutchman overhears this and assumes that Senta's vow is or will be broken. He releases her from her promise, reveals who he is and boards his ship to resume his wandering. As he sails away, Senta breaks free of Erik and her father and plunges over a cliff and into the sea, faithful unto death. The phantom ship immediately sinks, the curse is broken, and Senta and the Dutchman ascend to heaven.

As can readily be seen, his plot, stripped to its bare essentials, consists mostly of psychological, rather than actual, events. We are concerned primarily with the internal, rather than the external lives of the characters. Wagner remarked on this concentration and elimination of unnecessary features, saying:

> In the "Flying Dutchman" I first really turned my attention to keeping the action to its simplest features, to leaving out all useless details such as the intrigues of everyday life; and, on the other hand to bringing out those features more broadly, which, seeming to me coincident with the peculiarities of the motives involved, placed the characteristic coloring of the legendary subject in the right light, in such a way that this coloring itself became action.[1]

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[1]Wagner, "The Music of the Future," p. 171.

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What Wagner sought, for the first time in this work, was an abstraction of reality which was still intimately related to the known world but which acquired the peculiar lucidity and flavor, the impact, of a properly circumscribed presentation of eternal features. He did this in the *Dutchman* and in the remainder of his work for the very reasons which Bullough gives as an explanation for desiring the Distancing process:

> A condensement of the shape of actual life, however, can be comprehended by the latter only when--as compared with itself--it appears magnified, strengthened, unaccustomed. It is just in his busy scattering through time and space, that man cannot understand his own life energy: but the image of this energy, as brought within the compass of his understanding, is what the poet's shapings offer him for view; an image wherein this energy is condensed into an utmost-strengthened "moment," which, taken apart, most certainly seems wondrous and unwonted, yet shuts within itself its own unwontedness and wondrousness, and is in nowise taken by the beholder for a wonder but apprehended as the most intelligible representment of reality.[1]

The very basis of the creative act with Wagner was the stripping away of irrelevant, practical details to leave a clearly stated, interestingly presented core of truth which struck the viewer with great force, which captured and compelled his attention completely.

The restriction of the action led to another of Wagner's immediately apparent attributes: he lingered upon an idea or a situation until it was not only fully stated but drained and exhausted of any further possible development. This accounted for the extensiveness of most of the narratives and many of the hour-long scenes or acts in his work. The reason Wagner gave for such extended development was:

> Upon the working out of these fewer scenes, in each of which a decisive mood was to be given its full play, I might linger with an exhaustiveness already reckoned for in the original draft; I was not compelled to make shift with mere suggestion--to hasten on from one suggestion to another; but with needful

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[1] *Wagner on Music and Drama*, pp. 192-193.

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> repose I could display the simple object in the very last connections required to bring it clearly home to the dramatic understanding.[1]

His intuitive grasp of the necessity for the exhaustive development of ideas and situations when one seeks to create an empathic bond with the spectator, is a valid one. Without such completeness, the creator must rely upon "mere suggestion," upon the abstraction with all of its allusions and upon a far more Distanced frame of mind.

However, when he found it necessary, the emotional flow of the music often allowed Wagner to gloss over points or faults which would be more apparent in a spoken drama and which would, consequently, require explanation. As an example, neither the Dutchman's narrative nor Senta's ballad, as effective as they are, explain many portions of the curse which call for logical clarification. Why Satan should be the one to lay the curse upon the man; who or what the bright angel was who arranged the terms for his possible salvation; why the love of a faithful woman should be the redeeming element in this situation; what prompted the seven year term or how the Dutchman acquired the ship full of treasure--all are questions which are never considered within the drama. During a performance, such empathically disturbing questions are not even likely to occur to the spectator, thanks to the blanketing and emotionally unifying effect of the music.

Only one other plot element having to do with the attitude of the audience, the exact degree of Distance they assume in relation to the event, needs to be pointed out here. It is the apparent lack of comprehension on the part of most of the characters of the nature of the Dutchman and his ship. No one in the drama appears to be aware of the strange

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 267.

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blood-red sails and black masts of the Dutchman's ship until the sailor's chorus in Act III, in spite of their accurate description in the ballad and the apparent knowledge of the legend on the part of the sailors. By the same token, a picture of the Dutchman, a picture which is sufficiently accurate for Senta to recognize him immediately, hangs in Daland's home and yet all but Senta are horrified by his revelation of his identity just before he leaves in Act III. No one has noticed his resemblance to the portrait. Such flaws in the construction of the drama will normally have one of two effects upon the spectators. Either they will be badly disturbed by the flaws, perhaps to the point of being unable to accept the 'reality' of the characters and events and consequently lose empathic contact with the story, or they will simply accept such lapses as flaws in an otherwise acceptable art work. One attitude represents the destruction of the Distanced frame of mind by the intrusion of non-aesthetic elements into the field of perception and the other displays an adjustment which depends upon accepting as necessary a greater degree of abstraction and a resultant reduction in the empathic participation in the tale. The second reaction creates an attitude which is firmly held within the Distance-limits.

A good deal has been said already about the character of the Dutchman. The only other aspect of Van der Decken's (the Dutchman's) character which deserves immediate consideration is the deliberate manner in which Wagner would have him played from his first appearance to the end of Act II. He is called upon, by the author, to give the impression of a death-seeking, cursed, infinitely weary and almost non-human person. Only when there is some hope, that through Senta he may find redemption and release, does the character relax from his statuesque and highly Distanced attitude. During the love duet of Act II,

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> . . . his love for Senta displays itself at once in terror of the danger she herself incurs by reaching out a rescuing hand to him. It comes over him as a hideous crime, and in his passionate remonstrance against her sharing in his fate he becomes a human being through and through, whereas he hitherto had often given us but the grim impression of a ghost.[1]

Such a reduction in Distance, removing the uncomfortable stiffness of the character and replacing it with the empathy-provoking, thoroughly human attitude of love afforded a release of tension for the audience which accorded beautifully with the flowering of love depicted on the stage. Such an effect would draw the viewer further into the drama and, at the same time, impart at least some of the sense of relief and joy embedded in the words and music through a shift of his position on the Distance-scale.

Wagner knew that the Daland character was sketched in with such broad strokes of his musical brush that, without a sympathetic and intelligent actor-singer in the role, this character could easily be too Distanced to be believable. For that reason he said, " . . . I beseech the exponent of Daland not to drag his role into the region of the positively comic . . ."[2] This effect unfortunately could be generated by even the slightest increase in the already high degree of abstraction employed.

> While tragedy places the reader at the heart of the situation, comedy does not; it removes him to a distance from which he can look at the absurdities of characters . . .[3]

With comedy being a more abstracted form, any large degree of abstractive Distance in the midst of a more empathic event is likely to seem comic, hence the danger of the Daland character.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 334.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 335.

[3] Judah Bierman, James Hart and Stanley Johnson, *The Dramatic Experience* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1958), p. 363.

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In Senta, there is a fine balancing between the loving warmth of the woman and the irrational, mystical urge which drives her on to the salvation of the Dutchman. Such continuous movement along the Distance-scale as is required to adjust to the differing elements of her personality, never being sure what the exactly appropriate attitude for the following moment will be, lends a degree of complexity and humanity to Senta which none of the other characters possess in the same degree.

Wagner was still close enough to his early, purely operatic works so that there was no great change in style in the poetic setting of his piece. The older, more purely operatic form of verse setting used here led Wagner into a formal mannerism that he was later to deplore and banish from his work: " . . . the meaningless repetition of words in order to spread the music, [a device which] would not have been counted as a fault at that time by audiences who cared nothing for the words."[1]

In the music, Wagner began the process of composition with the spinning song and the sailor's chorus. Only when he was working on the ballad of Senta in the second act did the first principles of the leitmotiv system occur to the composer.[2] Once he had found the right emotional expression for a person, place, situation or condition, he moved the motives as a whole and repeated them basically in their original orchestration so that they reappeared in a known form and underwent minimal development of a symphonic nature. This device was used only minimally in this work but it was to be developed more fully in each succeeding opera.

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[1]Finck, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

[2]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 244.

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This music is lush and romantic and not so greatly different harmonically from the norm of the period so that anyone would have trouble responding to it empathically except for that portion of the music which supports the supernatural parts of the plot.

> The great difficulty of the representation is with the two ships. . . . The stage-directions are that the ships are "anchored close to the shore," and close to each other . . .[1]

Moreover, the effect is repeated; it occurs in both Acts I and III. A designer must crowd onto the average operatic stage (1) an inlet with a certain amount of water, (2) a rocky boundary for the body of water, for Senta must have a cliff from which to jump, (3) two ships in some sort of normal scale or at least large enough for the crew members to be seen moving upon their decks, and in Act III (4) a portion of Daland's house! This setting is so improbable in most theatres that the audience finds it impossible to believe in the reality of the arrangments. They have to accept the things shown as being merely symbols of reality and then turn their attention to other parts of the production. Otherwise, the faulty setting will cause them to be Over-Distanced, unbelieving and cold toward the drama as a whole.

TANNHÄUSER AND THE CONTEST OF SONG ON THE WARTBURG (1845)

Act I. After having spent some months in the sensuous Venusburg caverns in the arms of Venus, Tannhäuser, a minstrel-knight, has grown weary of continuous love and beauty. He pleads with Venus for release, but only after promising that he will sing her praises alone and then calling upon the Virgin Mary for salvation, does the heat-filled grotto

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[1]George Ainslie Hight, *Richard Wagner: A Critical Biography* (London: J. W. Arrowsmith, Ltd., 1925), pp. 131-132.

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vanish, to be replaced by the cool, green valley of the Wartburg. There the repentant knight is discovered by a hunting party made up of the Landgrave, Wolfram, and the remainder of Tannhäuser's friends from the period before he vanished. In his shame, Tannhäuser avoids their questions about his activities and refuses to join them. Only when Wolfram tells him that Elizabeth, the Landgrave's niece, refuses to visit their hall of song in his absence does Tannhäuser agree to follow them to Wartburg castle.

Act II. In the castle, Elizabeth and Tannhäuser are reunited by Wolfram just before the guests arrive for a contest of song. When all are assembled and the song competition on the topic "What is love?" is begun, Tannhäuser interrupts Wolfram's rhapsody of love as worship from afar and sings his wild paeon in praise of Venus. All are horrified and only Elizabeth's intervention prevents the knights from slaying Tannhäuser. He is spared on the condition that he join a group of pilgrims journeying to Rome and there ask pardon from the Pope.

Act III. In the autumn of the year, both Elizabeth and Wolfram await Tannhäuser's return at a roadside shrine where all the pilgrims pass. He is not among the absolved who file past and Elizabeth returns to the Wartburg to die of a broken heart. The ragged Tannhäuser appears and is persuaded to tell of his painful journey and the Pope's rejection of one as guilty as he. According to the Pope, he can no more be pardoned his profane love than the Pontiff's staff can bear new leaves. Tannhäuser, having given up all hope, now seeks the path back to Venus; but just as she appears and welcomes him, Wolfram points out Elizabeth's funeral procession. Venus vanishes. Tannhäuser appeals to Holy St. Elizabeth to intercede for him and he dies. The young pilgrims enter with news of a miracle: the Pope's staff has borne leaves as a sign of forgiveness.

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In this work the spectator is plunged into the supernatural with no preparation other than the wild Venusberg music which follows the overture. There are revels and love-making in Venus' cavern, but there is also the unholy overlay of the supernatural and the absolute surfeit of emotion of which Tannhäuser complains. Wagner, rejecting sensual love, as he does throughout this piece, created the display of Venus' seductions and then intensified them in the Paris revisions, not in order to promote unhallowed love, but to show, first of all, why a man might be induced to go to the goddess's cave as a motivation for the earlier conduct of Tannhäuser, and then, by exceeding all reasonable bounds, to provide a reason for his desire to escape. By using both ends of the Distance-scale, by heightening the initially pleasant empathic response to such a degree that a compensating movement into the abstract area of the scale become necessary, Wagner provided a reasonable motivation for most of what Tannhäuser does in Act I.

The process of foreshadowing a later development is an ancient and time-honored Distancing device. It supplies much of the sense of inevitability in the ancient Greek dramas and it is used with great consistency by Wagner in Tannhäuser's foretelling that he will sing the praises of Venus wherever he goes. The effect of such premonitions is a formal one. When the precise event which has been foretold comes to be, the audience derives a sense of completion, a release of the tension which was generated by the earlier suggestions. Such devices as dreams, premonitions, promises and prophecies appear to be in the abstractive, structuring range. In this work, Tannhäuser's promise returns to haunt him in the contest scene and precipitates the climax.

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[1]William

[2]Wagner,

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[3]William

"To Wagner, dramatically, this [contest] was the key scene for Tannhäuser, though he could get no tenor to value it in comparison with the great dramatic Rome Narration of the third act."[1] In fact, he regarded it as the key scene of the opera and it is interesting to note that it moves from the easily empathic meeting of Elizabeth and Tannhäuser, through the formal pomp of the assemblage of the knights and the cool, reserved nature of Wolfram's song, to the impassioned and excessive Venuslied, which, in turn, prompts a formal attack upon the singer, which can only be averted by an impassioned plea on the part of Elizabeth. The outcome of it all is the formal resolve to seek pardon, a relatively Distanced, mental reaction. Wagner prided himself upon his ability to control an audience's reaction in such a widely varying scene and he felt that he secured his most artistic effects through the calming of such overwrought emotions: " . . . just in the very gradual calming down of the highest excitement, as represented in this scene, I discover my greatest merit in the interest of dramatic truth."[2] In spite of all of his conscious desires and all of his theories, the very thing Wagner chose as the best representation of his efforts was a controlled movement <u>away</u> from the empathic and toward the more formulated and controlled.

The effect of Tannhäuser's character may not always be what Wagner intended: "He is not a particularly sympathetic character, too easily fluctuating between sacred and profane love and then lapsing into rather grovelling self-abasement . . ."[3] This critic has at least hit upon the

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[1]Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

[2]Wagner, *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt*, letter of January 30, 1852, p. 190.

[3]Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

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specific characteristic which Wagner said distinguishes Tannhäuser:

> The essential feature of Tannhäuser's character is his instant and complete saturation with the emotions called up by the passing incident, and the lively contrasts which the sudden changes of situation produce in his utterance of this fulness of feeling. Tannhäuser is never a "little" anything, but each thing fully and completely.[1]

Wagner sought an interpretation of this character which would swing radically and quickly from one end of the Distance-scale to the other. Whether a spectator or critic finds him somewhat unsympathetic or " . . . the most pathetic figure to be found among all the characters of Wagner"[2] depends primarily upon the critic's ability to make corresponding Distance-shifts as they are demanded by the changes in the character.

The two principle female roles, Elizabeth and Venus, represent violently varying attitudes toward women and their role in the world. Of course, Elizabeth, representing the 'proper' attitude and eliciting the majority of the sympathy and empathy is the more fully developed character. Venus remains largely a symbol, a more abstract means of indicating a state or condition.

Empathy is not supposed to function in relation to things like Venus' love, which are presumably (at least for the purposes of this drama) not approved by most people. Theodor Lipps, the foremost theorist of empathy says:

> The only condition under which the state of mind presented to me gives me pleasure is when I 'approve' it . . . 'Approval' is the actual harmony of my present nature and activity with what I approve. Just so I must 'approve' the

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[1]Henderson, *Richard Wagner,* p. 265.

[2]Claude Phillips, "The Conception of Love in Wagner," *Studies in Music,* ed. Robin Grey (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., Ltd., 1901), p. 129.

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> mental activities I apprehend in others (this is to say I must sympathize with them) if they are to please me . . .[1]

Developing further the reasons for rejecting the force which Venus represents, one could point to Bullough's comment that, if a performance is to remain of a Distanced, aesthetic character, no "questioning of . . . generally recognised ethical sanctions . . ."[2] can be permitted. Such questions as might be raised could cause the work to fall below the lower Distance-limit, thus becoming a moral judgment of a practical nature, rather than a reaction to an art work.

Lipps makes the functioning of empathy dependent upon a prior moralistic judgment, and it would seem almost inevitable that some such reaction and some degree of sensual response would be made to the type of love which is most removed from the abstract, the almost Platonic love of Elizabeth.

In its music *Tannhäuser* strongly resembled the older opera; it still had set, highly formal musical pieces.

> . . . the overture, the march, the choruses, Elizabeth's prayer, the song to the evening star, the septet, etc., are pieces which are not seriously marred by being torn from the operatic stage and placed in the concert hall. In so far as this is the case, *Tannhäuser* is, therefore, not a music-drama, but an opera--though infinitely removed from the old-fashioned Italian opera which Wagner has called a "concert in Costume. . . ."[3]

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[1]Theodor Lipps, "A Further Consideration of 'Empathy,'" *Psychological Studies*, 2nd ed., trans. Herbert C. Sanborn (Baltimore: The Williams and Wilkins Co., 1926), p. 257.

[2]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

[3]Finck, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-177.

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To the degree that the music for this work represented a departure from the norm, Wagner had difficulty securing a proper interpretation of it, particularly of the connective material between the arias. Wagner was slowly evolving the nature of his 'endless melody' and even this early, he objected strenuously to the singers delivering the non-aria portions of the score as though they were recitatives.

> . . . he could not get the singers to phrase the lyrical portions that were not cast in the obvious "aria" mode in any way but that of the old-style recitative. For them, vocal music must be one thing or the other; a type of arioso that lay midway between the two, that was certainly not in the set aria-form but at the same time needed to be sung as melody, not declaimed as recitative--the germ, in fact, of the Wagnerian melos, spread over a whole opera--was outside their comprehension. Their method of delivery in passages of this kind not only deprived the music of all naturalness but confused and chilled the audience: these ariosi failed on the one hand to afford the customary gratification expected from an aria, and on the other hand seemed to drag intolerably when looked upon as recitative. It was many years before Wagner could force his new conception of "endless melody" on the German singers, or even induce them to sing this midway order of vocal music in strict time, instead of with the almost rhythmless articulation of the ordinary operatic recitative.[1]

The intent behind the new *aria parlant* or connective material was a complete unification of the content. The singers insisted upon fragmenting the work. Wagner was striving for a work with which the audience could empathize with the fewest possible interruptions.

In the title role, Wagner never secured the kind of interpretation he wanted in the Contest scene, as has been noted, nor could he convince the singers that the Rome Narration was not a *tour de force* and that they could achieve a more telling dramatic effect by the use of greater Distance during its performance, rather than by tearing a passion to shreds. He

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[1]Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, p. 396.

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instructed his Paris Tannhäuser, Albert Niemann, in this manner:

> In this act . . . I do not want any exhibition of sensuous power of voice . . . Everything is calculated here in terms of a ghost-like tonelessness, with a gradual rise to no more than an expression of affecting softness.[1]

The warning made no difference; the tenors continued to look upon the Rome Narrative as their chance for emotional display--and sang it in that fashion. This empathic appeal occuring so late in the opera seriously threatens to unbalance the work and if the Rome speech is regarded as the pivotal scene, then the key event in the chain of action occurs off stage.

The scenic elements in this show vaccilate between the real world and that of magic and mysticism. Wagner plays with the audience's Distance by placing the sensual and empathic first scene in an obviously unreal setting and then suddenly jerking the audience back into the real.

> With the disappearance of the red and glittering cave of Venus and the appearance of the cool, fresh greens of the landscape--a striking pictorial contrast, full of theatrical effectiveness, and showing Wagner's employment of the combined arts of poetry, music, painting, and action in the new dramatic form--we enter the domain of the "Warburgkrieg."[2]

An abrupt change of this sort certainly assists the magical tone of the opera and helps to create a sense of dissociation with the real world. It also assists in the creation of the abstract attitude and point of view in which such symbolic events can be accepted by a modern audience without producing laughter as a result of Over-Distancing. By admitting that the events require a greater than usual Distance, the person staging the work may be able to determine just how Distanced the audience becomes and prevent them from going too far in that direction; he may, perhaps, control

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[1]Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[2]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 259.

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[1]Newman

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the unrealistic portion of the work in such a way that he can cause the audience to respond in his manner and only to the degree he chooses.

Some scenic effects on which Wagner miscalculated at the first performances by not making them spectacular and graphic enough were those at the end of Act III. Here, perhaps, he abstracted and symbolized too much.

> In this first version of the opera Venus did not appear to Tannhäuser in the flesh, but only as a figment of his fevered brain, suggested by a roseate light over the distant Horselberg, while the death of Elizabeth, instead of being announced by Wolfram, was merely indicated by bells tolling and torches flickering far away on the Wartburg. All in all, it was little wonder that the audience on the first night failed to grasp Wagner's novel dramatic ideas in all their subtlety of poetic detail.[1]

Wagner revised the ineffective and confusing ending and, in the process, declared a guiding principle which would virtually rule out abstraction on the stage. This theoretical reversal of his early procedure he never put fully into practice. He said: "Nothing that lies within the possibilities of representation on the stage should be only thought or indicated, but everything should be actually shown.[2] While the changes the composer made in this opera to bring it into its present form are generally acknowledged to be improvements and clarifications of its dramatic and scenic values, the strict application of the rule which prompted them might not always produce the best results. Such reality of presentation would prompt a high level of empathic involvement on the part of the audience, but it would rob the drama of much of its scope and flexibility and would virtually destroy most of the more formal plays (Marlowe's

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[1]Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, p. 398.

[2]Wagner, *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt*, letter of January 30, 1852, p. 191.

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Dr. Faustus, for instance, would be almost unproducible under such a rule). This demand for a full scenic realization of everything was to produce enough problems, at a later date, to cause Wagner to despair of his principle also.

LOHENGRIN (1848)

Act I. Before King Henry of Germany, Count Frederick of Telramund accuses Elsa of Brabant of murdering her brother so that she might inherit the Duchy. When Elsa is summoned, she makes no defense but instead tells of a dream in which a heavenly knight became her champion. The King decrees that the accusation will be settled by combat and the Herald is ordered to summon the warrior. There is no response to the first trumpet call and proclamation but, after a repetition, a knight is seen approaching on the river in a swan-drawn boat. When he lands he asks Elsa if she will accept him as her champion and husband, imposing only one condition: she must never ask his name or from whence he came. She readily assents to the terms and Lohengrin defeats Frederick but spares his life.

Act II. During the night before the wedding of Elsa and her knight, the banished Frederick and his wife Ortrud are in the courtyard before the women's quarters. Ortrud, a sorceress, intends to persuade Elsa to ask the forbidden questions. When Elsa appears on a balcony, Ortrud rouses her pity for the banished and is granted Elsa's aid and protection. At the dawn, after the people have assembled, the procession to the church begins. It is interrupted by Ortrud and Frederick, both of whom accuse the unknown knight of being a magician. Elsa, once more but with greater hesitancy, declares her confidence in him and the procession enters the church.

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Act III. Elsa and Lohengrin are conducted to their bridal chamber, but as soon as they are alone, Ortrud's accusations force Elsa to ask the proscribed questions. At that moment, Frederick and his men burst into the room to attack the knight. He defeats them and kills Frederick. He then directs that all concerned should assemble before the King, where he will reveal his background and identity.

In the second scene, Lohengrin defends his slaying of Frederick and reveals his identity as the son of Parsifal and a Knight of the Grail. Once his name and station are known, he must return to his service of the Grail and the swan boat accordingly reappears. Ortrud exults that she has driven Lohengrin away before his magic could release the spell she placed upon the Duke of Brabant, Elsa's brother, changing him into the swan before them. Lohengrin's prayer breaks the enchantment and Godfrey is restored to his sister as Lohengrin sails away in the boat, now pulled by the dove of the Grail.

If one accepts the clumsy stamping dance of the Norwegian sailors in Act II of the *Dutchman* as a ballet, and certainly the Venusberg episode would count as one in *Tannhäuser*, then this is the first of Wagner's operas to be rid of the conventional ballet. This is simply another of the formal elements which Wagner discarded during his development, never to return to it with the exception of the curious waltz in the *Meistersinger*. The concentration upon the score and its integration with action became greater with each work.

The very end of *Lohengrin* must prove somewhat disconcerting to an audience which is not aware of precisely how Lohengrin breaks the spell binding the young Duke. This is an episode that

> . . . aptly illustrates a fact that has often to be borne in mind when we are listening to a performance of a Wagner

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[3]*Ibid.*,

> opera; in the final process of alteration or compression he has omitted, or touched upon too lightly, some little point or other than only becomes fully clear to us after we have read his first Sketch.[1]

This failure to state specifically what Lohengrin is accomplishing and how he is doing it is a fault comparable to Wagner's first formulation of the ending of *Tannhäuser*; the difference between the two is that he never revised the ending of *Lohengrin* once it was composed. The effect of this fault is that it breaks the audience's contact with the story and forces thought concerning the events depicted.

The three primary characters of the opera, Lohengrin, Elsa and Ortrud, were conceived as occupying distinct places on the Distance-scale. Ortrud and Lohengrin are both abstract characters, one representing the old religion passing away and the other symbolizing Christianity which was replacing the old way of thinking.

> . . . he bound the story together with the symbolic background of . . . the conflict of Christianity with the pagan world it was superseding, and of whose gods Ortrud is here a last despairing (and in this sphere quite sincere) priestess. Her witchcraft and superstition are the Dark Ages opposite to the growing brightness and power of the Christian faith.[2]

In Ortrud's view, "the net indeed has a bigger fish than Elsa to enmesh: Christianity itself must be wiped out by a restoration of the pagan religion."[3] The first step in the process is the vanquishing of the Grail's Knight. By upholding such a position, by attacking a philosophy to which the majority in the audience are assumed to have given their allegiance, Ortrud has crossed the borderline pointed out by Bullough and must be

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[1]Newman, *The Wagner Operas*, p. 113.

[2]Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 65.

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Although Lohengrin has the title role and Ortrud motivates the plot, the character who caught Wagner's creative fancy and who came to dominate his thinking was the less symbolic, more human and more failure-ridden figure of Elsa.

> The whole interest of "Lohengrin" rests upon a process in the heart of Elsa, that touches all the secrets of her soul; the formation of a strangely blissful enchantment, that fills all about her with convincing reality, depends entirely upon her refraining from asking--whence he came? And finally this question forces itself like a cry from the deepest need of her woman's heart, and--the enchantment is gone. You notice how peculiarly this fatal "whence?" coincides with the theoretical "why?" to which I have before alluded?[1]

The "why?" mentioned is that which Wagner assumed that a listener to an abstract musical composition would ask when the emotional content became greater than the formal framework of the music could conveniently contain; it is the "why?" which prompted Wagner to adopt the drama as the justification for the great emotion displayed. Thus Wagner embodied a theoretical as well as an ethical problem in Elsa.

The heroine of this work has also been described as the empathic half of the love-pair while Lohengrin represents the abstractive portion.

> Else is the unconscious, the un-volitional, into which Lohengrin's conscious, volitional being yearns to be redeemed; but that yearning is itself the unconscious, un-volitional in Lohengrin, through which he feels himself akin in being to Elsa.[2]

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[1]Wagner, "The Music of the Future," p. 172.

[2]Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, p. 271.

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The more empathic, emotional part of the pair would, of course, attract Wagner to a greater extent than even his noble, un-worldly hero.

As in Tannhäuser, Wagner used motives to achieve Distance in both a reminiscent and a foreshadowing manner. An example is that of Ortrud's evil influence.

> This is first heard in the introduction to Act II. It reappears when Ortrud begins to reveal her ideas to Frederick, and accompanies each of her suggestions for the overthrow of Lohengrin and destruction of Elsa. It is heard again in the accompaniment to the short ensemble which succeeds Lohengrin's appeal to Elsa in the finale of Act II., when to his dismay he sees that she is wavering. Again it sounds when Frederick whispers to Elsa in the same scene, and when the maid declares her doubts in the chamber scene it is repeated to show that she is acting under the influence of Ortrud. This is a very close approach to the fully developed employment of the leitmotiv, for in the later dramas we find these themes frequently used to connect the passing action with the influences which have led to it or to associate it with an absent personality.[1]

There are also other uses of motives which would call for the mental manipulation of concepts and the drawing of conclusions which cannot be accomplished by means of empathy. After he has defended himself against Frederick and his men Lohengrin tells Elsa that he will reveal both his name and his origin to all people concerned and the orchestra plays *The Mystery of the Name* motive, this time followed by *The Grail*! This sequence of melodie phrases is clear only if one knows the story and the motives from previous study or an earlier hearing of the opera. Both motives have been heard, but no mention is made of the Grail until Lohengrin's narrative and, therefore, no association could have been made with it. Much of the richness of the Wagnerian motive system is apparent only after each opera has been heard several times, and it is

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[1]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 289.

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largely dependent upon the use of memory and the combining ability of the mind. This is at least in part in opposition to Wagner's theoretical aim but it is nevertheless a rather common method in his works.

In regard to spectacle, one need only repeat that abnormal or magical effects, such as the swan boat, will almost always produce a rather highly Distanced attitude.

LATER PERIOD

THE RING OF THE NIBELUNGEN (1851-1874)

Before discussing each of the dramas which go to make up this tetralogy, some overall comments on the unity created by the four works will be made.

When Wagner had reduced the detailed mass of material in the *Ring* myth to a single opera, he found that too much of the preceding action had to be given in a formal, Distanced narrative. When he expanded the tale to two works, the same was still true; there was still too much which required abstract visualization on the part of the audience. So he expanded the *Ring* to its present form of four music dramas to achieve more concrete, empathic stories.

When an idea or a series of ideas are taken from the realm of abstraction and given physical embodiment, a greater degree of empathy is possible. Wagner sought to reach his favorite end of the Distance-scale more fully, in spite of the remote and abstract nature of the *Ring*'s content. He was opposing the form to the content of the work, and, by creating pulls in opposite directions on the scale, achieved a balance within the Distance-limits.

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[3]Gilman,

The motive system was used fully in these works for the first time and the frequent repetitions were a basic theoretical part of this system. In music of any sort, the abstract pattern of sound can only acquire form and become intelligible when repetitions of some sort play a part in the flow. In such a radically new method of composition as the "endless melody," the repetitions were even more important than usual. Wagner said:

> The ear can only appreciate any particular manifestation amongst many as being striking and recognisable by virtue of its being repeatedly brought before it. In becoming thus set apart from other manifestations to which the same does not apply, the one in question has, through this repetition, a distinction conferred upon it, rousing the ear to special sympathy with it, as something of importance.[1]

Wagner realized the scale of the quadruple drama he was about to undertake; he knew that his music, released from the formal demands regarding repetition and key change, would seem formless to many people and he relied upon the reiteration of the motives to supply some Aesthetically Distanced shape for the works.

> . . . as the musical continuity grows larger and more tenuous, the time-scale expands, and tonality becomes more vague, it is urgent to have as many organizing themes as possible--to have plenty of *foci*, as it were, around which the fog can precipitate.[2]

Thus an auditor-spectator at the performance of a Wagnerian word-tone drama will miss much of its meaning if he does not study the motives and their permutations.

> It matters enormously "whether you know the motives"--it matters so much, indeed, that many passages in Wagner's music-dramas are deprived of their dramatic or poetical significance for those who do not know the meaning of the themes from which they are evolved.[3]

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[1]Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, ii., p. 476.

[2]Joseph Kerman, "Wagner: Thoughts in Season," *Hudson Review*, Vol. 13, Fall 1960, p. 345.

[3]Gilman, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

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These motives may produce an immediate emotional reaction or they may trigger intellectual perceptions in regard to the drama being enacted or they may do both. How they function depends, of course, upon the audience and what it wants from and is willing to give to the work.

> The point to decide for one's self, after all, is what one expects to get out of such a work as *Tristan* or the *Ring*. We may react to it passively, receptively, deriving what we can from it without bestirring ourselves much in the process. Or, we may react to it cooperatively, ardently, responsively, and thus find ourselves surprisingly enriched.[1]

Naturally, this study, concentrating largely upon an intellectual theory, advocates the latter process. As will be shown in some degree during the discussions of the individual works, there is an enormous content built into the use of the motives.

> It is necessary to study the scores very thoroughly, to note the intimate union of text and music, to observe the changes which motives undergo when new shades of meaning are to be expressed, to grasp the treatment of rhythm and tonality and the formation and expansion of themes, and generally to follow the composer through the various ramifications of the most elaborate plan for dramatic expression in music ever invented.[2]

It is a difficult but rewarding task. Wagner made exorbitant demands upon the abstractive ability of the spectator as well as upon the resources and control of the orchestra. With nothing to guide him except his pattern-sense and the flow of the action upon the stage, which is often so static as not to be helpful at all, the listener is expected to follow the ebb and flow and the permutations of these ideas when they appear in no fixed form.

Here, then, are plot sketches and comments concerning the four dramas of the *Ring of the Nibelungen*.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 264.

[2] Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 423.

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DAS RHEINGOLD
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Act I. Alberich, a Nibelung dwarf clambers along the bed of the Rhine river trying to catch one after another of the three Rhinemaidens, or Undines, charged with guarding a magical deposit of gold buried in the river. Their rejection and tormenting of him leads Alberich to capitalize on their indiscreet disclosure that he who rejects love can fashion the gold into a ring and thereby own the world and all its mighty power; he renounces love and seizing the gold disappears into the depths.

Act II. The Rhine sinks until its banks become visible. There the gods Wotan and his wife Fricka awake to see the castle (Valhalla) the giants have built for them. The payment Wotan has promised for this task is Freia, the goddess of love, but he has no intention of delivering her to them. Instead he relies upon Loge, the god of fire and lies, to find a way out of the contract. That worthy reports that the only thing valued more than love is gold, and he reports on Alberich's activities. The giants agree that they will accept the hoard of the Nibelungs rather than the goddess but they will keep her until the ransom is paid. With Freia gone, even the gods begin to grow old. Wotan is forced to go with Loge in search of the treasure.

Act III. They penetrate the earth to the dwarf's caverns and find Alberich driving the Nibelungs to amass more gold. He has power over them by virtue of the ring he has made and through the Tarnhelm, a helmet capable of transporting or transforming its wearer at his pleasure. This instrument Alberich's brother Mime, a smith, was forced to fashion. It is the Tarnhelm which appears to attract the god's attention and to display its powers Alberich changes himself into a dragon and then a toad. While

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he is in this shape Wotan simply steps on him and holds him while Loge takes the helmet. Alberich is carried to the surface.

Act IV. There he is required to relinquish the gold, the Tarnhelm and the ring. In anger at being robbed, Alberich places a death curse on the ring. The giants refuse the ransom as long as Wotan tries to hold back the powerful ring for himself. Erda, the spirit of the Earth, rises from the ground to warn Wotan against the ring (which has now been stolen twice) and to predict the downfall of the gods. He surrenders it. As soon as the giants have the ring, the curse begins to function on them for Fafner kills his brother and takes all of the gold for himself. Seeing the power of the curse, Wotan begins planning means to avert the fate of the gods through the restoration of the gold to the Rhine. The gods cross over a rainbow bridge into their new stronghold.

This prelude to *The Ring* cycle, *The Rhinegold*

> . . . is the least popular of the sections of The Ring. The reason is that its dramatic moments lie quite outside the consciousness of people whose joys and sorrows are all domestic and personal, and whose religious and political ideas are purely conventional and superstitious.[1]

Certainly there are few points of empathic contact in this work with the setting, the characters or the principle plot device of the curse. All three tend to Distance the drama.

Of the three, the problem of identifying with the characters probably presents the greatest difficulty for the audience. Wotan's weakness, duplicity and trust in the wily Loge, whom no other god trusts, may well cause him to lose that initial contact which he should make with the audience if he is going to attract their attention as the hero.

The character of Loge is an interesting one from the point of view of great Distancing. Wagner intended that he should be an unmotivated

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[1]Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

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incarnation of evil, a highly Distanced figure, a fact supported by the description the composer gave of his stage figure: "Face pale and shining, eyes large and black and intensified by silver foil: his hair a light red, and erect like twisted flames."[1]

The arch-villain of the *Ring* is Alberich. Of the various types of evil depicted in the *Ring,* "Alberich represents diabolical violence"[2] according to one author, but Wagner always had a rather soft spot in his heart for the dwarf, saying among other things that he was in sympathy with Alberich, "who represents the yearning of the ugly toward that which is beautiful."[3] Each additional character in the *Ring* is symbolic in the same general way, is Distanced by the same over-lays of meaning.

In either reading or viewing a production of *Das Rheingold,* it is difficult to escape the idea that this stylized fairy-tale must mean something other than what is apparent on the surface of it. This, of course, is true. It is a symbolic story which may be interpreted in several ways. The following is one such example:

> Wagner's criticism of cultural conditions in the mid-nineteenth century--given symbolic form in the character of Alberich, the ugly dwarf who renounces love and beauty for gold--is essentially no different (and a good deal less subtle and searching) from that of many other critics of his day. Like Heine, Balzac, Standhal, Carlyle, and Arnold, Wagner saw his age sinking into a morass of philistinism as everywhere the burgher class triumphed over the decadent aristocracy and the fettered proletariat.[4]

The symbolic nature of every aspect and every character in *Rheingold* strongly invites extended commentary. Only one example is chosen

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[1]Williamson, *op. cit.,* p. 80.

[2]Hight, *op. cit.,* p. 147.

[3]Gilman, *op. cit.,* p. 235.

[4]Goldman and Sprinchorn, *op. cit.,* p. 16.

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> The stolen ring made from stolen gold was the price paid for *Walhall,* but the connection between them is closer than that. The ring was the tool and the symbol of Alberich's greed--what is *Walhall* but the tool and symbol of Wotan's? Each motive (in its usual form) fills two measures, and in the first of these two measures the rhythm of both is identical.[1]

Verbally and musically everything is symbolic, abstract, Distanced. In this first work of the tetralogy, Wagner has moved the story of the cycle from the creation of the world to the point where error is so great that the inevitable destruction can be foreseen. It only remains to work out what must be.

"It is in the music of *Das Rheingold* that the essential Wagner--the Wagner who most profoundly stirs us--first reveals himself."[2] Here, for the first time, are dramas constructed according to the poetic dicta of *Opera and Drama,* with minimal dialogue and exhaustive development of the central episodes. But here, also, in the score of the Prologue to the cycle, is music which is written primarily on the basis of the motive system. It is the first music of the third stage of Wagnerian development.

The Prelude with which *Das Rheingold* opens provides an admirable preparation for the action, the music, and the moral which are to follow. To set up the hypnotic empathic conditions which Wagner desired in the production of his works, note the lulling effect even of the description of this piece of music.

> First, we hear a single mysterious note, very grave and greatly protracted: this is Nature asleep; to this fundamental, single, and primitive tone is then added its fifth; and, after a long interval, the octave; then, one by one, all the other harmonics in the same order in which Nature produces

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[1]Wilson, *op. cit.,* p. 29.

[2]Gilman, *op. cit.,* p. 74.

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> them; then, passing notes, more and more frequent; then appear rhythms, at first rudimentary, which mingle and assume complicated forms; organization has already commenced; at long intervals new instruments are added; a kind of regular and cadenced undulation is established, giving the feeling of water in movement; the sound gradually swells out and invades the orchestra like a torrent; the movement of the waves is accentuated, a trembling arises and increases, bringing the prescience of life; and, when the curtain rises, we are not in the least surprised to find ourselves at the bottom of a large flowing river, full to the banks; our mind had already pictured what the scenery reveals.[1]

There is a stasis induced by this 136 bars (about four times the length of a normal popular song), all of which is derived from just one chord, which is enough to deaden the sensibilities or lower the threshold of suggestibility of anyone. "The stage makes much use of devices that derive their effectiveness from soothing monotonous stimulation or from restriction of attention through fascination . . ."[2] but this Prelude is a prime example of devices of this nature.

Yet, it is only one among many such suspensions of musical movement in Wagner's mature works. While it is true that repetition of a given chord helps to strongly establish the tonality prior to Wagner's extensive modulation, this can hardly be the sole intent behind a list such as this:

> In *Das Rheingold* the first 136 bars are built upon one single perfect chord in E-flat major; the Prelude of the second scene for 15 bars only contains perfect chords of the fundamental tone belonging to the key of D-flat, or related keys and leading into the key of the dominant; the second scene is linked to the third by means of a pedal of the dominant on F, first in the bass, then in the treble, which is kept up for 55 bars.
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> In the first act of *Die Walküre* the tonality is established by the treble pedal of the tonic, which lasts for

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[1]Lavignac, *op. cit.*, pp. 343-344.

[2]June E. Downey, *Creative Imagination* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929), p. 217.

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> 64 bars, after which it is still long before we leave the key of D. In the third act the predominance of the key of B-minor, contrasted with the dominant F-sharp, is accented and maintained for 34 bars till the rising of the curtain.
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> In the first act of *Siegfried* there is a long bass pedal of the dominant on the note F for 50 bars, which becomes a treble pedal for 33 bars more, and which is succeeded by a pedal of the tonic of 12 bars on E-flat. That is Wagner's way of thoroughly establishing the tonality.
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> In the third act of *Götterdämmerung* it is still more strongly marked, for the key of F is not departed from for 149 bars, including not only the Prelude, but also the Trio of the Undines which follows.
>
> Need I still cite the Prelude to the first act of *Parsifal*, which, with the exception of a few bars, scarcely leaves the key of A-flat?
>
> Outside the Preludes, long and imposing holds are also sufficiently frequent; the theme of the Rainbow, almost at the end of *Das Rheingold*, has a perfect chord on G-flat, which is sustained for 20 bars in a slow movement; in *Lohengrin* the long flourish of trumpets which salutes the rising of the sun in Act II., Scene III., contain no less than 58 bars, augmented by holds on the one perfect major chord of A, to which immediately succeed (with one single transitory chord), 15 bars on the perfect chord of C major.[1]

No other musician in the history of Western music has found it necessary to repeat a given chord for such lengths merely in order to establish the tonality of a piece. That can be done in two chords, in less than one-half of one bar. There must have been some other reason for such repetition--and there was: Wagner was preparing the audience to receive the empathic revelation in his tone drama, his *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

A study of the motives used in the *Ring*, some 35 of which are introduced in *Rhinegold*, clearly indicates that they are most frequently derived from one another, thereby showing the relationships among the motives and helping to hold the spectator. To show the symbolic overtones of such motive derivations, consider these permutations of what is essentially a single motive:

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[1]Lavignac, *op. cit.*, pp. 257-258.

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> After the preliminary measures of the introduction to "Das Rheingold," we hear the first guiding theme of the drama, the motive of the Primeval Elements . . . This motive plays an important part in the trilogy. When Erda rises from the earth in the last scene of the prologue we hear this same theme in the minor mode, and we at once perceive that by this simple process of musical development Wagner associates her with the primeval elements (earth, air, and water), but emphasises the sadness of her character and her peculiar office in the tragedy as a prophetess of woe. When she utters the words, "Ein Düst'rer Tag dämmert den Göttern" ("A dismal day dawns for the Aesir"), we hear her motive first in its natural form, and then inverted, and we then learn that this inversion has an especial meaning, the end of the gods, the "Götterdämmerung" . . .[1]

By the same token, the motive of the gold is derived from that of the Rhine "as it logically should be, since it is the Gold of the Rhine,"[2] and once the Rhinegold has made Alberich the lord of the Nibelungs, the theme of Alberich's mastery "is compounded of the Rhinegold motive and that of the Nibelungs . . ."[3] etc. The whole tissue of motives grows with an almost organic inevitability, cross-relating and tying together all of the threads of the work. The whole begins to approach a totally organized art work.

One would expect then that Wagner would create a completely empathic state in his audiences by his use of motives but there are flaws in their use or the phrases chosen to represent a certain abstraction do not sufficiently suggest the nature of that thing or condition to satisfy all critics.

> There is no musical phrase which could express, for example, a ring, or a sword; for these we have names; music is superfluous and becomes a caricature. It can, I think scarcely be denied that Wagner in the earlier portions of the "Ring" used his motives injudiciously. It is not unreasonable to

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[1]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 424.

[2]Lavignac, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

[3]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 432.

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> suppose that at first, when feeling his way, he sometimes went astray. An example is the familiar "Ring"-motif. The mention of a ring does not affect the feelings in any way. Were it symbolical of eternity possibly some musical expression might be found for it, but it is not so here; it is just a gold ring and nothing more. We do not feel curly, or round, when the word is pronounced, and the phrase on two bassoons progressing in thirds, which recurs like a Norseman's fylgja every time that the ring is mentioned, is dramatically rather irritating than helpful. Similarly with the "Sword"-motif and many others. They are of the "visiting card" character which has been justly ridiculed. Unfortunately most people derive their notions of Wagner's methods from these more obvious examples in *Rheingold*.[1]

Mr. Hight is objecting to the fact that this motive produces, in him, less of an empathic response than he is used to deriving from Wagner's empathic motives. With the varying levels of abstraction among the people, things, ideas and places with which Wagner deals, there are, of course, bound to be variations in the degree of tactual and empathic contact which he can suggest, even assuming that he can always find the most appropriate musical image which could be chosen for that purpose.

A second, and for the moment sufficient, flaw in the functioning of the motives arises when the spectator is asked to grasp all of the motives and all of their implications in a single hearing. Even with the best will in the world and a highly Distanced state of mind,

> Where is the person who has ever at the first hearing of "Rhinegold" been able to identify and understand all the leit-motiven? But if they are not immediately and unavoidably intelligible, are not these leit-motiven undramatic?[2]

According to Wagner's theory, to that degree they are undramatic. Yet he created such an involved musical pattern that its perception is impossible without extended study of the scores and repeated hearings of the operas.

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[1]Hight, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170.

[2]Henderson, *Preludes and Studies*, p. 53.

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Wagner defeated his own intentions in regard to the easily understood and completely empathic absorption of his motives when he applied to them the full resources of instrumental development. By forcing the study of these works in this depth, Wagner required an abstractive, Distanced state in his hearers during their study of the 'continuous melody.'

Greater Distancing is also effected in the spectacular effects of the opera. Of all of Wagner's creations, *Rhinegold* is the one which invites the greatest use of the stage machinery and the largest display of spectacular effects. "In the preface to his Nibelung Poems he pointed out that *Rhinegold* would give the stage carpenters and machinists an opportunity to show that their profession is a real art."[1]

Wagner apparently thought nothing of asking for dwarfs and giants on the same stage at the same time (with both, of course, portrayed by human beings of normal stature), the raising and lowering of elevator sets before the eyes of the audience and without the disclosure of any of the machinery, the instantaneous transformation of a person into various animal forms, the creation of visible storms with lightening and the materialization of a bridge made only with light and strong enough to hold six people.

> Wagner was never dismayed by difficulties of representation. Until maidens are found who can move with the grace and rapidity of fishes the scene with the Rhinemaidens will always be impossible. Certainly the waving arms and floating cradles of our theatrical shows are as unlike the fish-like movements of Wagner's maidens, now gliding languidly, now darting like arrows, as anything can well be. Yet such is the magic of the music that the incongruity is scarcely felt at the actual performance.[2]

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[1]Finck, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

[2]*Hight*, op. cit., *ii.*, *p. 127.*

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> The final scene, splendidly as it is conceived, defies the technical resources of any theatre. As the clouds break there appears a rainbow bridging the Rhine and leading to the castle. An atmosphere of ethereal haze and falling mist is obtained by another of Wagner's wonderful orchestral devices, with six harps and violins divided into eight or more parts.[1]

The abstract, ethetreal and ideal music is consistently the thing which rescues the otherwise rather flat-footed representation and prevents a complete collapse of the illusion. Since the 'wonders' never measure up to one's expectations, the only protection the audience has for its illusions is to piece them out with its imagination--or to forget the staging completely and listen to the suggestions of the music. In either case, the spectacle interferes with, rather than intensifies, the empathic absorption and generates a greater Distance which must be counteracted by the empathic force of the music.

One other production device or bit of business will indicate just how much use of its memory and manipulation of symbols Wagner expected of his audiences. At the conclusion of the action of this drama, just before the gods cross the rainbow bridge into Valhalla, Wotan conceives the idea of the free hero who will regain the gold and restore it to the Rhine, thus lifting the curse and, hopefully, restoring the gods. Neither the stage action nor the dialogue of the libretto in any way informs the audience of what Wotan's secret thoughts are. The music is supposed to carry the full burden at this point, foreshadowing what is to come in an intelligible manner.

> The conception of the hero in the mind of Wotan is made known to us only by the orchestra, which intones the Sword motive here for the first time. . . . It was just a little too much for

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 132.

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> Wagner to expect that his auditors would carry the Sword motive in their minds from "Das Rheingold" to the first act of "Die Walküre," and remember when hearing it in the latter how it was used in the former and thus find out what it meant there.[1]

DIE WALKÜRE (1856)

Act I. Siegmund, one of Wotan's two human children who make up the race of the Walsungs, plunges from a stormy night and the pursuit of enemies into the hut of Hunding. There he meets and is cared for by Hunding's wife, Sieglinde, until Hunding returns. In spite of the fact that they are mortal enemies, Siegmund is granted hospitality for the night, but is threatened with combat in the morning. This is tantamount to a death sentence since Siegmund has no weapons, having lost his in battle and flight.

When the couple retire, Sieglinde gives her husband a sleeping draught and returns to the stranger to tell him of a weapon. They are in love before they discover that they are brother and sister. When Siegmund draws the sword Nothung from the support-tree of the hut (where it was imbedded by Wotan), Sieglinde knows that he is her prophesied defender. The two rush from the hut into the forest.

Act II. Wotan instructs Brunhilde, his favorite Walküre,[2] to protect Siegmund in his approaching fight with Hunding. Then Wotan's

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[1]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 395.

[2]A Walküre (or Valkyrie), the offspring of Wotan and Erda, is a minor divinity, a warrior maiden whose primary task it is to bring to Valhalla those warriors who lose their lives in battle. They do this by flying through the air on their horses to the scene of a battle, forewarning the hero of his death and then collecting his soul after he is cut down. They also serve as "Wish-Maidens" in Valhalla, a position which is never defined.

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wife Fricka, the goddess of marriage, appears to protest the incestuous destruction of a marriage by the Walsungs. Wotan is forced to submit to her logic and countermand his former instructions to Brunhilde. Knowing that her orders now are actually against Wotan's real will, she pleads for the warrior and decides to defend, rather than slay him. When she attempts this, Wotan appears above the contestants and uses his runic spear to defend Hunding, so that Siegmund's sword Nothung is broken across the spear. Siegmund is slain by Hunding, who is then struck down by Wotan. The disobedient Walküre flees from Wotan's anger, carrying Sieglinde and the pieces of the broken sword with her.

Act III. The Walküre, assembled at their haunt in the mountains, refuse to aid Brunhilde's flight or to hide her. When Brunhilde has told Sieglinde that she will bear the highest hero and has sent her away to safety, Brunhilde awaits the god's punishment. When Wotan arrives, he strips her of her divine status and decrees that she be cast into a sleep from which she can be awakened by any man who finds her and she must then belong to him. Her pleas soften the punishment to the point where her sleeping form will be surrounded by fire, through which only the bravest would penetrate. Wotan abandons his child under these conditions.

> It is in *Die Walküre* that Wagner, for the first time in the *Ring*, makes us aware of the vastness of the issues with which he is concerned. The work embodies two concurrent actions. The major one is the overarching and superhuman drama involving the consequences of Wotan's sin, stretching backward to *Das Rheingold* and to the theft of the Ring, and forward to the cosmic tragedy of doom and expiation that will be consummated in *Götterdämmerung*. The other drama is the human and subsidiary one of Siegmund and Sieglinde.[1]

Yet it is the latter which will require the majority of the comment in this section.

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[1]Gilman, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

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The *cause celebre* in this *Gesamtkunstwerk* is the relationship between Siegmund and Sieglinde, the twin children of Wotan.

> Contravening human laws against adultery, for Sieglinde is by this time married to Hunding, and contravening also holy ordinance against incest, the pair engender the hero, Siegfried: the old order is broken by immoralists.[1]

The taboos of the society are being challenged, apparently, and the danger of Under-Distancing becomes great when the noblest members of the human race, half gods themselves, unite in the face of both human and divine laws to produce what is to be regarded as a still higher being, Siegfried. Out of the destruction of the established order comes the brightest hope for the future.

> As for the charge of adultery, that is not admitted in this drama. Wagner does not concede that there can be a true marriage without love. Sieglinde was carried off forcibly by Hunding; she was overwhelmed; that is not marriage. The point is argued at length in the text by Wotan; at greater length still in the original version of the poem, which was abbreviated by 126 lines when it was set to music.[2]

Setting aside for the moment, the question of adultery, which it is assumed Wagner answered, one is still left with the highly explosive problem of incest,[3] which as Bullough pointed out ("the questioning of some generally

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[1]Bentley, "Richard Wagner," p. 177.

[2]Finck, *op. cit.*, ii., pp. 333-334.

[3]This problem ramifies in several directions: "I am not bound to defend Wagner's morals. [Note the ascription of this belief to the artist.] The relations between Siegmund and Sieglinde are outrageous, in spite of the logical demand that Wotan's wrong should be atoned for by Wotan's blood. It is a pity that Wagner could not have found means to avoid this difficulty. It is like other errors, in that it leads the erring one still farther astray; for it results in Siegfried's marrying his half-aunt. Siegmund and Sieglinde are children of Wotan; so is Brünnhilde; hence she is their half-sister, and her relation to their son, Siegfried, becomes painfully obvious. This comes of dealing with mythologies, which are proverbially improper." Henderson, *Preludes and Studies*, p. 19.

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recognised ethical sanctions . . ."[1]) is dangerously close to the Distance-limit of most people. This difficulty becomes a question of Distance-vs.-censorship which Bullough also discussed with great point. Here is a summary of his observations.

> Distance . . . admits naturally of degrees, and differs not only according to the nature of the object, which may impose a greater or smaller degree of Distance, but varies also according to the individual's capacity for maintaining a greater or lesser degree.[2]

So, it is not simply that Wagner has included in this libretto a 'shocking' scene based upon an 'immoral' idea--he has certainly done that and furthermore, clothed it in his warmest, most empathic verse and music thus making it difficult for audiences to retain a Distanced attitude.

> Theoretically there is no limit to the decrease of Distance. In theory, therefore, not only the usual subjects of Art, but even the most personal affections, whether ideas, percepts or emotions, can be sufficiently distanced to be aesthetically appreciable. Especially artists are gifted in this direction to a remarkable extent. The average individual, on the contrary, very rapidly reaches his limit of decreasing Distance, his 'Distance-limit', i.e. that point at which Distance is lost and appreciation either disappears or changes its character.[3]

It may be granted that Wagner's was basically a sensuous approach to music, that he usually desired the utmost empathic response from his audiences, and that when he depicted an engagement such as that between Siegmung and Sieglinde, he was inviting the audience to experience these forbidden arrangements in some degree. But it must also be noted that this arrangement was clothed in many of the Distancing devices which Wagner habitually and unconsciously used and that it has a formal, purposeful character.

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[1]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 100.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 101.

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The Distancing effect, produced by the manner in which the event is made artistic, purifies even the most potentially offensive action if the artist can organize and present it properly and if the audience is aware of the artistic properties of the scene rather than only of its content.

> The strength of the formal appeal depends upon both the talent of the artist and the experience of the appreciator. By reason of the cleverness of his technique, the master may with impunity present content of little distance and the appreciator or connoisseur by reason of his knowledge of the formal elements maintains his attitude no matter how much there is of content, or how close it may be. It follows that the public should be educated to observe the relations in art. It should know the value of lines and colors and the laws of the drama.[1]

It will readily be granted that this is a Utopian solution to an eternal problem in art, but it is still true that "if every member of the public could be trusted to keep it [Distance], there would be no sense whatever in the existence of a censor of plays"[2] nor would there be complaints about the propriety of such scenes.

SIEGFRIED (1871)

Mime, the Nibelung smith and the brother of Alberich, assisted Sieglinde, who died in childbirth, and has since raised her child Siegfried in the hope that he will be able to slay the giant Fafner. Fafner is still guarding the hoard of gold, but now in the shape of a dragon, thanks to the magical powers of the Tarnhelm. The young Siegfried, now grown to manhood, imposes his will upon the dwarf and has required that he fashion a sword fit for a hero. The smith is unable to do so, for Siegfried breaks each sword on the anvil with a single blow. Siegfried questions

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[1]Langfeld, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

[2]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

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Mime about his origin and the Nibelung is forced to tell the tale of the Walsungs. He produces the broken pieces of Siegmund's sword as a proof of the story. Siegfried orders Mime to repair the sword and leaves.

Wotan, in the guise of a Wanderer, appears to engage the dwarf in a session of riddles, the loser to forfeit his head. Mime, of course, loses, because he does not know that only he who is without fear (Siegfried) can mend the broken sword. The forfeited head is left on Mime's shoulders to be collected later by Siegfried.

When Siegfried returns, he decides that he will indeed have to do the work, so he recasts the sword while Mime mixes a poisoned drink to administer to him after he tries to kill Fafner. They set off for the "worm's" hole, so that Siegfried may learn what fear is.

Act II. Wotan appears to Alberich, who is loitering outside Fafner's cave, and announces the Siegfried is approaching. When the hero and Mime arrive, Mime hides while the hero rests under a tree and listens to a birdsong until Fafner makes an appearance. Siegfried slays the dragon, and having gotten some of its blood on his finger, puts the finger in his mouth to cool it. Immediately, Siegfried can understand the speech of the bird, who tells him to take the Tarnhelm and the ring of Rhinegold from the dragon's hole; he does so. When Mime tries to use his poisoned drink; Siegfried's new comprehension penetrates the dwarf's real thoughts and Siegfried slays him without compunction. The bird then tells the hero of Brunhilde, asleep on the Walkure's rock, and leads him toward her.

Act III. After another conference with Erda, the earth spirit, Wotan tries to speak with Siegfried and only succeeds in having his spear of power shattered by Siegfried's sword. Wotan leaves, knowing that the gods are truly doomed.

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[2]*Ibid*

Siegfried penetrates the wall of fire around Brunhilde, awakens her with a kiss, and during their love duet, Brunhilde willingly foregoes her immortal qualities to become his wife.

"*Siegfried* has been called the *scherzo* of *The Ring*, and it is indeed Wagner's 'happy' opera, as Shaw noted."[1] But it does suffer from some flaws which will destroy the spectator's delight in the word-tone drama unless he is highly Distanced. There is, for instance, the extended, and to some critics[2] unnecessary 'riddle' scene, a feature of the Eddas, the ancient tales from which Wagner adapted his material, which, as employed here, is useless dramatically but quite valuable musically. The same is true of the Act III encounter of Wotan and Erda.

Wagner used two techniques in this *Gesamtkunstwerk* to control and balance the audience's response to the cyclonic outpouring of love in the final act. The first of these is humor. It is somewhat more difficult to become empathically involved in the actions of someone who can be regarded, quite tolerantly, as a fool. Because of his secluded upbringing, there are many things which Siegfried does not know and some of them are used, in a joking manner, to retard the beginnings of the love scene. When Siegfried has made his way through the flames, discovered the sleeping person (whom he ought to have known to be a woman, for the bird told him of her), and has begun an examination of her,

> Wonder changes to shock as he removes the shield; and it is to a sudden violent burst of music that he starts back and cries "*Das ist kein Mann!*" The naivety is one of Wagner's characteristic touches of humour; and indeed perhaps only Wagner could have dared and got away with the half-amusing,

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[1]Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 108.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Bull

[3] Phil

> half-touching situation early in the love duet which follows, when Siegfried, misled by a phrase of Brünnhilde's and confusing the nature of womanhood and the love he feels beating within him, guilelessly assumes that his mother, after all, did not die and Brünnhilde must be Sieglinde: Brünnhilde's gentle correction is a model of tenderness and tact.[1]

Such bits of character revelation have a definite effect upon the flow of the action and upon the audience's reaction to what is depicted. They virtually force the adoption of a radically unusual attitude toward the love and the lovers being developed here.

The delicate balance between complete impossibility and a playful acceptance of the actions depicted is a difficult one to maintain.

> No doubt also, fairy-tales, fairy-plays, stories of strange adventures were primarily invented to satisfy the craving of curiosity, the desire for the marvellous, the shudder of the unwonted and the longing for imaginary experiences. But by their mere eccentricity in regard to the normal facts of experience they cannot have failed to arouse a strong feeling of Distance.[2]

The second device for controlling the empathic involvement of the audience in the love scene is the manipulation of the scale of the action and its resulting absolute openness and intensity.

> There is about the union of Siegfried and Brünnhilde the same element of the colossal, the superhuman, that strikes us with awe in the contemplation of Tristan and Isolde's fortunes. But here the parallel ends. Until black Alberich and his sinister child, the pale, cold-blooded Hagen, begin to weave their dark spells round the hero and the goddess transformed into woman, the radiant, all-piercing light of day envelops their loves, and even in the white heat of their passion there is perfect purity.[3]

This is an idealization of a wooing, an abstraction of what it perhaps should be like. Few things happen with the precision and agreement of

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[2] Bullough, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

[3] Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

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wills which characterizes Siegfried's and Brunhilde's love. As a result, the audience would have to be aware of the compression of events and the highly selective nature of what they are shown (being Distanced in that manner) or they would draw away from the scene with a scornful, "Ah, it could never happen like that." Either way, they will be somewhat removed from a highly empathic situation.

The idealization of Siegfried operates in another way, too. Wagner contrasts his concept of perfection with Wotan, of whom he says,

> Look well at him, for in every point he resembles us. He represents the actual sum of the Intelligence of the Present, whereas Siegfried is the man greatly desired and longed for by us of the Future. But we who long for him cannot fashion him . . .[1]

Because Wotan represents Intelligence, Power and Authority but suffers a humanizing defeat, he is both abstractive and empathic at the same time and, as a result, a complex character.

> The whole episode [in Act III between Siegfried and Wotan] is a revelation of human character--the grandfather's (as well as Creator's) pride and affection, a little amused at the boy's importunity and disrespect, finally angry at it; jealous, too, in a sudden pang, of Brünnhilde, the child who represents his 'real' self and inner conscience, as well as of his loss of authority. The Wotan who picks up his broken spear is a destroyed and superseded, and therefore tragic, human being, as well as an instrument of law and authority laid low. As so often with Wagner, the symbol of power is given imaginative force through human character and emotion.[2]

There was a considerable shift in the musical methods employed in this score as compared to the first two music dramas in the *Ring*. Wagner's musical and poetic theories were worked out to enable him to write the cycle, but long before it was finished, some twenty-five years later, he

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[1] *Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 292.

[2] Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

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had begun the process of modifying, correcting and in some cases even discarding the theory. The first indications of this change are to be found in the score of *Siegfried* "which contains a great amount of freely composed music. There is so much that is external and incidental in this work that the constant employment of guiding themes was unnecessary."[1] What this means, of course, is that Wagner relied more upon the purely sensual aspects of his music and called for less use of the intellect in following the motives and their changing forms.

When Wagner did use the motives, he used them less rigorously.

> In *Siegfried* (and in all of the succeeding works), the integration of orchestral motif with dialog is much less careful. The motifs occur so frequently, often two, sometimes three being woven together in one measure, that reminiscences, the function for which the motif of reminiscence was originally intended, are no longer possible. The motival interplay tends to become a contrapuntal interweaving with a purely musical significance.[2]

To the degree that the resulting music could produce emotions, it could also produce a greater degree of empathy than it had in Wagner's earlier works. To the degree that the audience is aware of the complexity of this writing and tries to follow the permutations of the themes, the intellectual complexity of the response was increased. Regardless of the audience's reaction, the music itself is far more instrumental in nature and symphonic in character.[3] This is true especially in the Forest Murmurs scene of Act II. Without a conscious knowledge of the motives, the whole of the action would seem to be interrupted here; with an awareness of what they mean, the action flows on, preparing the audience for the love duet.

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[1]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 439.

[2]Stein, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.

[3]This growing symphonic awareness is documented in Wagner's interest in writing symphonic music divorced from the stage. See Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, p. 240.

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Wagner's musical-dramatic handling of situations became surer all the time. He never failed to make extensive preparation for many episodes, preparation which could only be conscious on his part and which can be understood by conscious reflection on the part of the audience but which is incorporated into the score in order to produce a strong empathic reaction from the viewer. An example of such extended preparation is that which leads to the Act III awakening of Brunhilde and the following love duet.

> The passionate love-duo which closes the act would be magnificent in any place; but coming as it does, it affords a remarkable instance of Wagner's dramatic ingenuity. Through the first two acts and part of the third, for more than three hours and a half the spectator has heard no female voice, with the exception of the few notes sung by the Forest Bird and Erda. Siegfried, when he finds Brünnhilde, had never seen a woman; the audience, when she begins to sing, feel as if they had never heard a woman's voice. The effect is thrilling . . .[1]

In spite of all of these felicities of musical and dramatic expression, *Siegfried* does, however, represent a work in which tension can be felt between the purely musical and the dramatic portions. In particular, there is a major shift in mood between Acts II and III, the very spot where Wagner stopped work on the *Ring* in order to write *Tristan* and the *Meistersinger*. The first two acts of the work may well reflect a lighter more youthful tone than the portions which were written after the twelve year pause.

GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG
(THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS, 1874)

There is a double scenic prelude to this work. In the first, the Norns, or Fates, recount the events of the *Ring* while weaving the thread of life. When it breaks, their power is at an end and they vanish. In the second prelude, Brunhilde and Siegfried emerge from their cave.

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[1]Finck, *op. cit.*, ii., pp. 354-355.

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Siegfried, having learned the wisdom of the Walküre and been placed, by her, under a magical protection which makes him invulnerable except for his back,[1] is now about to set out in search of new adventures. In their loving farewell, the couple exchange gifts, Siegfried giving Brunhilde the ring of Rhinegold and she providing him with her Walküre horse.

Act I. In the hall of the Gibichungs, the half-brother Hagen (who was sired by Alberich) tells Gunther, the king, and his sister Gutrune of Siegfried and Brunhilde but leaves out their mating. His suggestion is that when the mighty Siegfried visits the court, he should be given a magic drink which would make him forget all other women and love only Gutrune. He could then be used to penetrate the flames around Brunhilde and win her for Gunther. The action follows his plot exactly, with the addition of a visit of a Walküre to Brunhilde to plead with her to return the ring to the Rhine and thus save the gods. Brunhilde refuses to part with the love token but when Siegfried, having used the Tarnhelm to transform him into the shape of Gunther, penetrates the flames, he tears the ring from her hand and leads her to their cave for the night.

Act II. At the Gibichung palace, Alberich appears to Hagen and again prompts him to secure the ring. Siegfried arrives, followed shortly by Gunther and his new queen Brunhilde. When Brunhilde sees Siegfried with Gutrune, and the ring upon his finger, she assumes that she has been betrayed and she accuses Siegfried of having broken his bond with Gunther by taking advantage of her during the night. Siegfried swears his innocence on Hagen's spear and leaves for the celebration of the double

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[1]The reason for the lack of complete coverage is that Brunhilde was sure that Siegfried would never turn his back on an enemy, would never retreat.

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marriage. Brunhilde's love turns to hatred and she joins in Hagen's plot to kill Siegfried, even telling him about Siegfried's vulnerable back. The king reluctantly joins the plot.

Act III. On a hunting expedition, Siegfried arrives at the banks of the Rhine, where the Rhinemaidens unsuccessfully ask for the return of the ring and prophesy his death.

Gunther, Hagen and the other hunters join Siegfried and, while they prepare their meal ask him to tell of his adventures. He does, to the killing of Fafner, and then stops until Hagen gives him another drink which restores his memory of Brunhilde. Hagen pierces Siegfried's back and he dies thinking of Brunhilde.

His body is brought back to the hall of the Gibichungs where Gutrune mourns Siegfried's death. Hagen and Gunther fight over the possession of the ring and Gunther is killed. Superstitious fear stops Hagen when the corpse raises its arm to warn him against taking the ring. Brunhilde, having learned the truth of the recent situations from the Rhinemaidens, appears and takes charge of the funeral preparations for Siegfried. A pyre is built near the river and Siegfried's body is placed upon it. Brunhilde puts the ring on her finger, lights the pyre and, mounting her horse, rides into the flames. The Rhine overflows, the Rhinemaidens reclaim the ring and drown Hagen, who tries to stop them.

The flames of the pyre ignite even Valhalla and the destruction of the gods is completed.

> Of all of his [Wagner's] utterances, this is the one that is couched most prevailingly and influentially in the grand style. It is not the most lovable of his scores, nor the most symmetrical in form, nor the most consistent in its texture. But it is beyond comparison the most tremendous.[1]

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[1]Gilman, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

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The same thing may be said of the libretto as of the score. Its scale is enormous and in the attempt to pull together all of the strands of the tetralogy, Wagner has produced both a flawed and an imposing dramatic structure.

Indeed, the first scene of the prologue, the appearance of the Norns, is often criticised even though this dark and foreboding scene is designed to pull the spectator's thoughts back from the relatively sun-lit world of *Siegfried* into the darker regions of impending tragic doom. It is an emotional scene intended to re-establish the hypnosis of the cycle and resubjugate the audience. The repetitive action of the Norns throughout the scene, the throwing from one to another of the rope which represents the Thread of Life and the looping and draping of it from the same points each time, fixes the audience's attention and provides the first real shock of the drama.

> In the spinning of the rope of fate we behold a ritual producing the impression of eternal continuity. To an audience brought under the domination of this impression the sudden breaking of the rope is a terrific shock. Woven in with its threads, the curse of greed has eaten through them--we cannot expect anything to escape from such destructive power.[1]

When Siegfried arrives at the palace of the Gibichungs and is given the magical cup of 'friendship,' another possible flaw which could disturb the audience's aesthetic attitude appears.

> . . . we may readily wonder why Gutrune's drink did not paralyze the man's entire memory, and not simply that part of it relating to his Valkyr bride, and we may ask why he could not recall her if he was able to recall the events leading up to her. But if we accept the fable of a magic drink at all, we have no right to put fanciful limitations to its powers.[2]

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[1]Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

[2]Henderson, *Preludes and Studies*, pp. 44-45.

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The last statement is correct as long as Wagner is consistent in his handling of the drink's effects. The degree of probability in a dramatic action does not usually concern an audience greatly as long as the asserted Distance, whatever it is, remains relatively constant. It is only when reality intrudes upon fantasy or vice versa, that the improbable elements begin to be disturbing. In this instance, in the specific action of this drug upon Siegfried's memory, Wagner is most inconsistent. He allows certain memories which should have been eliminated and cancels others which logically should have remained. Any inconsistency of this sort is in direct violation of Wagner's own theories and the theory of Aesthetic Distance. The audience, according to Wagner, should never have to actively use its abstracting and combining intellect in order to understand an action. The empathic involvement in the Distanced state requires a unified, completely stated, and immediately recognizable, naturalistic treatment of all aspects of the situation. If there are breaks or flaws in the action of the play, at those points the audience will be jarred out of an easy, empathic contact on an emotional level and will be fored to use its analytical powers to determine what was really meant and what the proper reaction on their part should have been.

There are two particularly abrupt changes in character in this work, changes which seem to violate the conception which has formed earlier of both Siegfried and Brunhilde. They both are presumably motivated by occurrences in the action, yet both changes are so great as to be potentially disturbing to any empathic contact the audience may have formed with these characters. Since most people do not seem to approve of inconsistency and unreliability in others and since Lipps indicates that empathy "can only be [valuable and pleasant] when the activity with which we

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identify ourselves is one that we should enjoy or approve in ourselves,"[1] this moralistic judging of the actions of the hero and heroine may be sufficient to cause an audience member to break off his empathic relationship (thereby destroying the conditions that Wagner wanted) and take an Over-Distanced attitude.

The changes in question occur, for Siegfried, in Act I, Scene three, and, for Brunhilde, in the latter part of Act II.

The Siegfried alteration is that which occurs when, disguised by the Tarnhelm, he penetrates the wall of flame around Brunhilde to woo her for Gunther. "Siegfried seems transformed in character no less than body; when she claims the Ring will protect her, he brutally wrenches it from her finger."[2] This action is in direct violation of all character traits which have been shown for Siegfried, would not presumably be approved by the audience members, and is continued or developed in no other scene. It constitutes a possible flaw in the empathic portion of the Distancing.

While the audience knows that Brunhilde must have some traits of hardness in her character for she was a messenger of death and she did exult in being in the midst of battles, nevertheless, the dominant facets of her character which have been displayed are those of the loving, concerned daughter, the goddess with enough sympathy for mortals to risk personal punishment to aid them and the heroically loving and tender woman wooed by Siegfried at the conclusion of the third part of the tetralogy. Her character has been presented as entirely positive and one with which there should be no problems in empathizing. What then is one to

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[1]E. F. Carritt, *The Theory of Beauty* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1928), p. 278.

[2]Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

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to make of the terrifying woman who, at the end of Act II, demands and plans the deliberate slaughter of the person she loved? An audience member may observe such changes with a Distanced, abstractive frame of mind with no great difficulty but he cannot continue to empathize with her completely without a good deal of difficulty which can only be resolved through the intellect, thereby restoring the conditions for empathy.

There is an odd discontinuity of thought in this cycle of music dramas which has been the cause of comment by several critics, foremost among whom is George Bernard Shaw. The problem they raise is whether the nature of the opera *Götterdämmerung* and the solution to the moral-ethical problem which is found there really is consistent with the remainder of the tetralogy.

If the unity which would enable the use of empathy is destroyed, how can one accept, not an abstract but an empathic solution like that of love? Wagner felt that his message was one of love. He originally had Brunhilde specifically state the moral in her final summation before plunging into the flames:

> And the lesson which we learn from it is this: "It has passed like a breath, this race of the gods; the treasure of my sacred knowledge I leave to the world: it is no longer goods, gold, or sacred pomp, houses, courts, lordly magnificence, nor the deceitful ties of dark treaties, nor the harsh law of hypocritical manner, but only one single thing which in good as in evil days makes us happy: Love!"[1]

But the author cut this verse from the poem before setting the work to music; he excised it on the basis that it was a negative, not a positive, assertion of the sort of love he meant to convey. His message of love is still readily understood as *Götterdämmerung* now exists.

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[1]Lavignac, *op. cit.*, p. 441.

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> In the legends the gods are destroyed in battle with the powers of evil. Here they die in solemn atonement for sin. And their punishment, which is their release, is accomplished by the voluntary sacrifice of a woman through love. Brunnhilde, wiser in the end than Wotan himself, perfects and completes his plan. The death of the hero, innocent and unoffending, was not enough. The intentional sacrifice, hallowed by love, accomplishes what all Wotan's schemes failed to achieve. The ethical plot of the drama is finished. "The eternal feminine leadeth us upward and on."[1]

The question is, 'Is it sufficient?' Or perhaps, 'Does it accomplish what the cycle seemed to indicate that it would?' It may be, as Shaw contended, that there was a shift in the intent of the work from the creation of a work of profound art to that of a 'teaching play' intended to influence the practical actions of the spectators outside the theatre.

> We shall now find that at the point where The Ring changes from music drama into opera, it also ceases to be philosophic, and becomes didactic. The philosophic part is a dramatic symbol of the world as Wagner observed it. In the didactic part the philosophy degenerates into the prescription of a romantic nostrum for all human ills.[2]

Shaw further decried this conclusion by calling it "a lapse into panacea-mongering didacticism by the holding up of Love as the remedy for all evils and the solvent of all social difficulties."[3] Shaw objected to this ending apparently because it avoided the Life-force concept he favored (and read into *The Ring*) and placed too much emphasis upon a Romantic, empathic idea. There should be no objection to closing *The Ring* on a note of love from the point of view of Aesthetic Distance because empathy is a part of that theory. However, if one accepts the contention that the conclusion is actually didactic, it might be challenged on the basis

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[1]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 421.

[2]Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

[3]*Ibid.*

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In *Götterdämmerung*, Wagner continued to develop the instrumental complexity of his music, moving ever further away from simple, possibly empathic tunes into the more formal and technical aspects of music. While the resultant combinations certainly still have an emotional impact, they are, at the same time, a richer field for intellectual exploration for the musically trained.

> It is evident that he now feels the harmonic instrument to be the most serviceable and flexible of all; and hundreds of his most overpowering effects in the *Götterdämmerung* are achieved by harmonic invention or harmonic transformation.[1]

" . . . much of the tense and tragic and oppressive atmosphere of the *Götterdämmerung* comes from this clouding of the simpler textures of the motives of the earlier operas."[2] What he specifically does to the motives would be apparent only to the most clinically detached auditors but the abstractive, intellectual, almost mathematical changes rung on the motives are there to be understood when one studies the scores, as Wagner seemed to expect of his listeners.

When Brunhilde takes control of the preparation for Siegfried's cremation, there are fine examples of the continuing surprises drawn from the motive system and a striking instance of a possible contact between stage and audience which is unusual but precisely what Wagner wanted for the communication of the 'message' of the cycle.

> With Siegfried dead and Brünnhilde captured, it appears that even the noblest natures are doomed to be crushed by the power of greed. Voicing this feeling, the motive of the *Fall of the Gods* descends in the orchestra, just after Erda sang,

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[1]Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, p. 281.

[2]Wagner quoted in Gilman, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

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> "All that is--ends!" Now, as the first word comes from Brünnhilde's lips, the motive suddenly turns and rises--it becomes the motive of growth (Nature motive), and it flows toward us with the same calm movement, the same suggestion of inexhaustible life that it had when we heard it at the opening of *Rheingold*. It makes us feel instinctively that something new and good will spring again from the earth laid waste by the curse of greed, and as we hear the motive with the first sound of Brünnhilde's voice, we look to her to tell us what this may be. It is to us that we expect her to reveal it, because there is no one on the stage who would desire or understand her message.[1]

Here is a closer than normal contact between the actors and the spectators, which still takes place within a properly Distanced framework.

If *Das Rheingold* is technically difficult enough to defeat most theatres of the world, then surely *Götterdämmerung* would have to be considered totally impossible of presentation on the normal stage. Consider, for example, the stage directions for the last few moments of the drama. Brunhilde

> . . . leaps wildly on to the horse and takes it with one bound into the burning pyre. The flames instantly blaze up and fill the entire space before the hall, seeming even to seize on the building. In terror the women cower towards the front. Suddenly the fire falls together, leaving only a mass of smoke which collects at the back and forms a cloud bank on the horizon. The Rhine swells up mightily and sweeps over the fire. On the surface appear the three Rhine-daughters, swimming close to the fire-embers. Hagen who has watched Brünnhilde's proceedings with increasing anxiety, is much alarmed on the appearance of the Rhine-daughters. He flings away hastily his spear, shield and helmet, and madly plunges into the flood crying: "The Ring's my right!"
>
> Woglinda and Wellgunda twine their arms round his neck and draw him thus down below. Flosshilde swimming before the others to the back, holds the recovered ring joyously up.
>
> Through the cloud-bank on the horizon breaks an increasing red glow. In its light the Rhine is seen to have returned to its bed and the nymphs are circling and playing with the ring on the calm waters.
>
> From the ruins of the half-burnt hall the men and women perceive with awe the light in the sky, in which now appears the hall of Vallhalla, where the gods and heroes are seen sitting together, as described by Valtrauta in the first

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[1]Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

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One could not empathize fully with the events portrayed because of the obvious implausibility of the stage demands.

> The loss of all simplicity and dignity, the impossibility of and credible scenic presentation of the incidents, and the extreme staginess of the conventions by which these impossibilities . . . are got over, are no doubt covered from the popular eye by the overwhelming prestige of Die Götterdämmerung as part of so great a work as The Ring, and by the extraordinary storm of emotion and excitement which the music keeps up.[2]

After such Titanic efforts as those involved in the creation of The Ring cycle it is difficult to imagine Wagner turning immediately to the composition of another profound, psychological drama of such depth as he had just plumbed. It is therefore probably only as a result that it was composed while *The Ring* was in progress that we now have

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE (1859)

Act I. On a ship bearing her from Ireland to Cornwall to become the bride of King Mark, the Irish princess Isolde chafes under the apparent indifference of the knight Tristan, who has been sent to bring her. When Isolde's maid Brangäne inquires of her problem, Isolde pours out the history of her encounter with Tristan. In the wars just ended he slew Isolde's betrothed, but was wounded himself. Not knowing who he was, Isolde nursed him. While he was still quite ill, she discovered his secret and started to kill him with his own sword, but a single penetrating glance stopped her; from that moment she loved him. When he was well and had

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[1] Wagner, *The Authentic Librettos*, p. 306.

[2] Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

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returned to the service of his king, he came once again to Ireland to win her, not for himself, but for his king.

She vacillates between love and hatred for him, but seeing no response from Tristan, she resolves to kill him by using a poison from the chest of magic fluids her mother sent with her. When she is ordered to prepare the death drink, Brangäne substitutes a love potion instead. Both Tristan and Isolde drink the potion and fall into one another's arms just as the ship arrives in Cornwall.

Act II. Isolde can hardly wait for the king's hunting party to be out of hearing so that she may signal Tristan to approach for a rendevous. Brangäne pleads with her not to give the signal; she feels that Melot, Tristan's supposed friend and the person who arranged the night hunt, is a traitor. Isolde will not listen and puts out the torch as the signal. Brangäne keeps watch from the tower while the lovers sing their love duet built around the ideas of Life and Death and Night and Day. Brangäne warns that the dawn is breaking and the king returning. Kurvenal, Tristan's servant, also tries to alert him but Melot, the King and their party come upon them almost immediately. King Mark, in dignified manner, reproaches Tristan for his infidelity. Tristan draws his sword on Melot but then deliberately drops his guard and is seriously wounded.

Act III. Tristan has been carried to his castle in Brittany by Kurvenal, who now tends his wounds. Tristan's delirium and fever have increased rather than abated so Kurvenal has sent for Isolde, depending upon her knowledge of magic and medicine to heal him. When she arrives, Tristan struggles from his bed to greet her and dies in her arms. King Mark, having heard the explanation of the lover's actions from Brangäne, has followed Isolde to give her to Tristan. When he and his retainers

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land, Kurvenal misunderstands and engages them in combat. He slays Melot and is killed himself. Isolde rouses from her faint only long enough to pour out her grief over Tristan's death and to visualize him coming for her before she too dies.

Such extreme personal involvement in the material as Wagner showed in this work, which grew out of his love affair with Mathilda Wesendonk, will either produce a distorted, non-aesthetic creation (which is simply too personal to be artistic) or, if the artist can Distance himself from the events he records and discipline them into a true form, the experience may provide the additional insight and awareness to produce a major work. An artist

> . . . will prove artistically most effective in the formulation of an intensely personal experience, but he can formulate it artistically only on condition of a detachment from the experience *qua personal*.[1]

Wagner achieved this feat in *Tristan and Isolde*, the work usually selected as his best and most revolutionary piece.

Wagner says a great deal about love, life and death in this work, all subjects of high empathic involvement. But he couches his comments in some of his most highly organized poetry and music: the artistic framework is there to hold the spectator at a reasonable Distance.

> The text is obscure beyond comparison, but a close study of it by the light of the music will show that the motives are developed with a logical consistency, a psychological subtlety and truthfulness, a sublimity of conception, and withal a poetic lightness and grace absolutely without a parallel in the whole range of dramatic literature of any time. In no other work of Wagner is the plot . . . more clear and consistent. Heinrich Porges truely remarks that the events follow each other with the certainty of natural phenomena.[2]

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[1]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

[2]Hight, *op. cit.*, p. 316

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While "some of the nineteenth century opponents of Wagner foamed at the mouth over the 'glorification of adultery' in this opera of his,"[1] the same conditions apply here as were noted in the discussion of *Die Walküre*. If the audience can hold its Distance, the story may be regarded simply as a work of art which does not imply any justification of any practical act. What Wagner has actually done with the love-drink is to add another level of symbolism which should help the audience to hold its Distance.

> . . . a poet with Wagner's keen dramatic instincts could not have possibly failed to utilize the love-potion, on account of its theatric value: it makes the underlying motive of the drama, the magic, irresistible power of Love VISIBLE to the to the spectators.[2]

This *Gesamtkunstwerk* is so over-laden with symbols, so "obscure beyond comparison" because of its multiple meanings, so burdened with philosophical discussions of the identity of Life and Day, Night and Death, that it is a wonder that anyone should have been offended by it. It tries to say too much to be a mere story of improper lovers.

Furthermore, the formal structure of the work is so obvious that, again, this could not be a tale designed to titillate or suggest. When the love duet of the second act is interrupted by the entrance of King Mark and his followers

> . . . Tristan boldly challenges Isolde to declare publicly her resolve. He may now die. For the second time (the first was when he drank with her the supposed poison) he tries to leave his life when he drops his sword before Melot. He again fails, and is only wounded. The third time, at the end of the

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[1]Newman, *The Wagner Operas*, p. 186.

[2]Finck, *op. cit.*, ii., p. 165.

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> third act, he is successful. Each time the act is voluntary and deliberate.[1]

Surely, even in the midst of such Romantic splendor as this score holds, the formal repetition of suicide attempts ought to Distance the audience.

The idea which Wagner crystallized most completely in this work was the paradoxical relationship of love and death, the subject of the love duet which fills most of Act II. This reconciliation of apparent opposites is something which must be known through the feeling ultimately, but to reach that state of emotional comprehension, the lovers must explore the relationship of the terms, much like logicians.

> . . . metaphysical discussions on love and death are not exactly the topics dear to lovers. Not to ordinary lovers, quite true. But Tristan and Isolde are not ordinary lovers. They are forced to love, but feel that they cannot enjoy that love unless their hopes and beliefs regarding a union of souls in death are realized; hence, to them, love and death are the most natural topics in the world.[2]

Such hair-splitting definition as the lovers employ has led to the accusation that Wagner was simply conducting a class in the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, his favorite philosopher during the period when he was writing *The Ring* and *Tristan*. The musician has been accused of improperly dealing with pure abstractions when the love scene called for a supremely high level of empathy. The only answer to such accusations, since the work is written in the form it now has (and "Wagner declared that when he wrote it he could not have composed it otherwise . . ."[3]) is to train the audience to perceive the abstractions empathically or to

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[1]Hight, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

[2]Finck, *op. cit.*, ii., p. 169.

[3]James Huneker, "A Note on Richard Wagner," *Mezzotints in Modern Music* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 293.

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find in the highest emotions their intellectual justifications: to sense both ends of the Distance-scale while being closer to one than to the other.

Tristan and Isolde, while diverging from the strict principles of poetic composition laid down in *Opera and Drama*, still illustrates many aspects of the theory with great clarity.

> Throughout the poem Wagner restricts himself to the barest minimum of words--sometimes no more than two or three to a line of verse,--having no need of speech beyond what is necessary to concretise the emotion that is being poured out by the prime expressive instrument of the work, the music.[1]

This restriction in the number of words to secure the maximum of emotional impact from those key root-words which are retained agrees perfectly with Wagner's theory and also establishes a Distancing artificiality, a compactness which is too great to be normal.

That Wagner's musical methods had changed may be heard immediately in the Prelude to the work.

> In contrast with the preludes to Wagner's earlier works the *Vorspiel* to *Tristan and Isolde* suggests no pictures. It is the expression of a mood for which one could not easily find a counterpart in the natural or the legendary world. Longing, as hopeless as deathless, is voiced in every phrase . . .[2]

> The phrases of sorrow and loneliness and aspiration that rise from the orchestra with so indescribable an effect: their mystical suggestion of tonal condensation, of an inner world of being gradually assuming form and substance, symbolizing, as Wagner said, that "perturbing creative breath" which shapes the world and all men's anguish and desire--these musical images are excessively difficult to project.[3]

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[1]Newman, *The Wagner Operas*, p. 204.

[2]Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

[3]Gilman, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-182.

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Part of the difficulty may well be the lack of 'pictures' in the music, its greater than usual abstraction. No longer does the orchestra establish such concrete things as the flow of the Rhine river or the dash and howl of a storm; it simply speaks of a heart-rending, insoluable, even indefinable, something which one knows, but does not know how to express. Wagner had suddenly turned his back on the world of Nature which dominated the *Ring* and began to speak of states of the soul in 'pure,' non-pictorial music.

> The musical texture of *Tristan* is different from that of any other of Wagner's works in that it is almost purely "symphonic"; often he abandons himself to the sheer intoxication of "developing" the mood symbolised by a particular motive for pages at a time, the stage situation meanwhile remaining stabilised.[1]

His growing penchant for the use of conventional, formal methods becomes clearer in this music also. Along with the more symphonic treatment of the music, one might well expect to find the recognized symphonic forms used, as indeed they are. Particularly does Wagner favor the simple theme-contrast-return of theme, or A-B-A, form, one of the simplest and most flexible of the standard structures.

> At the beginning of *Tristan*, for example, the steersman sings his melody; then comes the scene between Isolde and Brangäne; and after the climax, where Isolde calls for air ('Luft! Luft!'), we hear the steersman's song again. In the libretto this repetition marks a new scene but musically it is nothing but a subtly transformed ritornello.[2]

This abstract music of a known formal cast also called for, and received a different use of the motives. Where they had been used just to recall or to prophesy the future in the majority of their appearances,

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[1]Newman, *The Wagner Operas*, p. 202.

[2]Neville Cardus, "Wagner 1813-1883," *A Composers Eleven* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958), pp. 51-52.

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they now became parts in a musical texture, not necessarily dramatic or active in the sense they had been, but rather parts in a free sound pattern. The motives were still connected to specific thoughts, actions, people, etc. and necessarily carried an increment of meaning in this sense but they now sounded so frequently in the orchestra, so many of them occurred at once in order to create the polyphonic, linear style of this music that it was all but impossible to follow all of them at one time. They became simply emotionally rich melodic phrases which were contrapuntally manipulated and infinitely repeated until all possible permutations and cross-relations had been drawn from them. For instance, in the last act, Isolde,

> . . . entering breathlessly, receives her dying lover in her arms as the orchestra voices their emotions in one of the unendurable moments of the marvellous score. This outburst of tragic passion, beautiful and despairing, overwhelms the spirit, at the same time that it fills with wondering admiration the appreciative mind of the musician: for the passage is a miracle of contrapuntal art. Yet the effect upon the listener is immeasurably enhanced if, bearing in mind the preceding phases of the drama, he is aware that the instrumental fabric at this point is woven of no fewer than half a dozen motives, each one contributing its piercingly reminiscent allusion to some mood or scene or indident that has gone before: the motive of the signalling Torch, the motive of Death, a theme from the love duo of Act II, a phrase from the orchestral nocturne that accompanied Brangäne's song of warning, and the motives of Sorrow and of Desire first heard at the beginning of the Prelude to the opera.[1]

Beginning with *Tristan* and the latter parts of the *Ring*, the orchestra even had the last word in the opera, rather than having the music drama close with a chorus as it had, for example, in *Tannhäuser*.

> The moment in which Wagner makes us contemplate the final picture, where the central figures are motionless in death and the others in grief, gives opportunity for a partial detachment and a turning from the particular to the general . . .[2]

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[1]Gilman, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-262.

[2]Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

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> . . . bridges the space separating the events portrayed from the life of everyday to which we return, instead of dropping us off at the end to get across as best we may. It lends dignity to the fall of the curtain . . . and it usually states in a general way the central idea of the drama.[1]

This work, as has been noted by Appia and others, is the one Wagnerian drama which could dispense with formal scenery with the greatest ease. The primary actions here are subtle, psychological, inner shifts in the moods of the lovers and

> . . . when something does "happen," in the ordinary theatrical sense of the word, it strikes with tremendous force; it does precisely what Wagner intended it should do--the brief intrusion of reality gives us a blinding sense of how entirely Tristan and Isolde had lived, in the only sense that they would have called living, in a world of non-reality of their own.[2]

> In this case, life and death,--the very significance and existence of the outer world--depend upon the inner emotions of the soul alone. The whole effective action is produced by the fact that the inmost soul demands it; and it comes before the observer just as it has been inwardly developed.[3]

Such an interior world, so sharply marked off and isolated from reality, cannot escape Distancing. However, if a spectator ever surrenders himself to the circumscribed reality which exists within the opera and within the lovers, it is equally impossible to avoid some empathic identification with them.

DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NUREMBURG (1867)

Act I. Walther von Stolzing, a young knight, seeks the hand of Eva Pogner, only to discover that she is to be the prize in the Meistersinger's coming contest of song. Walther resolves to enter the contest

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[1]*Ibid.*, p. 81.

[2]Newman, The Wagner Operas, *p. 203.*

[3]Wagner, "The Music of the Future," p. 172.

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and is hastily instructed in the Mastersinger's many rules by David, the apprentice of Hans Sachs, the cobbler. When the Mastersingers assemble for the preliminary judging, Pogner, Eva's father, recognizes Walther as the son of an old friend and induces the Masters to listen to his trial song. Beckmesser, an applicant for Eva's hand, is displeased by the appearance of another rival, and, serving as the score-keeper or 'marker' during the trial song, he notes so many errors that Walther is eliminated. Only Hans Sachs is struck by the novelty and obvious inspiration of Walther's song.

Act II. The news of Walther's failure is given to Eva by the gentle Sachs. When Walther appears in the street near Eva's home, she goes to him and, since he cannot win her, agrees to elope with him. Sachs, considering this unwise, spoils their plan with too much light from his shop. Beckmesser puts in an appearance to serenade Eva, not realizing that her place on the balcony of her home has been taken by her maid Magdalena. The only way that Beckmesser can stop Sach's cobbling and singing long enough for the serenade is to agree to let him mark the errors in the serenade by a stroke of the hammer on the shoes. The song is so bad that Sachs quickly finishes the shoes. David, believing that Beckmesser is intentionally directing the song to his (David's) sweetheart, Magdalena, attacks Beckmesser and gives him a thorough beating. The noise attracts other people and a full scale riot develops. Sachs pulls Walther into his shop and Eva runs for her house. The appearance of the night watchman, making his sleepy and unknowing rounds, stops the fight as quickly as it started.

Act III. The following morning in Sach's house, Walther, who spent the night there, tells of a beautiful song he heard in his dream. He puts it into proper form under Sach's direction, who also writes it

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The second scene shows the gathering of the guilds on the meadow for the contest. Sachs receives special greetings from the crowd and the singing begins. Beckmesser tries to sing Walther's song but makes such a mess of it that he is well laughed at. He replies that the awful song was of Sachs' composition. Sachs denies it and gains permission for Walther to sing his composition. He is declared the winner, accepts the prize of Eva but declines to join the Mastersingers guild. Sachs gently corrects him with a paeon to German art, which all the people second.

The genial, warm, relaxed atmosphere in which this piece is set and the good, honest burghers make a sharp contrast with the gods and obsessed lovers of Wagner's other works. It is amazing that an author-composer, who was so consistently oriented toward tragedy could so suddenly, effectively and in such an isolated manner, work in the opposite genre. As will be noted in the Thought section, this music drama also represents a virtual denial of all of Wagner's theoretical principles, a complete abandonment of the intricate scheme for writing modern opera and a reversion to precisely the style and methods of composition against which he fought in his

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> In his art as in his life Wagner took appalling risks. The whole point of the plot-interest of *Meistersinger* is that Walther will sooner or later sing a great melody, a Preislied. The Preislied, in fact, is the hero of the opera. . . . Wagner staked the fate of his work on his ability to compose a melody which would convince the majority of his listeners, all over the world and in different ages, that it was a Preislied, nothing more or less. He wrote the melody demanded by the situation and the occasion . . .[1]

The gamble, the danger involved in this situation is, of course, that tastes vary. What to one person may be a marvellously romantic melody, to another may be a saccharine piece of sentimentality. What to another might appear a marvellously cool, controlled and classic melody may be to a fourth person as dead and uninteresting as a mathematical exercise. The wager that Wagner was making was that he could achieve a melody which lies in the exact center of the Distance-scale, one with some of the characteristics of all schools and periods, with something to appeal to everyone and yet with enough formal characteristics so that it will always be seen as a superior art work. Wagner was certain that he could find the exact point of balance which represents the Golden Mean. He was willing to build the whole of his plot on that ability.

In spite of the warmth and graciousness of most of the action, there are still many formal characteristics to this plot, not the least of which is the conclusion, the double ending of the work.

> The plot of the *Meistersinger* really ends with Walther's crowning, but by extending the *finale* Wagner has made the drama conclude not merely with the artistic victory of a Franconian knight over some Nuremberg burghers, but with a glorifying of song as the expression of what is best in the life and character of a people, and in a declaration of the essential union

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[1]Cardus, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

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> of all who serve it, whether by their creative genius, like Walter, or by their conservative efforts, like the masters.
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> It is no small achievement to succeed, in the very end of a drama, in changing the listener's attitude from antagonism to admiration, without introducing something to prove the former attitude founded upon a misconception. Wagner, following Aeschylus, brings this about by enlarging our view of the subject as a whole.[1]

Wagner used one of the many means of generating Distance to effect this change in attitude toward the masters: he enlarged the scope of the audience's perception from the specific to the general. The expansiveness not only fit the general tone of a comedy but enabled Wagner to communicate his 'message' at the same time.

To make such a figure as Hans Sachs (as Wagner has drawn him) the central core of a comedy is again to strive for a blending of the comic and the tragic, of the laughable and the tearfully pathetic which most great comics and comedies attempt, but which is always difficult because it draws equally upon both ends of the Distance-scale.

The only other character who needs to be considered here is that of the 'marker' Beckmesser. His case gives a fine example of Wagner's sensing the necessity to Distance a character further than he had originally intended if he expected an artistic reaction to him.

> In the second and third prose-drafts, written at Vienna in 1961, the character of the bigoted Marker is named "Hanlich," and was obviously intended as a satirical caricature of Wagner's critical adversary, the Viennese anti-Wagnerite, Eduard Hanslick. But Wagner was too wise and sensitive an artist not to realise the aesthetic error of so crass a kind of satire; and in *Die Meistersinger*, as it was completed, the pedantic and obscurantist Marker became "Beckmesser" (the name of one of the historic Mastersingers of Nuremberg).[2]

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[1]Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

[2]Gilman, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

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Though this opera seems a light hearted and comparatively simple boy-meets-girl story, it is anything but that. As has been indicated, Sachs, not the lovers, occupies the central position among the characters. Moreover, this story is at least as symbolic as most of Wagner's output. The whole opera and each element within it can be taken to have other meanings connected with Wagner's life and work and the general conditions to be found in the cultural climate of Germany: "the whole opera, in one sense, crystallises his own appalling fight for recognition, for the truth of his own new rules and inspiration, harried by the mockery and spite of the critics and certain musicians."[1]

> The masters represent the tyranny of formalism in art, the dominance of that opinion which mistakes form for substance, and attributes to the outward shape of every work the credit for its merit. Walther von Stolzing, in his efforts as poet and singer, is the embodiment of the free impulse, the desire for untrammelled expression. Sachs, without the creative power of the young knight, is the truer artist. He represents the influence of enlightened and sympathetic intelligence.[2]

And so on, each part falling into place in both a smaller and a larger framework. The double vision Wagner provided gives greater depth and meaning at the same time that "the particular becomes the generalized, the parish becomes the world."[3]

> . . . despite the individualized and concrete limning of characters and scenes, the rich, exact veracity of the portraiture that makes *Die Meistersinger* so astonishing an achievement, Wagner could not, even here, overcome his propensity for dealing with ever-lasting things . . .[4]

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[1]Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[2]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 343.

[3]Gilman, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 211.

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While the complexity of writing continued and even developed, one is less conscious here of musical technique and technicalities than in many of the other works. Instead, with the re-introduction of separate musical numbers which may be taken out of the flow of the 'endless melody,' the whole work seems to divide up into smaller pieces which neither feel choppy nor impose a sense of artificial tune-turning. Instead they seem to facilitate one's grasp of the whole, one piece at a time and through the relationships which these individual pieces have to the 'continuous melody.'

The motives were still woven into tight and complicated formal designs, in this show, especially certain chosen ones.

> And one of the miracles of the score is its use not only of the advanced technical style Wagner had now achieved, but of the Bach contrapuntal and earlier *chorale* forms which seemed to the composer to be nearer to the period of the story, without restricting his musical style to archaic mediaeval structures.[1]

Even in places in the score where one would ordinarily least expect to find a set form, it is present. At the end of Act II,

> . . . a brawl begins of heroic magnitude, not quenched by the jugs of water poured by indignant wives on the fighters below. It is marvellously set by Wagner in fugal style--a massive piece of contrapuntal writing in which all the individual characters and chorus take part.[2]

In the wildest part of the libretto, the musical form employed is the strictest and most involved used in the whole score. Freedom is counterbalanced by formal rules and the blazing energy of the fight imparts a zest and lightness to the fugue which may be considered rare in that form.

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[1]Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 156.

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To point out only one final way in which the *Opera and Drama* theories were abandoned, note the extensive use of several choruses. The first and the last things one hears in this work are choral passages and in between, there are choruses for the guild members, for the apprentices, and for the angry house wives.

> In no work of Wagner, with the exception of *The Mastersingers*, can it be said that he has succeeded in bringing the chorus convincingly into the main action. Indeed, after *Lohengrin*, Wagner dispenses with a chorus entirely until *The Mastersingers* except for a very few measures in the first act of *Tristan and Isolde*.[1]

Dispensing with the chorus in the middle works was in full accord with the theoretical principles which maintained that only individuals should be shown on the stage and that there was no justification for a character whose only purpose was to fill out the harmonic support of the principle. With no pronouncement and no excuse, Wagner had introduced and used choruses in this work more fully than in any other of his operas.

In the face of all of these abrupt and radical changes in the Master's methods, the true Wagnerite, the one converted to the new principles, is likely to be the one who is disconcerted and puzzled, while the majority of the audience who understand and accept the principals of the older opera are probably able to accept this drama with less effort than any other of the third period works. In essence, Wagner made it easier for the greater number of his listeners to accept this piece. It seems appropriate that a comedy should be easy to follow.

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[1]Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

PARSIFAL (1882)

Act I. In the forest near the temple of the Grail, Gurnemanz and some Grail squires greet the appearance of Kundry, the servant, with a balm for the King's wound. The King, Amfortas, the keeper of the Grail, passes, borne on his litter to the lake to bathe his wound. Gurnemanz tells the squires the history of the King's problem. Amfortas, going out to fight with the evil magician Klingsor, was tempted by a seductive woman and he allowed the sacred spear which pierced Christ's side to slip from his hand. Klingsor immediately inflicted a similar wound on Amfortas with the spear and then made off with it. Amfortas cannot die as long as he conducts the religious services of the knights, nor can he be healed until a guileless fool recovers the spear and touches the wound with it.

Parsifal has unwittingly penetrated the sacred grounds and not knowing that all life is inviolate there, he shoots a swan with an arrow. Gernemanz severely berates him and discovering how little he knows of the world wonders if this is the awaited pure fool. He takes the boy to the Temple where he is present at the unveiling of the Grail but when he obviously does not understand what he sees, Gurnemanz throws him out of the Temple.

Act II. Klingsor, aware that Parsifal is coming toward his magic castle and garden (created to tempt the knights of the Grail), summons Kundry, his chief seductress by a spell. She obeys most reluctantly. Klingsor's knights sent against Parsifal are defeated or killed and Parsifal finds himself in the magic garden surrounded by half human Flower Maidens who compete for his attentions. He resists them easily but almost falls a prey to the now enchantingly beautiful Kundry, who lures him with information about his parents and a kiss from his mother. That kiss awakens

in Parsifal both pity for Amfortas' condition and an awareness of how he was harmed. Kundry pleads with him for one hour of physical love, assuming that his purity would release her from the curse she incurred centuries before, by laughing at Christ on the cross. He will have nothing to do with her in that sense. Klingsor takes matters in his own hands. He launches the sacred spear at Parsifal but instead of harming him it remains suspended in the air above him. Parsifal grasps it, makes the sign of the cross and Klingsor and his magical forces collapse. Kundry curses Parsifal so that no road will lead him back to Montsalvat, the home of the knights of the holy Grail, but, nevertheless, he sets out for the Temple.

Act III. Years have passed, though the situation of the Grail knights and their leader is unchanged. After many weary adventures, Parsifal appears before Gurnemanz's cabin. He is recognized as the guileless fool, now grown wise through pity. Gurnemanz and Kundry, once more a servant of the Grail, wash and anoint Parisfal, who, in turn, baptises Kundry and all three set off for the castle.

Among the assembled knights, Amfortas is once more objecting to the exhibition of the Grail which will only prolong his unwanted life. He asks instead that the knights slay him. Parsifal, entering, goes immediately to the King, and touching the wound with the spear, instantly cures him. Parsifal announces that he is to succeed Amfortas as keeper of the Grail and he proceeds with the service. Kundry, redeemed with the release of her victim, dies at Parsifal's feet. When he raises the cup, the Temple is filled with light and a dove descends to hover above Parsifal's head.

The sources of this work are many; Wolfram von Eschenbach's poem *Parzifal*, Bournouf's *Introduction a l'histoire du Buddhisme Indien*,

Wagner's play *Jesus of Nazareth*, his earlier cantata *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* and the abandoned opera sketch *Die Sieger*, but "no other drama of Wagner shows wider departures from the original material or more condensation of it than this, the last of his works."[1] The compounding and overloading of symbols reaches its greatest degree here. Everything takes on multiple meanings, not only in cross references among the specific sources but also between the different cultures and religions which they represent. Such a wealth of material and inference brought with it problems as well as joys.

> It was . . . impossible to reduce the story of *Parsifal* to the highly concentrated form into which he had managed to cast *Tristan*. So he had to do what it had been his first impulse to do in the *Ring*--elucidate the visible action of the moment by a narrative of all that had happened before the action, or that particular stage of the action, began, and trust to the orchestra to maintain the musical interest by means of the interplay of leitmotives. Hence the lumbering stage technique of the first Act of *Parsifal*, and the *raison d'etre* for the endless garrulity of Gurnemanz. That venerable worthy is not a character, he is merely a walking and talking guide book . . .[2]

The very quantity of the material to be employed apparently forced the use of a formal and conventional expository technique. Or it may be that Wagner had developed his thoughts to the point where he, like Brecht, simply took the quickest, clearest method for setting up the conditions for the remainder of the action. Regardless of the reason, almost any audience would recognize the formal character of the expository device which Gurnemanz represents. This time-honored technique is a not inappropriate introduction to a formal and symbolic tale.

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[1]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, pp. 468-469.

[2]Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, p. 302.

In accord with the highly symbolic nature of this music drama, the characters do not invite empathy in the same manner that most other Wagnerian characters do. One always seems slightly put off, held away, by the religious aura which surrounds each of the characters. *Parsifal's*

> . . . characterization is not individual but symbolic; Amfortas and Parsifal and Kundry and Klingsor are not men and women whom we might meet any day in the flesh, but simply types of human aspiration or failure.[1]

> That is to say, the real actors are not the persons who figure upon the stage, but the ethical ideas which those persons represent, and truth here means not the exact imitation of given persons in their external features, as objects of Nature, but the logical representation of actions as the outcome of ideas.[2]

The mysterious Kundry, she of the double personality and an infinite background, is completely overlaid with symbolic meanings. Wagner

> . . . derived her in part from the character of Prakriti in his Buddhist drama *Die Sieger*--she who was obliged to expiate in her life the sin of pride committed in a prior existence. She is related also to Gundryggia, the wild serving messenger of Asgard's heroes; to Herodias, doomed by her mockery of Christ on the Cross to wander until she finds once more a savior; and to Mary Magdalen. Kundry is, in short, different incarnations of the same being. She exists "without beginning and without end. She has no individual character, because she is all women at the same time."[3]

In spite of the fact that the audience may want to let its heart go out to someone who obviously suffers as she does during the play, the chances are great that, just as they are about to establish empathic contact with her, another aspect of her manifold character--and that an uncomfortable or repulsive part--will come to the fore to stop them.

Amfortas is said to have a double symbolism. He is the personification of that suffering through sin which has

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 317.

[2] Hight, *op. cit.*, ii., p. 172.

[3] Gilman, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-241.

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[2] Hight, *op. cit.*, ii., p. 172.

[3] Gilman, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-241.

> penetrated even the sacred community of the Knights of the Grail. All the commentators say that he also typifies the sufferings of Christ. Perhaps this was Wagner's intention,[1] but to the writer's mind Amfortas more beautifully symbolizes the misery brought upon mankind through yielding to the lusts of the flesh, for it is Parsifal who represents the Redeemer throughout the drama.[2] He represents Him when he is anointed by Gurnemanz, when his feet are washed by the repentent Kundry, and when he baptizes her in that sublime scene which only a God-gifted genius could have dared to place upon the modern stage. But more than all, He surely is the Redeemer when He touches Amfortas with the holy spear and bids him
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> Be whole, forgiven, and absolved.[3]

Regardless of how they are approached, all of these characters are subject to levels of interpretation, and it is possible that the characteristics of Christ were shared among a number of them, each of which would symbolize Him in turn.

Surely enough instances have been given to show that these personages are merely symbols. It is rather apparent that they are during a performance also, because of the schematic nature of the action. As soon as the audience is aware that they are observing symbols moving within the confines of a parable or an allegory, a rather high degree of Distance is established.

What is the thought, condition or event being presented? "As in the *Ring* we witness the passing of a myth, the end of a divine world, so, in *Parsifal*, we behold the inception of a religion in its utmost naivete."[4]

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[1]It was, at least in part. See Gilman, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-232.

[2]Parsifal undoubtedly does represent Christ but "the spectator should guard against the too common error of identifying Parsifal vaguely with Christ. Any suggestion of that sort angered Wagner. 'The idea of making Christ a tenor!' he said: 'phew!'" Newman, *The Wagner Operas*, p. 722.

[3]Henderson, *Preludes and Studies*, pp. 103-104.

[4]Gilman, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

Because the religion depicted bears so many relationships to Christianity and yet cannot be taken to be any given sect (even the Roman Catholic which it most resembles), Wagner laid himself open to many more critical attacks for his impiety, his degredation of religious ideas, his daring to use holy ideas.

> We have ever with us those unduly contemptuous music lovers and musicians who look askance at *Parsifal* because of the fact that many devout and simple souls who can hardly be suspected of musical discernment regard attendance upon it as an exercise in piety. We have always with us, too, those who profess to be indignant because of its alleged exploitation of holy things; and there are other and implacable objectors who sincerely loathe the work not because it is an "exploitation" of holy things, but because it deals with holy things at all . . .[1]

Here is another of the areas of public thought which is normally forbidden to the stage, or which is approached only with great caution by an author. Any statement in connection with religion is likely to produce a negative reaction from some segment of the audience because, like the question of sex sanctions raised by *Die Walküre*, many and perhaps most of the audience members cannot be trusted to keep their Aesthetic Distance in relation to such subjects.

In this case in particular, many of the critics of Wagner's *Parsifal* made the glaring Distancing error of assuming that the composer was proposing these events, not as an aesthetic experience at all, but as the practical foundation for a variant type of Christianity. Extended critical battles were waged on this point and it is still apparently necessary for critics who can keep their Distance to point out the artistic aspects of the work.

Wagner continued to change his poetic style as long as he wrote. In this drama, almost no traces remain of the *Stabreim* with its

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

alliteration and its word order condensation. The lines have expanded into the long and flowing conceptions of his second period; though with a greater maturity. "The verse of the *Parsifal* poem is the freest and most varied Wagner ever wrote. It runs the gamut in variety from what could be called rhythmic prose in the more epic, narrative sections . . ."[1] to "the most expressionistic poetry . . ."[2] elsewhere. The continual fluctuations in the nature of the verse make it seem far more like normal speech than much of Wagner's poetic writing. And the variations seem appropriate to the lines of the music. In general, because of the less mechanical, less fixed form, it is easier to assume that this is not poetry, not an artificial manner of speaking. Empathy should be easier with such dialogue.

Because of the abstractness of the underlying concepts and the emotional settings in which they are enclosed, both the form and the content aspects of music are given ample range here.

The motive system still functions in this work, in its symphonic form, even though it does not always recall or prophesize. But, again, there are interruptions or inconsistencies in the use of the motives.

> The opening of the second act brings the motives of Klingsor, sorcery, and the suffering of Amfortas all into active use. The music is stormy, passionate, at times furious, till the flower-maidens appear to tempt Parsifal, and then we come to the long passage of freely written melody . . . The significant themes return in the scene between Kundry and Parsifal . . .[3]

Yet, the various approaches to setting the drama ultimately blend and seem to become one. The audience is called upon, and apparently does, follow

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[1]Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 208.

[3]Henderson, *Richard Wagner*, p. 481.

the alternation from the formal employment of the motives to the opposite stage of the freely composed music with fair ease. They move on the Distance-scale as easily as the music does.

> And finally, how exquisitely adapted is the melodic and harmonic idiom of *Parsifal*,--so smoothly flowing, so full of melting and caressing tenderness,--to that static world from which, with the purging from it of so much human passion, so much even of the ordinary physical energy of humanity too has gone. For this, as for everything else, he found the right, the only musical equivalent, without seeking for it. His visions painted themselves.[1]

Wagner's basic style here is empathic music designed for an abstract realm.

From this array of Romantic forests, impressive Grail Temples, magical castles and gardens, only two scenic things are chosen for comment. One of these is the method by which characters are assumed to move from the hut of Gurnemanz to the Temple of the Grail, a rather disconcerting method.

> The transformation scene, by which the two pass together to the temple, is an admirable preparation for the mystery which we are about to behold. Instead of walking up the path which leads to the shrine they stand almost still while the scenery passes along from left to right. The landscape grows wilder and wilder until we reach a hollow surrounded by huge barren rocks; these then seem to sink, until at last we find ourselves in the middle of the Grail Temple.[2]

Such an effect, while perfectly possible on the stage at any time, is still seldom used. It is quite likely to be disconcerting and Distancing; indeed, a very reasonable preparation for the viewing of a miracle.

The other scene selected for comment is that of the Flower Maidens. Of all of the scenes in the play this might well be the most empathic. These creatures of an abnormal beauty have as their goal the seduction of

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[1]Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, pp. 313-314.

[2]Hight, *op. cit.*, ii., p. 230.

Parsifal. They are given a setting of magical beauty, some of the most gracious music in the whole work and each is trying to outdo the others in order to attract the young man's attention. This would seem an occasion when anything might be acceptable. But note how much Wagner has Distanced and disciplined this seductiveness.

> . . . Wagner's own remarks . . . on the "childish naivete" of this scene, "far removed from any suggestion of sensuality"; and secured, partly, by "eliminating the passionate accents which usually break through all the melodic lines," in favor of grace and euphony. "I do not believe," he adds with pardonable pride, "that any other stage has ever shown such a bewitching exhibition of maidenly grace in song and action as our artistic friends provided in this scene."[1]

With the discussion of Parsifal we bring to a conclusion this consideration of Wagner's music dramas. They are an amazing sequence of works. Although they are the products of a single mind, each opera has a distinct character and a specific purpose within Wagner's total body of work

> *Lohengrin* is a romantic opera, *Tristan* a music-drama, or "action"; the *Nibelung's Ring* was entitled a "stage-festival-play," while *Parsifal* was baptised as a "stage-consecrating-festival-play" *(Bühnenweihfestspiel)*. The title explains itself: while the music-drama had driven unaesthetic absurdities from the opera, *Parsifal* consecrates the theatre, and converts it into a Temple of Art.[2]

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[1]Finck, *op. cit.*, ii., p. 425.

[2]*Ibid.*, ii., p. 412.

CHAPTER V

WAGNER'S STAGING

Wagner found that his operas could not be staged adequately by the majority of the theatres of his time. The directors, designers and stage crews were unwilling to expend the necessary time and energy in the creation of appropriate settings and technical devices; the singers, their technique and rehearsal time distorted by the repertory system of the third quarter of the 1800's, were unwilling or unable to study the roles adequately; and the orchestral members often failed to grasp the intention behind Wagner's orchestration or flatly declared that the music was unplayable.[1] The end result, of course, was that the works were performed in a non-realistic manner, were Over-Distanced and too formal, as were most opera productions of the period. Too much Distance harmed these comparatively more empathic works more than it did the more formal operas of other composers and, consequently, the *Gesamtkunstwerken* were slow in winning an audience. Wagner felt that if his compositions were ever to win their way and to help in the reconstruction of the operatic theatre for more serious purposes, exemplary productions were imperative. Particularly was this true of the gigantic *Ring* cycle, for which he felt that no theatre in the world was adequate. The only solution was the contruction of a special theatre, equipped and staffed specifically for the mounting of these operas.

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[1]Ann M. Lingg, "Great Opera Houses: Bayreuth," *Opera News*, Vol. 26, No. 9, January 13, 1962, p. 26.

This dream of a superlative theatre which would set the tone and dictate the style,[1] for all theatrical activities was a dream which had haunted Wagner for a quarter of a century before he was able to bring it into existence in Bayreuth. As early as 1848,

> In the *Entwurf zur Organisation eines Deutschen National-Theaters für das Königreich Sachsen* . . . he speaks of "demanding the fullest and most active interest of the whole nation in an artistic establishment that, conjointly with all the other arts, has for its object the ennobling of taste and manners." He does not develop the idea, however.[2]

This is not the place to recount the trials of the composer in bringing his theatre into being; it should be sufficient to indicate that

> The festival theatre at Bayreuth was Richard Wagner's own creation--in every sense of the word. He sought the place for it, he earned or begged the money to build it, he designed it and, if he did not erect it with his own hands, he supervised its erection down to the smallest detail.[3]

When the theatre was completed and performances were given there, it may be assumed that they came as close to Wagner's ideals of perfection as he could achieve.

Before considering the elements of the rehearsals, the staging devices and the performances some attention should be devoted to the *Festspielhaus*, the theatre itself.

Because much of the money for the construction of the building was raised by subscription and by appeals to the public, the funds were somewhat limited. Wagner, perhaps of necessity, regarded the Bayreuth opera

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[1]Or to put this concept in the terms of this study, to demonstrate the proper balance of involvement and non-involvement. For confirmation of the assertion that artistic style is dependent upon the establishment of the correct degree of Aesthetic Distance, see Michelis, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[2]Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, p. 184.

[3]Skelton, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

house as a simple, temporary structure which merely indicated what a theatre should be; this was to serve as an illustration of the proper methods and arrangements when the people of Germany united in building a truly monumental structure to house the national opera which would grow out of Wagner's work. Everything about the structure, in contrast with most opera houses of the 1800's, was of the simplest sort.

> Our very poverty of means, however, compelled us to think of nothing but the sheer objective fitness of our building, the absolutely essential for our aim: and aim and object here resided in the inner relation of the auditorium to a stage[1] of the largest dimensions necessary for mounting perfect scenery.[2]

Wagner was aware of the immensely important relationship which exists between the two spaces in a theatre, the audience seating area and the space reserved for the actors. Physically, these two spaces are the same or adjacent areas, but psychologically, during a performance, they are different spheres. The auditorium containing a group of real people who are subject to the laws, physical and political, of this world is most certainly a part of reality as we know it. On the other hand, the stage area occupied by actors in the process of performance is qualitatively different in that it is Distanced and therefore cut off from practical applications. The dream world shown on the stage need conform to no laws but its own; it exists in isolation behind the proscenium, an entire and self-sufficient world. That world may exist as long as the distinction between it and the world represented by the auditorium is recognized. A single spectator from the world of reality crossing the proscenium line would cause the destruction of the dramatic illusion by his intrusion into

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[1]"The Festspielhaus was built around an idea: the separation of the ideal world on the stage from the real world of the audience." Lingg, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

[2]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 368.

the ideal space of the play.[1] It is vital that the distinction between the areas be observed and the *Festspielhaus* was built to do just that.

The audience area at Bayreuth was a revolutionary one. While most auditoria of the time were built to facilitate the social proclivities of the nobles (to enable the ostentatious display of their clothing, to make it clear who was visiting whom in the boxes, to disclose what those of superior taste did when they were bored with the opera, etc.), the Bayreuth 'house' was not so constructed. Its sole purpose was to provide a seating area for those who were watching the performance. The intent behind the design of the Bayreuth auditorium was to eliminate all of the petty social distractions and to focus the audience's attention on the drama, for

> . . . just as in ancient Greece the theatre was a spiritual experience rather than a social occasion. The amphi-theatrical shape of the auditorium, every seat giving an uninterrupted view of the stage, was part of the process of persuading the audience to forget its social self.[2]

Even the shape of the auditorium was intended to begin the process of creating a Distanced emotive state of mind for the appreciation of the word-tone dramas. By cutting out the possibilities of external distractions,

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[1]This is generally true of all dramatic productions; no spectator may enter the play space and have a conventional play continue. When actors violate the stage picture frame, they can do so only with adequate preparation which redefines the space the characters occupy. Actors entering the auditorium must "carry the acting space with them." Even then, a spectator reaching out to touch an actor would violate the irregular playing space and produce a shock which would disrupt the action. Consequently a director who chooses to use the technique of moving the actors into the audience area reduces the physical factors which promote Aesthetic Distance and increases the likelihood of destroying the illusion of the play.

[2]Skelton, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

by plunging the house into darkness during the performance ("a rarity in the gaslight era"[1] of 1876), by immobilizing the seats so that they "must always keep their front toward the stage,"[2] and by stripping the building of all normal decoration which might attract the eye, the predisposing conditions for a hypnotized, empathic response were also strongly suggested. A concentration upon the stage action, a fixed attention to the performance was necessary simply because there was nothing else to be seen.

The proscenium in this theatre, the most obvious termination of the audience area in the direction in which the spectators must be focused, plays a great part in directing of the audience's attention. Normally,

> The function of the proscenium arch is merely to define the limits of the composition, to set it off by separating the fiction of the play from the reality of its surroundings, to prevent the eye from wandering to irrelevant things--in short, to maintain the aesthetic distance.[3]

It is used in this sense at Bayreuth, as an aid toward abstracing the performance, but, because of an extension of the lines of perspective built into the theatre and because of the existence of a double proscenium used to mask the "mystic abyss,"[4] the idea occurred to the designer to continue the expansion of the proscenia into the auditorium in a deliberate attempt to manipulate Distance.

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[1]Lingg, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[2]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 365.

[3]Dolman, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[4]This is one of a number of possible translations (gulf, chasm, depth, etc.) for the phrase "'Mysticher Abgrund,' Wagner's name for the orchestral chamber." Hight, *op. cit.*, ii., p. 97. The purpose of the mystical abyss will presently be described.

> Now, to mask the blanks immediately in front of our double proscenium, the ingenuity of my present adviser has already hit on the plan of throwing out a third and still broader proscenium.
>
> Seized with the excellence of this thought, we soon went further in the same direction, and found that, to do full justice to the idea of an auditorium narrowing in true perspective toward the stage, we must extend the process to the whole interior, adding proscenium after proscenium until they reached their climax in the crowning gallery, and thus enclosing the entire audience in the vista, no matter where it took its place.[1]

Quite literally, wherever one may chance to sit in the Bayreuth *Festspielhaus*, he is inside the lines of perspective which dominate the entire building; he is, in fact, inside the total picture. If his eye should ever drift away from the stage, it is pulled back to the performance by the almost magnetic 'funneling' of the attention through that concentrating series of ever smaller proscenia as one approaches the stage. As a result, the auditorium walls apparently made up of these false proscenia, assist enormously in directing the audience's attention to the stage. This effect aids in the isolation of the stage action from the real world and it, again, does not permit anything but a rapt attention to the performance. In addition, it creates a peculiar illusion of a far greater than real physical distance between any seat and the stage. "There is a depth here that seems hewn and distance that recedes infinitely further than a mathematical vanishing point."[2]

The point at which these auditorium decorations merged into the scenic display on the stage--the actual proscenium itself and its immediate vicinity--had always struck Wagner as a spot where the attention of the audience could too easily be distracted from the dramatic action. In

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[1] *Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 367.

[2] Lee Simonson, "Foreword," *Music and the Art of the Theatre* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1962), p. ii.

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[2] Lee Simonson, "Foreword," *Music and the Art of the Theatre* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1962), p. ii.

particular, the orchestra of conventional theatres, located on the auditorium floor level immediately in front of the scenic frame, was a source for many activities and noises which had nothing to do with the drama. Wagner made it the first requirement of this theatre that the orchestra should not interfere with the audience's line of sight.

> To explain the plan of the festival theatre . . . at Bayreuth I believe I cannot do better than to begin with the need I felt the first, that of rendering invisible the mechanical source of its music, to wit the orchestra; for this one requirement led step by step to a total transformation of the auditorium of our neo-European theatre.[1]

The reasons given by Wagner and by others for lowering the orchestra into a sunken orchestral pit are many and varied. In one way or another they almost all refer back to the idea of creating a unified impression of the performance, an ideal realization of the drama from which nothing distracts the attention to the real world of merely performing musicians. Wagner explained the necessity for hiding the orchestra in this manner:

> To complete the impression of such a performance, I should lay great stress upon an invisible orchestra, which it would be possible to effect by the architectural illusion of an amphitheatrical arrangement of the auditorium.
>
> The importance of this will be clear to anyone who attends our present operatic performances for the purpose of gaining any genuine impression of the dramatic art work, and finds himself made the involuntary witness of the technical evolutions caused by the unavoidable view of the mechanical movements made by the musicians and their leader. These should be as carefully concealed as the wires, roped canvas, and boards of the stage machinery, the sight of which, as everyone knows, creates a most disturbing impression and one calculated to destroy all illusions.[2]

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[1] *Wagner on Music and Drama*, pp. 364-365.

[2] Richard Wagner, *The Story of Bayreuth as Told in the Bayreuth Letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. and ed. Caroline V. Kerr (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1912), pp. 9-10. Brecht, it might be noted, used the stage machinery of his theatre for precisely this purpose: the destruction of illusion.

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What, in essence, Wagner and his architect did in order to eliminate the sight of the orchestra was to continue the tiers upon which the audience seats were arranged until they went below the level of, and quite literally under, the floor of the stage. The sight of the conductor and the violinists who are grouped on the first level of the orchestra area is blocked off from the audience by a wall at the conductor's back, as he faces the performers, a wall which assumes the aspect of a false apron for the stage, and by two horizontal partitions, one attached to the wall and extending toward the stage, the other affixed to the front edge of the stage and projecting toward the audience. These boards do not meet over the orchestra for that would muffle the sound of the players too much; there is an opening over the center of the orchestra, over the most important but always weaker sounding woodwind section. The opening is not visible because of the relative placement of the two sounding boards.

Sinking the orchestra below its usual level and concealing it completely not only removed a distraction and enabled a greater concentration on the part of the audience, it also removed any apparent source for the sound. Rather than having a mundane group of instrumentalists banging and sawing away before the audience's eyes, the sound of the music simply appears, it virtually materializes out of nowhere, a disembodied and spiritualized sound which is most effective in creating an emotionally affecting mood.

This sunken orchestral pit, with its concealing walls and partitions and its strange ability to clarify and blend sounds in a manner which cannot be heard elsewhere, forms the basis, in conjunction with the proscenia, for Wagner's famous "mystic gulf," probably the clearest indication of Wagner's concern with the whole Distance scale. While he wanted

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extremely close empathic contact between his characters and their audiences, he clearly recognized and approved of the Distancing effect of the "mystic abyss" which removed the art work from this plane of existence into an ideal one, while at the same time creating the illusion of immense physical distance.

> My demand that the orchestra should be made invisible had at once inspired . . . a scheme for the empty space between the proscenium and the front row of seats: this space--which we called the "mystic gulf," because it had to part reality from ideality--the master [architect] framed in a second, a wider proscenium, from whose relation to the narrower proscenium proper he anticipated the singular illusion of an apparent throwing back of the scene itself, making the spectator imagine it quite far away, though he still beholds it in all the clearness of its actual proximity; while this in turn gives rise to the illusion that the persons figuring upon the stage are of larger, superhuman stature.[1]

Nor are these properties all that were expected or derived from the action of the "mystic depths."

> By concealing the conductor and the orchestral players from the audience it shifts the emphasis of the whole production, concentrating attention on the drama rather than on the singer: the audience at Bayreuth is far less conscious of the fact that this soprano or that tenor is singing well or badly than of the fact that the character depicted is convincing or not convincing as the case may be. Even more important, the spectator, having no resting place for his eyes except on the stage, keeps them there and does not consciously take in the orchestral music at all. The orchestral sound works rather on the subconscious which, as Wagner was instinctively aware, responds directly and involuntarily to its emotional effect.
>
> Yet another function of the invisible orchestra, or rather in this case the curved roof above it, is to deprive the audience of a standard of physical measurement. Simply because there is no visible conductor against whom the eye can measure them it is possible to make the figures on the stage, by positioning and by a scaling of the background scenery, look large or small as required. This is an important consideration

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[1] *Wagner on Music and Drama*, pp. 365-366.

in a work like the *Ring* which contains dwarfs and giants as well as gods and men.[1]

Wagner summed up the effects which were supposed to be produced by the gulf in this fashion:

> Between the spectator . . . and the picture to be looked at there is nothing plainly visible, merely a floating atmosphere of distance, resulting from the architectural adjustment of the two proscenia; whereby the scene is removed as it were to the unapproachable world of dreams, while the spectral music sounding from the "mystic gulf," like vapors rising from the holy womb of Gaia beneath the Pythia's tripod, inspires him with that clairvoyance in which the scenic picture melts into the truest effigy of life itself.[2]

WAGNER'S REHEARSAL METHODS

As in almost all other areas connected with his theatre, Wagner expected perfection from his interpreters. In singers he looked for paragons of intellectual and emotional control, as well as musical ability.

> What Wagner wanted was first of all beauty of tone; next, so perfect a vocal tecnhique that the singer would never have to resort, even in the most difficult passages, to anything but pure singing; then a feeling for the quality of words as words, the varying build and weight and ring and rhythm of them; then the ability to bring out the verbal-dramatic essence of the music, but in the most intimate collaboration with this, the two strands of meaning being so blended as to be inseparable; then an art of gesture, pose and movement as complete, as flexible as the accompanying arts of singing and declamation; and finally a power of imaginative absorption in the character and in the drama as a whole, and of re-creation of these from the inside in terms of the actor's own physique and temperament, that should make the

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[1]Skelton, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34. While it may seem paradoxical to assert that an auditor is less conscious of the singing and more aware of the drama at Bayreuth, it is none the less true. Once the conventions of a dramatic performance are established, if nothing occurs to remind the spectator of those conventions (such as the fact that the characters sing in an opera) then he tends to forget them and to concentrate upon the play being enacted. At Bayreuth, not only are the mechanical means of producing the music hidden, but applause is forbidden during an act. Nothing breaks the spell.

[2]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, pp. 365-366.

> whole opera seem to spring into life as the inspired improvisation of the moment.[1]

While there is no comparable list drawn up by the composer himself, the eminent Wagnerian scholar and critic Ernest Newman seems to have placed these items in the proper order, giving more stress to the intellectual comprehension of the drama than to the empathic means of projecting that understanding. The only factor not mentioned here and one which frequently overweighed many of the others which are listed is that of physical appearance. In his drive for empathic contact with the audience, Wagner was often guilty of physical type-casting. Once a singer was chosen for a role, Wagner first explained the entire drama to him in an intellectual manner and then turned his attention to elicting a Stanislavskian-empathic reading.

The method was almost invariable: moving from an abstract comprehension of the structure of the drama to an emotional, empathic way of presenting any given character.

Even when Wagner was working with an entire cast, as in the rehearsals for the two Bayreuth festivals staged under his direction, he used the same approach.

> . . . he could and did insist that the singer should read the text and get to know it thoroughly before they even heard the music, maintaining that only in this way could the singer grasp the musical line of his part, which was shaped more by dramatic than purely musical sense. Then, knowing exactly what he had to express, he would naturally translate this into fitting gesture and movement.[2]

Then when the time came for the shift from the reading rehearsal or the private studio to the stage, the same over-all process continued.

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[1]Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, iv., p. 455.

[2]Skelton, *op. cit.*, p. 37

> Wagner's idea in these rehearsals was not to proceed from the single point to the whole, but just the reverse. First the whole, and then the working out of details, so that as a result of this method something relatively perfect was accomplished, and the rehearsals, so far as orchestral and voice parts were concerned, differed but little from the eventual public performances.[1]

When directing one of his operas, Wagner worked on the stage, in the middle of the whole effort.

> A small table furnished with a petroleum lamp and a box which served as a support for the score was placed for Wagner on the stage, and from this vantage-point he kept watch over the conductor and the progress of events on the stage.[2]

Such a positioning certainly gives the director the possibility of feeling that he is working with, instead of outside of, the group of performers, but it is likely to rob him of the physical distance from the scene which enables him to see the activities on the stage in a Distanced manner, as an artistic activity. The composer-director recognized this also and made arrangements to enable him to move away from the action to get some perspective on it. "A little bridge had been built for him across the mystic abyss, so that he could easily cross into the auditorium to study a scenic or acoustic effect . . ."[3]

Once the singers had an idea of the story to be told, Wagner's second concern was with the interpretation of the music and of its text, the factor which molded the music. He wanted an intelligible projection of all of the emotions included in the tale and he felt that the only way

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[1]Kerr (ed.), *The Story of Bayreuth*, pp. 226-227. This seems a valid approach for a director who sought empathic wholes rather than intellectual subdivisions. Naturally some parts would have to receive more attention than others.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 226.

[3]Finck, *op. cit.*, ii., p. 294.

he could secure this was by a clear presentation of the words of the libretto; he wanted to hear all of the words in order to grasp the emotional state.

> Before all else we had to adhere to the greatest distinctness, especially of speech: a passionate phrase must have a confusing, and may have a forbidding, effect if its logical tenor remains unseized; but to seize it without effort we must be enabled to understand plainly the smallest link in the chain of words at once: an elided prefix, a swallowed suffix, or a slurred connecting syllable destroys that due intelligibleness forthwith.[1]

With the elimination of the performer's regional dialects and other distortions of the communication of words, Wagner turned to the mimetic portion of the work and began his training of the actors in physical projection of the ideas.

> When once they knew and understood their part vocally and musically, his further training was devoted to helping them to realise the dramatic conception in terms of gesture and action. Here again he would have no conventional recipes; a leap or a blow, a gesture of pity or scorn, by a character in one situation would be inapplicable to another character in the same situation or a different one.[2]

In a word, Wagner wanted a truthful, empathic acting style, something with no conventional or artificial movements brought over from the highly mannered operatic theatres. No stock answers were allowed in the physical action on Wagner's stage, as is clearly indicated in the reminiscences of Herr Winkelmann, one of the creators of the role of Parsifal:

> . . . Wagner hated every pose on the stage, any straining after effect, every disturbing movement. He used to say: 'the acting must be controlled by the intelligence!' 'Everything must be genuine, sincere, on the stage.'

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[1] *Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 370. Note the formal Distancing clarity necessary in order to promote the desired empathic state.

[2] Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, iv., p. 456.

> Do you think you are in a theatre!' he cried to a singer who was making the most impossible gesticulations. 'Those are swimming exercises, not human gestures! Anyone who is unnatural, I consider as my enemy!'[1]

It should be noted, once more, that Wagner intended to use or to emphasize one part of the Distancing effect and could only do it by using the other half, the intellectual and abstractive part.

Wagner had a major problem in simply getting the singers to grasp what was wanted in the way of physical activity. They had been too long corrupted by the Over-Distanced style which was usual then.

> As the main affair of older opera was the monolgic aria, which the singer was almost compelled to fire into the face of the audience, so to say, the notion arose that even in duets, trios, nay, whole general musters, the so-called ensembles, everyone must discharge his part into the auditorium from a similar position. As walking was thus altogether precluded, the arms were set in that almost continuous motion of whose impropriety, nay, absurdity, we had already grown aware.[2]

Wagner's answer to the problem was to temper the style of acting so that it approached that which is now used. "In close connection with the advantage of a wise economy in the expenditure of breath, for the effectual understanding of the dramatic melody, we recognized the need of ennobling the plastic movements by a most conscientious moderation."[3] That moderation was supplied by Wagner dictating to the actors virtually every movement they were to make. "Every role has been minutely mapped out to the smallest detail by Wagner . . ."[4] then Wagner proceeded to explain, insist,

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[1]Winkelmann, cited in *The Story of Bayreuth*, pp. 355-356. The emphasis is Winkelmann's.

[2]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 372.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 371.

[4]Lavignac, *op. cit.*, p. 477.

demonstrate and convince his performers that they should do the roles as he envisioned them. He succeeded quite well.

Spectators like Albert Lavignac, present at the first *Ring* cycle in 1876 have commented on the novelty and effectiveness of the new style of acting. Note also the shock when the unity of the style was broken and the Distance increased too much.

> The stage business is quite different to ours [the French]. The actors play much less to the audience than to each other; they look at each other when they speak; they are not afraid of turning their backs on the audience when occasion demands, witness Parsifal, who stands in this attitude in the foreground without moving during half of the first act: they behave on the stage as they would do in real life, without seeming to be conscious of an audience in front of them. This is so natural to them that it does not seem at all remarkable to us; but if one of them happens to differ and act in the conventional manner, adressing his gestures and words to the audience, we are immediately astonished and shocked.[1]

> When there is a chorus, moreover, the members do not arrange themselves symmetrically in two rows, drawn up like soldiers in line, or in a half-circle, exactly facing the audience and raising their arms all together like automata at the loudest note. Each one has his individual part, he plays, sings, and acts it, and the result is a feeling of truth and life that is infinitely more satisfying.[2]

Wagner, as a result of his desire to hypnotize his audiences into an ecstatic, empathic state, was responsible both for radical modifications in the shape and nature of the theatre and for the development of some of the first naturalistic acting principles used in operatic presentations. His intention was always to create empathy and to deny the need for the use of the abstractive intellect but his major accomplishments all show at least equal parts of emotion and thought.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 499.

[2] *Ibid.*

THE STAGE SETTINGS FOR THE FESTIVALS

> Whereas his writings on the function of words and music dwelt exhaustively on the practical application as well as the theory, his definition of the function of scenery and costume was kept in vague and general terms.[1]

It may seem strange that a man with such strong opinions on everything, a man whose beloved step-father was, among other things, a scene painter, should have had so little to say about scenic design. The reason seems to be that he felt this aspect of the art of the theatre was sufficiently developed and in the proper manner. "There is no doubt that he considered the conventional forms of staging satisfactory--in need of reform in practice only, not in principle."[2] Wagner gave his approval to the highly developed art of scene painting in two dimensions in this way:

> As the final and most complete means of expression in visual art, landscape painting will become the life-giving soul of the whole construction. It will teach us to build for the drama the stage on which it will itself represent the warm natural background for the living actor.[3]

In addition to accepting the system of scene painting, Wagner apparently did not clarify his own ideas concerning the realistic, as opposed to the symbolic, nature of these paintings. Thus, once again, we find in Wagner's reactions to his work a contradictory, paradoxical duality.

Wagner's was the taste and the eye responsible for the original Bayreuth style, with its constructed crags and its infinite number of cut-out trees, its mixture of the two and the three-dimensional, and its great literalness. "He demanded rich, heavy, naturalistic scenery and intricate,

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[1]Skelton, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[2]Appia, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

[3]Skelton, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

patiently molded gesture--a style of presentation calculated to mirror the wealth of detail lavished on the music and the text . . ."[1] It was the ponderousness of this style for a symbolic form of theatre, particularly in regard to such internal and essentially psychological dramas as *Tristan and Isolde*, which prompted Adolphe Appia to his revolutionary methods of staging with open planes and levels and a great control of light, the style which is currently employed at Bayreuth by Wagner's heirs and successors.

> It should be borne in mind, however, that Wagner himself would almost certainly have disapproved of Appia's sets. He would have preferred to have the light fall on something solid and tangible than on amorphous shapes or on nothing at all. Like the *maître des feyntes* of the medieval Bible plays, Wagner strove for reality on the stage.[1]

A moment's consideration of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* in relation to his announced desires about Distance will not make it seem at all strange that he should want the immediately tangible, the concrete, the sensual rather than the suggestive, the allusive and the intellectual. It is not surprising that "the detailed stage directions which Wagner wrote for his works do seem to point directly to a romantic form of realism."[2] This is the style, in its literal realization, which would seem most life-like, most natural to the people of his period and which, therefore, would invite the greatest degree of empathy with the least exertion. For both realism and naturalism, the " . . . psychic presupposition, as can be clearly understood, is the process of empathy, for which the object nearest to hand is always the cognate organic, . . ."[3]

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[1]Goldman and Sprinchorn, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[2]Skelton, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

[3]Worringer, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

Though Wagner's intent was to achieve a literal representation of the scene of action, his necessary reliance upon the conventions of scenic painting as they existed produced flaws in the *Ring*.

> His lines to Ludwig II prove revealing: "Everyone thinks he can outdo me by better and more beautiful things, while I am only striving for a definite something, a certain poetic effect, but not theatrical pomp. Scenery, for instance, is invariably designed as though it were to be looked at for its own sake, as in a panorama, but I want only a subdued background to characterize a dramatic situation."[1]

The painters were simply doing their job as they understood it and as it was required of them in all other opera houses, but here they were introducing unnecessary and undesirable elements which caused Wagner and, no doubt, some of the Bayreuth patrons, to be distracted from the real point: the drama.

> Our aesthetic pleasure consists of being able to range between the two extremes of external appearance and inner reality. If the visual aspects of the production divert our attention, as so often happens when useless and alien elements are combined to achieve an effect not dictated by the text, our field of aesthetic activity is unfavorably enlarged, and we find it difficult to follow the central dramatic action, which is, after all, the most important consideration.[2]

Probably the most disturbing thing, to Wagner's mind, was not the insertion of needless, specific detail (he seems to have approved of highly detailed renderings) but rather the inclusion of abstract elements, the signs and symbols which the painters always used.

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[1]Wieland Wagner, "Tradition and Innovation," *Music Review*, Vol. 13, November 1952, pp. 297.

[2]Appia, *op. cit.*, p. 118. Appia, of course, is one of the champions of the elimination of all useless and alien elements. He is supported in his theories by Bullough, who said: "Modern reforms of staging, aiming primarily at the removal of artistic incongruities between excessive decoration and the living figures of the actors and at the production of a more homogeneous stage-picture, inevitably work also towards a greater emphasis and homogeneity of Distance." Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

> The laws governing sight and sound, which together control the conventions of stage decor, make it impossible to present actually in a production the place of the action with the same plastic truth as characterizes the language of the actors. One must therefore employ signs with which to indicate and suggest the scene, but which can never come into direct contact with the living actor. These signs can appeal to the audience only as some kind of highly developed hieroglyphs whose meanings are obvious.[1]

The painted sets took on the specifically non-real, symbolic nature of the highly Distanced artifact in spite of Wagner's wishes. He did everything he could to make the settings realistic or naturalistic but the pervading style of the period or a strange quirk in Wagner's mind forced him into a far more Distanced style than he would have consciously admitted desiring.

> Looking at pictures of the sets used at Bayreuth, the awkward dragon, the strange swimming-machines for the Rhine maidens, we might wonder how anyone could be hypnotized by this cluttered scenery and these creaking machines.[2]

The answer, of course, lies in the imaginary puissance of the audience, in their ability to accept a suggestion and mentally manipulate it into an acceptable image of the reality intended.

> "True stage-illusion," . . . [said] Coleridge, comparing a setting for a forest with a landscape by Claude in this same celebrated passage in his *Literary Remains*, "consists--not in the mind's judging it to be a forest, but in its remission of judgment that it is not a forest."[3]

Here the audience is adopting a Distanced attitude which permits the employment of symbols to represent something without requiring that the

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[1]Appie, *op. cit.*, p. 23. Regardless of how well a backdrop might have been painted, it could never have the exact look of nature; if nothing else betrayed its falseness, an actor approaching a painted drop would fail to shrink in proportion to the lines of perspective in the two-dimensional area. Therefore the mere presence of a painting made the setting highly conventional and Distanced. No painted backdrop, no matter how well it is done, could avoid using the conventions and formal signs of a highly developed craft.

[2]Goldman and Sprinchorn, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

[3]Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

object or the situation be present in its complete empathic detail. If empathy were the only mental or emotional method the audience could bring to bear on such scenery, it is doubtful that most people could find the typical setting sufficiently real to project themselves into the circumstances and feel comfortable. But if all they are asked to do is to acknowledge that the structures on the stage represent or symbolize something, most people seem to be able to accept this kind of abstraction without a second thought.

In the case of Wagner's music dramas, in their authorized presentations, the audience either had to accept the symbolic and suggestive nature of the setting or they had to ignore it completely and devote themselves to responding to the more ideal realizations of the places and objects which are contained in the scores.

> The state of mind necessary for the enjoyment and comprehension of the poetic-musical text is incompatible with the realism of the staging. If the discrepancy between the two sensations is too great, the conflict too positive, the eye will always be the first to surrender; it will simply record the spectacle in order that the spirit may be released to enjoy the absorbing and overwhelming elements of the score. Undeniably this is what usually happens; in the case of spectators of sensitive and cultivated taste it has become such a common occurrence that it is known as "Wagnerian hypnosis," or, when other influences enter in, "Bayreuth hypnosis . . ."[1]

There seems to be a strong division of opinion concerning the success of Wagner's original scenery, a division no doubt resulting from the varying abilities of the audience members to Distance what they actually saw on the stage.

Some spectators at the original festivals approved of the presentations but with obvious reservations where they had to supply the final

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[1]Appia, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.

magic from their imaginations: " . . . with rare exceptions it [the scenery] succeeds in producing the desired illusion."[1] Others, whose Distancing powers were greater or who were more materially assisted by the *chiaroscuro* of the dim gas lighting felt that the settings, as offered, were fine.

> All that was ever available to him [Wagner] was gaslight. Eyewitnesses attest to the unforgettable effects which were achieved by its dim, warm glow; in the mysterious semidarkness the exquisitely painted flats took on the magic illusion so essential to Wagner's operas.[2]

Wagner, at times, belonged to this latter group, saying

> Thus even the influence of our surrounding optic and acoustic atmosphere bore our souls away from the wonted world; and the consciousness of this was evident in our dread at the thought of going back into that world.[3]

But there were many others, those who possessed less Distancing ability or who were more literal-minded, who failed to be moved by the physical presentation at all. "But the unanimous testimony of all with whom I have spoken who were themselves present is that as a whole the representation was a grotesque failure."[4]

The failure could not have been complete or, under the conditions of extreme opposition which Wagner faced, the operas would never have survived their original stagings. But it is true that in evaluating the productions and the whole concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* which was contained in them, a good number of highly influential critics now seem to feel that Wagner was not successful. This is not to deny the force and expressiveness

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[1]Lavignac, *op. cit.*, p. 497.

[2]Wieland Wagner, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

[3]*Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 376.

[4]Hight, *op. cit.*, ii., p. 104.

of Wagner's music, nor his genius as a whole, but simply to indicate that the pyramiding of artistic forms, many of which have conflicting basic needs was not the method by which to arrive at the Art-Work of the Future. The general principles of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* have long since provoked a reaction in operatic circles against such massive, overwhelming, one-sided presentations and a number of modern composers, while still using Wagner's melodic methods, deny the value of his poetic, philosophical and staging dicta as a basis for any further development of the form of opera.

> If Wagner failed in his struggle with the musical-dramatic form, it was the failure of a Titan in a struggle that only a Titan would have ventured upon. Form and the perfection of form are simple enough matters for the smaller musical intelligences, for whom form means merely a symmetrical mould to be filled. It is for the greater minds that the problem of form is always a torture, for their ideas are perpetually outgrowing the mould.[1]

> . . . for us the amazing and almost incredible thing about Wagner is that he is far from a total failure. No great artist is open to so many objections. But he <u>is</u> a great artist.[2]

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[1]Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, p. 303

[2]Bentley, "Richard Wagner," p. 188.

CHAPTER VI

BRECHT'S THEORIES

In his theorizing, in his composition, and in his staging techniques, Wagner tried to establish many of the principles of what is now regarded as the conventional theatre: ensemble playing, realistic or naturalistic acting and scenery, the dominance of the director, the convention of ignoring the audience's presence, *etc.* The Epic Theatre of Bertolt Brecht was, in part, a revolt against many of these principles; in particular it was theoretically in opposition to one of Wagner's main concerns: empathy.

In his efforts to explain why a new style of theatre was needed, Brecht had to go back beyond Wagner's period to find an historical justification for a social, non-aesthetic theatre.

> Whereas in the Middle Ages, and to some extent even at the beginning of the modern period, the theatre had had a social function (as in public processions, market place performances, etc.), and in that way constantly addressed the public and took account of it in playing, now it no longer has such an immediate reference or social purpose and has become an "end in itself," a kind of art institute. Thus, as time goes on the gulf between the theatre and its public becomes wider and wider. The increasing commercialization of the theatre separated the theatre from the public still more; the "fourth wall" was invented and acting techniques and technical devices were devised to create the illusion that the actors were playing to no audience at all. But in this way the audience in particular was most strongly drawn into the "magic sphere" of the theatre. The dramaturgy which was developed for this theatre of illusion and used by its most prominent representatives did not give the spectator one moment in which he "gets time for reflection."

> Thus in the theatre of illusion the esthetic function took precedence over the social one.[1]

Particularly was this true of the period immediately before the turn of the century when Wagner's Romantic-realistic principles were having their first real vogue. Other designers and directors had capitalized on Wagner's theories and examples, while ignoring his efforts to use the theatre for practical purposes, and had fashioned a theatre form in which the intention behind the performance was to hypnotize the audience.

> The romantic theatre, especially, aimed at reducing the audience to an unthinking, highly suggestible mass in which the individual was transported out of himself and made to drift with the tides of the universe. In both its realistic and antirealistic aspects the nineteenth-century theatre sought to render the spectator incapable of passing impartial judgment or controlling his senses. It was a theatre of narcosis, and Wagner was its chief architect.[2]

It is apparent, of course, that the objections being voiced here make reference to Wagner's desire for an ecstatic empathic state in the spectator. Wagner, it will be remembered, did not want audience members to be critically conscious or to use their analytical intelligences in perceiving the music dramas; instead, he wished them to project themselves into the work, to sense it completely and to fall so totally under the spell of the music that they would be susceptible to the revelations contained there. Theoretically at least, ecstatic empathy was the most important principle in Wagner's theatre.

Bertolt Brecht objected most strenuously to this hypnotized, subhuman, ecstatic state in any audience.[3] Here is his description of an

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[1]Werner Hecht, "The Development of Brecht's Theory of the Epic Theatre, 1918-1933," trans. Bayard W. Morgan, *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1, September 1961, pp. 89-90.

[2]Goldman and Sprinchorn, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

[3]As he aged and he worked in the day-to-day process of production, Brecht was to temper his early and rather extreme attitudes.

audience which was apparently participating in a theatrical performance by means of the inner mimicry method of empathy and to the ecstatic degree:

> Let us go into one of these houses [theatres] and observe the effect which it has on the spectators. Looking about us, we see somewhat motionless figures in a peculiar condition: they seem strenuously to be tensing all their muscles, except where these are flabby and exhausted. They scarcely communicate with each other; their relations are those of a lot of sleepers, though of such as dream restlessly. . . . True, their eyes are open, but they stare rather than see, just as they listen rather than hear. They look at the stage as if in a trance. . . . Seeing and hearing are activities, and can be pleasant ones, but these people seem relieved of activity and like men to whom something is being done. This detached state, where they seem to be given over to vague but profound sensations, grows deeper the better the work of the actors . . .[1]

Brecht seemed to feel that "by causing the fiction to act immediately upon the emotions, [such a conventional or "Aristotelian" drama would] inhibit or even paralyze the spectator's reason and imagination."[2] Furthermore, he assumed that this extreme state of being was typically induced by any well-performed, cathartic drama. Further refining his analysis of the presumably detrimental effects of illusionistic drama, Brecht ascribed the negative aspects of audience indentification to empathy. He apparently believed that any emotions experienced without the assistance of empathy were not likely to destroy an audience's critical faculties but any which relied upon or employed empathy[3] were anti-personal and anti-social.

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[1]Brecht, "A Short Organum," pp. 82-83. It should be noted that Brecht was writing a polemic here rather than a criticism. Wagner often did the same thing.

[2]Ursula Jarvis, "Perspectives on Distance and Illusion: Otto Ludwig's Anticipations of Brecht," *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, No. 3, September 1964, pp. 312-313.

[3]While it is possible to imagine emotional states which are not dependent upon the observation of anything (for instance, loneliness or homesickness), it is difficult to see how the purely external stimuli of the stage can produce an emotional state without the use of empathy in some degree.

Because the conventional theatre used empathy rather consistently and generally had no intention of creating anything other than an evening of enjoyment or perhaps a general attitude toward its subject matter, it stood condemned, in Brecht's eyes, of affecting the viewer improperly.

> To the pure moralist, who accepts nothing but ethical values, in order to be justified, it [art] must be shown not only not to hinder but actually to forward right action, otherwise it is not only useless but, since it absorbs our energies, positively harmful.[1]

While one might hesitate to say that Brecht was only a moralist, a moralistic attitude was certainly one of his strong characteristics and he adopted exactly the position cited toward the whole of the theatre which preceeded his unless it could be recast into such a shape that it would have positive social and moral results on its audience. Of all other stage works he said, "we suspect that unduly subjective representations of the world have anti-social effects . . ."[2]

If the practices and psychological foundations of the customary theatre were invalid, what should the form and the bases of the modern theatre be? Brecht had an answer in the Epic Theatre.

DEFINITION OF THE EPIC THEATRE

Brecht's Epic Theatre was concerned with the contradictory and conflicting forces which act in current affairs and from which one might expect new and revolutionary syntheses, such forces being shown in the theatre by actors who used a theatricalist method of performance which induced Distance, along with all of the mechanical aids of modern science, in an attempt not to create an illusion but to present the facts of the

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[1]Fry, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[2]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 279.

situation depicted so that the audience might make critical judgments about the validity of the conduct and conditions shown and determine whether they would uphold the present state of things or deliberately choose to alter them.[1]

According to its author, "the theory [of Epic Theatre] is relatively simple. It deals with the traffic between stage and auditorium: how the spectator must master the incidents on the stage."[2] Everything mentioned in Brecht's many scattered comments and theoretical statements does ultimately have something to do with the "traffic between the stage and the auditorium." There is, however, a necessity to distinguish between ends and means, both of which are included in the theory. A listing of the means will be given first.

The very key to the Brechtian style of writing and acting lay in a substitution: "in place of 'empathy' the demonstration of patterns of behavior under certain social conditions is required"[3] and "thinking about the flow of the play is more important than thinking from within the flow of the play."[4]

To achieve the scope which Brecht believed necessary for a proper comprehension of the complexity of modern life, a new dramatic form had to be molded. "The 'epic course of the epoch from its roots to its last

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[1]In reality Brecht was never so objective and dissociated from his material as this definition would suggest: he invariably took an attitude toward the conditions he discussed.

[2]Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, p. 101.

[3]Hans Egon Holthusen, "Brecht's Dramatic Theory," *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 107.

[4]Raymond Williams, "The Achievement of Brecht," *The Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Summer 1961, p. 155.

effects' could only be produced in a justaposition and succession of scenes and tableaux. The dramatic form becomes reportorial."[1] The telescoping of great quantities of material, as well as a desire to alternate action with commentary led to changes in the structure of the play. The content was so great that it virtually burst the seams of the conventional drama. There was also no need for the more concentrated, empathic, emotional forms of the past. This new organizational pattern for drama

> . . . should be discursive, not incisive, in form--so much so that the sequence of scenes could be rearranged without affecting the development of the action. What was important was not the straining toward a climax but the cumulative effect of all the scenes.[2]

Because this apparently loose structure would not lead inevitably toward a specific conclusion, "one is not always asking what will happen next. One is not interested in the next scene, one is interested in this scene.[3] The result of this deliberate reversal of the methods of the past was to produce a group of fragments which must be related, not in time or space, but in intent or theory or principle. The resulting structure for a play was "a string of lively incidents each based on the same principle . . ."[4]

The principle which threaded these complete scenes together was, of course a reflection of the artist's attitude toward the actions shown.

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[1]Ernst Schumacher, "Piscator's Political Theater," *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1962), pp. 90-91.

[2]Mordecai Gorelik, "Brecht: 'I am the Einstein of the New Stage Form . . .,'" *Theatre Arts*, Vol. XLI, No. 3, March 1957, p. 86.

[3]Eric Bentley, "German Stagecraft Today," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. XI, No. 4, Autumn, 1949, p. 644.

[4]Francis Fergusson, "Three Allegorists: Brecht, Wilder, and Eliot," *Sewanee Review*, Vol. 64, Fall, 1956, p. 551.

"Without opinions and objectives one can represent nothing at all. Without knowledge one can show nothing; how could one know what would be worth showing?"[1] But, in opposition to the realistic, representational methods of writing and staging, in the Epic Theatre the author could and did introduce his underlying ideas in far more obvious ways.

> Among the formal innovations of epic theatre is the permission it gives the author to introduce his own ideas into his work, much as a novelist uses a narrative to shape the reader's responses to action and character. And Brecht takes full advantage of his opportunity, using narrative devices to influence the spectator's mind.[2]

Thus an artificial, non-realistic, and Distancing form was imposed upon the incidents and characters by bringing all of them into line with the dominant thought the playwright was trying to communicate. These plays became the Distanced expression of organized experience and reflection, a pattern of action which displayed the ordered perceptions of one mind. Because each aspect of the play was forced into line with an over-riding idea, the whole play often gained in clarity. It became a schematized form of life, an outline of it rather than a depiction. The startling clarity of most of the plays of the Epic Theatre made them non-realistically formal and thus highly Distanced.

Another form-giving device which reinforced the literary and isolated nature of the scenes in a Brechtian play was the series of scene titles which the author composed for display during the production of the work. A capsule summary of the action of the scene which was to follow, plus any comments which the author chose to make, were placed on placards

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[1]Brecht, "A Short Organum," p. 93.

[2]Brustein, "Bertolt Brecht," *The Theatre of Revolt*, p. 260.

or projected on screens or curtains during the show. The reason for this device, according to Brecht, was that

> The parts of the story have to be carefully set off one against another by giving each its own structure as a play within the play. To this end it is best to agree to use titles. . . . The titles must include the social point, saying at the same time something about the kind of portrayal wanted, i.e., should copy the tone of a chronicle or a ballad or a newspaper or a morality.[1]

Not only did this device destroy any possibility of suspense in the scene about to be played, thus freeing the audience to concentrate upon other parts or meanings for the scene, but it also provided for the drama the equivalent of footnotes or cross-references.

> The boards on which the titles of the scenes are projected are a primitive start toward a literarization of the theatre. This literarization of the theatre . . . must be developed to the greatest possible extent.
>
> Literarization means putting across ideas through actions; interspersing the "performed" with the "formulated." It makes it possible for the theatre to establish contact with other institutions of intellectual activity, but it must remain a one-sided affair so long as the audience does not take part in such literarization and thus breaks through to "higher things."[2]

That is, in spite of all of the Epic Theatre's unusual conventions and consequent jarring of the audience out of its usual perceptual patterns to a greater Distance, each audience member was still expected to participate in the drama by making evaluations of what he saw. "The episodes must not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give us a chance to interpose our judgment."[3]

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[1]Brecht, "A Short Organum," p. 99.

[2]Bertolt Brecht, "Notes to the Threepenny Opera." *The Threepenny Opera*, Trans. Desmond Vesey (New YOrk: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), p. 98.

[3]Brecht, "A Short Organum," p. 99.

The content of this literary, Distanced form, which was intended to promote judgments, consisted of actions which revealed attitudes toward the world. The attitudes were not those personal, emotional responses of the conventional theatre but attitudes of larger social consequence. "In Brecht's theatre, it is what people do, not what they feel, that counts. Action takes precedence over emotion, fact over fantasy."[1] The attitudes of importance, to Brecht, were those which people adopted toward the 'facts' presented and toward the characters which embodied those concrete facts.

> The epic theatre is chiefly interested in the attitudes which people adopt towards one another, wherever they are socio-historically significant (typical). It works out scenes where people adopt attitudes of such a sort that the social laws under which they are acting spring into sight. . . . Human behaviour is shown as alterable; man himself as dependent on certain political and economic factors and at the same time as capable of altering them.[2]

In such works, there was a definite shift away from the emotional and toward the statistically verifiable, away from one end of the Distance-scale and toward the other. To correspond with the abstract, conceptual aims of the form, new subject matter was necessary.

> In place, then, of the love-duty conflict of earlier drama, Brecht substitutes a conflict between generosity and self-interest, his invariable conclusion being that greed always triumphs.
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> Before his conversion to Marxism, Brecht took this triumph to be a fact of a cruel and unheeding universe--after, it became an inevitability of the capitalist system.[3]

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[1]Kenneth Tynan, "The Theatre Abroad: Germany," *The New Yorker*, Vol. 35, Part 3, No. 7, September 12, 1959, p. 104.

[2]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 86.

[3]Robert Brustein, "Bertolt Brecht in Folio," *The New Republic*, Vol. 144, No. 8, Issue 2,415, February 20, 1961, pp. 28-29. It is obvious that Brecht is here attacking the 'well-made' play of the commercial theatre as well as an economic system.

In the class warfare being dramatized, personal Romantic emotions had little place but conflicts over money and power were primary; the concrete economic aspects of a person's actions were more important than what they meant to him personally. "Like many of his Leftist contemporaries, Brecht was seeking a method whereby economic processes could be effectively dramatized; he hoped to see money and food someday displace power and sex as the drama's major themes."[1] This behavioristic attitude toward economic conditions provided the themes of the Epic Theatre.

Brecht chose to clothe these discussions of economic factors and social reactions in an abrupt yet poetic style of dialogue. In spite of the colloquial language employed, the vast majority of Brecht's work tended to read like poetry and thus to be Distanced from real life and the flatness of normal speech. One of the major stylistic problems Brecht set himself was the development of a cragy poetic language which could be used by common characters or in protest songs but which would still be recognized as poetic. It was this original style of speech which he typically employed.

Along with the poetic diction of the plays came a demand for a patterned method of movement during production, a style of movement which was also intended to communicate information on its own accord.

> Epigrammatic, compressed gestures (*gestus*); sophisticated arrangements of movement; stylization; cool elegance; and a relaxed enjoyment of the technicalities of art replace a correct imitation which is true to "life."[2]

This discussion of the means employed should have made it clear that, in its methods of writing and production, the Epic Theatre must

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[1]Tynan, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

[2]Demetz, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

ultimately be considered to be a form of theatricalism. It was designated to accomplish a single end by the most direct presentation methods, in the clearest and plainest possible manner.

> As Brecht sought to banish trance, illusion, magical effects and orgies of emotion from the theatre, he tried to replace them by lucidity, rationality, and elegance. The numerous and varied devices by which the illusion of reality was to be dispelled must bear the hallmark of honest craftsmanship, the perfection that comes from the unpretentious use of undisguised materials.[1]

Even the basic concept of the whole Brechtian system, the Alienation or *Verfremdungseffekt*, was intended to make one conscious of the theatre and of the demonstrative techniques employed there. "Brecht's technique of distancing (*Verfremdungseffekt*) derives also from this process of making one conscious of the theatrical image . . ."[2]

The reader is asked to note the theatrical means and effects in Brecht's own listing of the differences which existed between the representational theatre and the Epic Theatre:

Dramatic Form of the Theatre	Epic Form of the Theatre
active	narrative
involves the spectator in a stage-action	makes the spectator an observer, but
consumes his capacity to act	awakens his capacity to act
allows him to have feelings	demands decisions from him
experience	view of the world
spectator drawn into something	he is confronted with something
suggestion	argument
feelings are preserved	feelings driven into becoming realisations
the spectator stands inside, experiences with the characters	the spectator confronts and studies what he sees
man is assumed to be known	man is an object of investigation

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[1]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 135.

[2]Ronald Peacock, *The Art of Drama* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1957), pp. 165-166.

Dramatic Form of the Theatre	Epic Form of the Theatre
man unalterable	man alterable and altering
suspense in awaiting the outcome	suspense at the process
one scene exists for another	each scene for itself
growth	montage
linear progress	in curves
evolutionary inevitability	sudden leaps
man as fixed	man as a process
thought determines Being	social Being determines thought
feeling	reason[1]

PURPOSE OF THE EPIC THEATRE

As can readily be gathered, in theory the Epic Theatre differed radically from its conventional counterpart. The changes which Brecht tried to effect were not chosen haphazardly nor in a mere effort to be different. Each was selected because it counteracted or precluded one of the magical effects of the empathic theatre or because it established the conditions under which the rational probing of ideas which normally occurs in the classroom could take place.

Up until his last few years, Brecht never considered the theatre to be a house of entertainment. Instead, its purpose was instructional. "He . . . was convinced that the theatre must become a tool of social engineering, a laboratory of social change."[2] Note the key word "tool." In other words, Brecht, in a contradiction which he apparently never saw or resolved, attempted to use a great number of Distancing techniques in order to convert the theatre into a tool, a practical method of changing the world. He used his alienation techniques to break certain aspects of the world out of their usual contexts so that they might be seen and examined with unusual clarity in order to determine whether they were constituted or used as they should be.

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[1]Ronald Gray, *Brecht* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), pp. 62-63.

[2]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 123.

When Brecht tried to use the theatre for other than artistic purposes or entertainment, not only was there a shift in emphasis and technique from the aesthetic to the practical, but a different response was expected from the audience as a result of its bringing to bear different standards of judgment. In 'practical' art such as the Epic Theatre, the spectator "is encouraged to approach the art experience with the same ethical criteria that he applies, or at least ought to apply in his everyday existence."[1] In the Epic Theatre, the spectators were to see clear demonstrations of the economic and social factors which controlled their lives, were to evaluate and judge them on humane and ethical standards and to commit themselves either to the maintenance of the status quo or to the institution of the new values which they had derived from their rational and critical appraisal of the facts offered. Once again, the intent was practical and, presumably had an immediate effect upon the playgoer's life outside of the theatre.

This was the avowed purpose of the Epic Theatre: to tell the truth about our social systems and to promote practical action concerning their revision.

ALIENATION

The basic concept which underlay the whole system of Epic Theatre was that of alienation or *Verfremdung*, a paraphrasing of the Aesthetic Distance theory.

> "Verfremdung," in fact, is not simply the breaking of illusion (though that is one means to the end); and it does not

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[1]Jarvis, *op. cit.*, p. 314. While the ultimate result of a classic tragedy might have been practical, the whole intent of the performance was perceptual not combatative. There was a difference in the use to which the factors were put and a consequently different reaction on the part of the audience.

> mean 'alienating' the spectator in the sense of making him hostile to the play. It is a matter of detachment, of re-orientation: exactly what Shelley meant when he wrote that poetry 'makes familiar objects to be as if they were not familiar,' or Schopenhauer when he claimed that art must show 'common objects of experience in a light that is at once clear and unfamiliar.'[1]

These are allusive descriptions of the Distanced state, the mental condition in which objects are observed outside of their usual context or deprived of their practical functions and relations in order to be seen with greater clarity.

Further establishing the similarity of Brecht's and Bullough's theories, the process of alienation, like that of Distancing, was acknowledged to have an inhibitory and a developmental phase. The negative aspect of it is the stopping of a process on the part of the spectators:

> . . . the audience must be discouraged from losing their critical detachment by identification with one or more of the characters. The opposite of identification is the maintenance of a separate existence by being kept apart, alien, strange. . . . That is the meaning of the famous "Verfremdungseffekt". . . .[2]

This process of discouragement applied not only to empathic identification with the characters but to other aspects of the conventional theatre as well. The intent was to eliminate many of the devices of the current theatre, clearing away a number of the 'magical' effects of the stage so that the audience would be aware that they were witnessing merely a report or an analysis of a condition. There was an effort made to pare everything down to its essentials, not to entirely eliminate anything, but rather to reduce every portion of the presentation to an

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[1]Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

[2]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 125.

appropriate level so that it could be understood to be precisely what it was. Theoretically, this inhibitory phase was supposed to be accomplished in a particular manner.

> "Alienation" has usually been described in terms of its destruction of empathy, of suspense, of pathos as if it too were a taking-away of something, the deliberate impoverishment of an art by a fanatical didacticist. Actually, like illusion in the stage settings, these things were not eliminated but limited--limited by being placed alongside their opposites.[1]

The alienation effect intervenes in the theatrical transaction, then, through a process of comparison and contrast, by means of the dialectical opposition of incompatible states. Brecht's application of Hegelian-Marxian dialects in his plays was embodied, primarily, in his *Gestic* and dialogue device of the "Not . . . But."

> The very simplest sentences that apply in the A-effect are those with 'Not . . . But': (He didn't say 'come in' but 'keep moving'. He was not pleased but amazed). They include an expectation which is justified by experience but, in the event, disappointed. One might have thought that . . . but one oughtn't have thought it. There was not just one possibility but two; both are introduced, then the second one is alienated, then the first as well.[2]

The multiplicity of possibilities in the lines and attitudes of the characters made it possible for the audience to react away from the emotional states shown. The emotions felt by the audience need not correspond to those which the characters apparently felt. "On seeing worry the spectator may feel a sensation of joy; on seeing anger, one of disgust."[3] Producing such reactions in the audience would certainly cause a stripping away of the over-powering effects of a single emotional state and allow

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[1]Bentley, "German Stagecraft Today," p. 641.

[2]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 144.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 94.

the audience to perceive the complex possibilities in a situation. It would provide the freedom within which the spectator could sense his ability to make choices and to alter conditions. Seeing that there were many possibilities in any set of circumstances made it conceivable that the audience members might structure perceptions which they had never experienced before.

This active structuring was, of course, the positive or developmental portion of the effect, an exact parallel of the positive portion of the Distancing process.

> The *Verfremdungseffekt* has its positive side. By inhibiting the process of identification between the spectator and the characters, by creating a distance between them and enabling the audience to look at the action in a detached and critical spirit, familiar things, attitudes and situations appear in a new and strange light and create, through astonishment and wonder, a new understanding of the human situation.[1]

With these parallels established between the process of alienation and that of Distancing, it seems fairly obvious that alienation is simply a restating of the process of Distancing, using other terminology.

Once he had developed the alienation theory, Brecht tried to make applications of the state of clear perception which alienation or Distancing creates. He used this state of mind as a means rather than as an end, a means of fighting the evils of this world.

> True, profound, active application of alienation effects takes it for granted that society considers its condition to be historic and capable of improvement. True A-effects are of a combative character.[2]

Brecht made the assumption that the theatre audience came to the theatre to learn, as befitted an audience of a scientific age, and specifically

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[1]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 129.

[2]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 277.

to learn 'the truth' about their condition so that they might have knowledge on their side in their fight against their oppressors. He intended to give them that knowledge by alienating the social and economic conditions which restricted their development as full human beings.

The only thing which remains to be noted about alienation is that "in his theoretical writing he [Brecht] never allows that the alienation of the spectator can be overdone, so that he simply gets bored and wants to leave the theatre . . ."[1] Surely stressing one end of the scale or the other can be overdone. While Brecht formulated his theories to combat what was, for him, the Under-Distancing of most art works, he often engaged in over-statement which strongly implied that he wanted an Over-Distanced reaction. Intuitively, as a poet, he knew better and most of his works are not nearly so intellectual and controlled as his theories would indicate.

GESTUS

Another key concept and technical term which must be examined prior to noting how Brecht applied these thoughts in each area of the theatre is *Gestus*. The *Gestus* or *Gestic* action was the social core of the scene or the play. It was the most important relationship or basic attitude being demonstrated.

> It is at once gesture and gist, attitude and point: one aspect of the relation between two people, studied singly, cut to essentials and physically or verbally expressed. It excludes the psychological, the subconscious, the meta-physical unless they can be conveyed in concrete terms.[2]

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[1]"Bertolt Brecht: An Iconoclast in the Theatre," *The Times Literary Supplement*, No. 2,819, March 9, 1956, p. 142.

[2]Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

This idea of *Gestus* was important in Brecht's work because it underlay his methods of composition as well as the intent of his work. "Brecht's creative inspiration derived mainly from gestures. He first visualized the gestures of his characters in their various situations and then searched for the corresponding word."[1] The *Gestus* not only served as guide during the writing of a play but, if it were properly done, the *Gestic* aspects of the lines forced an interpretation of the roles which would reproduce the *Gestus*, thus guiding the actor and the director to a proper interpretation. Furthermore, the *Gestus* or implied activity in the lines of a play imparted a portion of the poetic effects in the apparently unstructured verse. "Brecht argues that it is this element of implied gesture which can make unrhymed, irregular verse still keep the quality of poetry."[2]

The parallels in terms of structure, condensation and repetition between the *Gestus* and the Wagnerian motive are, of course, obvious. Each was an intellectual device which bore a heavy emotional freight and which helped the artist and the spectator of his work to penetrate to the true meaning of the scene or the drama as a whole.

In Brecht's hands, the *Gestus* became a formal and formative device; when properly executed it served to create Distance. According to Brecht, the means by which the *Gestus* is projected, "Elegant movement and graceful groupings . . . promote detachment . . ."[3]

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[1]Lion Feuchtwanger, "The Great Experimenter; the Essence of Brecht's Genius," trans. Therese Pol, *The Nation*, Vol. 183, No. 19, November 10, 1956, p. 388.

[2]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 114.

[3]Brecht, "A Short Organum," p. 103.

WRITING

STYLE

Perhaps as a result of his early exposure to the classical German authors and perhaps as a result of his contact with Wagner's works, Brecht developed a strong dislike for the heroic and the bombastic. In particular, he seems to have been repelled by the language and verse forms employed in older works and finally came to believe that "the lie always affects a noble, evasive, general language. The language of truth, on the other hand, is dry, precise, and statistical."[1] Consequently when he began to fashion his own style of writing and to create the forms which he would use for the remainder of his life, he tried to formulate a poetic style which would be 'statistically truthful,' consequently low in emotional content and high in abstraction.

The early plays, most of them written before 1928-29, contained a high percentage of quite colorful, excessive and Expressionistic language. The decisive play in terms of Brecht's language style may well have been *Edward II*, the adaptation of Marlowe's play which Brecht did in collaboration with Lion Feuchtwanger. Brecht's first versions of the heroic blank verse were much too smooth and flowing, a style which apparently resulted from his collaborator's influence.

> Brecht, who knew his own facility in writing verse, deliberately attempted to get away from smooth, easy rhythms. "I needed a heightened language, but I was repelled by the oily smoothness of the usual iambic pentameter . . .[2]

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[1]Walter Weideli, *The Art of Bertolt Brecht*, trans. Daniel Russel (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 63.

[2]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 114.

Brecht had to revise *Edward II* several times in order to achieve an emphatic and irregular poetic form. In the process of evolving the dry, chopped-off style of his new kind of poetry, he made use of his experiences outside the theatre.

> . . . the political songs which he was starting to write, even the political slogans to which he had opened his ears all helped him to put his finger on the fundamental sense: they purified his language and showed him the practical and aesthetic value of saying just what one really means and no more.[1]

The characteristics of the poetry under discussion here have been sketched in the following manner:

> . . . Brecht has developed an unrhymed type of poetry which he calls *Gestich*. It consists of slightly formalized speech rhythms with certain forced pauses produced by arbitrary line divisions. . . . The diction of this verse is influenced by the Bible and the compressed simplicity of Chinese poetry. . . . *Gestich* represents a search for a dignified style with a slightly higher tension than prose but simple enough for an audience to follow aurally without difficulty.[2]

When the style was formed and Brecht had moved on from the excessively dry and Over-Distanced learning-plays to the mature creations, he used a modified form of this laconic language for particular Distancing effects: "for emphasis, for elevation, for parody, for variety, for musical or rhythmic relief."[3] When *Gestich* was used in a play, it was always in combination with other forms so that

> Prose slides into heightened prose or irregular verse, blank verse and prose alternate; each is liable to be interrupted by rhymed or unrhymed songs. The whole mixture suits

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[1]Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

[2]H. R. Hays, "Brecht, Anti-Individualist," *Selected Poems* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947), p. 11.

[3]Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

> Brecht's idea of conflict and incompatibility; it gives, to the later works especially, a great richness of texture.[1]

Such a mingling of forms allowed the dialogue to handle the ideational and the emotional segments with a form appropriate to each of them and, of course, the Epic Theatre, in spite of its theoretical dicta, had occasion to use both. Brecht had a variant dialogue form available for whatever he was trying to express at the moment but he tended to fill all of these forms with deceptively simple and clear-cut language. "Do not be betrayed by the simplicity of the language into a notion that the language is childish or unimportant. It is child-like and very important."[2] Its very naivete was one of its principal Distancing characteristics.

Since Brecht was so conscious of what he was doing and so deliberate in even his choice of simplicity as the key-note for his work, one ultimately had to become aware of the artfulness and the formal nature of his writing style. In reality, "almost every linguistic device used by Brecht can be reckoned among his estrangement effects."[3] We are here dealing with a conscious artfulness which is frequently concealed as artlessness but which is, nevertheless, highly formal and Distanced.

Brecht used his poetic style to Distance what he considered to be realities. But he apparently could not bring himself to sing of the wonders of the Communist world to come and, since Communism virtually has no present tense in its vocabulary (everything is being done in this 'transitional period' for the sake of posterity), he was again forced into

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

[2] Charles Shattuck, "Theatre for People," *Accent*, Vol. IX, No. 1, Autumn, 1948, p. 57.

[3] Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

the past and to a consideration of the evils which had developed prior to the dawn of scientific politics. Consequently, he used his method on the problems, not the potentialities, of the masses. The application of a highly Distanced form, particularly an usual and irregular form, to problems of this sort meant that, like Wagner, Brecht was slow in developing an audience which could follow his style properly and at a sufficient Distance so that riots did not develop regularly at his opening nights.

STRUCTURE

Since the Epic form was not supposed to empathically create the sweep of inevitable forces to a predetermined conclusion, much of the author's effort in plotting had to be devoted to determining the order and rhythm of the individual, repetitive playlets which made up the larger form.

> A frequent structural device is the repetition or duplication of characters or events. . . . seeing much the same events enacted a second time, the audience can afford to sit back and think, rather than allow itself to be carried away by the action.[1]

A widely recognized psychological principle suggests that a mere repetition of a stimulus, without wide variation in it, will produce less of a reaction each time it recurs. If the author deliberately built his play in a cyclic form so that circumstances were repeated, the emotional impact of the scene or event should be less each time it reappeared or it should be viewed in a different light. Brecht took advantage of this idea in plotting many of his plays.[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

[2] For instance, how many times must Galy Gay be convinced that he is someone else? How many times do people take advantage of Shen Te? How many times does Mother Courage lose one of her children? *Etc.*

Because each scene was written in a bare and unadorned style, with each point being made in the fewest possible words, each segment of an Epic play was made as short as it could be. This facilitated and clarified the repetition of the scenes and enabled the author to assemble the play out of easily handled sequences. The Epic drama was presumably assembled in the same *montage* manner as a motion picture, from separate and complete units which only became fully meaningful when they were assembled in the final pattern chosen. This technique, when it was applied, not as the film directors use it to create suspense, but to inhibit suspense and to promote the ideas contained in the play, was likely to result in an alternation of scenes which seemed active and dramatic on their first appearance but which became expository or commentarial in their reappearance.

> Together with the actual "play" scenes, the expository scenes give to the drama its characteristic rhythm of greater and lesser emotional involvement and effect a similar restoration of balance in the spectator.[1]

Brecht not only used this alternation technique to Distance the audience members but he forced the consciousness of the effect on the viewers by linking the scenes in an obvious manner. ". . . the scenes are tied together in such a way that 'the knots are visible' to the spectator, who is thus able to intervene."[2] By seeing the connections which exist between the depicted events, the spectator should realize that there are similar joints in reality at which it would be possible to institute other causes which would deflect and possibly correct the consequences of actions.

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[1]Jarvis, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

[2]Grossvogel, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

The audience members should be made aware of alternative possible developments in any chain of events.

Therefore, it was both the rhythm of the tensions and the obviously fragmented form of the *montage* which Distanced the spectator and stimulated his comprehension of the implications of the action.

> Foregoing the esthetic advantages of a complete synthesis by tone or mood (the ideal since the nineteenth century of both the conventional realists and the art-for-art's sake symbolists), Brecht concentrates on the diversity of a problem or situation, because the interrelationship of many facts and forces comprises its social reality.[1]

This orientation toward the examination of many aspects of a problem determined the structure of most of Brecht's plays.

CHARACTERS

The Epic Theatre was not concerned with the mighty passions of individuals, but instead, dealt with the masses and the social forces which move large groups; "there is no attempt to create fixed, highly individualized characters. Character emerges from the social function of the individual and changes with that function."[2] By this device also, the spectator was forced away from personal, empathic contact with the characters. The author purposefully avoided the delineation of readily identifiable and distinct personalities[3] and what few characteristics the characters were given might be altered at any moment. In theory, then, the single person became of far less importance and

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[1]Gassner, "A Modern Style of Theatre," pp. 69-70.

[2]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 127.

[3]The state of affairs described here existed in theory only throughout most of Brecht's life. In reality, Brecht created a marvellous gallery of highly distinct characters. One has only to think of Mother Courage, Galileo, Grusha, Azdak, *etc.* to know that he never seriously tried to achieve this goal after his *Lehrstücke* period. In that period, it is true, the characters are mere abstractions.

> The study of human nature is thus replaced by that of human relations. Not the characters but the story in which they are involved becomes the main concern of the epic, narrative, historical theatre.[1]

In a paradoxical manner, Brecht both forbade an interest in his characters and then permitted it, subject to certain restraints. He was to do the same thing in regard to the prohibition of empathy and it is certainly possible to assume an interconnection between these two retractions. Brecht, perhaps in spite of himself, created characters who live so fully that they automatically invite empathic reactions from the audience. When their author saw that they would attract empathy in spite of everything he could do to prevent it, he modified his theories to allow for some conventional growth for the characters.[2]

ACTING

The embodiment of Brecht's characters in living human beings brought with it the possibility of an empathic relationship between the audience and the actors. Because most of the actors who appeared in various productions of his plays prior to the formation of the Berliner Ensemble had not been trained by Brecht, they tended to use other methods than the ones he had worked out to maintain a great Distance. Brecht believed that "actors are accustomed to rely primarily on the spectator's empathy, which means exploiting his most easily-accessible emotions. . . ."[3] In short, they had been taught incorrectly. The actors tended to work in opposition to the play and to seek empathy since they had not grasped the nature of the new system. Brecht objected to this, saying of the actor, "He must

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[1]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 133.

[2]See Chapter VII.

[3]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 100.

not 'cast a spell' over anyone. He should not transport people from normality to 'higher realms'. He need not dispose of any special powers of suggestion."[1]

Once more, Brecht was reacting against the emotional excesses of the style used in his day to interpret the German classics, a ranting bombastic delivery which took advantage of every emotional possibility to the fullest. If the actor using such a style depended solely upon empathy to achieve his relationship to the character and to his audience, then there were certainly possibilities for mis-application of the process.

> It should be obvious that if the actor throws himself into a part with so much realism as to break down emotionally he has destroyed his own aesthetic distance; and if he has done that there is a fair probability that he has done the same thing empathically for his audience.[2]

It was this sort of complete identification on the part of the actor and of his audience which caused Brecht to work out the alienation system in acting "to overdistance in order to prevent any Einfühlung, any empathy, on the part of actors and audience."[3]

The first step in the new Epic style of acting was to divorce the actor from his character. This could be done, in part, by a simple reversal of most of the Stanislavskian-empathic methods.

> In order to produce A-effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learned of persuading the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays. Aiming not to put his audience into a trance, he must not go into a trance himself. His muscles must remain loose, for a turn of the head, e.g., with tautened neck muscles, will "magically" lead the spectators' eyes and even their heads to turn with it, and this can only detract from any speculation or reaction which the gesture may bring about. . . . Even when he plays

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

[2] Dolman, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

[3] Budel, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

> a man possessed he must not seem to be possessed himself, for how can the spectator discover what possesses the character if he does?[1]

Again, Brecht is over-simplifying the process of identification and assuming that it is always present. However, working from this rejection of ecstatic empathy, Brecht went one to explain why it was socially important that the actor should be clearly detached from his character:

> . . . if the audience is to be shown how to handle the character, or if people who resemble it or are in similar situations are to be shown the secret of their problems, then he must adopt a standpoint which is not only outside the character's radius but also at a more advanced stage of evolution.[2]

Instead of assisting the actor and the audience to a further mastery of the world, Brecht felt that empathy would becloud both the problem and its solution. Great abstraction or withdrawal, on the other hand, should provide the Distance which would enable both to see the problem with maximum clarity and to apply the full resources of their intellects without interference from the emotions.

If the actor could arrive at a properly Distanced interpretation, the audience should be conscious of the characterization and of the actor at the same time. Two entities, working in opposition, would occupy the actor's area at the same time.

> The actor embodies the character and at the same time comments on him; in other words, he shows the actions of the character and simultaneously presents the critical reasoning that might have stopped him from acting as he does. Brecht wanted the actor to present a picture of man impelled by his emotions, critically yet helplessly aware of their irrationality.[3]

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[1]Brecht, "A Short Organum," pp. 89-90.

[2]Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, p. 76.

[3]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 249.

From the interaction of the actor's real personality with that of the assumed character's, the tension and interest of the portrayal was developed. A split image of a single person was presented to the audience so that greater penetration into all of the aspects of that character-actor relationship could be had by the audience.[1] Theoretically, such an acting method should provide more information than was normally given by an actor who was not Distanced while in the process of acting.

Such a double-exposure of a character was a phonemenon which Brecht assumed to be peculiar to the Epic Theatre and in opposition to Stanislavskian acting, which he also assumed to be the normal technique used by actors outside of this system. The two types of acting seem to be in sharp opposition to one another and to represent two entirely divergent versions of an activity. In reality, this apparent problem, which has occupied theoreticians and practitioners of the theatre since Diderot posed his famous paradox of the actor, has been resolved by a good number of actors by the simple process of blending the two techniques of recreated emotion and pure technical acting. This is possible as long as the extreme states noted are connected by the Distance-scale.

> Explanations [of the actor's state while performing] have differed widely, going from the one extreme of an identification of the acting and the normal personality to the other of a separation so wide as to be theoretically inconceivable and contradicted by experience. It is necessary to offer some conception which will account for the differences as well as for the indirect connection between the two forms of being and which is applicable not merely to acting, but to other kinds of art as well. Distance, it is here contended, meets the requirement even in its subtlest shakes.[2]

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[1]This split image concept was probably the point of origin for Brecht's many split personality characters, of which Shen Te is probably the most obvious.

[2]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

One can define any degree of identification or alienation, and all combinations of the two, by reference to the scale. Thus, Brecht probably desired a more abstracted actor than any other major author-director but he could also write empathic scenes for his actors and, as a director, allow them to experience empathy during rehearsals without being completely contradictory. He was simply permitting them, at specific times, to move along the scale closer to the Golden Mean, so long as they could then move back to the abstract end for the majority of the time.

The use of empathy during the rehearsals of Epic productions was not forbidden, though its use during a production was discouraged. In this connection, Brecht said:

> Probably you'll have repeatedly to get inside the person you are representing, his situation, his physical characteristics, his modes of thought. It's one of the operations involved in building the character up. It's entirely consistent with our purposes, so long as you know how to get out of him again.[1]

But the process of empathizing, as far as Brecht was concerned, was only a means to an end.

> The only justification for the actor's efforts to "feel his way into the character," according to Brecht, was so that he could ultimately come out "the other side" and observe the character from the standpoint of a seasoned social critic who could add his own explicit criticism to his version of the character.[2]

What Brecht seemed to be saying was that running the gamut on the Distance scale tends to produce a more complex realization of the character. However, he would restrict such probing and development of the character to the rehearsal rather than the performance because "Brecht believed

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[1]Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, p. 55.

[2]Hersh, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

that it is the actor's business not to express feeling but to 'show attitudes' or *Gesten*."[1] He would have the actor complete the realization of the character in rehearsal and analyze it there in a complete manner so that he would be ready, not to play or experience the part during the performance, but to demonstrate it. During the performance, the actor "'is' not King Lear, but he 'demonstrates' King Lear."[2]

Such an attitude on the part of the actor calls for the delivery of the character's lines as though they were in the third person, not the first person.

> . . . the actor must remain a demonstrator; he must present the person demonstrated as a stranger, he must not suppress the 'he did that, he said that' element in his performance. He must not go so far as to be wholly transformed into the person demonstrated.[3]

The technique of which Brecht spoke perhaps found its fullest and clearest explanation in his famous example of the street-scene. As a witness to an accident explains it to the passers-by, he makes no effort to cast a spell by means of empathy; he does not want or expect his audience to lose their control of themselves or their powers of observation. He merely demonstrates and explains how and why the accident happened. Certainly he may dramatize and perhaps even act out the most exciting or violent portions of the event but it will not bother either the witness or his audience if he suddenly drops out of character in order to clarify the matter by personal commentary. He would never consider hiding the fact that he has studied the event and formed an opinion about it. Such a natural actor, dealing with the practical factors of an event in an

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[1] Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

[2] Budel, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

[3] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 125.

effort to promote understanding, was the prototype of the Brechtian actor.

The process of demonstrating how a thing actually occurred not only brings into the discussion the techniques of narration and quotation but the sense of history as well. The events cannot be described nor the statements of the participants quoted until after they have existed, until after they have been completed. " . . . the actor should not regard himself as impersonating the character so much as narrating the actions of another person at a definite time in the past."[1] The narration of events dissociated them in time from the present just as the use of an attitude which suggested that 'he the character, not I the actor, did that' denied the present responsibility of the person the audience saw on the stage and created a sense of fluidity and the possibility of change. That was a basic reason for the temporal distancing. To gain the sense of moral detachment which was a basic element of the Distanced state,

> The actor must play the incidents as historical ones. Historical incidents are unique, transitory incidents associated with particular periods. The conduct of the persons involved in them is not fixed and 'universally human'; it includes elements that have been or may be overtaken by the course of history, and is subject to criticism from the immediately following period's point of view. The conduct of those born before use is alienated from us by an incessant evolution.
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> It is up to the actor to treat present-day events and modes of behaviour with the same detachment as the historian adopts with regard to those of the past. He must alienate these characters and incidents from us.[2]

Regardless of the actual placement in time of the incidents to be played, in the Epic Theatre, they were always acted as though they were completed

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[1]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 130.

[2]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 140.

actions of an historical nature which may now be understood to have had certain consequences, but only because particular choices were made by characters who could have acted in other ways.

In one other way did the sense of the past get called into play in the acting used in the Epic Theatre. The production offered before the public was the end result of a prolonged period of rehearsal and Brecht wanted the audience to be aware of the time which had been spent in perfecting the play.

> . . . the delivery to the audience of what has been built up in the rehearsals. Here it is essential that the actual playing should be infused with the *Gestus* of handing over a finished article. What now comes before the spectator is the most frequently repeated of what has not been rejected, and so the finished representations have to be delivered with the eyes fully open, so that they may be received with the eyes open too.[1]

If the events were not happening here and now but were only a narrated or demonstrated report being given by an actor, who has gone through the rehearsals of the play many times over and who knew how the plot evolved, then the omniscient actor was in a position to comment upon the action, even in direct address to the audience.[2]

The speaking of lines which were intended for delivery, not to another character but to the audience, required careful handling. Brecht tended to ask his actors who were breaking the action for direct address or unmotivated song to move to specified areas on the stage, usually down center, where they were given special lighting or other alienating aids.

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[1]Brecht, "A Short Organum," p. 104.

[2]"It should be apparent all through his performance that 'even at the start and in the middle he knows how it ends' and he must 'thus maintain a calm independence throughout.'" Brecht, "A Short Organum," p. 91.

The lights, symbols and special areas were necessary to maintain the Distance. Otherwise, an actor

> if he walks to the forefront of the stage, will at once give us the impression that he is entering our own space, and will disturb us because his fictitious counterpart begins to turn into a real being.[1]

> Even in specialized productions in which the actor breaks through the frame and in a sense addresses the spectator directly. . . he carefully fosters a certain kind of distance lest the spectator misunderstand him and take him for something he is not.[2]

Part of this protection of the Distance could be accomplished by staging devices but the vast majority of the responsibility fell on the actor who always had the major part to play in the control of audience reactions.

As long as the actor could suggest, even in his most personal and intimate contact with the audience, that this too has been rehearsed many times over, or that he, the actor, might be addressing the assembled group but that he was still carefully observing the manner of the communication, then the Distance would be retained.

The actor in the Epic Theatre, as one of his Distancing devices, was expected always to give the impression that he was watching himself in the process of demonstrating. This alienating device Brecht borrowed from the Chinese theatre where the Chinese actor shows his awareness of being watched.

> The actors openly choose those positions which will best show them off to the audience, just as if they were acrobats. A further means is that the artist observes himself. Thus if he is representing a cloud, perhaps, showing its unexpected appearances, its soft and strong growth, its rapid yet gradual transformation, he will occasionally look at the audience as

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[1]Michelis, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[2]Albright, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

> if to say: isn't it just like that? At the same time he also observes his own arms and legs, adducing them, testing them and perhaps finally approving them.[1]

The intent behind this double viewing was solely that of Distancing.

> The performer's self-observation, an artful and artistic act of self-alienation, stopped the spectator from losing himself in the character completely, i.e. to the point of giving up his own identity, and lent a splendid remoteness to the events. Yet the spectator's empathy was not entirely rejected. The audience identifies itself with the actor as being an observer, and accordingly develops his attitude of observing or looking on.[2]

This principle, "that 'der Zeigende gezeigt wird': that the process of showing must itself be shown"[3] was particularly important to Brecht when the actor changed his means of expression and began to sing: "The actor must not only sing but show a man who is singing."[4] Brecht stressed the unusual aspects of people bursting into song on occasions which might not call for melody but which could be made to seem even stranger by the process of using song. He clearly differentiated all musical performances from the normal acts of his characters in all of the mature works on the basis that

> . . . the general *Gestus* of showing . . . always underlies that which is being shown, when the audience is musically addressed by means of songs. Because of this the actors ought not to "drop into" song, but should clearly mark it off from the rest of the text.[5]

The reason for this sharp dissociation was that

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[1] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 92.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

[3] Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

[4] Brecht, "Notes to the Threepenny Opera," pp. 106-107.

[5] Brecht, "A Short Organum," p. 102.

> When he sings, the actor accomplishes a change of function. Nothing is more detestable than when an actor gives the impression of not having noticed that he has left the ground of plain speech and is already singing.[1]

What the actor was doing during this process of clearly marking off the songs from the dialogue, if he did it correctly, was stressing to the viewer the artificial and artistic qualities of his performance. The performer was making the audience aware of the unusual nature of all artistic and creative work so that they would clearly differentiate it from normal human activity and appreciate it as an end in itself. He was using another method of Distancing.

The whole method of performance in the Epic Theatre using all of the procedures mentioned above was an attempt at heightening the artificiality of art. The Epic performer never tried to photographically reproduce reality. That sort of imitative or reproductive acting had the possibility of being confused with reality. The Epic actor wanted anything but such confusion for it was his job to analyze and restructure reality into intelligible patterns which could be seen to be artificial, in an artistic sense, but which also exposed the sub-structure of the social conditions his character encountered with great clarity. The actions were made unreal, startling, strange and alien so that they could be seen to be alterable, not predetermined. At the same time, the actor suggested in his oblique commentary how they should be changed.

> What is meant here is 'creative' acting, which in its turn must be distinguished from 'reproductive' acting--two different types traceable through the greater part of theatrical history, which in their highest development are often

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[1]Brecht, "Notes to the Threepenny Opera," pp. 106-107

> outwardly indistinguishable, but nevertheless retain traces of differences, characteristic of their procedures and physical mechanism.[1]

In reality, much of the Epic Theatre theory of acting was an overstatement of perfectly valid principles. And though it might apply or be needed far more to counteract the excesses continually demonstrated on the German stage in Brecht's time, the attempt to apply these principles to all acting could conceivably be beneficial. While an actor could hardly succeed in applying these ideas exactly as they are stated in the theory, he might be able to produce "that truly rending contradiction between experience and portrayal, empathy and demonstration, justification and criticism, which is what is aimed at."[2]

PRODUCTION

> Brecht's scenic theory . . . is likewise drastically opposed to current practice. As he scorned the well-made script, so he challenged the whole theory of synthesis in production--the thesis first formulated by Richard Wagner, and afterwards developed by Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig. The idea of fusing the elements of the playscript, setting, lighting, direction, acting, music and dancing into one indivisible, magical impression struck Brecht as the technical means of giving pseudo life to corrupt ideas.[3]

If, again, there was to be no synthesis, but rather a fragmentation of the parts, Brecht moved in direct opposition to the realistic-naturalistic style of staging. In his theatre, he sought no integral combinations of effects which would convince the spectator that he was observing life itself. Brecht, as a theatricalist, readily acknowledged that the theatre was not life, that it can seldom, if ever give even a clear impression of

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[1]Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

[2]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 277.

[3]Gorelik, "Brecht: 'I am the Einstein,'" p. 87.

being life, so why not admit its theatricality and capitalize upon it to achieve a greater Distance?

> For the joys known to playgoers are joys born of the theatre's illusions. It is in terms of the means by which these illusions are created that the theatre takes its place, and is judged, as an art. It is not a world that is condemned to unreality but that exults in it . . .[1]

Brecht chose to stress the methods and the means of production, just as he did of acting and the other arts employed.

As a result, the heavy machinery and the complex setting, the hidden light sources and the fourth wall convention, in fact, most of the intricate and often unwieldy conventions of the realistic theatre were scrapped, to be replaced by the simplest possible alternative.

> . . . a simple technique not only proves more stimulating to the imagination and more productive of illusion than an elaborate one, but renders the task of maintaining aesthetic distance vastly easier.[2]

By inviting the spectator's imaginative participation in the completion of the missing elements, "the contradiction between empathy and detachment is made stronger and becomes an element in the performance."[3] The spectator must remain mentally alert, must recognize the allusive suggestions which he has been given, and must participate in the structuring of the scene before he can then empathize in even the slightest degree. Being forced to work mentally in order to make something of the suggestions given keeps the spectator awake and subtlely suggests to him that if he can build a better reality in the theatre, he can do the same outside of it. And for those audience members who were deficient in visual imagination,

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[1]Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

[2]Dolman, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

[3]Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, p. 102.

> Good acting can overcome poor technical elements since the reactions of the audience are more quickly affected by the animate than the inanimate elements of the production. The imagination of the audience, their ability to pretend, will work more readily with no stimuli than from stimuli that lead in the wrong direction.[1]

The result of the deliberate incompleteness of the production was that, in the Epic Theatre, "the integrated work of art (or 'Gesamtkunstwerk') appeared before the spectator as a bundle of separate elements."[2] The connective links between and among the arts were deliberately severed so that each existed independently and no one of them only served another.

> . . . the non-literary elements of the production--decor, music, and choreography . . . are raised to the level of autonomous elements; instead of pulling in the same direction as the words, they enter into a dialectical, contrapuntal relationship with them.[3]

Such radical separation, in which each art went its own way rather than assisting the dialogue, only served to make the spectator more aware of the components in the art work and the structure which held these arts together and thus stressed the Distance chosen for the piece. In addition, such contrary and opposing parts, each flying off about its own affairs with comparatively little acknowledgement that they belonged together, imparted a tremendous sense of vitality and energy to the play.

Beyond the separate nature of the arts, the jerky, non-linear development of the plot and the distinct coolness of the actors in their roles, Brecht's theatre production was also marked by a great awareness of many of the physical characteristics of the stage, the mechanisms and

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[1]Gilmore Brown and Alice Garwood, *General Principles of Play Direction* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1947), p. 138.

[2]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 134.

[3]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 128.

the effects used there. Brecht selected or developed a number of Distanced characteristics which marked a production as being Brechtian Epic Theatre.

> . . . slogans on placards had been put in the auditorium for *Trommeln in der Nacht*; sub-titles had been shown between the scenes in *Edward II*; there had been a half-height linen curtain and a song sung verse by verse during scene changes in Geis's production of *Mann ist Mann*. . . . these link together with the use of projections for song texts or drawings, with the visible lights and formal interruptions of the text by songs, to make a completely distinctive style . . .[1]

Basically, these staccato effects were a matter of further abstraction and literarization of the theatre by mechanical means. The machinery, as benefitted a theatre style designed for a mechanical and scientific age, aided in the commentary upon the action, further formulating and Distancing the content. "The mechanics of the stage remain visible and function as a play outside the play."[2] And the process of bracketing a performance in any manner is one of the oldest devices, usually in the form of a play within a play, for achieving greater Distance. Brecht developed this technique one step further by exposing the means of creating the effect, while using it.

Among the pieces of apparatus which particularly caught Brecht's fancy were the lighting instruments, the slide or motion picture projector and the phonograph.

As will be noted below in the lighting section, Brecht tended to think that mechanical devices which were capable of creating "magical" effects should be shown to the audience while they were being used so

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[1]Willett, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-149.

[2]Heinz Politzer, "How Epic is Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre?", *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, June 1962, p. 101.

that there might be no confusion about the source and nature of the effect. In addition to revealing the light instruments, Brecht also felt, in his formative period, that "It is best to place the record player, like the orchestra, so that it can be seen."[1] He found in these machines and their functioning an appropriate Distancing symbol for a mechanical era and a scientific world. They projected a formulated conception of the world and showed that man, through his technology and the application of his understanding was capable of creating a wonderful and practical world. Among other things Brecht found that the motion picture projector "can be used better than almost anything else to supersede the old kind of untechnical, anti-technical 'glowing' art, with its religious links."[2]

After Brecht's *Lehrstucke* phase, make-up on the Epic stage tended to be rather conservative. It was often replaced by highly exaggerated masks of great Distancing power to differentiate the materialistic characters[3] from the better people but the facial make-up was fairly conventional. This seems an odd oversight in a director who so consistently sought means of creating greater Distance, for "make-up, to the extent that it disguises the actor, helps to maintain aesthetic distance . . ."[4]

Brecht, in theory at least, used costume only to the extent necessary to distinguish one character from another and only under such conditions as would stress Distance. Brecht authorized

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[1] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 103.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[3] Materialistic in most, but not all, cases was the equivalent of evil. The sort of characters referred to are the Iron Shirts or the royalty in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* or the Shui Ta part of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

[4] Dolman, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

> . . . only a limited use of costume. There must be no question of creating an illusion that the demonstrators really are these characters. (The epic theatre can counteract this illusion by especially exaggerated costume or by garments that are somehow marked out as objects for display.)[1]

It is interesting to note that, with the exception of characters like the Governor and his wife in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* who came from the ruling classes, most of Brecht's characters were ordinary workers who would not (and who did not) dress in any peculiar or distinctive manner. This is another example of a theory which was not carried out consistently.

SETTING

> Scenically Brecht rejected not only naturalism but the picturesque, atmospheric stage picture as well. Instead of surrounding his actors with an atmospheric reproduction of a locale, he asked his scene designers to proceed by what he called "the inductive instead of the deductive" method. In practice, that meant beginning by giving the actors the furniture and properties necessary for the action, and following up with a "report on the environment." The reports are painted or projected tokens of locale: a photograph or framed picture of a house, town or countryside; a drop, painted so obviously that it cannot create any illusion; the name of a town in cutout lettering hung over the stage. All in all, the Epic setting becomes so utterly functional that it cannot be distinguished from an organized group of stage properties.[2]

"Illusion is a matter of degree, and a lesser degree of it is not necessarily less dramatic than a higher degree of it."[3] When Brecht reduced the amount of illusion in his stage settings he did not destroy the theatrical effectiveness of them. He merely called for another type of perception on the part of his audience. Instead of pretending that the

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[1] *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 127-128.

[2] Gorelik, "Epic Scene Design," pp. 77 and 80.

[3] Bentley, "German Stagecraft Today," p. 635.

stage area really represented some other place and some other time, Brecht insisted that it be regarded as a platform in the here and now upon which demonstrations had been arranged in the clearest possible manner. Brecht used the stage as though it were a classroom demonstration area, within which interesting, but obviously artificial, illustrative examples could be presented. His stage settings were made to accord with this approach.

In that its settings included properties which were as real, as old and worn as possible, the Epic Theatre did not reject naturalism completely. In that whatever could not actually be shown on the stage could be represented by something else, Brecht's theatre did not reject symbolism. In fact, it included both styles in varying, but almost equal, amounts, with small modifications in technique so that the Distancing stylistic elements would be clearly noted. The blend of such sharply contrasting styles added still another disconcerting jar to the stimulating shocks the Epic stage was supposed to provide.

While the naturalist designer would normally avoid the Distancing generalizations of symbols, both the symbolist designer and the Epic one were free to use symbols. The difference in the use of them by each lay in the Epic artist's greater acknowledgment of the artificiality of the symbol.

> Symbolism can be used on the Epic stage whenever Naturalism is impossible. Thus a disc can represent the sun. Yet if we thus use a symbol we must not fool ourselves into believing that it is not a symbol but the reality. We must not hang the disc on an invisible wire and ask our audience to believe that this is a photograph of the sun. We must hang it on a visible chain.[1]

When such a literal-minded approach to symbols was taken, almost anything could acquire symbolic overtones but, at the same time, it would be seen

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 636.

to be, most literally, something else. In Brecht's theatre, it was always important to make an "unpretentious use of undisguised materials." The exact nature of the symbolic object could never be in doubt.

> Epic design differs from both Eastern and Western Theatricalism in insisting that everything scenic that appears on stage must be "the object itself," not an illusion of the object. A backdrop must never pretend to be anything but painted cloth; an electric bulb may be used to represent a star, but must not give the illusion of a star.[1]

Such realistic portions of the setting as were left and such work-a-day-world symbols as were chosen to fill out the setting still could not "magically" appear on the stage for fear that they might trick the spectator into believing the illusion which was being suggested. Instead, activity should be visible behind the half-high curtain which Brecht used to mask scene shifts.

> Leaning back the spectator
> Should see
> How cunningly you prepare for him.
> Should see
> The tin moon come swaying down.
> And the cottage roof brought in.
> Do not disclose over much
> Yet disclose something to him.
> Friends
> Let him discover
> You are not conjuring
> But working.[2]

It might seem that an Epic setting, stripped of all but the necessary realities, provided with symbols of only a very earthy variety and denied even the element of surprise in the unveiling of these components, would be a bare and drab sort of arrangement in which to perform a play. However,

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[1]Gorelik, "Epic Scene Design," p. 80.

[2]Brecht, *Poems on the Theatre*, p. 12.

> . . . contrary to popular notions about Brecht's staging, he never asked for, or wanted, bare or colorless settings. In most cases the settings for his plays have been dynamic in design, rich in detail and striking in color. In no case were they thrown haphazardly on stage; Brecht's designers have had, as always, to organize their scenic elements into a purposeful arrangement.[1]

The very basis of the Distanced state is a formulated content which can be perceived in comprehensable patterns.

LIGHTING

Though Wagner never lived to use the new system of electrical lighting, with its ability to dim the illumination of the scene, his suggestive, candlelit settings established a style which was only fully realized in the electrical lighting which underlay the moody and atmospheric designs of Appia.

> The perfection of electric lighting meant, among other things, the possibility of graduating the intensity of stage lights, which consequently became a steady source of temptation to the arty. The ruling passion of stage designers after Appia and Craig was for semi-darkness, a fact that the historian would have to relate to the whole spirit of the Wagnerian epoch.[2]

Such uses of light as Appia and Craig and their followers made was designed to heighten the illusionistic aspects of the theatre and, with the low intensity levels employed, there was a good possibility of lulling the audience toward the hypnotic trance. In the world they created on the stage, nothing seemed to have a source: the planes and blocks of the designs apparently were neither wholly natural objects nor precisely man-made creations. And the infinitely subtle play of the light, bringing first this and then that object out of the gloom, also had no source or obvious control.

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[1]Gorelik, "Brecht: 'I am the Einstein . . . ," p. 87.

[2]Bentley, "German Stagecraft Today," p. 637.

> . . . nothing does more to convey the idea that the stage is hocus-pocus than the appearance and disappearance of light as if at the bidding of unseen gods. . . . The Epic Realist who admits that the stage is a stage, admits also that a lamp is a lamp.[1]

The consequence of the open admission that all effects achieved in the Epic Theatre were the result of man's efforts, in the case of lighting, was the open display of all of the lighting instruments within the audience's field of vision.

> If we light the actors and their performance in such a way that the lights themselves are within the spectator's field of vision we destroy part of his illusion of being present at a spontaneous, transitory, authentic, unrehearsed event. He sees that arrangements have been made to show something; something is being repeated here under special conditions, for instance in a very brilliant light. Displaying the actual lights is meant to be a counter to the old-fashioned theatre's efforts to hide them.[2]

Such illusion-destroying displays also attracted the eye occasionally and pulled the spectator away from the action being performed, thus Distancing him. But, since the lighting instruments were intentionally incorporated in the design, they, presumably, did not remind him too forcefully of practical matters outside of the art work or matters which were not intended.

In the desirability of exposing the flood and spot lights and their battens, another instance was given of a theoretical conception which was tried out and discarded. "In fact, Brecht did not adopt this practice with the Berliner Ensemble, just as he withdrew from sight the gramophone which produced sound-effects, when he found it merely aroused amusement."[3] It may be that the effect caused an Over-Distancing or it

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 141.

[3] Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

may be that the audience simply acknowledged the presence of the lights and then virtually ignored them much as they do the proscenium, the curtains and so on, so that they produced little or no effect.[1] Brecht never explained his reversal of procedure in this instance.

He did, however, retain another of his ideas about lighting, believing throughout his career that the shadows of the suggestive stage should be banished by a flood of light.

> If a playwright's whole lifework is a nocturne (one thinks of Maeterlinck), the "modern" style of lighting will no doubt be what he needs. If reality is invisible, the less we see the better. But, if, on the other hand, a playwright, like Brecht, believes that--figuratively speaking--he can throw light on reality, and that reality is indeed there to be thrown light on, he will naturally want to use plenty of stage light--literally speaking. Thus, Brecht is in favor of switching on the lights and leaving them switched on, a revealing flood of white light covering the whole stage.[2]

So when Brecht and his company began their work in Berlin, he could report:

> Our lighting was white and even and as brilliant as our equipment allowed. This enabled us to get rid of any remnants of 'atmosphere' such as would have given the incidents a slightly romantic flavour.[3]

Such a revealing light, lavished on the setting as light is in a surgical arena or a boxing ring, could not avoid seeming artificial merely because of its intensity. It set the action apart in still another way as something which had been prepared for viewing; it distanced the work.

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[1] Audiences consistantly ignore exposed lighting instruments in most arena theatres and in the productions of many touring companies which have to adapt their lighting equipment to all sorts of auditoria.

[2] Bentley, "German Stagecraft Today," pp. 637-638.

[3] *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 217-218.

MUSIC

Brecht had no more use for the type of emotional, empathic music which stems from Wagner than he did for any of the other elements which were derived from the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In regard to its content, he said:

> Our Wagnerites are now pleased to remember that the original Wagnerites posited a sense of which they were presumably aware. Those composers who stem from Wagner still insist on posing as philosophers. . . . We still maintain the whole highly-developed technique which made this pose possible: the vulgarian strikes a philosophical attitude from which to conduct his hackneyed ruminations.[1]

And its effects he described in this manner:

> It seduces the listener into an enervating, because unproductive, act of enjoyment. No number of refinements can convince me that its social function is any different from that of the Broadway burlesques.[2]

Brecht appears to have assumed that all concerts and, indeed, all music outside of protest songs and propaganda choruses (useful music of the types he helped to create) were emotional, ecstacy-producing devices with no abstractive, intellectual qualities. As a result of his strongly practical and moralistic bias, Brecht denied music any artistic, Distanced characteristics.

With his usual vigor and decisiveness, Brecht attacked the supposedly empathic form of music to fragment it and free it for intellectual purposes.

> When the epic theatre's methods begin to penetrate the opera the first result is a radical separation of the elements. The great struggle for supremacy between words, music and production . . . can simply be by-passed by radically separating the elements. So long as the expression 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (or 'integrated work of art') means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

> supposed to be 'fused' together, the various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere 'feed' to the rest.[1]

It was important to Brecht that this art be 'freed' from its old uses and abuses because "he used music in every play for incidental or total underscoring of his texts."[2] Something which recurred often in Brecht's work was of major consequence to him.

His methods of handling music in his plays show the way in which he developed his kind of intellectual, Distanced music, his *Gestic* music. "In the first few plays music was used in a fairly conventional way; it was a matter of songs and marches, and there was usually some naturalistic pretext for each musical piece."[3] But by the time Brecht had the highly musical plays *The Threepenny Opera* and *Happy End* and the opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* behind him and was ready to move into his learning-play period, his theory of the style and purpose of music was completely formed.

> In the postface to his opera *Mahagonny* (1929), Brecht sets forth some of the functions of music on his stage: it is meant to "explicate" the text, to show a "way of action" (in contrast with Wagnerian music that depicts a "psychological state"). The songs scattered through the plays of Brecht are conceived as separate units that mark a break in the action and invite further commentary upon it.[4]

Commentary, however, was not this music's only function. These were "songs which summarise, comment on, or predict the action."[5] Thus the music used in a Brechtian play was intended to serve precisely the same function as

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

[2] Charles H. Shattuck, "The First Book on Brecht," *Accent*, Vol. XIX, No. 3, Summer 1959, p. 175.

[3] *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 84-85.

[4] Grossvogel, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[5] Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

the Wagnerian leitmotive system, while it added a deliberate Distance to the whole play.

In no sense was the music supposed to blend into the action; it served precisely the opposite purpose: it interrupted whatever was going on. This interruption was intended to promote intellectual comprehension and was supported by other factors in the production.

> The coming of such an interruption is usually announced beforehand by some visible change on the stage: the title of the song may flash on a screen, special lights may be put on, or a symbolic emblem (e.g. flags and trumpets) may come down from the flies.[1]

With its function defined and its method of inclusion in the whole determined, the only thing which remained was to state the nature of the music. While Wagner's music was supposed to consist of 'continuous expression' of a highly elevating and almost religious character, Brecht completely reversed these characteristics and selected a jazzy, deliberately non-lyric style. He found it already formulated and ready for use.

> So-called 'cheap' music, particularly that of the cabaret and the operetta, has for some time been a sort of gestic music. Serious music, however, still clings to lyricism, and cultivates expression for its own sake.[2]

Brecht's type of music would not, of course, cultivate expression for its own sake. It was to be informative, combative, practical, non-empathic and blatantly artificial.

Kurt Weill, Brecht's most widely known musical collaborator, quoting Brecht, said:

> "I set up my music in opposition to the action, knowing that music excludes, by its essence, all realism." Inspired by

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[1]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 137.

[2]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 87.

> the technical contribution of jazz, our composer then set out to combat--from the inside--the narcotic powers of music.[1]

The music written for Brecht's play by each of his three primary collaborators tended to sound much the same. This implies that there was a single taste, a single set of standards used to guide the creation of the entire body of music. That taste could only have been Brecht's.

> According to Ernest Borneman . . . Brecht was responsible for all the musical ideas in his works, using his composers merely to arrange them. Mr. Willett does not state so extreme an opinion, but he shows clearly how Brecht kept a tight rein on the music, so that it would do its vital work and not steal the show. He insisted on sparse development, small orchestral ensembles, and singers who could sometimes prevent themselves from singing and simply "speak against the music."[2]

Since Brecht is known to have composed tunes for his poems so that he could sing them in beer halls, a number of the melodic ideas may have been his.

SUMMARY

Brecht began his theorizing about the theatre by assuming that the audience of a scientific age would be more rational and more interested in factual statement than was that of the Romantic era. He decried a theatre of emotional hypnosis but no real thought content, a theatre lacking in true social significance, one well represented in his mind by Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In the place of such singular emotional content, Brecht wanted to substitute a cool, restrained, reasoning form which was concerned with the important ethical and moral problems of the

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[1]Weideli, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[2]Shattuck, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-176.

world.[1] By the techniques he evolved, Brecht intended to make concrete statements of practical importance to audiences which were oriented toward 'reality,' not toward fantasy. As Bullough intimated, the Wagnerian form of "over-distanced Art is specially designed for a class of appreciation which has difficulty to rise spontaneously to any degree of Distance."[2] Thus, Brecht's new form of theatre, his learning-plays, were intended for an entirely different audience, for a group of people primarily oriented toward the non-Distanced and the practical, for the common working man.

To explain to the masses "the teachings of the classic writers and the propagandists, the ABC of communism; to the ignorant, instruction about their condition; to the oppressed, class consciousness; and to the class conscious, the experience of revolution,"[3] Brecht wrote plays about economic and social conditions and, concurrently, structured a rather haphazard theory which was intended to prevent identification with the characters of the plays and, at the same time, to stimulate critical thinking about the states depicted. One uses a term like 'haphazard' in relation to the theory of Epic Theatre because of the many contradictions and mutually exclusive demands which appeared within the theory at different times, because of the doubt of many critics as to its usefulness and practicability and because Brecht himself apparently decided that the whole theory, as it was structured, did not work or was incomplete.

> Whether Brecht's theories were merely rationalizations of his intuition, taste, and imagination (which they

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[1] "The great bulk of his work is designed to be an impersonal and schematic contribution to Marxist myth-making." Brustein, "Bertolt Brecht," *The Theatre of Revolt*, p. 231.

[2] Bullough, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

[3] Brecht, "The Measures Taken," *The Jewish Wife and Other Short Plays*, trans. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), p. 79.

> almost certainly were), or whether they were the results of the application of ice-cold logic and deeply probing sociological analysis (as he sometimes claimed them to be) . . .[1]

> . . . much of the discussion of these theories as general principles has proved barren and unreal: it remains yet to be proved that they have any validity apart from Brecht's own works--and productions--which they were intended to explain and justify.[2]

The theories were founded on Brecht's version of the theory of Aesthetic Distance which he called *Verfremdung* or Alienation. The intent behind the use of this method of controlling the audience's involvement was to eliminate (or at least to highly restrict) empathy and to make the commonplace seem striking so that attention would be paid to it.

Brecht evolved many devices to bring about an effect of Alienation or estrangement, almost all of them based upon an inversion of the procedures of the conventional stage. He would continually remind the audience that it was watching an arranged spectacle by stressing the presence of the theatre itself in a theatricalist manner (exposing the machinery of the stage, allowing the actors to violate the fourth wall convention and address the audience directly, restricting the setting to the bare essentials, seeking an acting style which banished the possibility of an ecstatic involvement and reminding the audience of the presence of the actor, etc.) In addition, he relied upon his bold and beautiful language forms and the staccato, fragmented and repetitive nature of the scenes to put the audience at an appropriate Distance.

He carried out his theories in his writing by striving for a heightened but rough style in which almost all prose and verse forms

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[1]Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, p. 124.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 107.

might alternate. The intention of his *Gebrauchslyrik* was to be non-emotional and statistically truthful.

The structure of the plays Brecht wrote tends to be episodic, with an alternation of dramatic and expository scenes which acquire their tension and true meaning by their montage, their specific relationship to one another in the order in which they are finally assembled.

The plays were to be interpreted by actors who never identified with the characters, but rather demonstrated and either narrated or quoted the characters actions as though they were already historically complete. Such an actor, who stood outside of the character and only used a *gestus* of showing to communicate the necessary facts about the character, was also in a position to comment upon the character, to criticize him. Such an actor was presumably artistically Distanced from both his character and his audience.

Every part of the production which surrounded the actor in the Epic Theatre, should be a separate and equal part of the whole. In Brecht's productions, the setting, the lighting, the music, the costumes, the make-up, etc. were each regarded as having something to say, something which was of equal importance with every other part. Instead of a synthesis of production elements, dialectical, contrapuntal relationships were established among them and each went its own way.

The setting was designed by an inductive system which first provided the necessary, real and 'practical' properties needed by the actors and then framed them in a report on the remainder of the environment. The resultant style was a combination of naturalism and symbolism.

The lighting in the Epic Theatre was to be flat, as bright as possible, and uncolored, except for special area lighting for such given

purposes as the 'song lights.' This approach to illumination eliminated all traces of atmosphere and mystery. If the lighting specialist wished to carry the debunking a step further, he might leave the lighting instruments exposed to the audience's view.

The musical portion of each of these Brechtian plays was not included to underline the emotional aspects of the work but rather to interrupt the action in order to explicate the text. Like the Wagnerian motive, the *gestic*, non-lyric music of the Epic Theatre was intended to summarize and comment upon the action and to predict its further development.

If the theories of the Epic Theatre were to be applied as rigorously as Brecht indicated that they should be, then

> All Brecht achieves with this rigorous demand is a loss of distance through overdistancing. What we get, then, is a theatre from which all tension and antinomy have been removed, and which is demonstrating situations of a mere factual nature and relationship.[1]

Outside of the *Lehrstücke* to be discussed in the next chapter, the absolute application of these demands was never even attempted. And such limited use as Brecht made of them, he later denied, saying that it was hardly worthwhile:

> True, for about half a century they [the audience members] have been able to see rather more faithful representations of human social life, as well as individual figures who were in revolt against certain social evils or even against the structure of society as a whole. They felt interested enough to put up with a temporary and exceptional restriction of language, plot, and spiritual scope, for the fresh wind of the scientific spirit nearly withered the charms to which they had grown used. The sacrifice was not especially worthwhile. The greater subtlety of the representations substracted from one pleasure without satisfying another. The field of human relationships came within

[1] Budel, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

> our view, but not within our grasp. Our feelings, having been aroused in the old (magic) way, were bound themselves to remain unaltered.[1]

Brecht discovered, at least in part, that he was attempting an improper application of an aesthetic theory in an attempt to produce practical results. The end he sought could not flow from the means he chose to use. By creating a Distanced frame of mind, which involves an element of empathy, he inadvertantly stimulated the very "magical" involvement in the story which he had sought to avoid. While it is true that "there is no such thing as an automatic dramatic susceptibility in a theatre audience: there is only a volitional dramatic susceptibility,"[2] the creation of Distancing effects which isolate and protect the audience from emotional harm while in contact with a story encourages them to play the game and to join in the action. An audience in a Distanced frame of mind feels that it may safely empathize. As a result, "he never succeeded in evoking the critical attitude he postulated. The audience stubbornly went on being moved to terror and to pity."[3]

In his later writings, Brecht frankly admitted that he had been wrong in many theoretical parts of his work, just as the staging methods of the Ensemble slowly but surely discarded many of the more extreme requirements.[4]

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[1]Brecht, "A Short Organum," p. 84.

[2]Nathan, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

[3]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 141.

[4]"'In most cases,' Dr. Schumacher recollects him as saying, during the summer of 1956, 'all that remains of the "Verfremdungseffekten" is the "effects", stripped of their social application, stripped of their point.'" Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

Finally, he considered abandoning the whole body of theory without having the time or the energy to construct another to replace it. In essence, his "Dialectical Theatre" which he suggested might be an alternative title, sounds as though it would be little more than conventional theatre.

> If we now discard the concept of EPIC THEATRE we are not discarding that progress towards conscious experience which it still makes possible. It is just that the concept is too slight and too vague for the kind of theatre intended; it needs exacter definition and must achieve more. Besides, it was too inflexibly opposed to the concept of the dramatic, often just taking it naively for granted, roughly in the sense that 'of course' it always embraces incidents that take place directly with all or most of the hall-marks of immediacy. In the same slightly hazardous way we always take it for granted that whatever its novelty it is still theatre, and does not turn into a scientific demonstration.[1]

While the concept of a rational theatre for a scientific age seemed appropriate and the detached contemplation of the Aesthetically Distanced state appeared to be the proper method by which to achieve rationality, there was no guarantee built into the Epic Theatre system that its methods of perception were radically different from the conventional theatre or that they would produce practical reactions.

> In a sense, every great play possesses its own A-Effect. It is the assimilation of the play's ideas with our own thinking; and it invariably happens after the performance. It may be interesting for it to happen during the performance, but it does not necessarily insure any greater degree of insight.[2]

The conclusion reached both here and in the chapter on Wagner's theories is that these men worked out improper developments of a valid idea. Because the theory of Aesthetic Distance is one of balance among

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[1] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 276.

[2] Charles Marowitz, *The Method As Means* (London: Herbert Jenkins, Ltd., 1961), p. 109.

all factors, any theorist who stresses only one aspect of the aesthetic transaction in his work is going to produce an invalid assertion when judged by the theory of Aesthetic Distance. Both Wagner and Brecht theoretically tried to exceed the normal Distance limits (each in his own direction) and to the degree that they did so in practice, their work, by definition, becomes something other than and something less than, art works. To the degree that they failed to translate their theories into practice, they produced art by normal definitions and in terms of Aesthetic Distance.

Even though both of these men were wrong in some degree and both of them realized it in their later years, nothing said here should be taken to mean that the bodies of theory which they produced were not important to the theatre. On the contrary, they were, and are, of immense practical importance. These theories not only guide directors of their works but have stimulated intense and extensive discussions of what the theatre should be and how it should accomplish whatever task is chosen for it. Both of these men and both of their theories must be regarded as pivotal for entire periods of theatrical history.

CHAPTER VII

BRECHT'S PLAYS

Brecht's total body of dramatic work, some fifty-two plays or fragments, is too large to be considered in detail. To reduce the whole to a reasonable size, it is necessary to group the plays into categories, to mention the general characteristics of each phase of Brecht's artistic activity and then to select a representative or outstanding example from each group of plays for a more detailed examination. The only variation from this pattern will be in Brecht's mature and most widely known plays: each of these will be discussed at some length in regard to Aesthetic Distance.

No mention will be made of the unfinished plays (*Hannibal*, *Gosta Berling*, *Salzberg Dance of Death*, *Untergang des Egoisten Johann Fatzer*, *Der Brotladen*, *Leben des Konfutse* and *Turandot oder der Kongress der Weisswaescher*) or of the completed but unpublished one-act plays of Brecht's early period (*Die Hochzeit*, *Der Bettler oder Der Tote Hund*, *Er Treibt einen Teufel aus*, and *Lux in Tenebris*).[1]

> The collaborations and adaptations where Brecht played a major creative part have been included with the main body of his work. So many of his plays began life as one or the other that it would be pedantic to count them separately.[2]

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[1]Most of these works are at least mentioned in the "Plays and Other Stage Works" section of the "Descriptive List of Brecht's Works" given in Esslin's *Brecht: The Man and His work*, pp. 277-314.

[2]Willett, p. 21.

The only variation to this rule will be *Kalkutta, 4.Mai*, which began as a play by Leon Feuchtwanger called *Warren Hastings, Gouveneur von Indien* but was revised by Feuchtwanger and Brecht into *Calcutta, May 4*. The reason for this exclusion of a single play is that "Brecht's hand can be seen clearly only in the song 'Surabaya Johnny' (sung by Warren Hastings's mistress, Lady Marjorie Hike), which he used again in *Happy End*."[1] A play which shows so little of Brecht's influence hardly seems to warrant discussion.

The basis for the division of the remaining plays is that

> . . . there are . . . three main elements of Brecht's theatre, and indeed of his whole work: the highly flavoured, half-nostalgic artificial world of the early plays; the very clear didacticism of his thirties; and arising out of this, the more complicated, less schematized moral-social arguments of the plays from about 1938 on.[2]

For the sake of clarity, it seems necessary to add to this list a subdivision containing Brecht's one acknowledged attempt at an opera, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogonny*, and the two pieces which are known primarily as musicals, *The Threepenny Opera* and *Happy End*. It might well be argued that such cantata-like pieces as *The Flight of the Lindbergs*, the *Baden Lehrstücke: On Consent, The Trial of Lucullus*, etc. should be included in a group of musical works, but it seems to the present author that their primary purpose, as far as Brecht was concerned, was didactic, not musical. As a result, such pieces are included in the learning plays.

The rise to power of Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party was so important to Brecht that the plays which resulted from this political upheaval deserve comment in a separate section. Brecht apparently joined

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[1]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Works*, p. 283.

[2]Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

the ranks of the Communistically inclined, though not the actual party, partially as a result of the fact that the Communist party was the only group which offered any effective opposition to Hitler within Germany. The Nazis, once they were in power, forced Brecht to flee the country and wander from one location to another for years in order to preserve his life; they forced him into a political exile quite similar to the one Wagner experienced and, perhaps, indirectly created the conditions of divorcement from the active theatre which brought forth Brecht's major plays, just as Wagner's *Ring* could only have been created under extreme isolation. Finally, an author so intensely dedicated to peace and so actively opposed to war as Brecht appears to have been, who also, felt it to be his duty to inform and educate his public in connection with the events and conditions occurring in the world, could not have avoided treating the factors which caused World War II. Brecht wrote six plays dealing with that conflict.

And, finally Brecht did a number of adaptations of classic works into the Epic style for his performing company, The Berliner Ensemble.

These, then, are the categories into which Brecht's plays will be grouped for the purposes of this study: (1) the early, formative period, (2) the musical comedy or musical drama genre; (3) the austerely didactic learning plays, (4) the plays dealing with World War II; (5) the fully mature, morally-concerned plays from his most productive and most telling phase; and (6) the adaptations which he made for the Berliner Ensemble.

THE EARLY PLAYS

Brecht came to maturity and began his career as an author and *dramaturg* in the theatre in 1921, a period of turmoil. He moved into the

theatre in Germany at a time when the older standards for performance and composition had passed away with the old order at the end of World War I and when the new poets and dramatists were experimenting radically in an attempt to find a means of expressing the nature of the world in which they found themselves. He was, in part, a product of the disillusioned Neo-Romantic era, of the sort of thinking which could no longer regard man as basically good or actively in control of his own destiny and, in part, of the intense, impressive over-statement of the expressionistic movement. While he quickly rebelled against these influences and tried to shape his personal manner of composition, he, nevertheless, carried many traces of them into his first plays.

The plays of the first period of Brecht's theatrical life are *Baal* (1918), *Drums In the Night* (1918), *In the Swamp* (1921-1923), *Life of Edward II of England* (1923-1924), *A Man's a Man* (1924-1925), and *The Elephant Calf* (1924-1925). *Baal* demonstrates the possibility of living a completely amoral life, while *Drums In the Night* defends the anti-hero's right to choose comfort and domesticity rather than participating in the revolution. By the time he wrote *In the Swamp*, Brecht felt that the isolation of each person was so great that any communication between people was impossible. *Edward II* was a translation-adaptation of Marlowe's play which stressed the homosexual elements in the plot. *A Man's a Man* questioned the validity and permancence of individual human identity and *The Elephant Calf* restated the same question in an almost surrealistic fashion. All of these plays through *Edward II* were dark, intense and negative statements of disillusionment.

Only with *A Man's a Man* can one see the emergence of the later Brecht: it was a pivotal play in this author's development. For that

reason, and because it is the most frequently performed of the early works, *A Man's a Man* was selected for comment here.

A MAN'S A MAN (1924-1925)

Scene 1. An innocuous waterfront porter of Kilkoa, India, Galy Gay sets out to buy a fish for a meal.

Scene 2. Four drunken British soldiers, Uriah Shelley, Jesse Mahoney, Polly Baker and Jeraiah Jip, break into a pagoda to steal the money from the poor box in order to buy more alcohol. Jip gets his hair stuck in the pitch applied to a window and can only be freed by cutting off his hair. Because the resulting bald patch would betray the quartet as the men who robbed the pagoda, the group put Jip into a leather chest until they can return and shave his head completely.

Scene 3. A Sargeant, Bloody Five, seeking the group who committed the crime, questions the three soldiers and informs them that they had better have a fourth man in their unit at roll call. The soldiers eavesdrop on a discussion between Galy Gay and the Widow Begbick, a canteen owner, and discover that Galy is a man who cannot say no. They decide he is to be their temporary replacement.

Scene 4. The three soldiers purchase a uniform from the Widow Begbick and induce Galy to answer the roll call with them. Rain is coming and it is made clear that Sargeant Bloody Five is concerned with nothing but the seduction of women when it rains.

Scene 5. At the desecrated pagoda, Mister Wang and his Chinese Sexton discover Jip in the leather chest when it is brought in out of the rain. In order to recoup the stolen funds, Mister Wang decides to convert Jip into a god and put him on display. Wang refuses to return Jip

when his comrades come in search of him and they decide to drop the matter on the assumption that Jip will return, on his own, as soon as he is sober.

Scene 6. When the three soldiers return to the canteen, Galy Gay is still there, sleeping. They determine to keep him as a part of their unit.

Scene 7. Jip, having been left when the unit moved out a month ago, is only now recovering from the alcohol which Wang has given him to keep him in a useful state. The process of fleecing the devout and the food he is given are not distasteful, so Jip agrees to remain a god.

Scene 8. The trio of soldiers continue to detain Galy Gay by promising him a deal on an elephant. When Mrs. Gay appears, searching for her husband, Galy denies knowing her in order to protect his new friends from Bloody Five. Since the army is about to leave for Tibet, the soldiers decide that Galy must be transformed immediately and completely into Jeraiah Jip.

Scene 9. In order to trap Galy into a crooked deal, and thus gain control over him, the three soldiers make an elephant out of a stuffed elephant's head and a map thrown over Jesse and Polly. They arrange with the Widow to pretend to be an immediate purchaser for the bogus elephant. Galy, claiming that the elephant is his, sells it to the widow and is arrested by one of the soldiers. The 'elephant' comes apart, leaving a completely confused Galy gaping as it runs off. The soldiers then put Galy on trial for selling the fake elephant. Under cross examination, Galy is anxious not to be the seller of stolen and fradulent goods but he is still unwilling to assume another person's identity until he is threatened with the firing squad. Then he is so confused that he will

accept any identity other than that of the man condemned to death. Nevertheless, the soldiers stage their mock execution and Galy falls into a dead faint. Bloody Five returns, quite drunk, and tries to boast and demonstrate his marksmanship in order to attract one of the Widow's dauthters but none of his efforts turn out and he has to accept the Widow herself. When Galy awakens and sees the soldiers carrying the nickelodeon crate from the canteen as though it were a coffin, he is virtually convinced that Galy Gay has been eliminated. He pronounces his own funeral oration over the box and packs up for the move to the Tibetian front.

Scene 10. On the train going to the front, Galy Gay awakens remembering who he is. He is treated by the soldiers as though he were their companion Jeraiah Jip, who, momentarily, has lost his mind. Even Galy's conviction concerning his identity is shaken by the identification papers the soldiers have placed on him. Bloody Five appears, feeling that he has been disgraced and reduced to being less than the soldier that his name indicates he is, by the extended sexual debauch he has been on with the Widow during the rainy spell. To prevent that from ever happening again and to preserve the glory of his name, he castrates himself by shooting. Galy realizes that the preservation of a name is not that important and he finally accepts the Jip identity completely. The train approaches the front.

Scene 11. At the scene of the battle, the transformed Galy is commanding the unit and bullying the three soldiers to the point of taking their rations. When the real Jip shows up, the three former buddies pretend not to recognize him and, since he has no papers to prove his identity, he is dismissed with the papers of Galy Gay. The newly aggressive Galy bombards the fortress blocking the advance of the army and single-handedly

opens the way for them. Having become Jip, he has now done so with a vengeance and becomes a fighting maching.

As Eric Bentley has astutely observed,[1] this play represented a complete change in nature from everything which preceded it: it was a comedy, rather than a tragedy. This was a profound change in the working methods and aims of the young Brecht, a light and ironic statement of the problem replacing the dark disillusionment and almost morbid literalness of his previous plays. This suggests that Brecht had gained a greater control over his own emotions and had been able to translate that new-found self-possession into a new formal style. If it is true that "The new-fangled notion of Epic Theatre can be construed as a synonym for traditional Comedy,"[2] the reader will not have to be reminded that comedy is more Distanced than tragedy (requiring a greater degree of detachment and objectivity before the possibly tragic action can be viewed and accepted as funny)[3] and he will see that the change in manner finally enabled Brecht to achieve the disengagement he personally sought and that he desired from his audience. By writing comedy rather than tragedy, the attention of the spectator could be focused upon a serious problem without necessarily causing the viewer to respond emotionally or empathically: he could be Distanced and his reactions controlled.

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[1]Eric Bentley, "Introduction: Homage to B.B.," *Seven Plays by Bertolt Brecht*, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), p. xvii.

[2]*Ibid.*

[3]" . . . the comic theater is conventional, unrealistic, and illusory to a much more obvious degree than the tragic theater." Robert J. Nelson, *Play Within a Play: The Dramatist's Conception of His Art: Shakespeare to Anouilh* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 4. While it may be over-simplifying the problem to suggest that Brecht only wrote comedies or tragedies, it is certainly easier to discuss the relative Distancing involved if the more extreme states are used: the contrast is clearer and the reader can make a modified application of the concepts after they are grasped.

At the same time, the change from the tragic to the comic allowed Brecht to depersonalize the central character of his play and thereby to expand the work from the level of a tale of the exploits of a single individual to a more universal fable. In contrast with the strong, sharply defined leading characters of the other plays up to this time, the Baals, the Kraglers, the Edwards, etc., Galy Gay had little character and few defining characteristics. He had to be malleable in order for the basic plot device to work and the fewer definite characteristics which had to be altered to effect a change in his personality, the easier the transformation would be to effect. Such a change in the nature of his characters accorded nicely with Brecht's desires and intents: he sought generalized, non-specific statements about the condition of man, not about man as such. Few devices that the author could have used would, at the same time, have more definitely divorced the audience from empathic entanglements and demonstrated the change to the comic, Distanced vein, for

> . . . conventional tragedy rests upon assumptions concerning the reality of the ego, the supreme importance of man in a universe where he is only a little below the angels, and the responsibility of the individual for his own conduct.[1]

Brecht, in this play, suddenly adopted a behavioristic view of mankind and flatly asserted that a man was definable only in terms of his function, of the purpose which he served. Man was demoted from his traditional, tragic position of importance to one in which his character was infinitely exchangeable and correspondingly abstract. This was a master stroke of Distancing, a decisive device which caused the typical audience member to react less violently to the things done to Galy Gay and to observe the process of brainwashing through which he was put in a more observant, but

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[1]Joseph Wood Krutch, *"Modernism" in Modern Drama, A Definition and an Estimate* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1953), pp. 115-116.

less involved manner. Generalization, with its consequent reduction of specific details, created greater Distance.

Much of the action of this play was rowdy, irreligious and overlaid with Freudian sex symbols and it tampered with traditionally unchallengeable concepts like the sanctity of the ego. The devices of repetitive form, poetic language, time confusion, etc. used in the early plays to assist in the Distancing process were all still very much in evidence here.

THE MUSICAL WORKS

Music of his own particular sort was always important to Brecht. He began his theatrical career by appearing in local cabarets to play the guitar and sing his verses to folk tunes, popular songs or melodies of his own devising. When he began writing plays, Brecht almost invariably included a number of songs in each text. As a result, it is somewhat arbitrary to select three of his works and to designate them as musical in nature, thereby implying that the remainder are not. Such implications are not intended in this work but the choices designated as musical can be defended on the basis of the manner in which the music is employed, the extensiveness of it, and either Brecht's comments or the critic's reactions to the pieces.

The pieces to be included in this section are *The Threepenny Opera*, *Happy End* and *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. The first named play will be used as the primary example of the group because it was Brecht's single most popular work.

With the resounding success of *The Threepenny Opera*, Brecht and Weill tried to mine the same vein further by turning to the underworld

characters of the Damon Runyon short stories which were later to provide the basis for Frank Loesser's *Guys and Dolls*. All that Brecht and Weill found there was the basis for their least successful collaboration, *Happy End*: the work was a complete failure.

In *Mahagonny* Brecht was still obsessed with the idea of demonstrating the repressive nature of the Capitalist economic system. Even in a city where everything is permitted, even to the point of producing anarchy, man can still not find happiness if he has to pay for every item consumed. In this tale, the hero is executed for the crime of not having any money.

Neither of these latter two works has been able to hold the stage or to establish itself in the repertoire of any theatre in the world. Therefore, for an example of Brecht's musical comedy style, one must return to *The Threepenny Opera*. It is also a valuable example in that it shows why an emphasis is here placed on the musical line of the show: *The Threepenny Opera*'s "chief formal significance for Brecht lay . . . in the singing and the music; the play itself was Gay's."[1]

THE THREEPENNY OPERA (1928)

Act I, Scene 1. In his wardrobe room, Mr. Peachum explains his business of equipping beggars and organizing them in proper business fashion. He also inquires of his wife about the stranger who has been courting their daughter Polly and recognizes him as Mackie the Knife.

Scene 2. Mackie, Polly and Mack's gang take over an empty stable to hold Mack's and Polly's wedding. The guests have stolen the presents of food, furniture, etc. The Sheriff of London and Mack's old army buddy,

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[1]Willett, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

Tiger Brown, attends the festivities. Once he is recognized, Brown's presence creates no alarm among the crooks because Mack gives him a cut of each robbery and Brown tips off Mack about raids and keeps his name out of the Scotland Yard files. When the gang presents them with a bed, Mack and Polly are left alone.

Scene 3. Back at Peachum's establishment, Polly tells her parents of her marriage. Peachum swears that her leaving will wreck his business. The Peachums try to get Polly to divorce Mack but she won't, so Peachum decides to have Mack hanged by informing on him to the Sheriff. Mrs. Peachum goes to Wapping to bribe Mack's whores to turn him in and Polly is dragged with Peachum to the Sheriff's.

Act II, Scene 1. Polly reports to Mack, in the stable, that her father has pressured Tiger Brown and that there is now enough evidence against Mack to hang him. Since Mack will have to leave, he explains his business affairs to Polly. She is to run the gang, get all of the money out of the business and turn the men over to the police. Polly cows the gang and Mack leaves, presumably to flee.

Interlude: Mrs. Peachum bribes Ginny Jenny to turn Mack in when he shows up. Mrs. Peachum is sure that he will run to his whores rather than leave the town.

Scene 2. When Mack appears at the brothel, Ginny Jenny betrays him into the hands of the police and Mrs. Peachum. He is taken to jail.

Scene 3. Tiger Brown's hope that Mack has escaped is dashed when he is brought in to the jail. Lucy, Brown's daughter and another of Mack's apparently pregnant lady loves, visits him in jail to complain of his marriage to Polly and encounters that lady. There is a jealous squabble which is broken off when Mrs. Peachum appears and drags Polly away. Lucy

helps Mack escape. Mr. Peachum comes looking for Mack and finds only Brown, whom he threatens with dire consequences because of the escape.

Act III, Scene 1. As Peachum organizes his beggars for a demonstration intended to disrupt the coronation of the new queen, the whores arrive to collect for turning Mack over to the police. They are denied their blood money because of the escape until the Peachums learn that Mack has gone right back to the girls and is even then with one of them. Just as the new information is about to be sent to the police, Tiger Brown and his men arrive at Peachum's shop to arrest the whole group and thus to prevent the complications at the coronation. In this manner, Brown hopes to save his friend Mack. But Peachum convinces Brown that the legions of the poor can make a shambles of the imminent ceremony if he, Peachum, is harmed. Brown gives in, and leaves to arrest Mackie again.

Scene 2. Polly visits Lucy to discover Mack's hideout. The girls are formally polite and viciously petty at the same time, but conclude their interview by comisserating with each other for loving a man too much. Lucy's pregnancy is revealed as a ruse to hold Mack's affection. Mrs. Peachum intervenes to announce that Macheath has been arrested.

Scene 3. Because the crowd of the poor has gathered around the jail to see Mack hanged rather than going to the corronation, it is necessary for the authorities to hurry the hanging so that they may return to their places along the queen's line of march. Mack has only an hour to live. He appeals to two of his men for their life's savings in order to bribe the jailer; they leave to get the money. The same appeal to Polly produces no effect on her recently acquired business-like attitude: She has no money with which to save him. Since his men cannot get through the press of the spectators to secure their money, Macheath is

taken to the gallows. At the last moment, a mounted messenger from the Queen brings a royal command that Mack be released and informs him that he has been raised to the nobility, with a castle provided and a pension for life.

In the eleven sections of this work, Brecht required his performers to sing on twenty-seven separate occassions. The music did not underlie the whole of the work: it was not a continuous framework through which the action was presented, as is the case with a true opera. Rather, Brecht clearly used the songs as a commentary upon the underlying motives of the characters. When the songs occurred, the action stopped, but the intellectual perceptions about the reasons for the action continued. The author called for special song lighting and the presentation of the song titles as means of alienating and Distancing these portions of the work so that they might produce a greater awareness. *The Threepenny Opera*'s " . . . most striking innovation lay in the strict separation of the music from all the other elements of entertainment offered."[1] The songs were set apart through the use of the whole array of devices which Brecht evolved for the separation of his songs: the orchestra was visible on the stage, the actors assumed special positions at the beginning of each number, the 'song lighting' was used, and " . . . three pathetic lamps at the end of a stick are lowered: all the false pathos and false magic of prior stages are elaborately mocked."[2] Once these devices had interrupted the magical spell of the play and prepared the audience for reflection, all of the conventional forms of true opera were employed. "There were duets, trios, solos and final choruses. The musical items, which had the

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[1]Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 85.

[2]Grossvogel, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

immediacy of a ballad, were of a reflective and moralizing nature."[1] The music indeed became the true center of the work and held the thoughts and perceptions which the author wished to communicate. He made these central parts of the work outstanding by wrenching them out of the context of the whole.

The concepts which Brecht wanted to communicate in *The Threepenny Opera* were basically economic in nature. His relatively recent conversion to the Communist methods of analysis provided him with insights into the nature of the world around him, insights which he apparently felt compelled to proclaim. The libretto of this piece presented " . . . an analysis of capitalist society . . . based on Proudhon's dictum that property is theft."[2] Every member of this larcenous cast of characters operated in a business-like manner. Each conducted his affairs so as to accumulate the greatest amount of property--and human feelings and emotions be damned. Even the love affairs were there to forward one aspect or another of Mack's commercial interests. "In his marriage he sees a means of safeguarding his business. Temporary absence from the metropolis . . . is made inevitable by his profession; and his employees are very unreliable."[3] Therefore, he needed a wife to 'mind the store' while he was away. And while Polly might have loved Mack, once she understood the Capitalist system, she refused to give up the profits of the business even to save Macheath from the gallows. The idea of making a profit from their criminal activities dominated the thinking of all characters to the exclusion of all other thoughts and they each and every

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[1]Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 85.

[2]Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[3]Brecht, "Notes to the Threepenny Opera," p. 102.

one regarded their singleminded devotion to the dollar as perfectly normal. They were not criminals in their own minds; they were simply business people who happened to engage in a particular profession. By "Making crime merely a left-handed form of human endeavor, he [Brecht] stigmatizes . . . the right-handed form."[1]

Thus Brecht took swipes at every member of his presumed audience and tried to force them to appraise what they did when they engaged in activity for personal profit.

> The *Threepenny Opera* is concerned with bourgeois conceptions not only as content, by representing them, but also through the manner in which it does so. It is a kind of report on life as any member of the audience would like to see it. Since at the same time however, he sees a good deal that he has no wish to see; since therefore he sees his wishes not merely fulfilled but also criticized (sees himself not as the subject but as the object), he is theoretically in a position to appoint a new function for the theatre.[2]

The new function Brecht sought for the theatre was the reasoned, Distanced criticism of life. He expected to prompt that criticism through the use of his alienation effects, which were more developed in this work than in any he had written up to this time.

> The *Threepenny Opera* cogently demonstrates the ironic uses of the *Verfremdungseffekt*, since it creates an atmosphere of distance and withdrawal through the use of sharp satiric contrasts. Peachum's religious placards, for example, like his canting dialogue, are incongruously juxtaposed with his ruthless criminal activities, just as Brecht's rhetorical, often biblical, titles are contrasted with the argot of thieves and whores.[3]

The contrasts were always sharp and pointed, as extreme as they could be made.

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[1]Brustein, "Bertolt Brecht," p. 263.

[2]Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 43.

[3]Brustein, "Bertolt Brecht," p. 260.

> The language crackles with bawdry, blasphemy, and coarse wit when it does not bait the listener with gooey sentiment, uncomfortably putting his favorite cliches into the mouths of unsavory characters.[1]

The intent was always apparently to cause the spectator to mentally step backward to a greater Distance in order to gain a clearer perception of the truth about his own life.

> There the technique of "*Verfremdung*" has been developed a further step: the scene depends for its effect not on the direct participation of the audience in the happenings on stage, which are deliberately "acted out," but by their reacting from them and remembering more forcefully the true state of things.[2]

According to Brecht, his intention was to stimulate, not an emotional, empathic involvement, but a multi-layered perception such as can be gained only when the spectator utilizes his critical faculties to the full. He said: "Complex seeing must be practiced. . . . thinking about the flow of the play is more important than thinking from within the flow of the play."[3] That is a virtual definition of the Distanced state.

To achieve the proper Distancing, one of the more important devices, in Brecht's mind, was the use of projected titles for each scene and song.

> The boards on which the titles of the scene are projected are a primitive start toward a literarization of the theatre. . . .
>
> Literarization means putting across ideas through actions; interspersing the "performed" with the "formulated." It makes it possible for the theatre to establish contact with other institutions of intellectual activity, but it must remain a one-sided affair so long as the audience does not take part in such literarization and thus break through to "higher things."[4]

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[1]George Salomon, "Happy Ending, Nice and Tidy," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3, Summer 1962, p. 547.

[2]Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

[3]Brecht, "Notes to the Threepenny Opera," p. 99.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 98.

The bitter, moralizing statements projected on the boards were vital to Brecht's intentions but relatively useless unless the audience adopted the proper attitude toward them and utilized them in the desired manner. Once again Brecht pointed out how dependent his technique was upon the establishment of a cooly perceptive frame of mind.

The final element in this show which deserves special comment is its wildly improbable denouement. While the whole of the action occurred in an England which never existed, among characters who could never have acted as these did, the ending of the play was so much more abrupt and impossible than the remainder of the show that it came as a laugh-producing shock; it was Brecht's final jab at the audience's conventional expectations.

> Whenever the bourgeoisie sees its own world presented, the appearance of the royal mounted messenger is absolutely inevitable. . . . Theatrical practitioners may care to ponder why nothing is more stupid than to abolish the horse of the messenger--as nearly all modernistic producers of *The Threepenny Opera* have done. If one were representing a judicial murder on the stage, one could only pay proper tribute to the theatre's role in bourgeois society by having the journalist who discloses the innocence of the murdered man drawn into court by a swan. [Note the attack upon the devices of *Lohengrin*.] So cannot people realize how tactless it is to lure the public into laughing at itself by making the appearance of the mounted messenger a matter for mirth? Without the appearance of some form of mounted messenger, bourgeois literature would sink to a mere representation of circumstances. The mounted messenger guarantees really undisturbed enjoyment even of circumstances themselves unbearable, and is therefore a *conditio sine qua non* for a literature whose *conditio sine qua non* is lack of consequences.[1]
>
> The spectator is asked to accept the scenic device as a conventional statement of grandeur so that he may objectify the pleasure he has felt in it and reject it along with the many other implications of falseness in the opera.[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

[2] Grossvogel, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

Even in the finale, the audience was asked to remove itself from the spell of the action and to consciously appraise the validity of what it was seeing enacted. The reaction Brecht hoped for was indeed a very complex one, one which was only possible from a Distance.

Brecht knew that his work existed on several planes and required a number of varying attitudes on the part of his audience. He said:

> I hope that the moralizing parts of *The Threepenny Opera* and the educative songs are reasonably entertaining, but it is certain that the entertainment in question is different from what one gets from the more orthodox scenes. The play has a double nature. Instruction and entertainment conflict openly.[1]

The conventional scenes were there to hold the play together as a play while the philosophical sections and the "educative songs" existed in order to provoke a Distanced, double perception of the situation.

THE LEHRSTÜCKE

The Lehrstücke, the learning plays or didactic pieces, represented a third decisive phase in Brecht's development. With the appearance of these small plays,[2] Brecht discarded "the anarchic exuberance of his early style . . .",[3] any concentrated attempt to shock merely for the sake of shock and any use of music for purely decorative purposes. Perhaps under the influence of Marxism, which he began to study around the time of the first of these teaching plays (1928), he began to strip away and pare down all artistic effects in his works in order to center them still more upon the intellectual content and the formal structure which he created for them. The bare bones of a problem were exposed in each play with a

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[1]Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 132.

[2]Seven out of the ten Lehrstücke are one act plays.

[3]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 113.

startling clarity. There was nothing to disrupt the audience's perception and comprehension except, perhaps, the austerity, the enormous Distance, which the author imposed upon these plays.

Each of the Lehrstücke

> . . . were set to music by [Hans] Eisler, Kurt Weill, and Paul Hindemith. All centered upon social and political, philosophical and moral lessons. Most were for acting by amateurs, "learners," often children, with the audience sometimes given a role. . . . In each, the role of the reason in man's ascent was made central.[1]

Drawing upon "the resources of Agitational Propaganda theater, dubbed 'agitprop'"[2] for many of his themes and the precise manner of the plays' presentation; upon the *No Plays* of Japan for a cool, expository dialogue,[3] upon his own *Edward II* for a special type of arhythmic, free-form poetry; and upon the techniques of debate and of the courts, Brecht fashioned a type of play in which problems with enormous implications could be considered and, presumably, settled with a clinical precision and directness. The clarity and simplicity of these works and their absolute insistence upon rationality in the pondering of the evils of the world often created an aura of coldness about these hard, gem-like little pieces.

The Lehrstücke were as unremittingly Distanced as anything Brecht ever created.

The pieces in this period were *The Flight of the Lindbergs* (1928-1929), *The Baden Lehrstucke: On Consent* (1928-1929), *He Who Says Yes* and *He Who Says No* (1929-1930), *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1929-1930),

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[1]Lee Baxandall, "Introduction," *The Mother* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), p. 25.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 29.

[3]"Bertolt Brecht: An Iconoclast in the Theatre," p. 142.

The Measures Taken (1930), *The Exception and The Rule* (1930), *The Mother* (1930-1931), *The Seven Deadly Sins of the Lower Middle Class* (1933), *The Horations and the Curations* (1934), *The Trial of Lucullus* (1939) and *Herr Puntila and His Hired Man, Matti* (1940-1941).

The Flight of the Lindberghs makes the solo crossing of the Atlantic symbolic of man's success in conquering nature. *On Consent* stresses the necessity of accepting historic inevitability. *He Who Says Yes* asserts that one must automatically be willing to sacrifice himself for the good of the group, while *He Who Says No* denies the correctness of custom and tradition and requires that each situation be considered on its own merits. *St. Joan* tries to explain the law of supply and demand in a dramatic fashion as well as to link big business and religion in the process of suppressing the masses. *The Measures Taken* will be discussed below. *The Exception and the Rule* says that man's inhumanity to man is so common here that an act of kindness can logically be interpreted as an attack. *The Mother* tells of the slow conversion of a working woman to her son's convictions about the Russian revolution so that when he is killed, she is willing to take his place in the front lines. *The Seven Deadly Sins* suggests that, among the economically deprived, any normal human response to the world can be interpreted as one of the seven deadly sins and must be repressed. *The Horatians* warns against a too hasty judgment of a tactic and implies that any device may be used to win a battle when the odds are against one. *The Trial of Lucullus* is a violent condemnation of imperialistic warfare. *Herr Puntila* demonstrates how the profit system can warp an otherwise jolly and good man into an unfeeling member of the monied class and shows the impossibility of friendship or marriage across class lines.

The Measures Taken is a medium length work which clearly shows the characteristics of this group of plays and so will be used as representative of the Lehrstücke.

THE MEASURES TAKEN (1930)

Four Communist agitators are being lauded by the Control Chorus, the equivalent of an investigative committee, when they interrupt to announce that they have killed a comrade. The Chorus asks for a demonstration of the circumstances in order to judge the deed.

Scene 1. The Classical Writings.[1]

The agitators were on their way into China to bring "to the ignorant, instruction about their condition; to the oppressed, class consciousness; and to the class conscious, the experience of revolution,"[2] when they stopped at the last Party Headquarters before the border to demand an automobile and a guide. The Young Comrade volunteered to act as their guide and to assist in their work.

Scene 2. The Blotting Out.

The group received their instructions from the Leader of the Party Headquarters, who indicated that they must disguise themselves as Chinese and must, under no conditions, be revealed as agitators. The group agreed to the blotting out of their faces by masks.

Scene 3. The Stone.

For the first attempt at agitation, the Young Comrade was sent to spread propaganda among the Coolies dragging a rice barge up a river but, when he saw their misery, he forgot his instructions and assisted them by

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[1]The scene titles appearing in the text could be used on placards or in projections.

[2]Bertolt Brecht, "The Measures Taken," p. 79.

placing a stone upon the slippery bank to give them a foothold. This act of mercy caused him to be recognized as an agitator and the group was pursued to the city of Mukden. The agitators explain[1] to the Chorus that the Young Comrade did not actually help the Coolies and he hindered the propaganda effort. The Chorus agrees.

Scene 4. Justice.

The agitators trusted the Young Comrade with another assignment but instead of merely handing out leaflets to the textile workers, he urged them to strike over their reduced wages. When a policeman sought the source of the leaflets, he mistook a textile worker for the man responsible and killed him. The Young Comrade incited the workers to demonstrate against police violence and to demand the punishment of the policeman. This came about, but the small concession in regard to the punishment of the policeman destroyed the great strike the agitators sought.

Scene 5. What Is A Human Being Actually?

Trying to capitalize upon a conflict between the Chinese merchants and the British rulers, the four agitators sent the Young Comrade to the richest of the merchants to ask him to arm the Coolies. In their discussions, the Young Comrade came to realize how little the trader valued the lives of his Coolies or any property outside of its monetary value. As a result, he refused to eat with the man, was driven from his house and lost

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[1]The majority of this play is a relation of completed events, a report of past tense activities, but part of it is assumed to be happening in the present as the group discusses their activities with the control chorus. This continuous alternation in time and the use of past tense narration of events which are acted out at the same time were two of Brecht's favorite Distancing or alienating techniques.

the arms the Coolies needed. The agitators maintain that it is not right to put honor before everything else; one should be willing to do anything, degrade himself to any degree, in order to accomplish good. The Chorus agrees.

Scene 6. Rebellion Against the Teaching.

Instead of continuing their slow work and following their instructions, the Young Comrade, having been approached by a delegation of the unemployed, favored the abandonment of their partially successful tactics in favor of an immediate rebellion. The agitators tried to show him how futile such an approach was, but the Young Comrade, in his excitement, unmasked and destroyed his disguise. This made the group recognizable as feared foreigners. The agitators struck down the Young Comrade and fled the city, carrying him with them.

Scene 7. Final Pursuit and Analysis.

Avoiding their pursuers, the group reached the lime pits on the city limits. They were still helping their Comrade along but they realized that if they did not elude their pursuers soon and return to the city, the whole of their campaign would have been in vain. Their analysis of the situation made it plain that they could not permit their pursuers to overtake or unmask them.

Scene 8. The Interment.

The group decided that the Young Comrade must disappear so that they might return to their work. Their only method was to shoot him and throw his body in the lime pit. When questioned about this possibility, the Young Comrade agreed to their solution, so it was carried out. Since the group returned to its work and was successful in its mission, the Control Chorus agrees with what was done, with The Measures Taken.

"This [work] was probably the first of Brecht's plays in which his intellectual intentions worked at cross-purposes with his imaginative sympathies."[1] It clearly showed Brecht's life-long struggle to suppress the highly emotional, empathic portion of his being and to replace it with a reasoned, Distanced, intellectual attitude toward events. It demonstrated the difficulties encountered by even a highly intelligent, dedicated person when he tried to deny his involvement in his work or in the events which occur in the world in order to replace the involvement with a Distanced, non-involved perception and analysis. This act was seldom easy for a person trained and conditioned to respond in an involved manner; even Brecht, as he tried to evolve the methods and techniques by which to do it on a consistent basis encountered many problems, some of which he dramatized, as he did in this piece.

The reader or performer encountered in this play the first of the many split personality characters in Brecht's pantheon which embodied the struggle to avoid too much involvement and to substitute a rigid mental control for an overly empathic response. In this work,

> The Young Comrade is the natural and spontaneous part of the self; the Four Agitators who murder him are the planning and deliberate Shui Ta part of the self which must suppress and kill goodness in order to prepare its actualization.[2]

The five principal characters, only four of whom were ever seen, since each of the Agitators assumed the character of the Young Comrade during one of the episodes, showed that the two possible responses to a situation were a part of each human being and that if thought was to rule the actions

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[1]Hersh, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

[2]Walter H. Sokel, "Brecht's Split Characters and His Sense of the Tragic," *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 136.

of man, then his emotions must be suppressed to some degree. The only solution Brecht could find for this eternal conflict appears to have been the death of a part of each of us. " . . . the young comrade of *Die Massnahme* is deliberately put to death as a punishment for having been unable to resist his emotional impulse."[1] Without such a death, Man will continue to be irrationally emotional.

It should also be noted that the Agitators each perform and relate one of the acts of the Young Comrade in precisely the manner which Brecht described in his "Street Corner Incident" in A New Technique of Acting.[2] They each make an incident vividly clear by acting it out but without ever 'losing themselves' in the part of the Young Comrade or trying to trick the Chorus into believing that they are the person they are describing. They simply demonstrate in a Distanced fashion.

One of the spell-breaking, Distancing devices used in *The Measures Taken* was an actual break in the flow of the action, a cessation in which the audience was invited to use its mind rather than its emotions.

> Is it really inevitable, he [the spectator] may ask, that this young man should die? A pause is provided in the play in which he is invited to think this over, and in this pause he may recall the reasons already given by the agitators.[3]

Many critics question the validity of the reasons Brecht provided in the play for this action but few, if any, of them miss the Distancing effect of this device.

> There can be no emotional intensity here, for the agitators make no serious attempt at seeking a way out: not for an

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[1]Ernest Borneman, "Two Brechtians," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. XXII, Summer, 1960, p. 481. The italics are Borneman's.

[2]Bertolt Brecht, "A New Technique of Acting," *Actors on Acting*, ed. Cole, Toby and Chinoy, Helen K. (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc, 1949).

[3]Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

> instant do they give the impression of urgently looking for means of saving their comrade's life, and centuries of humane tradition are brushed aside on the flimsiest of pretexts. . . . The essential thing, it seems, was that audiences should be persuaded of the need for inhumanity by hook or by crook, and this despite the professed "*Verfremdung*" whereby they were encouraged to make judgments of their own.[1]

Brecht, himself, stressed the alienated, Distanced manner of performance necessary in order to allow the audience to decide the truth of the solution proposed:

> The dramatic procedure must be simple and sober. Especial emotional punch and especial expressivity are superfluous. The actors must merely present that part of the behavior of the four that is necessary for the understanding and judging of the case.[2]

And he was not unaware of the bias which he displayed in reaching the conclusion which he chose. He defended it, in part, by saying

> For several ethical ideas like justice, freedom, humanity, etc., which come up in *The Measures Taken*, what Lenin said about morality holds: 'We derive our morality from the interests of the proletarian class war.'[3]

Distortion in a given direction was certainly present but so, also, was the Distancing which Brecht sought, for even flaws in the dramatic logic could force the audience members to think through the problem in an effort to discover where the error lay. The coolness of the recounting, the oratorio-like quality of the show, the continual swapping of personalities, and the distortion of normal thought processes all forced the spectator away from the action of the play to what was presumably a properly Distanced attitude.

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[2] Bertolt Brecht, "Notes on Rehearsing *The Measures Taken*," *The Modern Theatre*, Vol. 6, ed. Eric Bentley (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1960), p. 290.

[3] *Ibid.*

THE PLAYS ABOUT WORLD WAR II

Written between 1932 and 1944, these works dealing with various aspects of Hitler's rise to power and World War II seem particularly weak. Having been driven from the experimental Berlin theatres by the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, it was only normal that Brecht should have had something to say about the condition of the world as he saw and understood it. But the topicality of the plays and the very fact that they could no longer be staged in an experimental atmosphere with highly skilled professional players, but, instead, had to be mounted by amateur groups operating under unstable conditions perhaps led Brecht away from his more Distanced experiments to a more conventional, empathic, Aristotelian form of drama. He seems not to have known immediately how to adapt his unconventional perceptions and manner of statement to a style which he apparently felt would be more easily understood and conveyed by the amateurs. He went through a period of experimentation and struggle with his medium which may remind one of his early phase in many respects. The plays were deliberately written in a more conventional mold but seldom managed to sustain the 'normal' style in a consistent manner.

Perhaps one of the factors which interferred with Brecht's creativity and force was that he himself suffered so directly from the Nazi's actions that he was unable to maintain his objectivity. To write about the class struggle when he did not experience it directly[1] was one thing; to treat artistically and in a detached manner something which drove him from his homeland and from most of the things which he valued most highly was quite another thing. He was certainly not the first artist to find himself unable to treat objectively his own personal experiences.

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[1]See Sergey Tretiakov, "Bert Brecht," *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 26.

In addition, as Bullough warned, there are dangers in treating of the immediately practical: to do so is often an open invitation for both the author and the spectator to fall below the minimum Distance-limit. This is particularly true when the author questions "Why shouldn't art try, by its own means of course, to further the great social task of mastering life?"[1] This immediately period-oriented and practical outlook posed particular problems for Brecht. He wanted to eliminate the Nazi party and its ideas but was unable to do this by direct political action. He was forced to attempt it in his plays, just as Wagner tried in a similar manner to rearrange a society.

> . . . it is the essence of the play as stratagem to be concerned with an end beyond itself: the play is used for the accomplishment of some purpose in the real or offstage world which cannot be effected by direct action.[2]

When the questions debated were basically resolved by something as decisive as the conclusion of a war and the suppression of the party which prompted the conflict, then plays written about the struggle and the ideas which caused it can live only because they deal with eternal problems such as war and cruelty or as historical documents or museum pieces. Brecht fully expected these latter results in connection with all of his work but, so far, it has come about only in regard to his plays about World War II.

The plays in this group are: *The Roundheads and the Peakheads* (1932-1934), *The Private Life of the Master Race* (1935-1938), *Senora Carrar's Rifles* (1937), *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941); *The Visions of Simone Machard* (1941-1943), and *Schweik in the Second World*

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[1]Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 96.

[2]Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

War (1941-1944).

The Roundheads was an attack upon the racial theories of the Nazis and an attempt to prove that the monied Jews were actually on the side of their 'oppressors.' *The Private Life of the Master Race* or *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* was a loosely assembled group of one-act plays, each demonstrating some aspect of the Nazis' effect upon the people of Germany. *Senora Carrar's Rifles* is a rewriting of *Rider's to the Sea* in the setting of the Spanish Civil War. *Arturo Ui* tries to explain Hitler's rise to power by analogy with a Capone-like Chicago gangster of the 1930's. *Schweik in the Second World War* brings to life again the bumbling, good-natured soul who caused such confusion during the first World War. He is up to his old tricks and provides Brecht with a fine opportunity to 'prove' that the average German couldn't care less what the fortunes of Hitler and his regime might be.

The play selected for comment here is not the most popular of the World War II works: segments of the *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, each treated as an independent one act play, have apparently been staged far more frequently than have any of the full length plays of this group. *Arturo Ui* appears to be gaining some popularity and having a number of productions; it may ultimately be the most popular. It does seem to the present author though, that *The Visions of Simone Machard* clearly exemplifies Brecht's struggles with the conventional dramatic form and represents his most successful combination of Epic and "Aristotelian" elements.

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THE VISIONS OF SIMONE MACHARD (1941-1943)

The Book. At the Hostelry "Au Relais" in the small Frech town of Saint-Martin, in June of 1940, a young girl, Simone, pauses in her tasks to join some of the other employees of the hostelry in the courtyard. While they discuss the depressing progress of the war, she tries to read a bit in the history of Joan of Arc, a book given her by M. Soupeau, the owner of the place. A deserting French Colonel sneaks into the Hostelry to eat and is fed royally but soldiers from the unit in which Simone's brother is serving can get only a bucket-full of food. Soupeau claims he feeds the refugees, dismisses the soldiers and sends an exorbitant check to the Colonel. Simone is horribly ashamed of the treatment of the soldiers. The hostelry workmen are ordered to deliver a Captain's wine vats in spite of the refugees crowding the roads. The Mayor of the town requisitions the trucks and gasoline for the use of the refugees, but Soupeau denies that he is hoarding gasoline and browbeats the employees into supporting him. Simone is sent to the assembly hall to sell food to the refugees.

The First Dream. In Simone's imagination, an angel appears on the roof of the garage and, speaking in rhymed couplets, announces God's choice of Simone as a new Joan. He gives her a drum with which to call the French to arms. As Simone recognizes the Angel as her brother André, he vanishes. When Simone sets out for Orleans to see the King (she walks in a circle), she is joined by the other employees who are dressed in medieval armor. The Mayor appears in the robes of Charles the Seventh and asks about the stored gasoline, the sold food, etc. Simone beats her drum, calling the people, crowns the King and accepts the cheers of the crowd for saving France. The stage darkens.

The Handshake. Because the Germans have crossed the Loire, Soupeau wants his china and wine loaded on the requisitioned trucks. The employees

refuse to load them. Simone slips out and tells the Mayor of Soupeau's plans. The Mayor appears with the police but Soupeau twists the situation so much that the Mayor approves of his actions. A crowd of refugees come to the gate to beg for the trucks. Simone suggests making room on the trucks by giving the food to the people. The idea of food causes the refugees to break down the gates. An argument among the factions ensues. Madame Soupeau mediates the fight and has Simone open the stores to the people in exchange for room on the trucks for the china and silver. Simone is given all of the credit for the food. Madame further promises to feed those who remain behind. Soupeau allows the trucks to gas up at his supplies in the brickyard, but refuses to have the gasoline dump destroyed. Soupeau and his chauffeurs leave with his valuables. Madame Soupeau repeats her son's prohibition when Simone volunteers to burn the gasoline to keep it from falling into the German's hands. Simone is dismissed from her job as a rebellious person.

The Second Dream. When Simone, as the Maid, appears before the Mayor-King, her request for an army is rejected but she is made a *Grand Dame* of France. Her sword is used, but not returned to her: she is dismissed. She calls the angel to her and receives his instructions to "Go forth and destroy."

The Fire. The invading German Captain is received by Madame and shown to his room. Orders are given that the refugees may not enter the Hostelry; they might disturb the Germans. When the refugees are repulsed without food, Simone promises to bring it to them at the assembly hall. When the Mayor appears, Simone pleads that he have the gasoline destroyed but he refuses.

The Daydream. The rich people and the German Captain become the historical personages of the Joan story. The Mayor-King feels that Joan is in danger but cannot leave the game the group is playing in order to save her. Simone, shaken from the dream, cannot get anyone to help her burn the gasoline. She leaves, alone. When Madame, the German, etc. come out of the Hostelry, the sky is red from the fire.

Soupeau and his group return and are told of the brickyard fire. Soupeau is afraid that he'll be blamed. Simone agrees to confess to the act and refuses to lie about the conditions. Soupeau asks her to let him explain and leads her into the Hostelry.

The Trial: The Fourth Dream. The invaders, appearing as medieval Germans have captured Joan and concluded her trial. Four Frenchmen (the Colonel, the French Captain, Soupeau and the Mayor) each break a staff before Joan to indicate her death sentence. After the sentence is pronounced, she demands a trial.[1] Madame comes forward as the accusor. Simone tells the court of her angel. The angel does not respond to the court's summons and the ground of France does not sound like a drum when Simone strikes it.

By the following morning, Simone has crawled through the window of the room where she was imprisoned and escaped. Soupeau has been trying to convince the Germans that Simone is an irresponsible child; the employees know that she is the only one who has acted properly. German soldiers bring in Simone who was captured at the assembly hall. Madame proves that she has taken food for the refugees; she would place all the

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[1]This is an example of the Distancing inconsistencies which Brecht occasionally left in his work. Such contradictions are enough to jar any audience into awareness even if this one can be explained by reference to the shifting nature of dreams.

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blame on Simone for everything which has gone wrong since the invasion. The employees defend her. Gray Ladies from the reformatory, an institution for the feeble-minded, respond to the French Captain's telephone call. Simone reluctantly prepares to go with them, even as Madame takes her Joan of Arc book away from her. The angel appears only to say that France will rise again and he goes. Simone is taken away. The refugees burn down the assembly hall rather than turn it over to the Germans. Apparently Simone's resistance has taught them something after all.

Brecht's second treatment of the St. Joan story[1] appears to be his most successful blending of Aristotelian and alienated segments in the World War II plays: he seems to have solved most of the problems which vexed him when he turned to more conventional writing. The dream sequences certainly place the realistic segments in a new light, expand the scope of the action, and bring into play many meaningful cross references and implications. The dreams allowed Brecht full scope for his poetic style, his child-like, unsophisticated cliches of perception and his deliberately chosen anachronisms and confusions, while the realistic portions of the play moved with order and precision to an audience-involving, pathetic conclusion. The alternation of the segments, in their two different styles, Distanced the work and forced perceptions from the spectator about both levels of reality.

In addition, this work makes a strong bid for a continuing life of its own because it is not concerned solely with World War II; the war was simply the caustive factor which prompted the varying reactions of the characters and unearthed their motivations. This play " . . . is an unambiguous call for heroic endeavour, inspired both by the legend of Joan

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[1]The first one was *St. Joan of the Stockyards*, written in 1929-1930.

of Arc and by the French Resistance movement."[1] Unlike the other plays in this group, *Simone Machard* does not squander its force or work at cross purposes with itself to the point where the audience is unsure of its real intent. One knows at the end of this piece that Brecht firmly believed in the necessity for courage and direct action against the warped conditions which man creates, regardless of the personal cost. This is not to say, however, that the anti-sentimental, clear-headed Brecht did not realize that, from one point of view, a hero must be somewhat mad or other-worldly.

> He borrows from Christian imagery in order to show that it it anachronistic. When Simone Machard distributes her superiors' merchandise to the refugees or sets fire to a gasoline dump that they were getting ready to turn over to the Germans, she is being inspired by the exterior manifestations of Joan's heroism. But this heroism collides with the conspiracy of the very same people who taught it to her. Her martyrdom is even ridiculous. Simone does not end up at the stake but in a lunatic asylum. In the eyes of her masters, who soon discovered in the former enemy an ally of their class, her case has pathological causes.[2]

Brecht presented all sides of the problem but firmly weighed the action in the direction of Simone--Joan's form of divine madness. By thus treating in an unambiguous manner of man's generalized and Distanced need for heroism, Brecht may have lifted this work into the realm of art, rather than propaganda.

THE MAJOR PLAYS

By the time he wrote most of these plays, Brecht seems to have relaxed some of his stringent requirements concerning alienation, to have given up the writing of plays whose sole purpose was didactic and to have

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[1]Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

[2]Weideli, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

enlarged the scope of his questioning so that he was concerned both with the nature of the world as it was then structured and with the good-bad nature of the little people who inhabited it and who suffered most from society's organization under Capitalism. These plays allowed more of the humanistic side of Brecht to show through and they centered around truly human characters with whom the audience could feel some empathic identification. They are the group of plays upon which Brecht's future reputation will probably rest.

MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN (1939)

Utilizing many of the time-honored 'Aristotelian' techniques which Brecht rediscovered and learned to use in some of his war plays, the author here turned to the first of a truly outstanding group of characterizations. Mother Courage, because of her hard-headed materialism, and Kattrin, because of her final scene, emerge from this script as portraits of fully dimensioned human beings. As will be noted, the audience was permitted a degree of identification with these characters which was unusual in Brecht up to this point in his career. Because there was the possibility of a close association with these people, they tend to be remembered as more realistic and complete images than most of Brecht's schematic characters.

Scene 1. Mother Courage and her three children, Eilef, Swiss Cheese and Kattrin, try to get their provision wagon to the battlefield past a recruiting officer and his sergeant but, while Mother Courage is distracted by bargaining with the sergeant over a belt, the officer enlists Eilef.

Scene 2. Two years later, as Mother Courage is trying to sell a capon to a commander's Cook, her son Eilef is escorted into the commander's

tent by the commander himself. Eilef is being congratulated and rewarded for having taken some cattle from a group of peasants by trickery. The mother and son are reunited for a moment.

Scene 3. Three years pass before we again see Mother Courage, her son Swiss Cheese (who has now been made the Paymaster of a Protestant regiment) and Kattrin. The camp follower Yvette Pottier tells Kattrin of her betrayal by a soldier. The Chaplain and the Cook appear to woo Mother Courage for the Cook and to drink her brandy, but they are interrupted by a surprise attack by the Catholics, who win the battle. The Chaplain hides his clerical garb and assumes the guise of a bartender, Mother Courage changes her Protestant flag for the Catholic one, and Swiss Cheese, trying to save the Regimental cashbox is captured. To avoid Swiss Cheese being shot, Mother Courage pawns her wagon to Yvette, but then haggles over the ransom so long that her son is executed. She has to deny knowing him or claiming his body in order to avoid incriminating herself. Swiss Cheese's body is thrown on the garbage dump.

Scene 4. Mother Courage intends to complain to the Captain about the slashing of her wagon and the imposition of a fine but, while waiting outside his tent, she encounters a young soldier who also plans to lodge a complaint against the Captain. She sings him the Song of the Great Capitulation and dissuades both him and herself from their aims.

Scene 5. Two years later, General Tilly's victory at Leipzig causes the wounding of a family of peasants who tried to save their farm. Mother Courage refuses linen for bandages, but Kattrin and the Chaplain overpower her and rip up her officer's shirts to care for them. Kattrin saves a baby from the collapsing house. Courage regards these acts with disgust because they produce no profit.

Scene 6. In spite of the fact that General Tilly has been killed, the Chaplain assures Courage and the soldiers that the war will never end. Mother Courage, who has promised Kattrin a husband when the war is over, sends her to town to pick up some of her trousseau and while she is gone repulses the Chaplain's advances. Kattrin returns with a wound which will disfigure her for life and prevent any possibility of marriage. Mother Courage curses the war.

Scene 7. With the Chaplain and Kattrin pulling the wagon, Courage goes on with her trade.

Scene 8. Because the King of Sweden was killed, peace is declared just after Courage has purchased a large quantity of supplies. The Cook, missing for some time, returns and re-establishes his control over Mother Courage, even though Yvette reappears and identifies the Cook as her seducer. The disillusioned Courage and Yvette go to army headquarters to try to dispose of some of the surplus supplies. Eilif is brought in under guard; he has been arrested for the same activity which formerly brought him praise: he tried it during peacetime. For that reason, he now stands condemned. Courage scrambles back with the news that the war has broken out again and, since the Chaplain went with Eilif, she persuades the Cook to remain and help pull her wagon.

Scene 9. After sixteen years of war, all are on the verge of starvation. The Cook has received a letter telling of the death of his Mother and of his inheriting an inn. He tries to persuade Courage to come with him to the inn, leaving the wagon to Kattrin. She is tempted, but abandons the Cook and the two women pull the wagon off to more business.

Scene 10. Kattrin and Mother Courage pause in their weary way along the highway to listen to the Song of Shelter sung by a farmer. They push on.

Scene 11. Courage has left Kattrin and the wagon in a farmyard while she goes to town to purchase more supplies. The Catholic soldiers, preparing a surprise attack on the town of Halle, capture the area and force the peasant's son to guide them. The Old Peasant places a ladder against his roof and climbs up to see the forces advancing against the town. Believing that they can do nothing, the Peasants kneel in prayer, asking safety for their son and his children in the town. The mention of the children prompts the maternal Kattrin to climb to the roof with a drum and begin to beat it to warn the town and save the children. The soldiers return and threaten Kattrin, but are unable to make her stop her warning noises. Just as they shoot her, the sound of a cannon from the town indicates that she has succeeded in awakening the sleeping town and rousing it to its own defense.

Scene 12. Mother Courage tries to convince herself that Kattrin is only asleep, not dead, but when she hears the last regiment passing, she leaves the body to be buried by the Peasants and harnesses herself to the wagon to pull it after them.

This chronicle play, while allowing more contact with the characters did not abandon all or even most of Brecht's Distancing devices. The Epic scope of the work was retained because of its extended time span and the titanic forces which encircle and direct the activities of the characters. It's possibly pathetic elements were countered by reiterations of the economic bases of the character's actions. "Scenes full of tense action are followed by more harmonious ones in which reflective elements predominate."[1] The whole of the work had a

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[1]Mennemeier, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-149.

predictable, yet artistic, ebb and flow. In addition, the form of the play, falling neatly into three parts, each climaxed by the death of another of the children, was clearly outlined and set forth in the opening scene; the alert viewer could not avoid grasping the artistic formulation of the content. "By a vivid dissociation of form and content Brecht has brought to consciousness the absurd character of war and its ideological, mendacious vocabulary."[1] The speeches of the characters were more realistic in many respects than most of Brecht's dialogue, yet they were still interrupted or superceded by songs which carried the burden of the argument. The staging of the work was intended to be bare, sparse and highly selective in its choice of elements and it still incorporated specialized lighting, extended scene titles, visible notations of location lowered from the flies and many other of Brecht's favoriate devices. This was both an involving and a non-involving play; it was perhaps, the most delicately balanced of all of Brecht's works in that regard.

To return to the characterizations which dominate this script, one must note that Brecht inadvertantly allowed Mother Courage to appeal to the audience's sympathies to such a degree that he found rewriting of the part necessary. Following the play's initial production, Brecht was dismayed to discover that the audience tended to find in Mother Courage a Niobe figure; a Mater Dolorosa, whose sufferings distracted the spectators from his intended message. His immediate response was to insert additional scenes and rearrange others so as to lessen her empathic impact.

> Intentionally, in part as an afterthought, Brecht has equipped Mother Courage with "disagreeable," "inhuman" charactieristics which are supposed to sabotage the empathy-mechanism of the public which has been trained to expect the "humane." The good

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

will the observer brings to Mother Courage is shaken again and again by shocks setting in motion reflections about the background of her actions.[1]

Regardless of the spectator's final evaluation of the central character, she does provide one of Brecht's clearest examples of a person trying desperately to Distance herself appropriately from her circumstances. "Take part and keep aloof: this is the contradictory slogan of Mother Courage, born out of the senselessness of the situation."[2] By trying to participate in and profit from the war without paying anything to it in return, Mother Courage became a walking embodiment of the Distanced attitude.

Her daughter, Kattrin, was defenseless enough throughout the play to attract some sympathy from the audience but she did not really come into her own until her death scene, "that sudden eruption from the narrative flatness of the play."[3] This scene, which Brecht did not change from its initial form, caused the author to comment and defend it perhaps more than any other episode he ever wrote. Brecht frankly admitted that his characters in this play were intended, in some degree, to attract emotional commitments; speaking first of Kattrin, Brecht has said:

Her helplessness
As she drags up her warning drum
To beat astride the roof,
She the great helper,
Should fill you with pride.
The capability of her mother
Who learns nothing
Should fill you with pity.[4]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

[3] Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

[4] Brecht, *Poems on the Theatre*, pp. 10-11.

This appears to be a complete abandonment of Brecht's Distancing efforts until one encounters his later efforts to explain the degree and extent of the involvement permitted and to retain it within the limits of an alienated work.

> In reality the epic theatre is in a position to portray other occurrances besides excitements, collisions, conspiracies, spiritual torments, etc., but it is at the same time also in a position to portray these. Members of the audience may identify themselves with dumb Kattrin in this scene; they may get into her skin by empathy and enjoy feeling that they themselves have the same latent strength. But they will not have experienced empathy thoughout the whole play, hardly in the opening scenes for instance.[1]

This explanation does not ring entirely true, even when one is aware of the circumstances which bracket it, of Brecht's attempts to control and limit the involvement by an awareness of the factors which precede and follow it.

> The episode is simple, startling, magnificent, with a mounting emotional crescendo created primarily through the use of drumbeats. But the catharsis it accomplishes, so rare in Brecht's drama, is followed almost immediately by grim, cooling irony. Kattrin's sacrifice has really been in vain. The town is saved, but the sound which signifies this is the explosion of a cannon. The war will continue for another twelve years; and after this war is finished, three hundred more years of killing will follow.[2]

The fact remains that Brecht wrote and retained a scene which he knew would provoke a high degree of empathy on the part of the audience. His approach to drama had undergone a modification during the World War II period which he refused to admit and sought vainly to bring into accord with his already stated theories.

> Albrecht Schöne has called this scene [Kattrin's death] "the self-alienation of Brecht's Alienation tendencies." It shows,

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[1] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 221.

[2] Brustein, "Bertolt Brecht," *The Theatre of Revolt*, p. 275.

> he says, the unconditional and presents compassion as a force beyond any dispute; it grows into a parable of human behavior which is no longer in any way subject to the criticism from the viewpoint of any following period. One can put it much more simply: Kattrin's sacrificial death is unabashedly moral.[1]
>
> Brecht has sought deep within the human tangle the "contradictions evidenced by the actions and characters of real people" to which the "Organon" refers, and in so doing, he has strayed from the normative ways of logical demonstrations. There comes a moment when the human evidence within the stage person sends the spectator back into himself with too much force: it is then that the spectator sees the person on stage as himself and ascribes his own impulses to that person's gestures. That character is no longer the author's: it lives in the intimate lives of all who <u>are</u> that character.[2]

In spite of himself, Brecht's feelings for the 'little people' and their deep emotions had caused him to include a wholly empathic scene in a highly Distanced work. The natural balance of a truly Distanced state, that conscious but emotionally colored perception of a situation, had asserted itself as the truly correct way to say what he wanted to communicate. From this point on, each of Brecht's leading characters could command a certain degree of emotion and participation on the part of the spectator.

GALILEO (1938-1939, with revisions continuing through 1954)

The external devices which have been used to describe Brecht's form of Epic Theatre were remarkably absent from this play. It was true that there were prefatory poems for most scenes, that the work spans many years and apparently deals with various incidents not wholly related to a single compact central idea, and that the work was staged against projections taken from the works of the real Galileo. Still, the most immediate impression that a spectator or reader was likely to gain was that he was witnessing or experiencing a relatively conventional play which was not

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[1]Politzer, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

[2]Grossvoget, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

strongly structured, a penetrating character study which rambled. To see the piece as Epic Theatre, one must closely examine the formal scheme it employed, keeping in mind Brecht's announced intentions in regard to form.

> In conformity to the rules of his epic theatre, of which *Galileo* is the most finished example, the life of the great scientist is split into autonomous scenes. There is no center of gravity, neither is there any dramatic progression.[1]

The play did consist of scenes which might conceivably be played in another sequence and still retain much of their force as separate playlets. Yet this total work is certainly more organic, more unified and more in need of chronological presentation than the discreet units which make up *The Private Life of the Master Race.*

Scene 1. Galileo is explaining the new idea of the earth moving about the sun to the boy Andrea Sarti, the son of his housekeeper when she introduces a young nobleman who wishes to be the pupil of Galileo. In their conversation arranging for the lessons, the nobleman, Ludovico, explains the construction of a new instrument, the telescope, which he has seen recently in Holland. When he leaves Galileo sends Andrea to the lens maker for lenses with which to construct a telescope. The curator of the museum, Galileo's next visitor, has to refuse his request for an honorarium and advises him that if he seeks money, he must either go to the Medici court in Florence or invent something practical. Galileo feels that he soon may have something practical to offer to the city elders.

Scene 2. Galileo presents the telescope he has made to the Senators, claiming that it is his own invention. But he is no longer interested in the money which the device will bring him; he has trained it upon the heavens and has realized its importance to astronomy. Galileo's

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[1]Grossvogel, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

daughter, Virginia, recognizes Ludovico in the audience and brings him to Galileo to congratulate her father on his discovery.

Scene 3. Galileo and his friend Sagredo are using the telescope to explore and redefine the nature of the heavenly bodies when the Curator arrives to report that Dutch telescopes will be on sale the following day. Galileo cannot be bothered with such trifles. The discoveries of the friends make Sagredo realize that the new science of astronomy will cause doubt about the existence of God. He pleads against Galileo's decision to go to Florence where "the monks are in power."

Scene 4. In his new house in Florence, Galileo is trying to present his discovery of the moons of Jupiter to the nine year old Cosimo de Medici but he is circumvented by a Philosopher presenting the Aristotelian theory of the heavens. The Prince is rushed out of the room by his counselors to attend a court ball without his ever having looked through the telescope.

Scene 5. In the Papal College in Rome, Galileo waits and is teased and lectured by the various monks and Cardinals while Christopher Clavius, the Chief Astronomer of the College tests the telescope and Galileo's assertions. When Clavius hastens through the room he admits that Galileo is correct in his theories.

Scene 6. At Cardinal Bellarmin's house in Rome, while Virginia and her fiance Ludovico enjoy a ball, Galileo disputes his findings with Cardinals Bellarmin and Barberini. Bellarmin announces that the theory of the earth's rotation has been declared a heresy. Galileo cannot accept their warning to abandon such teachings. His responses to the Cardinals are recorded by Secretaries and turned over to the Inquisitor.

Scene 7. A monk versed in physics has come to Galileo to tell him that he, the monk, cannot reconcile the new concept of space with the teachings of the Church and has decided to abandon his studies, accepting the Church's decree. They debate the merits of silence on the new findings and Galileo indicates that he cannot ignore the truth. Neither can the monk, who, against his wishes, is fascinated with a new volume of Galileo's writings.

Scene 8. While Mrs. Serti, the housekeeper, and Virginia sew her trousseau, Galileo and his assistants Andres, Federzoni and the Little Monk are conducting experiments with bodies which are heavier than water. Ludovico appears to be sure that the new interest in sun spots will not tempt Galileo into publishing something new. While Virginia dons her wedding gown for Ludovico, the men discuss the approaching death of the Pope and the probable succession of Barberini. It also becomes apparent that Galileo has already weakened his eyesight in observations concerning the sun spots. When Ludovico cannot convince Galileo to abandon his researches, he breaks the engagement and leaves. The scientists turn their attention to the sun spots.

Scene 9. Galileo's ideas have spread until they are the themes of a Ballad Singer and a parade float on April Fools's Day. Galileo is indicated as a destroyer of the old order of things and as the Bible killer.

Scene 10. Virginia and the almost blinded Galileo are waiting in an antechamber of the palace to present Galileo's new book on the mechanics of the firmament to the Prince. The Prince will not receive them but the Lord Chamberlain informs Galileo that "The Florentine Court is no longer in a position to oppose the request of the Holy Inquisition to

interrogate you in Rome."

Scene 11. The new Pope, formerly Cardinal Barberini, is arguing with the Cardinal Inquisitor about Galileo while he is being robed for a conclave. The Pope begins by stoutly defending Galileo but the more he is dressed, the more he bends under the Inquisitor's insistence. By the end of the discussion, Galileo is to be shown the instruments of torture in an effort to make him recant.

Scene 12. Galileo's assistants do not believe that the bell of Saint Marcus will toll to indicate that Galileo has renounced his teachings, but it does. When he enters, a broken man, no one acknowledges his presence. Andrea turns away from him.

Scene 13. Galileo has spent almost ten years under the guard of an Official of the Inquisition to be sure that he publishes no more. Since his eyes have failed further, he now uses Virginia as a scribe to record his thoughts and then furtively copies them over at night before the original manuscript is confiscated by the Church. When Andrea pays a formal call, he is given the secret copy of the *Discorsi* to smuggle out of the country for publication and he realizes that Galileo's recantation was the best thing which could have happened since it brought him the time to complete the manuscript. Galileo does not necessarily agree with him.

Scene 14. While Andrea waits to be cleared by the Customs Officials, at the border, he tries to show a boy that an old woman is not a witch merely because a shadow makes her seem to be stirring a cauldron. His method of direct observation seems to have its effect, but when Andrea crosses the border with Galileo's book, the children again attack the old woman with their ignorance.

Once again, as he did in *Mother Courage*, Brecht managed to create a unity out of partially unrelated segments by basing them all upon the fascinating central character, whose personality and adaptation to an unfeeling world provided the cohesive elements. "The later plays shift the central interest from technical experimentation and the discussion of ideological issues to an overwhelming creation of vital, 'earthy,' and impressive dramatic figures."[1] The character and responses of this imagined Galileo were the central features of this play.

The complex seeing which Brecht advocated in regard to all dramatic presentations was certainly possible with respect to this Galileo. The audience saw him at his best and his worst; he was neither a superman nor an impossibly heroic central character; he evolved into a contradictory person who doubted and questioned himself as much as he did others and the nature of the universe. At the same time that a spectator might be dismayed by his imperfections, he was conscious of the man's achievements and was forced to consider how much of a person's worth may grow from his shortcomings. "It is possible, in the main, to stay pro-Galileo to the end. A familiar Brechtian feature! Moral disapproval goes one way, but human sympathy goes the same way!"[2] One was alienated enough to take objective stock of the man but involved enough to sympathize and even to empathize with the character.

If the play had a high point of tension or a decisive point which determined the audience's reaction to Galileo, it must surely have been his off-stage questioning by the Inquisition and its consequences.

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[1]Demetz, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

[2]Eric Bentley, "Introduction" to *Seven Plays*, p. xxvii.

Again, the author forced a double response from the perceiver, two contradictory states of mind which enriched the play by working at cross purposes and revealing all of the possible alternatives in a given situation.

> Brecht, the epic narrator of the plot, who judges by hindsight, lets us know that at no time was Galileo's life in serious danger; bold, decisive behavior would have saved him from the torture.
>
> What has Brecht achieved dramaturgically with this device? The event acquires the depth of tragedy in its perspective backward. Galileo's failure is based upon a false assumption; he could have avoided his renunciation of truth.[1]

Even the author himself, observing the action from his omniscient position, was of two minds concerning this event in the action:

> Says Galileo matter-of-factly: "I cannot afford to be smoked on a wood fire like a ham."
>
> This echoes a deep-lying sentiment of Brecht's. He was once asked what the purpose of drama was. Brecht answered: "To teach us how to survive." Peculiarly enough, Brecht goes on to argue that Galileo paid too high a price for survival and makes the absurd charge that his recantation aborted an age of reason. To an audience, however, the treason of the intellectual is less perceptible than the moving spectacle of an old man's humiliation.[2]

Once again, Brecht's ambivalent attitude, the precise attitude which he wished to transmit to his audience, caused his work to become rich enough in implications to perhaps defeat, in part, his objective instruction of the spectators. When we know a person well enough to understand their reasons for their actions, it is often difficult not to become involved with them and to sympathize even with their weaknesses.

It may also be that Brecht, consciously or unconsciously, weighed the 'evidence' of the play to provoke this empathic response. " . . . one

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[1]Günter Rohrmoser, "Brecht's *Galileo*," *Brecht: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 123.

[2]"Black Comedy," *Time*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 12, March 17, 1961, p. 98.

comes away from a performance . . . with the sense of an absolute demand for courage."[1]

As with most of the major plays, Brecht achieved a marvelous blending of involvement and non-involvement, of empathic entaglement and abstraction, in *Galileo*.

THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN (1938-1940)

While Brecht still spoke here of the class and the economic systems of the Capitalist world, of his life-long preoccupation with the problems of religion and of the inhuamnity of the gods and man to the little person, the clearest impression to be gained from this play is of Brecht's concern for his central character, his basic humanity forced its way through his own system and all of the Distancing techniques he could bring to bear in this work. He made an impassioned cry for justice, for moderation, for relief from the miseries of this world--for the person who tried to do her best for all concerned and suffered as a result of her actions.

Prologue. The Water Seller, Wong, expects three gods whom he assumes to be coming to rectify the awful conditions which exist in the city of Setzuan. When they appear, he tries to find them a place to spend the night but can only place them in the home of the prostitute Shen Te. The gods declare Shen Te to be the good person they were seeking (merely to prove that such people still exist) and they decide to relieve her poverty so that she may be truly good. They do so by paying her for their lodging.

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[1]Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

Scene 1. With the thousand dollars the gods gave her, Shen Te purchases a tobacco shop. Immediately, the poor move into the shop of the excessively good woman and, while they help her avoid some troubles with the landlady and the carpenter by suggesting the existence of a mythical cousin who will provide references and pay the bills, they eat her food, smoke her wares and wreck her shop by fighting. There will also be too many of the poor for the small shop to hold shortly.

Scene 1a. Wong sleeps in his den in the sewer pipe and dreams of the three gods. They command him to observe Shen Te and report on her. In the meanwhile, they will continue their search for other good people.

Scene 2. The following morning, Shen Te's 'cousin' Shui Ta, in reality, Shen Te in disguise, appears at the shop. He bluffs the carpenter into taking twenty dollars for his shelves rather than the one hundred he had demanded, arranges to have the 'spongers' arrested and evicted, but cannot produce the six months rent which the landlady, Mrs. Mi Tzu, demands in order to rent to a prostitute like Shen Te. The friendly policeman suggests that the only way for Shen Te to keep her shop is to advertise for a husband who has money.

Scene 3. In the park, in the rain, the unemployed pilot Yang Sun is about to hang himself when he is interrupted by Shen Te, who falls in love with him. When Wong appears she buys a cup of water from him for the flyer, but Yang Sun, his emotional crisis passed, has fallen asleep.

Scene 3a. While Wong dreams in his den, the three gods appear to him again to receive his report on Shen Te. They are pleased with her deeds except for the transaction with the carpenter, which Wong blames on the cousin Shui Ta. The gods do not understand business but they condemn the action. Wong suggests that they should not ask too much all at once.

Scene 4. Wong is chased out of the barber shop by the barber Shu Fu and burned on the hand with a curling iron. When Shen Te comes to the shop after having been out all night with Yang Sun, she is reminded of the necessity for finding the rent money. The old couple in the shop next door lend her $200 against her tobacco stock. Wong decides to sue for the damages to his hand but can find no witnesses among the poachers in the shop. Shen Te agrees to testify even though she was not present. Mrs. Yang, Sun's mother, introduces herself and reports that Yang Sun can have a job flying if he can get $500. Shen Te pledges the $200 she has and indicates that Shui Ta can get the rest of the needed sum.

Scene 4a. Shen Te sings the Song of Defenselessness as she reluctantly dons the mask of Shui Ta again.

Scene 5. Yang Sun comes to the shop and encounters Shui Ta. For once, that strong businessman cannot control the situation. Yang Sun talks him into selling the tobacco shop for $300. It is also made quite clear that Yang Sun is simply using Shen Te for his own ends. When he has gone, Shui Ta arranges with the barber Shu Fu for his 'assistance' with Shen Te's problem, but as Shen Te is about to go to the barber to talk over the ways he might help her charities to the poor, Yang Sun reappears and Shen Te goes with him in spite of the cost.

Scene 5a. On the way to her wedding with Yang Sun, Shen Te reviews the action to this point and indicates that the old people who lent her the $200 have asked for it back and she has promised to return it.

Scene 6. The wedding is held up, awaiting the appearance of Shui Ta and the $300, until the priest and then the guests leave.

Scene 6a. The gods appear again in Wong's sewer pipe. They refuse to intervene in Shen Te's behalf and offer only a group of platitudes as a solution to her problems.

Scene 7. Shen Te is back at her shop when Shu Fu rushes in, having heard of her problems, and hands her a signed blank check "with no strings attached." Shen Te cannot force herself to use it, so she intends to give up her shop and move into the shacks behind Shu Fu's shop. However the discovery that she is to bear a child forces her to act like a tigress in order to protect it. She once more becomes Shui Ta. He immediately fills in the check for $1,000, appropriates some stolen tobacco the beggars have brought in and gives them the choice of working in the tobacco factory he is establishing or getting out.

Scene 7a. In another dream, Wong appeals to the gods for a small relaxation of their rules, to help Shen Te, but they refuse completely.

Scene 8. After he has dissipated the $200, Yang Sun applies to Shui Ta for help and is given a job in the factory, the missing money to be taken from his wages. Yang Sun quickly works his way into the position of foreman.

Scene 9. While everyone wonders when the long-absent Shen Te will return, only Mrs. Shin has discovered the double identity of Shui Ta and his-her pregnancy. Shen Te's pregnancy, but not the disguise, is revealed to Yang Sun by Wong, leading Yang Sun to assume that Shui Ta is holding his former fiancee a prisoner in the back room of the factory. He tries to use this 'information' to blackmail his way into the control of the factory but is refused and leaves to find the police. Shui Ta is interrupted while trying to get Shen Te's clothing out of the back room

and is arrested for the assumed murder of the missing Shen Te.

Scene 9a. Wong makes his final report to the gods, indicating that Shen Te has vanished. The desperate gods, undable to discover another good person, feel that they must find her.

Scene 10. In the courtroom, the three gods take the place of the judges to hear Shui Ta's trial. The rich and the poor give such conflicting opinions of Shui Ta and his actions that the gods are confused and can render no verdict. Shui Ta asks that the court be cleared and tears off his mask to reveal Shen Te. The gods are delighted to have found her again, but rather than offer any solution or assistance, they tell her to continue to be good and not to resort to her cousin's aid more than once a month. Then they fly off to heaven, leaving the distraught Shen Te to solve her problems as best she can.

This play constitutes a prime example of Brecht's final grasping of the essential nature of the Distancing principle; it clearly shows that empathic involvement and intellectual disengagement are complementary activities which only reach their fullest realization in the presence of their opposites. To have each function properly, the other condition must be present and fully realized. It was vital for Brecht's complete development that real sympathy for his central character be re-admitted to his plays and accepted without question by the author himself.

This open acknowledgement of the emotional claims of a character upon both the author and the audience did not preclude the use of many alienating effects; instead, it simply allowed a free and complete vacillation along the entire Distancing continuum, opening up levels of complexity denied to the more simplistic *Lehrstücke*, for instance. The

end result of the use of his total resources was that Brecht produced one of his masterpieces.

> In structure, this is by no means "epic" theatre: the plot is an extremely complicated affair rather than a concatenation; in addition, there is an intensity of argument, an exaggerated caricaturing of situations, which both recall the earliest plays and make it difficult to preserve an attitude of detachment, although devices of estrangement are employed. The clarity of outline in the propagandist plays has gone. Yet this lack of clarity adds to the dramatic interest. Instead of a biased message, a dialectic of opposing attitudes emerges, providing tension and involvement in the manner of the traditional theatre. At the same time, it will be seen that without some degree of detachment also the play is liable to be misunderstood.[1]

In this and the succeeding play to be discussed in this section Brecht both involved and detached the spectator from the action in alternation or simultaneously. The result of such varied reactions on the part of the spectator should be a rich, varied and complex perception of the action, a rewarding and stimulating condition.

Among the Distancing devices employed in this work which have not been mentioned earlier in this commentary, one might note both the basic importance of the use of masks and the peculiar nature of the split personality of the central character.

The mask is a potent Distancing agent because of its power of generalization and its ability to suggest contradictory states in a single moment.

> . . . whereas the face imprinted on the mask remains immobile as the dead, the actor behind it is alive, he acts and moves. A contradiction is thus raised, to be reconciled in the knowledge that the mask emphasizes the permanent character of the being which, unchanging, follows the actor's every action. It gives the finite creature a supra-individual appearance, makes of it the representative of a force, the personification of an afflatus.[2]

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[1]Gray, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

[2]Michelis, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

In this work, Brecht used Shui Ta's mask to protray the virtually eternal characteristics of the self-seeking or self-protecting individual and the application and removal of it to symbolize the psychic problems, the tearing apart of the personality of anyone faced with the problems of life.

> The modern use of the mask to suggest the assumption by the actor of different points of view, different phases of personality, is part of the same attempt to project the subjective self, to dramatize psychic tensions. For the multiple self, multiple faces.[1]

The mask was here used for symbolic purposes, not merely as a means of forcing a disengagement of the audience's affections from the characters.

"Brecht's most exciting Alienation Effect, however, lies in the human sphere. . . . In this world without human mercy, even the good is possible--as an Alienation Effect.[2] Never before had Brecht's perception of the plight of the common man caused him to see that even the innate humanity of the average person could be used as a Distancing device. Still,

> There is the same sort of strangeness, of irreconcilability, about an individual who is naturally good in a society which is evil. To understand, we must watch his path through society. We must stand at a distance and judge him; we are powerless to help him but we can recognize where he goes wrong.[3]

Even kindness can be so unusual as to cause a probing, questioning reaction of the part of the audience.

The conclusion of this play was also somewhat unusual for a Brecht drama. Typically Brecht sought an inconclusive ending to the problem which he considered in order to force the spectators to debate the basic questions after the fall of the final curtain. He wanted a continuation

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[1]Downey, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

[2]Politzer, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

[3]Adler, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

of the situation in the audience's mind and he sought endings which would leave the spectator unsatisfied, unsure that the conclusion reached was a proper one or the only acceptable conclusion. In his efforts to activate the audience, Brecht had to avoid the 'pat' ending, had to leave a number of unresolved threads of action, yet in no other play did the author achieve this effect to such a high degree.

> The fact that we find a question rather than an "obvious" answer at the end of Brecht's parable turns out to be an artistic device of great ingenuity. It is this seeming omission of a conclusion which gives the play "the dynamic force of a fragment. The intensity with which it causes the onlooker to come to terms with the problems posed is even stronger than would be the case with a well-rounded drama. Thus it evokes his dissatisfaction . . . urges him on to solve the seemingly insoluble." Volker Klotz goes on to compare the fragment in this respect to the syntactic figure of an ellipsis, calling in similar fashion on the reader or listener not only to supplement the missing part but, in doing so, to proceed in an implied direction. There is no longer a question of free choice--the seemingly "conclusionless" end "fits effectively the purpose of the didactic form of the parable."[1]

THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE (1944-1945)

As with most of the plays in this section, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is a rich and varied work, well designed to exercise the critical and analytical powers of its Distanced spectators or readers. There is so much involved in this discussion of the proper rights of ownership that an audience might not only follow the basic argument and be fascinated by the characters but also exercise its ability to pinpoint the sources of various aspects of the work.

> The plot and some of the language are Biblical; the 'Song of Chaos' Egyptian; the technique of narration and comment Japanese; the construction cinematic; the conclusion didactic;

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[1]Ernst Loeb, "Sartre's *No Exit* and Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan:* A Comparison," *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, April 1959, p. 288.

> the wedding scene a reflection of the Marx brothers' *A Night at the Opera*; the soldiers an apparent recollection of *Mann ist Mann*; the atmosphere a cross between Brueghel and the pseudo-Chinese; the framework a commonsense, non-political issue debated in modern Georgia . . . And several of the later plays have a pedigree as complicated as this.[1]

There was much here to attract and hold the attention of a mentally active spectator.

Prologue. Two Soviet communes are disputing the possession of a single valley; the goat-herders had the land until the Nazi invaders drove them from it, then the vineyard growers took control of it. Now that the war is over, to whom should the land belong? The presentation of a plan for irrigation of the area wins the land for the cultivation of orchards and vineyards. To celebrate the decision, a story-teller will present the "Circle of Chalk."

Part One, Scene 1. In the story-teller's tale, the Governor, his haughty wife and their child, attended with all possible pomp, go to church, leaving a Palace Guard, Simon Shashava, outside the door where he can speak to the peasant girl Grusha Vashnadze. Shortly after the church services begin, the Princes stage an uprising and Simon is ordered to conduct the Governor's wife to safety. Before he leaves, he and Grusha formally arrange their betrothal and she promises that she will wait until he returns. In her frantic haste to escape and her great concern over her dresses, the Governor's wife simply forgets her child and, since no one else will help it, Grusha takes the child with her.

Scene 2. After carrying the child, Michael, a great distance away from the city with much trouble, Grusha leaves him to be adopted by a farm family and starts to return. But she encounters Ironshirts (Royal

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[1]Willett, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124.

soldiers) and feels impelled to guard the child. She returns to it, defends the child by knocking out the corporal and carries it further away for twenty-two days. At the foot of the mountains, she baptizes and adopts the child, then takes it up a pass and across a broken bridge to safety, narrowly escaping the Ironshirts.

Scene 3. Grusha reaches her brother's farm and, much against the wishes of his wife, spends the winter with them. The following spring, to prevent further intimations of illegitimacy against Michael, her brother arranges for Grusha to marry a farmer who is on his 'death bed.' As soon as the ceremony is performed and someone mentions that the war is over and the soldiers are returning, the 'dying' man, who has feined illness only to avoid the draft, springs from bed and resumes his normal life, but with a wife now. After some months, Grusha is at the stream washing clothing when Simon appears. He does not understand the situation and will not listen to her explanations. As he leaves, the Ironshirts come to take Michael back to the city. Grusha follows him.

Part Two, Scene 1. On the day of the uprising in part one, the Village Recorder, Azdak, unwittingly gave shelter to the Grand Duke and then denounced himself for the act. Instead of punishing Azda, the Ironshirts are amused at his antics and make him a judge. Though his decisions do not follow the law or logic, still there is justice in them and, for a two year period, Azdak champions the poor and punishes the lords. Only when the Grand Duke returns with a Persian army to restore order does Azdak's brazenness desert him. He promises the newly returned Governor's wife that the servant woman who carried off Michael will be punished.

Scene 2. Just before the trial to determine the mother of Michael, Azdak is denounced by some farmers and is being beaten quite thoroughly

when a dispatch from the Grand Duke arrives re-appointing Azdak as the judge in return for having saved his life. Simon, who now understands that the child is not Grusha's but does not understand her being married, comes to tell her that he will swear that the child is his. When the trial begins, Azdak accepts a bribe from the lawyers of the Governor's wife, apparently overlooks the fact that the only interest the Governor's wife has in the child is that he has inherited the estates of her former husband, and arouses Grusha's indignation at his conduct so that she further prejudices her case by berating him. Since Azdak often judges two cases at once, he is also considering divorcing an old couple at the same time that he is weighing the merits of the maternity case. Unable to decide the child's parentage on the basis of the evidence presented, Azdak arranges the test of the Chalk Circle: a circle is drawn on the ground, the child is placed in it, the two litigants take their positions on opposite sides of the boy and, upon command, they are expected to try to pull the child to their side. Grusha twice refuses to pull on Michael's arm for fear of hurting him, so Azdak declares her to be the true mother. The judge further rules that the estates become the property of the city and will be converted into a playground for the children. The Governor's wife faints and is carried out of court. As Azdak steps down from the bench, he remembers the divorce proceeding and writes out the divorce decree. Unfortunately, he makes a 'mistake' and divorces Grusha and, of course, he never retracts a judgment. After this final trial, Azdak disappears but was long remembered for his justice.

The story-teller draws the moral that "what there is shall go to those who are good for it" and reinforces the decision to give the valley to the vinegrowers.

In this work, Brecht used one of the classic Distancing devices, the play within a play (prologue-epilogue framework), to set up the various levels upon which the work could be studied.

> With respect to the spectator's relationship to the outer play, the play within a play is an associative device ("how can people who are looking at a play be unreal?"); conversely, with respect to the spectator's relationship to the play within a play itself, the device is dissociative ("like me, those on-stage spectators are looking at a play, something unreal").[1]

While the author made no great point of this bracketing effect, it, nevertheless, removed the action one further step and prevented the emotion-laden, potentially rather "soap opera-ish" and empathic tale from becoming so emotionally involving that the critical faculties of the spectators were dulled.

The play within a play also motivated the use of the Story Teller, "a crossbreed between Greek chorus and personified alienation effect . . .",[2] so that the author could demonstrate another of his theoretical Distancing methods in the scene where Grusha is tempted to save the Governor's abandoned son.

> Grusha acts the whole scene out in pantomime while the Singer relates what she is doing, in the third person and the past tense. In this the Singer is doing for Grusha exactly what Brecht, in his essay "A New Technique of Acting," suggests should be done to help an actor emancipate himself from the Stanislavsky procedure. If an actor hears his role talked about in the third person and his deeds talked about in the past tense, he stands apart from the role and the deeds and renders them, not as self-expression, but as history. When he uses the device in *Chalk Circle* Brecht of course is radically "alienating" Grusha's actions so that we do not lose ourselves in our compassion. He uses the third person, the past tense, the art of pantomime, and a refined language as massed alienation effects.[3]

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[1]Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

[2]Politzer, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

[3]Bentley, "German Stagecraft Today," p. 642.

While the story of Grusha or that of Azdak followed a strict chronological sequence while it was the center of interest, the structure of this play was still fragmented and doubled back upon itself by the mere process of telling two divergent stories which occupied the same time and yet not relating them concurrently or in alternation. By going back and beginning the second tale at the same point in time at which the first story started, the audience was forced to realize how much more was going on at the same time and to broaden and deepen its understanding of the complexity of life. One should not become too empathically involved in Grusha's affairs if she obviously was not the only person who was living through important events at a given moment. This represents a highly sophisticated Distancing device, not merely a structural weakness, because it adds layers of meaning which the audience can grasp only by mental readjustments.

Brecht also assured the audience's Distance by refusing to develop any of his characters too far. Certainly the spectator "feels with" and appreciates Grusha's efforts at motherhood and enjoys the rowdy and farcical aspects of Azdak's improbable rise to the heights, but neither character was allowed to dominate the play to the point of the exclusion of the other. The division in the plot development prevented this. In addition, the dialogue given to each pushed the spectator away from them. Grusha and Simon spoke with great poetic formality; they seem almost mechanical in their verbal precision. Azdak, on the other hand, was never consistent,

> There is nothing that can properly be called a self in Azdak, nothing consistent or foreseeable in his actions: he acts on impluse. He sets no store by his actions, any more than Grusha does by hers, and it is this that helps to make him the most fascinating character in the play, insulting and generous,

> preposterous and humble, ignorant and wise, blasphemous and pious.[1]

They are both beautifully Distanced characters, Distanced by entirely different means, in a successfully balanced and removed play.

> . . . *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* . . . marks an end point. I have read most of what Brecht is known to have written afterwards, and I find him taking no new steps--only retracing old ones. In the sense here suggested, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is his last play.[2]

THE PLAYS FOR THE BERLINER ENSEMBLE

When Brecht returned to Germany and to the active production of plays in the theatre, of necessity he turned his attention to many tasks with which he had not bothered for many years. He found himself responsible for training an acting company, for the many problems of handling finances, of planning seasons and tours, etc. He had to adjust to the realities of life in a Communist country, to participate in ceremonial affairs which required much of his time, and to reconsider his theoretical statements in the light of practical productions. His time was taken by so many other activities that his playwriting suffered as a result. Or perhaps it was simply that Brecht had really said everything which he had to say. Whatever the reason for the weakening of his powers, Brecht created no more highly original works. Only one of the plays from this period can be considered to be Brecht's work alone, *Report on Herrnburg* (1951), and most of the critics rank it among the worst of his plays. *The Days of the Commune* (1948-1949) is in some degree Brecht's creation but it represents a mere variation on Nordahl Greig's *The Defeat*,

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[1]Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

[2]Bentley, "Introduction" to *Seven Plays*, p. xivii.

utilizing characters and situations from the work that Brecht was countering in his play. All of the remainder of his output for the rest of his life were adaptations of no great originality. The plays from this period which have not been mentioned were *The Private Tutor* (1950), *The Trial of Joan of Arc at Rouen 1431* (1952), *Don Juan* (1952), *Coriolanus* (1952-1953), and *Trumpets and Drums* (1955).

SUMMARY

Throughout the whole of his literary career, Brecht demonstrated the widest possible variations in his handling of Distance. He began his work in a relatively Distanced, Expressionistic manner but then proceeded to develop his alienating techniques to their absolute extremes in the Learning Plays. During the World War period, he deliberately tried to work in an Aristotelian, empathic manner in some of his plays. In his major period, Brecht seems to have achieved the best possible balance between involvement and non-involvement, a state which he tried, unsuccessfully, to maintain during his Ensemble period.

Brecht's plays alone, discounting for the moment the importance of his volumes of poetry, his narrative prose, his essays and theoretical writings, his scripts for motion pictures, his translations of the works of others, his model books, etc., are an amazing contribution to the literature of the world. Many of them in the more extreme styles are probably doomed to be forgotten; many of the strictly topical works are already virtually gone from the boards. But there will be a hard core of at least a half a dozen of Brecht's plays which will be a part of the world theatre for many years to come.

CHAPTER VIII

BRECHT'S STAGING

When Brecht returned to the Continent after World War II and had the Theatre am Schiffbauerdamm placed at his disposal, along with a company of actors of his own choosing, and a yearly subsidy for the operation of the theatre in excess of three million marks,[1] he faced the problems of making his theories of Distance and alienation workable under relatively stable theatrical conditions. As will be pointed out again, many of his theoretical ideas were radically altered or simply discarded. Even his final major theoretical statement, the Organum

> . . . was also something of a liability to Brecht himself. For when he returned to a more active theatrical life in 1948 he found that the workers were not all that scientific and sceptical, any more than they had been under Hitler; and the audience which he demanded was slow to come forward.[2]

This chapter will be devoted primarily to a consideration of the techniques, methods and devices which he did retain and which stamped his production work with his company, The Berliner Ensemble.

The dominant traits of Brecht's productions, as one might expect from a study of his theories, were clarity, precision, objectivity of acting and sparse settings which suggested rather than stated anything. Much of the freakishness and deliberate attempts at shocking the audience were discarded in favor of lucidity and pure style or, in other words,

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[1]Tynan, *op. cit.*, p. 117. The Berliner Ensemble was founded in the autumn of 1949 and opened its first show on November 8 of that year. Brecht continued his work with the company until his death August 14, 1956.

[2]Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

Brecht stopped distorting the methods of Aesthetic Distance and began to apply them in order to achieve artistic ends.

"In his rehearsals Brecht strove not only for clarity of speech but for coordination of speech and gesture, that the speech might simply serve to complete and explain the gesture."[1] Brecht's imagination, on the testimony of his friends and collaborators, was primarily visual in nature. He began the composition of his plays by picturing to himself the actions of the characters and then selecting the words which also conveyed the same *Gestus*. It was natural therefore, that he should continue his stress on the pictorial and mimetic aspects of the plays in production while never forgetting the poetic nature of his lines. He simply placed the words in the service of the over-riding visual image which he held in his mind's eye and if a conflict developed, the words were deemed the alterable part of the whole. "'The gesture precedes the word,' says Brecht. And if the word is discordant with the gesture, he discards it for another."[2]

This visually-oriented approach caused a great concentration on the acting and the setting, and since the setting was so often reduced to the bare minimum, to a 'report' on the environment, the physical presence of the actor took on an especial prominence.

> Brecht was extremely sensitive to groupings and gestures, which in all the early rehearsals were designed simply to tell the story, in an almost silent-film way, and only later became refined and polished up.[3]

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[1]Tretiakov, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[2]*Ibid.*

[3]Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

According to Brecht himself,

> The grouping of the characters on the stage and the movements of the groups must be such that the necessary beauty is attained above all by the elegance with which the material conveying that *Gestus* is set out and laid bare to the understanding of the audience.[1]

The primary aspect of the presentation which was intended to make it both artistic and beautiful was the positioning of the actors[2] and, to a lesser degree, the movement necessary to attain and maintain a physical position. As in most of his work, Brecht made the assumption that the simplest and easiest method was the best.

> The epic theatre uses the simplest possible groupings, such as express the event's overall sense. No more 'casual,' 'life-like,' 'unforced' groupings; the stage no longer reflects the 'natural' disorder of things. The opposite of natural disorder is aimed at: natural order.[3]

But it should be noted that Brecht's "simplest possible groupings" were not intended to be naturalistic but were consciously stylized. He apparently felt that simplified, stylized groupings would lend Distance and an artistic focus to any event, no matter how brutal or real it happened to be. "Reality may lack beauty, but that by no means disqualifies it for a stylized stage."[4] Brecht intended to stylize his plays, both in their writing and their production, to stress their artificial, arranged and pedogogic nature. Such Distancing methods enabled him to treat of the often brutal themes of the Epic Theatre without destroying the artistic character of the plays and production.

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[1]Brecht, "A Short Organum," p. 99.

[2]This stress on the importance of the grouping of the actors explained in part, why Brecht should have thought it a good idea to create the Model Books, the photographic and textual analyses of productions which were to serve as guides to all other producers.

[3]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 58.

[4]*Ibid.*, p.1155.

> Art is in a position to represent the ugly man's ugliness in a beautiful manner, the base man's baseness in a noble manner, for the artist can also show ungraciousness graciously and meekness with power. There is no reason why the subject matter of a comedy portraying 'life as it is' should not be ennobled. The theatre has at its command delicate colours, agreeable and significant grouping, original gests--in short, style--; it has humour, imagination and wisdom with which to overcome ugliness.[1]

Thus, in the Distancing style which set examples of the Epic Theatre apart from the reality of which it presumably spoke one could find the dialectical devices which underlay Brecht's methods and the artistic aspects of the plays.

The staging of the Brechtian play was highly important and the visual elements involved were particularly so, but Brecht was always intensely aware of all aspects of the production. He, like Wagner, sought a complete and totally realized art work.

> Brecht strove for an all-encompassing work of art; the essence of his plays is revealed only in their presentation, in his presentation, which breaks with all forms of the theatre as we have known it.[2]

REHEARSAL METHODS

In order to note the implementation of Aesthetic Distance in the production situation it is necessary to delineate the techniques which he used during his rehearsals and the things which he permitted and demanded of his actors.

Because Brecht's reputation as an author is increasing as his works are widely translated and become available for production in English, it

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[1] *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 155-156.

[2] Feuchtwanger, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

may become ever easier to forget that he was a director of rare ability and that a good portion of his creative life was devoted to direction.

> During the last seven years of his life, his activities (apart from some adaptations and a vast quantity of theoretical writings) were confined to his work as a producer, putting into practice his novel theories of stagecraft. It was this practical side of his work which had the most immediate effect on the Western theatre.[1]

While most of his theories were produced while he was in exile and away from the theatre, they were finally tested in practical productions and those elements which were retained would seem to represent Brecht's final ideas on how the rehearsals of an Epic Theatre production should be conducted.

Remembering always that Brecht did not specifically intend to arouse empathic emotion but rather, that he sought to challenge the critical intelligence of both the actor and the audience, his invariable first device in rehearsal made admirable sense.

> Regardless of whether he directed one of his own plays or somebody else's, Brecht would start his rehearsals by pretending to have been struck with some form of total amnesia: he couldn't remember what the play was about, he couldn't remember a line from it, he had no idea what characters were in it and what they stood for: would the actors please explain things to him?
>
> With this Socratian gambit, the game opened. An actor who had to explain himself and could survive this sort of grilling stood a fair chance of developing into the kind of actor Brecht admired: calm, collected, questing, ironical and skilled.[2]

Brecht brought the abstractive, analytical, extremely Distanced attitude to the forefront of the rehearsals immediately and he kept it there throughout the process, even though he allowed himself more emotional reactions than he did his actors.

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[1]H. F. Garten, *Modern German Drama* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962), p. 242.

[2]Borneman, *op. cit.*, pp. 466-467.

> During rehearsals Brecht was quarrelsome, domineering and irritable. He would not rest until his actors had given everything they had. He drove them to frustration and exhaustion. He fed on the vitality of others, but he himself gave without stint or envy.[1]

> In rehearsal he torments and challenges them [the actors], again and again, till it clicks. When this happens, he will jump up in excitement, as Chaplin does, and cackle with glee.[2]

Setting a mood in which delight in proper performance and accurate accomplishment could be applauded, demanding critical analysis and an almost combative attitude on the part of the actor toward the director, the play, the character and the actions, Brecht also allowed any member of his cast or crew to offer suggestions concerning the handling of any detail. Yet, he did not want to discuss the various possibilities; he wanted them visualized completely.

> . . . he was open to any suggestion, so long as it could be shown to him on the stage. 'Don't talk about it,' he would say. 'Act it to us.' In this way discussion was cut down, and the actor himself was made quickly aware if his proposal fell flat.[3]

The suggestions had to be presented in an emotionally and intellectually realized form, after which they were subjected to critical analysis and suggestions for changes, and finally approved or discarded. Thus the creation of any of Brecht's productions, unlike Wagner's, was a group project, with each person having added whatever he could and having been engaged in the dialectical evolution of the finished product. Just as Brecht's scripts could be regarded as compounds of absorbed suggestions, so also

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[1]Feuchtwanger, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

[2]"The Man Who Has Everything," *The New Statesman and Nation*, Vol. LI, No. 1,319, June 23, 1956, p. 731.

[3]Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

might his staging of the plays be called collaborative.

Yet, just as he took an infinite number of suggestions during the process of composition and still molded them into a play which bears the imprint of a single mind, so his productions, were nevertheless distinctly his own and obviously the product of the same mind which conceived the Epic Theatre theories.

According to the critics Marieluise Fleisser and Herbert Thering, Brecht, in his productions,

> . . . did not analyse the characters; he set them at a distance. . . . He called for a report on the events. He insisted on simple gestures. He compelled a clear and cool manner of speaking. No emotional tricks were allowed. That ensured the objective, 'epic' style.[1]

Yet he accomplished the creation of this Distanced style during the rehearsal period without having imposed his theories upon his actors. From the beginning of his directorial work to its end, Brecht apparently never discussed theory with his casts. Commenting upon this facet of Brecht's manner, Lotte Lenya said,

> Directing *Threepenny* and *Mahagonny* in 1928 and 1931, Brecht "never once talked to me about *Verfremdung* and all those things. Either it was right or wrong and no more and no theory ever."[2]

INVOLVEMENT AND ABSTRACTION DURING THE REHEARSAL PERIOD

The creation of the Brechtian style of production, as with any other style, is in large part a matter of determining the exact proportions of involvement and abstraction on the part of the actors which will, in turn, affect the audience's reactions and guide them to a proper appreciation

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[1]Quoted in Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

[2]David Beams, "Lotte Lenya," *Theatre Arts*, Vol. XLVI, No. 6, June 1962, p. 13.

and acceptance of the pre-selected Distance. Proper style may be merely a question of choosing a workable and valuable Distance for what must be said and then discovering the devices which will create the desired state of mind. While he may not have mentioned theory, as such, to his actors, Brecht, with his characteristic thoroughness, had fully evolved notions about rehearsals and the methods for achieving desirable ends, and he committed them to paper.

Brecht outlined the whole process of developing a character in this manner:

> (1) Before you assimilate or lose yourself in a character you must first become acquainted with it without understanding it. This happens both when a play is first read and during early rehearsals. You look resolutely for contradictions, deviations from the typical, ugliness side by side with beauty and beauty side by side with ugliness. The most important gesture during this first phase is shaking your head. You must shake your head like a tree losing its fruits until each lies on the ground ready to be gathered up.
>
> (2) The second phase is that of empathy, and search for the character's truth in the subjective sense. In other words, you leave it to its own volition, you permit it to do what it wants, how it wants. But this is not yet a headlong plunge. You allow your character to react to other characters, to its environment, and to the plot. All this in a simple and natural manner. Such gathering up is tedious process, but eventually the plunge does come and you fall headlong into the final form of the character, becoming one with it.
>
> (3) And then there is the third phase in which you try to see the character from the outside, from the standpoint of society. At the same time you must try to recall both the distrust and the admiration you felt during the first phase. After the third phase you are ready to present your character to society.
>
> (4) It is perhaps necessary to add that once working rehearsals have begun, all things do not necessarily progress so cleanly, according to a pre-established schedule. The evolution of character knows no set rules. The phases will repeatedly displace and intertwine with each other. While some characters will have almost reached the third phase, others will still be meeting difficulties in the second or even first phase.[1]

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[1]Bertolt Brecht, "Notes on Stanislavski," trans. Carl R. Mueller, *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Winter 1964, p. 159. The piece was written in 1952, after he began work with the Berliner Ensemble.

While this is a relatively late stage in Brecht's thinking and represents his ideas after he had discovered that it was not really possible to exclude empathy from the theatrical process, nevertheless, such statements give the lie both to Brecht's critics who maintain that he never wanted or used empathy and to his own earlier theories on this point. He did eventually see that empathy would function in spite of anything that he might do to prevent it, that it would be present during the performances as well as in the rehearsals and that he might as well make a positive, if limited, use of the effect for his own purposes.

> It is interesting how Stanislavski admits falsehood--at rehearsal! In the same way I admit empathy--at rehearsal! (And both of us must admit them in performance, albeit in differing mixtures.)[1]

Brecht apparently found it difficult to admit that almost the whole of his earlier theorizing had been misguided and was the result of misunderstanding and overstatement of the Aesthetic Distance principle. He recanted many of his principles but, instead of openly admitting that his use of empathy was conscious, deliberate and relatively consistent, he chose to admit its presence but maintain that his methods held it in check. Theoretically he allowed the audience empathic responses during some portions of his plays while denying them in others, thereby 'restricting' the effect of the empathy, just as he ultimately allowed the actors to experience this process during rehearsal but still asked that they avoid it during performance.

> But whereas the usual practice in acting is to execute it [empathy] during the actual performance, in the hope of

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

> simulating the spectator into a similar operation, he [the actor] will achieve it only at an earlier stage, at some time during rehearsals.[1]

As was noted above in Brecht's description of the process of character creation, empathy was finally acknowledged to be one step in the actor's elaboration of a character but it was thought of as an early stage in the process and one to be followed by more Distanced, controlled and abstract thought patterns.

> At one stage in his preparatory work the Brechtian actor also has to feel himself into the character, but the results of this process of empathy are only one of a number of elements which fuse in the final performance on the stage. They must be supplemented by acute and fully rational observations, by implied comment on the character's actions . . .[2]

Empathy was admitted to be useful in discovering certain aspects of the character's personal life and nature:

> Even if empathy, or self-identification with the character, can be usefully indulged in at rehearsal (something to be avoided in a performance), it has to be treated as just one of a number of methods of observation. It can help when rehearsing, for even though the contemporary theatre has applied it in an indiscriminate way it has none the less led to subtle delineation of personality.[3]

Still, empathy would supply no data concerning the character's economic life and status or his political committment--but would only reveal his emotional reactions to the world. These missing factors had to be added in a lucid manner by an analytical and non-involved actor. This material involved a kind of contact but it was of an intellectual, conceptual nature rather than an empathetic one. Such facts reveal an attitude

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[1]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 137. This passage from "New Technique of Acting" was not published, according to Willett, until 1951 but was probably written about 1940. Thus it may represent an earlier and perhaps untried formulation.

[2]Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 131.

[3]Brecht, "A Short Organum," p. 92.

toward the world rather than a reaction to it and must be treated differently.

Over the years, Brecht evolved many devices, which were almost exclusively his, and which were intended to alienate the actor from his character, to enable the artist to break free of the spell of the character and to examine the character's reactions in a controlled and logical manner.

An almost completely theoretical example of such devices were the *Practice Scenes for Actors*. Had they been seriously employed during rehearsals these debunking satirical scenes would have stripped a good deal of the majesty from the characters and presented entirely different perceptions of them to both the actors and the audiences. The practice scenes were of two types:

> . . . 'parallel scenes' by which the actors are to be made to see hackneyed classical situations in a new--estranged--light (the murder scene in *Macbeth* is equated with the pangs of conscience of a concierge's wife who has broken off the head of a china statue belonging to the lady of the house, and finally blames the deed on a passing beggar); and 'bridge scenes,' to be acted during rehearsal but omitted in performance (Hamlet learns that Claudius has ceded a strip of land to Norway in return for a trade agreement, which guarantees the sale of Danish salted herrings to Norway; this puts him into the right mood to hear of Fortinbras's expedition to Poland and explains his change of mind in 'How all occasions do inform against me'). But as Brecht never tackled Macbeth, Hamlet, or any of the other plays for which he wrote these practice scenes, they remain expressions of his love of debunking and parody rather than constructive contributions to the art of acting.[1]

As Esslin indicates there is no record of such scenes ever being used in rehearsal. One can see theoretically how they might alter the actor's conception of his role but their practical effect, were they actually to be used, remains unknown.

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[1]Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, p. 123.

Among Brecht's other techniques for alienating or maintaining Distance during rehearsals are these:

> . . . the actors should sometimes swap roles with their partners during rehearsal, so that the characters can get what they need from one another. But it is also good for the actors when they see their characters copied or portrayed in another form. If the part is played by somebody of the opposite sex, the sex of the character will be more clearly brought out; if it is played by a comedian, whether comically or tragically, it will gain fresh aspects. By helping to develop the parts that correspond to his own, or at any rate standing in for their players, the actor strengthens the all-decisive social standpoint from which he has to present his character. The master is only the sort of master his servant lets him be, and so on.[1]

This method of development by contrast and opposition, by viewing the character from an uncommon angle, by actually seeing those aspects of it which normally go unobserved because they are so commonplace and normal, was precisely the method of Distancing which produced the greatest shock of discovery, the largest amount of fresh reflections upon the character. When seen in such an unusual light, the character acquired contradictory elements in his personality and greater depth in his overall make-up.

> Another method was to get each actor to use his own local dialect in the rehearsals, so that the real text would keep a certain freshness, although its content was familiar. Yet another was to make the actor change the tenses in his part, to add 'the man said,' 'she said,' at the end of each speech,[2] or to try and imagine each sentence in terms of 'not . . . but'--thus: 'he told her not to take the coffee away but to hand it to him'--so as to make it clear that each sentence has its unspoken ('dialectical') alternative.[3]

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[1] Brecht, "A Short Organum," p. 95.

[2] "During rehearsals the actors were invited to translate their texts into the third person, so that they were made to relate the story of the actions and speeches of the characters they were later to act." Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 137. Note the relationship of this technique to the narrated events of the Street Corner Incident.

[3] Willett, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157.

Using the many dialects of German and carefully avoiding the artificiality of stage 'High German', created a babble of almost unintelligible tongues (the divisions among the various regional dialects are that extreme) thereby forcing each actor to pay strict attention to what his partner was saying in order to be able to follow it. This deliberate confusion was as far removed from Wagner's insistence upon absolute intelligibility at all times as one could well get. Brecht, too, insisted upon a re-installation of a more uniform speech pattern during production, but he found the dialects to be alienating and Distancing during the rehearsals.

Using the past tense and the third person during rehearsals was a method of forcing upon the actor's awareness the distinct difference which existed between the assumed time of the play and the present and between the character and the actor portraying him. The actor, using such techniques, could never forget the difference between illusion and reality.

> Transposing it into the past gives the speaker a standpoint from which he can look back at his sentence. The sentence too is thereby alienated without the speaker adopting an unreal point of view; unlike the spectator, he has read the play right through and is better placed to judge the sentence in accordance with the ending, with its consequences, than the former, who knows less and is more of a stranger to the sentence.[1]

"Another device for inhibiting the identification of actor and character is the inclusion of all stage directions in the text spoken during rehearsals."[2]

> Speaking the stage directions out loud in the third person results in a clash between two tones of voice, alienating the second of them, the text proper. This style of acting

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[1] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 138.

[2] Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, p. 123.

> is further alienated by taking place on the stage after having been outlined and announced in words.[1]

The interruptions in the flow of the play created by the inclusion of the stage directions called for a great deal of concentration on the part of the actors in order to sustain the flow and continuity of the action. The actors were challenged to maintain the action in spite of the interruptions and, because of the repetitive nature of the spoken instructions which were being acted out, the Distanced attitude Brecht wanted his actors to assume toward their characters was generated quite early in rehearsal. Brecht consistently sought to remind his performers that they were actors and not the characters they presented.

If all of these methods for the creation of non-involvement or alienation were used during the rehearsals, the level of empathy would certainly be rigidly controlled. The actor would be able to consciously determine the appropriate Distance for himself in relation to his character, thereby controlling the audience's response to that character and to the play as a whole.

THE BERLINER ENSEMBLE

The single theatre in which the most consistent attempt has been made to bring Brecht's theories and methods to life on the stage is the Theatre am Schiffbauerdamm on the Friedrichstrasse in East Berlin. This is the home of Brecht's own personal company The Berliner Ensemble, the only group in the world specifically trained by Brecht for the performance of his own works and various classic plays which were adapted to an Epic treatment. It was Brecht's rather curious boast that

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[1] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 138.

> In fact our theatre can stage anything--from *Oedipus* to Hauptmann's *Biberpelz*, not because it has an individual style strong enough to melt down the products of so many different authors, but because it lacks any style of its own.[1]

While most critics were aware of a distinctive clarity, pace and elan in the Ensemble's performances, to the degree that the group did not exhibit in production all of the techniques Brecht attributed to the Epic Theatre, it might be said not to have a wholly Epic style. In spite of the use of the methods and exercises detailed above, little seems to have been done during rehearsals under Brecht's direction to make the members of the Ensemble aware of Brecht's theories or to impose any artificial style upon their work. As a result, even the members of the company were not sure that they had a particular style. One could explain the often reported

> . . . uncertainty of the Ensemble's members as to whether or not there was a special Berliner Ensemble style of acting by saying that, 'This is probably due to the fact that neither Brecht nor any other Berliner Ensemble producer refers to Brecht's theoretical works during rehearsals. In certain plays use is made of one or two practical instructions to be found there, but it is Brecht's view that the theatre is not at present in a state to allow of their full application.[2]

By 1948, the time of the composition of the "Short Organum," Brecht had discarded many of his more extreme demands in regard to non-involvemnt. He had decided that the point of theatre, as of all art, was to provide pleasure and that empathy (under controlled conditions) was admissible in the theatre. Therefore, one might assume that this mellowed, aesthetic and permissive attitude represented the mature and considered opinions of the man. If any theories were to be followed in the Ensemble's rehearsals and productions, those contained in the 'Organum' would seem to be

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 222.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 243.

the obvious ones to select, particularly because he returned to the continent that year and shortly thereafter formed the group. However,

> The doctrines laid down in the 'Short Organum' were by all accounts neither discussed nor put into practice in the Berliner Ensemble. Regine Lutz, one of its principle actresses from 1949 on, told me in 1957 that she had never read Brecht's theoretical works.[1]

In short, Brecht's theories were so altered by maturity and practical productions that one could almost say that the descriptions of the Epic Theatre did not apply to the Berliner Ensemble. Brecht had to fight clear of his own theorizing in order to be able to produce his plays with the Ensemble.

> In the Ensemble, theory was seldom mentioned; visitors found it hard to get Brecht to discuss it. The title, projections and other mannerisms survived, but he plainly found it a continual nuisance to explain why he was not following all his former recommendations to the letter. 'There is no purely theoretical approach to Epic Theatre,' he said; and once again 'It is not true . . . that epic theatre . . . proclaims the slogan "Reason this side, Emotion that;" finally, 'I cannot rewrite all the notes to my plays.'[2]

The style mentioned above as distinctive of the Ensemble is one which either grew out of, or was first exemplified in, Brecht's production of *Mother Courage*, his first venture with the company. The style of that production "--light, relaxed, and ascetically spare--set the pattern for all his subsequent productions."[3] A style which emanated directly from the nature of the scripts themselves.

> The style of acting in the Ensemble, and more particularly the care and thought that went into it, was a further elucidation of Brecht's intentions; it had a clean-cut, unsentimental matter-of-factness that is certainly required by

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 236.

[2] Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

[3] Tynan, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

> his language as a rule, yet which does not always translate itself in non-Brechtian productions.[1]

The thought expended in clarifying every detail, Distancing everything into ideally clear statements, has made the Berliner Ensemble recognizable in performance, even if their procedures were not consciously based upon theory.

The ensemble is now widely recognized as one of the world's leading companies, ranking alongside the Moscow Art Theatre of the pre World War II period in importance and influence. Yet it is questionable that the group ever represented Brecht's ideal or, of course, ever will, since he is no longer guiding it. Nevertheless, in spite of a lack of knowledge of Epic theory on the part of the company members Brecht's directoral force, continued to be a potent influence. Yet Brecht found fault with their, and his, work, saying:

> . . . our mistakes are different from those of other theatres. Their actors are liable to display too much spurious temperament; ours often show too little of the real thing. Aiming to avoid artificial heat, we fall short in natural warmth.[2]

The critics did not always agree with this evaluation, finding instead that in spite of the use of various alienation effects, the company often overwhelmed the audience and involved them greatly.

> On stage the apparatus of alienation is called into action as a fire brigade. The whole effort of the Berlin Ensemble production is to counteract the natural flow of sympathy to Galileo. These actors know this particular job well. They have performed it for *Puntila*; as I write, they are performing it for a *Threepenny Opera* in which Mackie is not to be

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[1]Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

[2]*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 248.

allowed any charm; and they try in vain to perform it for *Mother Courage*.[1]

The company which Brecht trained appears to be involved in the same conflict which engaged so much of Brecht's energies throughout his life: they tried to follow his model books and directions in order to produce a cool, abstract, reasoned report of the dramatic events but, instead, and in spite of themselves, they created empathy levels which were almost as high as a conventional theatre. Their productions, as a result, had enormous tension generated by the conflicting goals and procedures. " . . . it became the historic task of the Brechtian theatre to demonstrate night after night at what point Brecht's techniques would break under the strain of audience reaction."[2] As a result of the tension, Berliner Ensemble productions seemed to explode with vitality and life.

The productions of the Ensemble achieved their distinctive flavor and character as a result of many separate properties, no one of which completely described the methods used. But, surely, one of the most important was the infinite care with which they dealt with every part of the production, an attribute contributed by Brecht.

> 'Each scene,' says a writer in *Theaterarbeit* of his [Brecht's] rehearsing of *Mother Courage*,
> is subdivided into a succession of episodes. Brecht produces as though each of these little episodes could be taken out of the play and performed on its own. They are meticulously realized, down to the smallest detail.[3]

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[1]Eric Bentley, "Introduction," p. xxvii. "The very nature of the dramatic process is hypnotic. If it were not, Brecht would not have had to devote a life-time of writing and coaching to neutralize its effects." Grossvogel, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[2]Ernest Borneman, "Credo Quia Absurdum: An Epitaph for Bertolt Brecht," *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. XXI, Spring 1959, p. 197.

[3]Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

No pains were ever spared by Brecht and his co-workers to produce the most finished and stylistically polished performance of which they were capable. By dwelling endlessly, and in a highly conscious manner, upon each detail, by bringing the critical intelligence of the actors and producers to bear upon everything, the group tried for perfection. As the producer, Brecht even had photographs and tape-recordings[1] made of the rehearsals, so that he might study them afterward to detect still other things which needed correction.

With a completely equipped theatre provided, a company numbering almost three hundred people, a yearly subsidy of more than three million marks, no required number of productions or production deadlines, and no dependence upon the box office, rehearsals in the Berliner Ensemble went through sixty to one hundred sessions spread over the two to six months prior to a production.[2]

The intent behind the extended rehearsal periods of the Ensemble was simply to produce the most complete and the best possible reading of the work being produced. It might also be that these enormously extended periods of rehearsal contributed to the 'wearing off' of empathy through the repetitiveness of the preparation process and the exhaustive nature of the character analysis which would be possible.

The audiences attending the group's performances have tended to expect just good theatre but the critics, armed with a knowledge of Brecht's earlier theories, have expected peculiar or unusual production methods and end results. The differences in the reactions of these two

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[1]"The Man Who has Everything," p. 731.

[2]Tynan, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

audiences, the one knowledgeable and the other not so much so, caused Brecht to lament late in his life,

> If the critics could only look at my theatre as the audience does, without starting out by stressing my theories, then they might well simply see theatre--a theatre, I hope, imbued with imagination, humour and meaning--and only when they began to analyse its effects would they be struck by certain innovations, which they could then find explained in my theoretical writings. I think the root of the trouble was that my plays have to be properly performed if they are to be effective, so that for the sake of (oh dear me!) a non-aristotelian dramaturgy I had to outline (calamity!) an epic theatre.[1]

In essence, Brecht here turned his back upon the highly rational and knowing frame of mind which he championed throughout the majority of his life and indicated that the natural, the human, the emotional reaction to his plays produced the most complete understanding of them. He abandoned his strict requirement for a functional Distance or a practical reaction and relied upon the artistic perceptions of even the common man.

This change in Brecht's expectations in regard to audience reactions paralleled his modifications of his theories and production methods so that the whole atmosphere of his theatre became more relaxed, less dogmatic and more aesthetic. The productions of the company reflected Brecht's changed desires.

> . . . When it came to the practice of the Ensemble and to the performance of the later plays there was little superficial sign of their being based on a distinctive theory. . . . only certain favourite methods remained to stamp this theatre as Brecht's, and they seemed more like personal idiosyncrasies than evidence of a special theatrical approach. The careful narrative clarity, the perfection of detail, the acute observation, the concrete expression of attitudes, the emotional restraint: these were the real essentials, and they might all have been aimed at, and even sometimes achieved, by producers of a more empirical school.[2]

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[1] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 248.

[2] Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

In spite of largely abandoning his own theories and modifying his practices until the Berliner Ensemble became merely a superbly trained theatrical company,

> . . . Brecht often managed, as he intended, to shed an unfamiliar light on our moral and social behaviour, illuminating, in his very personal way, that interesting and largely neglected area where ethics, politics and economics meet.[1]

He succeeded in broadening the subject matter, the production methods and, perhaps in some degree, the aesthetics of the theatre while building one of the world's leading companies. "Though Brecht violated his theory in practice, he held his theatre together by the strength of his own personality. Whether a successor can be found, only time will determine.[2]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

[2] Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

CHAPTER XI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study has dealt with three aesthetic theories: (1) Edward Bullough's Aesthetic Distance, (2) Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and (3) Bertolt Brecht's version of Epic Theatre. It has tried to explain all three ideas in a clear and concise form so that the relationships which exist among these concepts can be readily seen. It has further examined the plays and operas of the two theatre men and their methods of staging their works both in the light of their own theories and in terms of Aesthetic Distance, the theory which binds them together and clarifies their relationships to one another.

There are a remarkable number of parallels between Richard Wagner and Bertolt Brecht. Both were outstanding German writers. They were both socially oriented, concerned in a profound manner with the structure of the societies within which they lived. Each of them might, in modern terminology, be considered to have been Communistically inclined. Each of them felt that a better way of life could be evolved for mankind and each chose to use the theatre as his instrument by which to bring a new order or a new conception of life into being. They both endured political exile because of their beliefs and each wrote his major works, both theoretical and practical, while he was forbidden access to Germany and to its stage. They each did their best work while in an estranging isolation.

Both men were theatrical innovators of a high order, evolving ideas of dramatic composition and production which have had profound influences

upon the theatrical activity of much of the Western World. Their theories and methods continue to be studied and used even after their deaths.

Their startlingly divergent techniques were both based upon analyses of audiences' involvement in, and reaction to, theatrical productions and virtually every device they chose to use was intended to manipulate and control the degree of the audiences' empathic reactions. To the degree that this is true, they were both vitally concerned with Aesthetic Distance.

In part, both Wagner and Brecht evolved or modified their theories over a period of years and in a constant process of trial and error. Their pronouncements about the theatre were, as often as not, justifications of their intuitively derived procedures as much as they were formulations of a proscriptive nature for " . . . in the theatre, as elsewhere, theory does not govern art, but is deduced from the practice of the artists."[1] They each altered their ideas after their works were in fairly regular production, in both cases tending to reconcile them, in some degree, with the established norms of theatrical practice.

To discuss the ideas of such towering figures and to attempt to simplify, coordinate and regularise them or to bring them into accord even with a theory which links and unifies them is a difficult procedure. All aesthetic theories tend to be highly abstract and, consequently, somewhat intractable. But these men theorised and tried to explain what they were doing and why. If they felt that aesthetic theories were valuable in explaining their efforts, then surely the use of one more such concept

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[1]John Drinkwater, *The Art of Theatre-Going* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), p. 211.

which places their ideas in a specific relationship and perspective is not amiss. That is the whole reason for this study.

> We cannot hope to prove aesthetic theories definitely true or false by recourse to concrete instances; but there is a middle course between that and pure dialectic. One can, in a broad sense, test a given theory in practice by going directly to a variety of relevant objects of art with that one theory uppermost in mind, and by noting the extent to which that theory is borne out by one's own experience of the objects.[1]

That, of course, was the procedure used here, a direct examination of the dramas and theories in the light of Aesthetic Distance. It is hoped that the relevance of Distance to the analysis of dramatic activities has been shown to be of some value.

"The style of each art-era, as it reflects the spirit of an age, illustrates the aesthetic distance collectively established by its arts."[2] Both Wagner and Brecht found it necessary to place themselves in opposition to the Distance-limits which their publics were initially trained to accept. Both tried to enlarge the aesthetically acceptable topics and styles by consciously placing their work at one extreme of the Distance scale, Wagner deeply involved in ecstatic empathy and Brecht trying to prod his audiences into a non-involved, rational, critical state of mind. They both used plot lines and pivotal concepts which were outside the usual limits of the drama of their time.

> Obviously, there is no experience which, theoretically, cannot be utilized artistically, provided the artist knows how to distance this material for his public. Individuals in whom the power of distancing is slight will demand idealized portrayals of life and refuse their sanction of trivial incidents or commonplace characters.[3]

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[1]Thomas Munro, *Scientific Method in Aesthetics* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1928), p. 27.

[2]Michelis, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[3]Downey, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

This is, undoubtedly, the way in which Wagner viewed his audience while Brecht either found, or felt that he could create, a more detached, scientific audience for his plays. The ways in which these authors saw their audiences are indicative, perhaps, of the periodic changes of style which occur in the theatre and which each of these men tried to formulate and 'fix' for their periods. Neither one succeeded completely, but each was successful to some degree.

Perhaps the least successful portions of their efforts can be related to the social applications they sought outside of the theatre. "It seems to be the fate of the drama that audiences will frequently accept and abide by its artistic and cultural injuctions but seldom, if ever, by its political, social, religious, or economic."[1] If this is true, then both of these men are certainly subject to examination on aesthetic principles rather than those of religion, politics and economics, the principles they sought to invoke in defence and explanation of their work.

" . . . art's business is to display to us the endless beauty and interest of things, not to argue us into the adoption of this or that view of this infinite, incomprehensible world."[2] "Only as the artist expresses--and does not plead--the social wedded to its sense-embodiment is he the true artist."[3] Both of these author-directors did 'express' or embody in their works the social conditions which they felt were extant or needed by the world and both did it by controlling and manipulating the expressive, emotional content and the Distancing form of their creations. Are their

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[1]George Jean Nathan, *Encyclopaedia of the Theatre* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 227.

[2]Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist*, pp. 190-191.

[3]Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

motivating social concepts to be discounted entirely then? No, because, having given them form through aesthetic means, they have given us a more precise picture of certain eras or particular modes of thought. They have clarified and captured for us certain ways of looking at the world; they have used the artistic power of Distancing to structure otherwise nebulous ideas into expressable forms.

For emotions

> . . . to be aesthetic at all . . . they must be felt, as it were, at a distance. For this reason we can the more easily objectify and study them. They then become objects of thought in spite of their cloudy indefiniteness, and we can draw critical judgments from them.[1]

This is a process of which both of these artists would probably have approved, though they sought this end in entirely different ways. They employed the opposite ends of the Distance scale, involvement and non-involvement, to achieve essentially the same goal. But the real point is that they utilized the aesthetic concept of Distance to make their creations both artistic and informative.

> The notion of "psychical distance" as a hallmark of every artistic "projection" of experience, which Edward Bullough has developed, does not make the emotive contents typical, general, impersonal, or "static"; but it makes them conceivable, so that we can envisage and understand them without verbal helps, and without the scaffolding of an occasion wherein they figure . . .[2]

Through the application of Distance, "Art thus becomes a kind of contemplation; and its withdrawal of the artist from social activity on one plane is in the interest of a social activity upon a higher plane."[3]

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[1]Alan Reynolds Thompson, *The Anatomy of Drama* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1946), p. 49.

[2]Langer, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

[3]Henry Rago, *The Philosophy of Esthetic Individualism* (Notre Dame, Indiana: The University of Notre Dame, 1941), p. 74.

Both men, the present author feels, would have been happy with such a result.

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