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# Four Brechtian variations\*

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## 1. Beyond expressionism

Brecht's literary activity begins when the parabola of Expressionism, in the immediate post-war, had reached its apex and begun its decline. The dramas *Baal* and *Trommeln in der Nacht*, written between 1918 and 1919, are the most genuine documents of Brecht's "expressionistic manner", even if Italian criticism (but not only Italian: a Spanish scholar even went so far as to include *Mutter Courage*) often unnecessarily considered as such texts that in reality were rather distant from just such a "manner". In fact, by Brecht's third work, *Im Dickicht der Städte*, planned already two years after *Trommeln in der Nacht*, all expressionistic suggestions have been decisively and largely eliminated and instead it carries the unmistakable mark of an original style already entirely "à la Brecht". This rapidity of development is comprehensible, in our opinion, only if one point remains clear: Brecht's interest in expressionistic dramaturgy does not have so much to do with its "contents" and attitudes – too often mystical, "religious", and rather distant from his tastes and mentality – so much as with its technical experiments and its audacious innovations in the field of theatrical structures.

We have demonstrated elsewhere through a confrontation with a "classic" text of expressionist drama, Toller's *Hinkemann*, the stylistic and human measure already achieved by Brecht with *Trommeln in der Nacht*, and the profound difference that exists between the two authors if one looks at the full semantic meaning of their respective works. In the former case a uniqueness that struggles to translate itself into a concrete and precise profile, ideological and abstract wishful thinking, and generic humanity. In the latter a uni-

\* The citations from the works of Bertolt Brecht are taken from the *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, edited by Werner Hecht *et al.*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1988 (marked in the text BFA and accompanied by the indication of the volume and page number).



versality, which, far from being watered down in a symbolic void, instead draws upon the realistic dimension of the character in his human and therefore contradictory intellectual and emotional articulations. This, nevertheless, is not the best place to better rediscover the new perspective opened up by Brecht in the development of theatrical language since the break with expressionistic values is, in this specific case, an implicit though short-lived adhesion to a module that we could define as “naturalistic”. The movement from the most strictly critical phase to the strictly constructive one in the field of new linguistic research whether at the level of the “scenic” word or at the level of the “poetic” word (two levels which do not always coincide in dramatists’ works) can be understood through Brecht’s editing of the play *Im Dickicht der Städte*. One can follow the development of this process *in fieri* by observing the semantic dislocation of the first draft of the piece that was staged in Munich in 1923 and characterized by a barbaric and fable-like depiction of a modern metropolis (Chicago) open, however, to the suggestions of the most exotic and intense aromas (in the line of Villon-Rimbaud-Kipling) of a sensually evocative and magical style still close to the extremely singular atmospheres of *Baal*; through to the next staging in Berlin in 1924 that was a more limpid and concentrated affair, drier in its refutation of any and every captivating concession to color and to “clime”. For it is precisely in *Dickicht* that one discovers, moreover, the first real consciousness, the first direct and explicit document, the “incunabula” in other words, of that “epic theatre” which only in 1930 would find a provisional and hasty general systemization. Let us therefore reread the *Vorspruch* which the author placed at the play’s beginning:

Sie befinden sich im Jahre 1912 in der Stadt Chicago. Sie betrachten den unerklärlichen Ringkampf zweier Menschen und Sie wohnen dem Untergang einer Familie bei, die aus den Savannen in das Dickicht der großen Stadt gekommen ist. Zerbrechen Sie sich nicht den Kopf über die Motive dieses Kampfes, sondern beteiligen Sie sich an den menschlichen Einsätzen, beurteilen Sie unparteiisch die Kampfform der Gegner und lenken Sie Ihr Interesse auf das Finish [BFA 1, 438].



*Trommeln in der Nacht*'s by now famous “glotzt mir nicht so romantisch”, which Brecht (identifying himself for a moment with the protagonist Andreas Kragler) extrapolated from the text and projected onto the scene almost as if it were a cautionary billboard (thereby suggesting to the public the perspective from which to observe the action, the “behavior” to observe), here assumes a new and broader dimension, one we could already call – and here in full “epic theatre” mode – pedagogical; even though in this case (and not, as we will see, without a reason) it is still about a negative pedagogy, a preventive care and caution which does not indicate the moment of active intervention and “praxis”. It cannot escape the careful reader that within these “indications for use” the entire universe of Brechtian theater is contained *in nuce* just as we find it defined – almost twenty years later – in a rather overlooked paralipomenon from the *Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst* (1940) that is worth quoting here in full:

Beispiele für mechanische Mittel: Sehr helle Beleuchtung der Bühne (da eine drämmige Beleuchtung zusammen mit der völligen Verdunklung des Zuschauerraums, die dem Zuschauer den Anblick seines Nebenmanns entzieht und ihn selber vor diesem verbirgt, dem Zuschauer viel von seiner Nüchternheit nimmt) und *die Sichtbarkeit der Lichtquellen*.

Das offene Zeigen der Lampenapparatur hat Bedeutung, da es eines der Mittel sein kann, nicht gewünschte Illusion zu verhindern. Es verhindert kaum die gewünschte Konzentration. Wenn wir das Spiel der Schauspieler so beleuchten, dass die Beleuchtungsanlage ins Blickfeld des Zuschauers fällt, zerstören wir einiges von seiner Illusion, einem momentanen, spontanen, nichterprobten, wirklichen Vorgang beizuwohnen. Er sieht, es sind Anstalten getroffen, etwas zu zeigen, hier wird etwas wiederholt unter besonderen Umständen, zum Beispiel in hellstem Licht. Getroffen werden soll durch das Zeigen der Lichtquellen die Absicht des alten Theaters, sie zu verbergen. Niemand würde erwarten dass bei einer sportlichen Veranstaltung, etwa ein Boxkampf, die Lampen verdeckt werden. Wie immer die Darbietungen des neueren Theaters sich von sportlichen unter-



scheiden mögen, sie unterscheiden sich von ihnen nicht in dem Punkt, wo das alte Theater es für nötig findet, die Lichtquellen zu verstecken [BFA 22.2, 648].

A page in which, in the short space of a few lines, an extraordinarily complex experience is condensed that constructs an extremely daring bridge between tradition and modernity, marrying Shakespeare to the avant-garde theater.

If a text such as *Im Dickicht der Städte* is symptomatic, as we have argued, it has been conditioned ideologically by the fundamentals of Brechtian poetics (a sociological analysis of bourgeois structures and behaviors based on paradox as an instrument of the observer), but at the same time by a phenomenological suspension of judgment in which the moment of verification and action remains in parentheses. Herbert Ihering intuited the play's "clinical-symptomatological" (but not yet "therapeutic") strength rather well when in an article published April 30, 1927, he observed "Brecht's poetry is neither bourgeois nor anti-bourgeois, it does not affirm nor does it negate – he has completed a process of transformation which in reality has just been sketched. He is not a pathetic revolutionary. He is neither pro nor contra. He does not exalt its technical aspects nor does he negate the mechanization of our age. For him it is an obvious fact. He lives in it. For him it is the foundation, the material of creation". In an otherwise precise discourse the German critic nonetheless forgot to mention that "spirit of contradiction" that Brecht, in a lucid personal appraisal of 1954, recognized as one of the fundamental marks of his "mentality". In Brechtian phenomenological analyses, in other words, it is impossible to observe the becoming-aware-of a torn reality, of an existential "being" against which every rebellion is in vain. The words the author places in the mouth of one of *Dickicht's* protagonist's

Ich habe die Tiere beobachtet. Die Liebe, Wärme aus Körpernähe, ist unsere einzige Gnade in der Finsternis! Aber die Vereinigung der Organe ist die einzige, sie überbrückt nicht die Entzweiung der Sprache. Dennoch vereinigen sie sich, Wesen zu erzeugen, die ihnen in ihrer trostlosen Vereinzelung beistehen möchten. Und die Genera-



tionen blicken sich kalt in die Augen. Wenn ihr ein Schiff vollstopft mit Menschenleibern, daß es birst, es wird eine solche Einsamkeit in ihm sein, daß sie alle gefrieren [BFA 1, 423]

are not a desperate declaration of nihilism, just as Edward II's contemporaneous verses are not

Ach, Spencer,  
Da Worte roh sind, nur trennen Herz von Herz  
Und Verständigung uns nicht geschenkt ist  
In solcher Taubheit bleibt nur körperlich Berühren  
Zwischen den Männern. Doch auch dieses ist  
Sehr wenig und alles ist eitel [BFA 2, 55].

Rather, they reflect the attitude of one who has cleanly and definitively burned all their bridges, truncated any extension of reality within transcendence, and completely secularized the human world (there where a Benn, for example, “deconsecrates” it, but maintains the terms of “tension” intact even if under a different sign). In this sense the poem “Gegen Verführung”, which closes the youthful collection *Hauspostille* (1927), takes up the idea of just such a perspective once again in exemplary fashion:

Laßt Euch nicht verführen!  
Es gibt keine Wiederkehr.  
Der Tag steht in den Türen,  
ihr könnt schon Nachtwind spüren:  
Es kommt kein Morgen mehr.

Laßt Euch nicht betrügen!  
Das Leben wenig ist.  
Schlürft es in vollen Zügen!  
Es wird Euch nicht genügen,  
wenn Ihr es lassen müßt!

Laßt Euch nicht vertrösten!  
Ihr habt nicht zu viel Zeit!



Laßt den Moder den Erlösten!  
Das Leben ist am größten:  
Es steht nicht mehr bereit.

Laßt Euch nicht verführen  
Zu Fron und Ausgezehr!  
Was kann Euch Angst noch rühren?  
Ihr sterbt mit allen Tieren  
und es kommt nichts nachher [BFA 11, 116].

In an essay not without interesting points and happy critical openings Piero Raffa characterized the “Brechtian mentality” in its essential components as follows: “Eidos: 1) reality is experienced as a laceration of the I-world relationship. Between man and the world there exists a radical incompatibility or impossibility of coexistence. The world is uninhabitable for man. 2) This state of things is experienced as the absolute absence of value, as a radical negativity. The laceration is irrevocable: there are no other remedies to recast the two terms in a harmonious relationship. Man is condemned to live in a world empty of values. Ethos: 3) as there is no other reality outside of this one, man’s duty consists in the refutation of any evasion, even under the form of utopian perspectives. Any form of appeal to an inexistent better world is judged rhetorical. Man’s duty consists in the absolute dedication to the *hic et nunc*. His passion must be the development of a realistic awareness and the inflexible denunciation of evils in the world as it is. 4) As the laceration and negativity of the world are incurable, this passion cannot manifest itself other than through mere tonal expressions of behavior (sarcasm, irony, cynicism, etc.), and as a need for a purely implicit human integrity which denies expression”. In spite of the undeniable suggestive power of just such a critical proposition, it seems to us that in Raffa’s discourse acceptable considerations are mixed up with rather less acceptable ones. If it is true, in fact, that for Brecht “man’s duty consists in the absolute dedication to the *hic et nunc*” and the “refutation of any evasion, even under the form of utopian perspectives” (an ideological position that will be fully realized in the poetry of a text like *Der gute Mensch von*



*Sezuan*, 1938-1942), it is however no less true that he does not at all accept the idea that the “laceration and negativity of the world” are “incurable”; if he did, one would not be able to understand the meaning, other than the purely moralistic one, of an “inflexible denunciation of evils in the world”. On the contrary, Brecht’s continual return to concrete terms of the “situation” acquires a meaning precisely when understood as an efficacious and authentic premise to the active and revolutionary intervention on reality in order to transform it. Carrying out the terms and the “possibilities” of bourgeois structures and norms all the way, the dress and morals of capitalistic society, the concrete articulation of its political and economic standards – that is, consuming from within all the virtual reserves and potentialities –, what else does it mean if not establishing the steadiest bases for its “real”, and not utopian, overcoming? To employ a sports metaphor he might not have liked, Brecht warmed up for a run in order to better overcome the obstacles he had before himself. And the “alienation”, to which we will later return, is precisely the ideal place – as a concrete perspective – that *hic et nunc* that does not give in to utopia is realized. Only he who has bureaucratically sanctioned the transformation of that perspective into reality and supported utopia in order to make of it a critical arm with which to measure the present can think that the open and dialectical Brechtian problem constitutes an act of doubt, a gesture of definitive renunciation. Yet, on the other hand, whoever does not perceive that Brecht always gave a tangible human and practical mission to the sense of disappointment in much of his artistic output has failed to profoundly understand the filtered and experienced disappointment of that output. Even on a strictly poetic level the lines of “An die Nachgeborenen”

Dabei wissen wir doch:

Auch der Haß gegen die Niedrigkeit  
Verzerrt die Züge.

Auch der Zorn über das Unrecht  
Macht die Stimme heiser. Ach, wir

Die wir den Boden bereiten wollten für Freundlichkeit  
Konnten selber nicht freundlich sein.



Ihr aber, wenn es so weit sein wird  
Daß der Mensch dem Menschen ein Helfer ist  
Gedenkt unsrer  
Mit Nachsicht [BFA 12, 87]

would not be usable in their full semantic identity if denied validity and full, that is, concrete, signification as regards that perspective of renewal the poet's works – precisely in as much as they are understood in their unique punctuality of contestation –, inevitably entail. Has the extraordinary brilliance and human pregnancy of this “reversal of perspective” not perhaps been lost on too many critics and readers, which, instead of redeeming the bitter pain that the present human condition causes by sublimating it – according to a procedure dear to many “socialist realist” writers – into a gilded and manneristic “happy end”, on the contrary takes its cue precisely from confronting that which could be the life of tomorrow in order to stimulate and increase it?

If this were not the case, without a doubt those who include Brecht in the theatrical avant-garde of today would be right. But it is precisely here – not accidentally – that the two roads diverge. When Raffa believes he is able to affirm that for Brecht the laceration and the negation of the world are incurable, in reality he does nothing other than identify a typical element of neo-avantgarde ideological-structure. “I have never understood...the difference between the comic and the tragic. The comic, being the child of the absurd, seems to me to be more desperate than the tragic. The comic offers no escape-route”. This is not Brecht, but Ionesco speaking. “Tragedy presupposes guilt [...] a responsibility. [...] In our century there are no longer either guilty parties or responsible ones. No one can do anything, nor do they want to”. This is not Brecht, but Dürrenmatt speaking. “The theater can gather up today's problems only in as much as they are the problems of comedy. All the others avoid direct representation. Comedy allows for solutions, tragedy – in the case that one still believes in its being possible – no. Comedy makes possible, or rather, necessarily determines a distance and, with that, a clear comprehension of the connections”. This is not Ionesco, but Brecht



speaking. “I cannot affirm that the dramatic conceptions I, for specific reasons, call non-Aristotelian and the epic acting style with its connected conceptions represent *the* solution. One thing, however, is by this point clear: the world of today can be described to the men of today only on condition that it is described as a world that can be changed”. This is Brecht, once again, and not Dürrenmatt speaking. The dialectic suggested by Raffa between the *eidōs* of “pessimism” and the *ethos* of “pure implication” is revealed, in this manner, to be similar to the esoteric undressing of that more concrete materialist dialectic that Brecht himself proposes in the drama *Die Mutter* (1932): the dialectic between the “not yet” and the “today itself”.

If this is the way things are, and it does not seem to us that they can be different after what we have stated, the importance of a text like *Im Dickicht der Städte* becomes clear: it is the real determinant between one side of Brecht’s dramatic production and the other, and contains within itself all the ambiguity that every determinant contains. In this specific case, the progression on the level of dramaturgical technique and of the maturation of the expressive means is without a doubt more relevant than the strictly ideological progression. If the attitude of “detached participant” (if we can call it such) that Brecht theoretically establishes and practically realizes on the concrete plane of artistic creation in *Dickicht* represents the necessary premise for a renewed vision of reality and, above all, of its ties, it has not yet devoured the conscious elaboration of the moment of “praxis”. The *Verfremdung* [alienation], which in *Trommeln in der Nacht* (and that the self-same author recognized) is practically absent save for the finale and that here begins to take shape as a concrete need of the play, must still make clear – through the severe test of a multiform poetic experimentation and the connected maturation of a critical methodology – all of the revolutionary tension it virtually possesses.

## 2. “Alienation”

That the key to Brechtian poetics is contained in the notion of *Verfremdung* and the related ways of incorporating it into the plays under the most congenial and satisfying guises at the level of artis-



tic language is by now the most solidly acquired heritage of the most sensible and aware *Brecht-Forschung*. In some cases it has also been realized that its validity goes well beyond the field of “Non-Aristotelian dramaturgy” (the Brechtian poetic of drama) and the “epic theatre” (the Brechtian poetic of the performance), as is easily understandable from its active and energetic presence in other linguistic fields (poetry, fiction), as well as on other levels of semantic stratification (lexis, syntax).

Keeping to the concept of “alienation” will mean, in the first place, maintaining in Brecht a constant opening toward a conception of life as a node of contradictory complexes and as a source of perpetual wonder even there where – in the fixed didactic plays, for example, and in general in the “Cartesian” phase of the didactic theatre with his insistence on “clear and distinct” ideas – the interpretation of reality would seem to make itself less “available” and to almost have metaphysical and absolute values. It is no accident that the Guide in *Lehrstück. Die Ausnahme und die Regel* (1930) will say:

In dem System, das sie gemacht haben  
Ist Menschlichkeit eine Ausnahme.  
Wer sich also menschlich erzeigt  
Der trägt den Schaden davon.  
Fürchtet für jeden, ihr  
Der freundlich aussieht!  
Haltet ihn zurück  
Der da jemand helfen will!  
Neben dir drustet einer: schließe schnelle deine Augen!  
Verstopf dein Ohr: neben dir stöhnt jemand!  
Halte deinen Fuß zurück: man ruft dich um Hilfe!  
Wehe dem, der sich da vergisst! Er  
Gibt einem Menschen zu trinken und  
Ein Wolf trinkt [BFA 3, 258].

And so the motif of “alienation” successfully inserts itself into the voluntarily iconoclastic and unmerciful plot of this ideological setting:



Wir berichten euch sogleich  
Die Geschichte einer Reise. Ein Abenteuer  
Und zwei Ausgebeutete unternehmen sie.  
Betrachtet genau das Verhalten dieser Leute:  
Findet es befremdend, wenn auch die Regel.  
Unverständlich, wenn auch die Regel.  
Selbst die kleinste Handlung, scheinbar einfach  
Betrachtet mit Mißtrauen! Untersucht, ob es nötig ist  
Besonders das Übliche!  
Wir bitten euch ausdrücklich, findet  
Das immerfort Vorkommende nicht natürlich!  
Denn nichts werde natürlich genannt  
In solcher Zeit blutiger Verwirrung  
Verordneter Unordnung, planmäßiger Willkür  
Entmenschter Menschheit, damit nichts  
Unveränderlich gelte [BFA 3, 237].

Whence the “strange” conclusion:

So endet  
Die Geschichte einer Reise.  
Ihr habt gehört und ihr habt gesehen.  
Ihr saht das Übliche, das immerfort Vorkommende.  
Wir bitten euch aber;  
Was nicht fremd ist, findet befremdlich!  
Was gewöhnlich ist, findet unerklärlich!  
Was da üblich ist, das soll euch erstaunen.  
Was die Regel ist, das erkennt als Mißbrauch.  
Und wo ihr den Mißbrauch erkannt habt  
Da schafft Abhilfe! [BFA 3, 260].

It is enough to render groundless the thesis of those who assign a substantially polemical aim to the Brechtian theory of “alienation” as regards an established theatrical praxis and who identify its roots in a particular and defined situation of German scenic development and its destructive force in the subversive value that it assumes as re-



gards that development (Esslin). It is, however, true that when Brecht, in the famous XLVIII paragraph of *Kleines Organon für das Theater* (1948), suggests that “In keinem Augenblick läßt er [der Schauspieler] es zur restlosen Verwandlung in die Figur kommen. Ein Urteil ‘er spielte den Lear nicht, er war Lear’, wäre für ihn vernichtend” [BFA 23, 83] he is directly calling into question (though he does not quote him) no less than Alfred Kerr, the pope of 20<sup>th</sup> century German dramatic criticism, to whom, in Hans Meyer’s witty words, the “incriminating affirmation” in quotation marks was entirely directed; the why would seem to spontaneously reconnect the entire context, in addition to its simply being “dated”, to the field of an unequivocally “national” *status*. Nevertheless, if nothing else, one cannot but recall that the most conscious and mature elaboration of the concept of alienation (as we find it formulated in the comments to the theatrical texts and in the theoretical-programmatic writings) occurs right in the middle of Brecht’s period of exile when an explicit and polemical reference to German scenic practice would not have made much sense; yet, on the other hand, he always sharpened the “ecumenical” range of his “Anti-Aristotelianism”. Furthermore, always ready to expose the sources of this theory, in an unpublished diary entry dated August 2, 1940, the same author reminds us “the alienation effect is an ancient artistic method known to comedy, to certain records of popular art and to the praxis of Asiatic theater”. If anything, it would be helpful to reexamine, in a completely different direction of research, the most popular hypotheses (from Willett, for example, and in a slightly doubtful form from Grimm, a hypothesis recently rejected by the Soviet scholar Fradkin) of “alienation”’s direct derivation from the *priëm ostranneniija* that Viktor Shklovsky elaborated in the by now legendary times of Russian formalism, particularly attractive in the context of today’s extraordinarily lively interest in structuralist theories. The last word on the actual state of relative studies and documentation, however, cannot yet be given; the attention given today to structuralism should not induce us to too offhandedly attribute responsibility for ideas born perhaps in the crucible of different intellectual experiences. In particular, Willett’s thesis that states “the concept itself, like the term that expresses it, appeared for



the first time in Brechtian language after his trip to Moscow in 1935” is clearly refuted, in our opinion, by the fragmentary essay *Die dialektische Dramatik* (1929-1930) where one can find an indirect definition of the *Verfremdungseffekt* destined to show up again, in part, in the same terms in the later *Straßenszene*: “Die dialektische Dramatik setzte ein mit vornehmlich formalen, nicht stofflichen Versuchen. Sie arbeitete ohne Psychologie, ohne Individuum und löste, betont episch, die Zustände in Prozesse auf. Die großen Typen, welche als möglichst fremd, also möglichst objektiv (nicht so, dass man sich in sie hinein fühlen konnte) dargestellt wurden, sollten durch ihr Verhalten zu anderen Typen gezeigt werden. Ihr Handeln wurde als nicht selbstverständlich, sondern als auffällig hingestellt” [BFA 21, 439]. One must also not forget that in 1935 the liquidation of the accumulated experiences of the Soviet avant-garde of the “twenties”, and in particular of formalist theories, was by that time a point of fact: from 1930 onward Shklovsky himself rescinded his own positions publishing the *Monument to a Scientific Error*, while the Soviet Writers Congress (1934) aligned itself to Gorky’s doctrine of “proletarian humanism”, defining Dostoevsky “a traitor”. Yet, on the other hand, there is no doubt that Shklovsky’s theses on the purpose of art as a “liberation of things from [the] automatism” of perception, and, above all, on the necessary techniques for attaining such liberation (first and foremost the *priëm ostrannenija*), seem to coincide precisely with Brecht’s idea of *Verfremdung*: “Once a thing has been perceived more than once, one begins to perceive in terms of mere acknowledgment. The thing is in front of us, we know that it is there, but we do not see it any longer, and therefore can say nothing about it. [...] In order to resurrect our perception of life, in order to render things perceivable, in order to make a stone a stone, we have what we call art. The point of art is to give us a sensation of the thing, a sensation that must be vision and not only acknowledgment. To obtain this result art uses two tricks: the alienation of things and the complication of forms with which it tends to render perception more difficult and to prolong its duration” (*A Theory of Prose*, 1925). The philological problem, in any event, remains open, but the temptation to connect the genesis of “alienation” to the climate of the Middle European



avant-garde between the 1920s and 1930s (and it was Berlin that hosted Mejerchol'd and Tretyakov, Mayakovsky and Schlovsky in those years) is without a doubt strong.

However, whether it also concerns classical French tragedy – which, according to Sartre, contains the active principle of Brechtian “formalism”, or Diderot’s *Pardoxe sur le comédien* whose importance Esslin argues –, that which is relevant to our discussion is the observation of the “universal” vocation of that principle, its complicated ascendancy, its cosmopolitan right of citizenship. It will also be a good idea to keep its latitudinal and extensive value in mind, not in the strict play of direct derivations and indisputable authorships, but in the larger intellectual circulation of specific ideological motives as well as in the spontaneous and parallel – when not too dissimilar – spurt of reactions to the homogenous structural conditions (even if those reactions were at times considerably confused). More than to expressionist dramatic technique and its general theories, the alienation effect – in which some people have wanted “in no small part” to see an “expressionistic derivation” (Mittner) or even “the punctual heir of expressionist language” (Raffa) – should be re-connected to certain aspects of Pirandellian theater, to his insistence on humor as an instrument which qualifies the theater not as a “mirror *of* life” (the canonical definition of old and new naturalism), but as the “mirror *for* life”; that is, the intentional formulation of the same in the specific modalities of artistic language in order to thus escape the mystification that its structures would have imposed in the field of faithful imitation. A position that is not really all that substantially distant from – in Roland Barthes’ lucid words – that of Brechtian poetics: “For Brecht [...] art today – that is to say, in a historical conflict where human dis-alienation is at play – must be a contro-natura, an *antiphysis*. Brecht’s formalism is a radical protest against the bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie’s way of presenting themselves; in a still alienated society art must be critical, must remove every illusion, even that of ‘nature’. The sign must be partially arbitrary, otherwise one will fall back into an art of expression, an art of essential illusion”. Having said that, however, their profound and radical differences



must not be ignored. It has been affirmed, and rightly so, that Pirandello was the first – in contemporary theater – to explore the demystification of theatrical illusion all the way, theorizing and practicing the principle of representation as a conscious fiction. In that he preceded Brecht who, if anything, would have “reduced the distance”. “The conscious fiction,” Luigi Ferrante observes, “was the great change Pirandello brought to the theater of the individual and to its set of problems; Brecht brought awareness into society and its history. One must not try to create analogies between these two writers who were so different in thought and language, but more generally consider their acceptance of the conflict between passion and rationality, between life and the scene: Pirandello brings theater to the theater, Brecht, in order to save time and close the gap of a similar confrontation, does not hesitate to give us history in the stage directions and ‘epic’ illusion to the scene”. Yet, as much as Pirandello is often overly “theatrical” in his process of “disillusion”, as much as he is tied to the dead convention of the stage, how positively theatrical Brecht is in this his recovery of the vital sense – and therefore of the artifice as well – of the scene! It is not the author of *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* who is the modern and conscious heir to Commedia dell’arte, but that weaver of the highest “morality” of our time: *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*, *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis*, *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, *Das Leben des Galilei*.

The principal intent governing the *Verfremdungseffekt* is in any event demystified in the highest and deepest sense of the word, and in that we once again find – there is no doubt – the original cell from which the “epic theater” in all its rich implications will develop. The alienation effect breaks through – and this is the decisive point of departure – the progressive state of paralysis that traditional (Aristotelian) theater forces upon the spectator. If within today’s refined advertising techniques the “hidden persuader” is concealed in the folds of a series of varied mediations so as to generate within the consumer the impression that his needs are being met and satisfied, in reality the exact opposite is the case and that illusion is a part of the new system of “circumvention”. In the theatrical spectacle the public, having abandoned all discretion, finds nothing wrong with



the persuader presenting himself in all of his crude immediacy and that with just such crude immediacy he exposes his trick, hypnotizing the spectator, so to speak, and forcing him to dance at his will, just like the sorcerer Cipolla in Thomas Mann's novella. The applause is the supreme and totalitarian sanction of this cult, the sacrificial homage to the ritual of the scene and the priests celebrating it. Thus in the *Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst* Brecht will say: "Voraussetzung für die Anwendung des V-Effekts zu dem angeführten Zweck ist, dass Bühne und Zuschauerraum von allem 'Magischen' gesäubert werden und keine 'hypnotischen Felder' entstehen" [BFA 22.2, 641]. However, when writing on the great Mei Lan-fang's acting in *Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst* (1937) Brecht had already observed that Lan-fang ignored "the hypnotic effect" and the "mysticism of the scenic transfiguration", adding "Der chinesische Artist befindet sich nicht in Trance". It is useless to add that this process of demystification is developed on every level of the play: "Der V-Effekt," Brecht – restating some of the fundamental experiences of the German scene in the 1920s – writes in the aforementioned essay, "wurde im deutschen epischen Theater nicht nur durch den Schauspieler, sondern auch durch Musik (Chöre, Songs) und die Dekoration (Zeitgetafeln, Film usw.) erzeugt" [BFA 22.1-2, 205-206]. One could say that the general task of the *Verfremdung* is to always present the play as a conscious fiction: the acting thus does not identify the actor with the character, but gives him an essentially "deictic" function (he must not "relive" his part, but "demonstrate" it); the music must "contradict" the reality of the "poetic" climate (apparently) created by the scene, and reveal its true nature; and the scenography, finally, does not tend to completely reproduce the "world" nor simply reduce it to an abstract simplification, but aims at balancing itself between alluding to the world in as much as it is a necessary point of reference (according to that technique of *pars pro toto* that is easily identifiable in large zones of contemporary artistic research) and calling attention to theatrical artifice with the obvious exhibition of the stagecraft (light sources, etc.). By means of this original and highly personal perspective Brecht distances himself from both scenic symbolism – which a large part of contemporary



theater still indulges in because the element present on the stage is never an abstraction, a concentration, a symbol of a greater semantic circuit, but rather a concrete object, precisely identifiable in its precise and settled value – as well as from Constructivism *et similia*, since the technical structures of the scene are not (as for a Mejerchol'd or a Tairov in Russia, or even for a Jeßner in Germany) plastic occasions and lines of force within the dynamic of the play that finish in order to flow into a new, even if different “symbolism”; rather, they construct – in order to enter directly into the game of representation – the self-same “historicizing” element.

It is peculiar to have to note at this point that almost no one has understood the real import of this Brechtian proposal, the effective dimensions within which it – even if through a slow process of maturation that sometimes pushed the author onto difficult and possibly even mistaken paths – little by little acquired its final form. Moreover, it sounds almost anachronistic to have to dispute the accusation – to this day still leveled against him – of an arid rationality incapable of bearing the weight that, in the game of the human adventure, emotion always has. If we remember just how many still hold these positions, which from that distant 1930 onward – sketching in the *Anmerkungen zur Oper 'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahogony'* the most sensible points of divergence between the dramatic and epic forms of theater – Brecht was preoccupied with pointing out did not indicate “absolute contrasts, but only the manner in which the accents are moved”, it is worthwhile underlining how he repeatedly informed people of the need to reaffirm and specify such necessary distinctions, assigning full right of citizenship, next to *Ratio* and *Gefühl* (“not only mysticism generates emotions” he observed in *Bemerkungen über die chinesische Schauspielkunst*, 1936), and specifying the concrete terms within which *Einfühlung* could have a place. “Einerseits,” we read in a posthumous diary entry from October 17, 1940, “kommt nämlich der *Einfühlungsakt* auch unter Verwertung rationeller Elemente vor, andererseits kann der V-Effekt auch rein gefühlmäßig gesetzt werden. Stanislawski benutzt für die Einfühlung lange Analysen, und bei den Panoramagemälden der Jahrmärkte (“Nero betrachtet den Brand Roms”, “Erschießung des Anarchisten



Ferrer”, “Das Erdbeben von Lissabon”) ist der V-Effekt reines Gefühl. In dem aristotelischen Theater ist die Einfühlung auch eine geistige, das nichtaristotelische Theater benutzt auch gefühlmäßige Kritik” [BFA 26, 438]. So, over the course of a dramaturgical discussion in 1954 which, departing from the staging of Johannes R. Becher’s drama *Winterschlacht*, finished with the confrontation of some of the central questions of Brechtian theatrical poetics, the writer could calmly affirm that

der Gegensatz zwischen Vernunft und Gefühl besteht nur in ihren unvernünftigen Köpfen und nur infolge ihres höchst zweifelhaften Gefühlsleben. Sie verwechseln die schönen und mächtigen Gefühle, welche die Literaturen der großen Zeiten widerspiegeln, mit ihren eigenen, imitierten, verschmutzten und krampfigen, welche das Licht der Vernunft allerdings zu scheuen haben. Und Vernunft nennen sie etwas, was nicht wirkliche Vernunft ist, da es großen Gefühlen entgegensteht. Beide, Vernunft und Gefühl, sind im Zeitalter des Kapitalismus, als dieses seinem Ende zu ging, entartet und einen schlechten, unproduktiven Widerspruch zueinander geraten. Die aufsteigende neue Klasse hingegen und jene, die mit ihr zusammen kämpfen, haben es mit Vernunft und Gefühl in großem produktivem Widerspruch zu tun. Uns drängen die Gefühle zur äußersten Anspannung der Vernunft, und die Vernunft reinigt unsere Gefühle [BFA 23, 338].

By departing from these presuppositions it will now be possible to understand, in all of its importance, the meaning of what may be the happiest Brechtian definition of the *Verfremdungseffekt*: “The alienation effect does not function,” Brecht writes, “under the form of an absence of emotions, but rather under the form of emotions that do not need to be those of the character represented. A scene of pain can arouse feelings of joy in the spectator, a scene of fury disgust”. Which is, in the case in point, the right way of observing, for example, the figure of Mother Courage, a figure whose individual drama is not aimed at evoking echoes of shared emotion and pity in the spectator, but the refutation of this emotion and this pity



as the waste – arising from a profoundly historical and dialectic vision – of the human and social condition that had elevated them to such paradox.

### 3. Brecht and Stanislavski

The reference to Stanislavski and to the part that absolves the analytical-intellectual element in his theory of identification conclusively re-proposes, on the other hand, the problem of the relationships that exist between two such different conceptions of theater. It seems to us that up until today the problem has been posed for the most part in substantially “political” and not scientific terms. On the one hand, that is, in Brecht’s attitude in relation to Stanislavski’s principles people have wanted to see a challenge to the cultural policies of the German Democratic Republic; and, on the other, have attempted too superficially and simply to resolve the contrast that would save Brechtian orthodoxy at all costs from the privileges official Marxist positions in this particular sector of artistic activity gave, and without any doubt continue to give, to Stanislavski’s “system”, being as it is both closer and more congenial in its substance and methods to the canons of “socialist realism”. There is no doubt that Brecht’s interest in that “system” is in part connected to a specific “situation” of German theatrical culture: it is no accident that his “Stanislavskian studies” were almost entirely born between the years 1951 – 1953 and that they were the pillars of the conference held by the Deutsche Akademie der Künste of Berlin between April 17 and 19, 1953, to discuss the most suitable means of assimilating the teachings of the great Russian man of theater. Meditating on themes discussed at this conference, Brecht could observe “gerade wir Deutschen, deren Theater zwischen ideenlosem Naturalismus und purem Idealismus schwankt, können da von Stanislawski viel lernen” [BFA 23, 237] (*Einige Gedanken zur Stanislawski-Konferenz*, 1953). On the other hand, however, one cannot deny that in his confrontation with the brilliant master of the Moscow Art Theatre research themes and less “occasional” reflections emerge – more profoundly tied, that is, to the “classical” Brechtian set of problems –, bringing to light a



more advanced and, in any event, new phase of development. Here it is sufficient to mention the dialectical relationship that is established between *Verfremdung* and *Einfühlung* according to a line of research that was certainly developed from 1936 onward and that recovered the moment of identification as an indispensable presupposition of his successive critical distance. Empathy thus seems necessary in a determined phase of rehearsal when the actor “identifies” with his part in order to then reemerge thanks to alienation, that is, to its precise “social” collocation within a context of human relationships; renouncing the essential function, even if subordinated, of that phase, one risks giving “nur die Kritik der Figur und nicht die Figur” (*Einfühlung*, 1953). Furthermore, the moment of identification is not “resolved” without traces in the synthesis of the alienated acting, since “Der Schauspieler steht ja tatsächlich auf der Bühne als Schauspieler und als Stückfigur zugleich, und dieser Widerspruch muss sich in seinem Bewusstsein vorfinden; er macht die Gestalt recht eigentlich lebendig” [BFA 25, 580] (*Das ‘Kleine Organon’ und Stanislavskis System*, 1953); and this, in the end, is the key to understanding characters like Puntilla and Mother Courage, gifted as they are with a full-blooded vitality in the subtle and complex play of alienation that sustains them.

With the desire to now scrutinize the terms of that *controversy* at the subjective level of the theory, it is appropriate to depart from the quotation of Brecht’s text *Was unter anderem vom Theater Stanislavskis gelernt werden kann* (1952), which in its extremely concise and emphatic form it is better to quote in full:

1. Der Sinn für das Dichterische eines Stücks. Selbst naturalistischen Stücken, die Stanislavskis Theater nach dem Zeitgeschmack zu spielen hatte, verlieh die Inszenierung dichterische Züge; niemals verfiel es in platte Reportage. Bei uns in Deutschland gewinnen oft selbst die klassischen Stücke keinen Glanz.
2. Das Verantwortungsgefühl der Gesellschaft gegenüber. Stanislavski lehrte den Schauspielern die gesellschaftliche Bedeutung des Theaterspielens. Die Kunst war ihm nicht Selbstzweck, aber er wusste, dass auf dem Theater kein Zweck erreicht wird außer durch Kunst.



3. Das Ensemblespiel der Stars. In Stanislawskis Theater gab es nur Stars – große und kleine. Er zeigte, dass das Einzelspiel nur zu voller Wirkung kommen kann durch das Zusammenspiel.

4. Wichtigkeit der großen Linie und des Details. Jedem Stück gab das Moskauer Künstlertheater eine gedankenvolle Konzeption und eine Fülle fein ausgearbeiteter Details. Das eine ist nichts ohne das andere.

5. Die Verpflichtung zur Wahrheit. Stanislawski lehrte, dass der Schauspieler sich selbst und die Menschen, die er darstellen will, genauestens kennen muss und dass das eine aus dem anderen kommt. Nichts, was der Schauspieler nicht aus der Beobachtung holt oder was nicht von der Beobachtung bestätigt wird, ist wert, vom Publikum beobachtet zu werden.

6. Der Einklang von Natürlichkeit und Stil. In Stanislawskis Theater paarte sich schöne Natürlichkeit mit großer Bedeutung. Als Realist schreckte er nie zurück von der Darstellung des Häßlichen, aber er stellte es mit Armut dar.

7. Darstellung der Wirklichkeit als voll von Widersprüchen. Stanislawski begriff die Kompliziertheit und Differenziertheit des gesellschaftlichen Lebens und wusste sie darzustellen, ohne sich darin zu verlieren. Alle seine Aufführungen ergeben Sinn.

8. Die Wichtigkeit des Menschen. Stanislawski war ein überzeugter Humanist, und als solcher führte er sein Theater auf den Weg zum Sozialismus.

9. Die Bedeutung der Weiterentwicklung der Kunst. Das Moskauer Künstlertheater schloß nie auf seinen Lorbeeren. Stanislawski entwickelte für jede Aufführung neue Kunstmittel. Aus seinem Theater gingen so bedeutende Künstler wie Wachtangow hervor, welche ihrerseits die Kunst ihres Lebens völlig frei weiterentwickelten [BFA 23, 167-168].

Brecht touches upon the “dialectic” of the Stanislavskian conception of acting in a discussion with his collaborators working on a study of the first scene of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* (a text whose importance we have already mentioned in other works) there where, in relation to the figure of the protagonist, he observes: “Ein Detail für viele: Da



von seinem Stolz die Rede ist, spüren wir nach, wo er Demut zeigt, nach dem Stanislawski, der von dem Darsteller des Geizigen verlangte, er solle ihn zeigen, wo er großzügig ist". And on the motive of the "artistic necessity" that must also govern the most socially dedicated work, and which he believed to have seen in Stanislawski's theatrical praxis ("Die Kunst war ihm nicht Selbstzweck, aber er wußte, daß auf dem Theater kein Zweck erreicht wird außer durch Kunst") [BFA 23, 166] – connected to the other by "grace" or "artistry" or "poeticity" with which the Russian director confronted the problem of realistic representation, even of the ugly ("als Realist schreckte er nie zurück von der Darstellung des Häßlichen, aber er stellte es mit Anmut dar") – in a commentary Brecht returns to the production of Lenz's *Hofmeister* for the Berliner Ensemble, explaining: "Neuerdings untersuchen wir Kunstwerke überhaupt nicht mehr nach ihrer poetischen (künstlerischen) Seite hin und begnügen uns auch noch mit Werken, die für das Theater keinerlei artistischen Reiz mehr haben. Werke und Aufführungen, die keinerlei poetischen Reiz mehr haben. Werke und Aufführungen solcher Art mögen nun ihre Wirkungen haben, aber es können kaum tiefe sein, auch nicht in politischer Richtung. Es ist nämlich eine Eigentümlichkeit der theatralischen Mittel, dass sie Erkenntnisse und Impulse in Form von Genüssen vermitteln; die Tiefe der Erkenntnis und des Impulses entspricht der Tiefe des Genusses" [BFA 24, 380]. In addition to some affinity here, of course, one may discover some motives which, more than being useful cues for a general comparison, lead one to think (and it is a hypothesis that should be seriously examined philologically) that Brecht attributed intentions and merits to Stanislawski in these pages that, more than being Stanislawski's, are in reality his own. In particular, it could be that Brecht had wanted to contrast the great Russian director's artistic excellence against his gray and scholastic German imitators and above all lay claim to the legitimacy of original research in the field of expressive means attributing it, with a unique stress, to Stanislawski himself ("Stanislawski entwickelte für jede Aufführung neue Kunstmittel") [BFA 23, 168]; in addition to yet again criticizing those who wanted to imprison theatrical art in an easy and tired repetition of paradigms. In reality it is a "self-portrait" and explicitly connected to that which



Brecht once defined “the sovereign duty of a model”, the small chapter he included in his *Vorschläge für die Stanislavski-Konferenz* (1953): “Aus der Arbeitsweise Stanislavskis muss das übernommen werden, was die individuelle Arbeitsweise unserer Regisseure und Schauspieler fördert, nicht das, was sie hindern kann. Keine Aufführung, die nur nach der Methode Stanislavskis aufgebaut wurde, hat die geringste Chance, einer Stanislavski-Aufführung zu gleichen, wenn sie nicht eine individuelle künstlerische Handschrift zeigt, ebenso unverkennbar wie die Stanislavskis” [BFA 23, 233-234].

Nevertheless, passing from theory to praxis, it is certain that Brecht’s concrete creative work as a writer and as a man of the theater re-proposes, in new forms and without a doubt ones more congenial to the modern mentality, some needs that also constitute the most valid and lasting inheritance of Stanislavski’s “system”: the dialectical representation of reality (it is no accident that Brecht later judged the definition of “epic theater” as insufficient and sought another that might better express the dialectical character of his conception), the instant of verisimilitude that could not not identify itself – in the field of a mature reflection on the problems of art – with the necessity of style and form; with, in the end, the achievement of the poetic, the real and effective content of the work of art. In this higher sense the open prospect of Galvano della Volpe’s intelligent *aperçus* thus establishes a fruitful indication of work and research stating “in harmony with what came before [...] the new acting technique advocated by Brecht is comprehensible, a synthesis of Enlightenment-like and Diderot-esque ‘paradox’ and Stanislavskian ‘verity’”, as perhaps – in Philippe Ivernel’s words – “Brechtian acting technique is not opposed to that of Stanislavski, but a complement to it”.

#### 4. “Die Mutter” or rather, art and/or politics

Indeed, a reconsideration of the critical relationship between Brecht and the realistic Gorkian-Stanislavskian tradition seems necessary when dealing with a key text like *Die Mutter*. That obviously entails yet again taking up a rather complex discourse (that is here impossible to even touch upon) around a decisive moment in the



Brechtian political-intellectual itinerary: the phase of the “didactic plays”. Referring the reader to other pages this paper’s author has written, it is sufficient to mention here that at the present moment (1971) the social use of Brecht’s theater seems to us to be ever more divergent from (in some specific points) the historical *judgment* of that use within the perspective of a trajectory that by this point is, at least subjectively, finished. The *Lehrstücke*, above all when compared to the great texts of “maturity”, are obvious proof: while the last ones appear ever more consumable by the omnivorous apparatus of the System – compromised by ambiguous ideological operations and reduced to the function of *engagée* representations or to the object of elegant exercises of style –, the first ones in a sense offer a scarcer and more slippery pretext to the processes of commercialization underway on an international scale and furthermore wind up being, objectively, better connected *in situazione*. The reawakening, on great fronts, of the struggle of the working-class, the maturation of an ever more aware and advanced class conflict, the clearer design of a trade union initiative that is slowly developing into a political project: all these today are pushing theatrical models like *Die Ausnahme und die Regel* or *Die Maßnahme* to the foreground. Not of course in the sense that they suggest obligatory behavior for a revolutionary vision that does not allow other choices; but rather, if anything, in the clear sense indicated by Barthes when he writes that “his [Brecht’s] morality is not at all catechistic, for the most part it is strictly questioning,” and that “Brecht’s moral role is to fiercely pose a question in the full face of a fact”. Since (it is still Barthes speaking) “capitalistic society will last, communistic society is changing, revolutionary action must always live, and in a quasi-institutional way, with the norms of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois morality”. It is therefore in the “small space” of that “quasi” that we see – paradoxically – “destiny” position itself within a time of the working class’s strategy and Brecht’s art: the same space in which – in the Sukhlinov workshops of *Die Mutter* to the eve of the strike against the reduction of wages – the reformist Karpov, union organizer, and the simple laborer Anton Rybin angrily compete.

Nevertheless, “managing” this small space is not possible (here is the second paradox) with the simple Words of Politics: on the con-



trary, an articulated syntax that will give us real instruments of comprehension and struggle is required. Here one discovers the ulterior and crucial reason for the *Lehrstücke's* actuality, pieces that are not only the pinnacle of Brecht's works from a formal point of view (Cases), but, moving the discourse from the aesthetic plane to the properly semiological one, construct the first and most radical affirmation of his base "anti-naturalism" according to the aforementioned words of Barthes' and following on what Brecht himself had stated in the fragmentary essay on *Die dialektische Dramatik*, composed in the years in which the "didactic pieces" were being seen through to fruition: "Die dialektische Dramatik setzte ein mit vornehmlich formalen, nicht stofflichen Versuchen" [BFA 21, 439]. Which is an effective paradox (the third) to invert the principles of the romantic philosophy of art and therefore the content in the form (following a blueprint that may bring us once again back to Della Volpe), and moreover to liberate the Sklovskian thesis on the "complication of form" from every suspicion of empty verbal funambulism.

Therefore it is not pure coincidence that the newest scenic experiments, abandoning the tempting gastronomical suggestions of an opulent Brechtian tradition, tend to privilege the youthful works (even with that margin of ambiguity that such an operation entails) and those indeed of the "middle phase": in their concise and classical austerity, in fact, they contain a flexible and differentiated richness of linguistic planes that is anything but exhausted. In particular, *Die Mutter* – whose protagonist Benjamin has caught sight of "die fleischgewordene Praxis", and that certainly constitutes an important step forward toward the full and coherent design of a theater *within* history – may be the first example (as we have said at other times) "of a conscious 'gestural' research capable of translating pure ideal thoughts into concrete scenic figurations of life and for life".

But conforming to the experimental field that Brecht traces with the *Lehrstücke* within the "epic theater" is his external plan to seek a *specific* speaker: homologous or, at most, identical. Above all, from the point of view of an actualizing and functional perspective, we in fact agree with Bruno Schacherl that "[in] the *Lehrstücke*, the didactic choices are not only, as the majority of critics maintain, a flight



forward (or backward) to propaganda, the negation of art and its reduction to a direct political message, or an almost Christian-like act of humility in order to rediscover the roots of a popular art outside of Dada, expressionist, Rimbaudian or generically 'avantgarde' styles that his youthful stylistic research had been inspired by. Rather, it concerns a structural choice, the first exploration of the new frontiers of theater in the age of revolutions and 'class war'. The essential thing is the attempt to establish a new relationship between the scene and the audience, the discovery – in concrete action, in theatrical and political action – that the same intuition (present from the very first texts onward, but already technically brilliant in his transcription of Marlowe's *Edward II* as well as being by that point fully mature on the theoretical plane as well) of the epic form cannot, under the pain of consuming itself, remain on the stage, but must, so to speak, find its legs with which to walk, even if they are only the small singers of the workers' choruses".

Beyond any suspicions of "mass theater" or amateur working-class actors, works like *Die Mutter* once again raise the possibility of opening a direct discourse (by direct we mean in terms of "contents" and not of "form") with a diverse audience, eliminating on the one hand the false problem of *political theater* (in its various guises: documentary theater, street theater, guerilla theater) and replacing it with the *function of theater* (to be verified, obviously, in its real spaces of movement); and on the other identifying an ulterior socio-political referent to its discourse, *another* circuit (which is quite a different thing, it is important to note, from the "alternative circuit" of which one too often speaks). Only by expressing the struggle, by specifying its objectives and thereby rendering criticism's arms ever more effective, will it be possible to realize – through patient, daily work – the project that Pelagia Vlassova sees, justifiably, in a time both close and far away: "The simple thing / that it is difficult to do".

1961-1971