

and miseries of Paul and Pauline Christianity. For, perhaps surprisingly in a screenplay dedicated to Paul, Pasolini shows hardly any interest in the problem of law, focusing instead on naked power, domination and the temptations of conformity. Reflecting on these issues through the medium of law would seem to Pasolini an alleviation or even a diversion. The screenplay then rarely cites from the Letter to Romans, and then only in the final scenes set in New York/Rome and even then with little attention to the disquisitions on the law. The subdued citation from the famed discourse on the aporias of the law, Romans 7:7–12, is immediately followed by a scene of celebration between Satan and Luke. They see in Paul's mumbled deduction of the holiness of the law the definitive step towards the liquidation of Christ's legacy and a welcome diminution of its potential to resist power. They drink a toast to the Church and get drunk on champagne, 'evoking all the crimes of the Church: a huge and long list of criminal popes, of compromises of the Church with power, of bullying, violence, repressions, ignorance, dogmas. At the end the two are completely drunk and they laugh thinking of Paul who is still there, travelling round the world preaching and organizing'. Towards the end of

the screenplay, then, Paul returns as a holy fool, but this time working unknowingly for the devil.

The 1968 *Plan for a Film about Saint Paul* ends in New York as the Rome of the contemporary Empire, where 'the state of injustice that dominates in a slave society like that of Imperial Rome can be symbolized by racism and the condition of blacks'. Paul intervenes in this struggle and is imprisoned and finally judicially murdered: 'Saint Paul will suffer martyrdom in the middle of the bustle of a large city.' In the revised 1974 *Outline of a Screenplay* Rome is still New York and Paul is still in prison, but the execution is now extra-judicial and far more attention paid to the 'desperate and slimy faces of the servants of Power' and the deserted city of 'skyscrapers in the dust' where Power reigns. The distinction between the endings is critical – the former is classically Pauline with its reference to the injustice of the law executed in the midst of the crowded metropolis but where even so the 'word God resounds (or starts to resound)', while the latter at the hands of naked and sweaty Power is closer to Pasolini with its final aesthetic redemption not in the name of God but in the 'small rosy puddle, in which the drops of Paul's blood continue to fall'.

Howard Caygill

War and commas

Hanns Eisler in Conversation with Hans Bunge, *Brecht, Music and Culture*, ed. and trans. Sabine Berendse and Paul Clements, Bloomsbury Methuen, London, 2014. 312 pp., £50.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 1 47252 435 5 hb., 978 1 47253 159 9 pb.

On 8 May 1932, Sergei Eisenstein and Bertolt Brecht travelled together by train from Berlin to Moscow. Brecht was attending the premiere of his film *Kuhle Wampe* while Eisenstein was returning from his (mostly disastrous) trip to Mexico and the United States. Apparently, they did not get along. Eisenstein thought Brecht's work too didactic, too moralizing, too much an illustration of Marxist ideology. It is of course the standard complaint levelled against Brecht. Eisenstein's solution to the problem of Marxist didacticism was far from standard. His basic aim, one he shared with Hollywood film-makers, was to produce a kind of art that 'contains a *maximum of emotion and affective power*.' And if the aim of art was the maximum production of affect, then film was the greatest machine or weapon.

Like Brecht and his musical collaborator Hanns Eisler, Eisenstein learned a great deal from their

first-hand encounters with the Hollywood affect industry. Eisenstein, working temporarily with Paramount in 1930, and Brecht and Eisler, from around 1941 to 1948 working in and (mostly) out of the Hollywood system, were fundamentally shaped by the experience. Hollywood signalled for them a singular instance of ambivalence: horror mixed with fascination at what Hollywood could make its audience do – lull them into utter stupor or stimulate them to relieve boredom. There is a constant refrain about Hollywood in Eisenstein's, Brecht's and Eisler's writings that its basic powers were intoxicating, yielding a drug-like stupefaction balanced with meaningless excitement. They were equally fascinated by the sheer *effectiveness* of Hollywood's hold over its audiences. 'We used to go to the cinema, especially to gangster movies', Eisler recalled, 'in order ... to undertake social studies.'

Brecht and Eisler had more to learn from the persuasive powers of Hollywood than Eisenstein. For the film-maker, Hollywood showed him how to perfect his already streamlined techniques of audience control; he put Hollywood to use in his later films, even if the state did not want his help. (Hollywood returned the debt through innumerable homages to Eisenstein's techniques, minus the meaning, of course, and when he was well gone.) When Brecht and Eisler returned to Germany in 1948 they had to contend with a different kind of audience. For the first time, Brecht and Eisler were working with (roughly) the same audience Eisenstein had all along: socialists. No longer pitched directly to bourgeois viewers, Brecht shifted his art away from didactic commitments to reason and understanding – *Verfremdungseffekt* as an aesthetic instrument directed towards better understanding of the structure of capitalism, a structure which required a disidentification with the individuated plights of workers – and instead towards what we might call aesthetic propaganda. Eisler's conversations with Hans Bunge about Brecht focus on their time together in Hollywood as well as on the building of a 'magnificent' new socialist republic. For Eisler, the 'be-all and end-all' of their work was to 'educate the teacher!' The question of course was *how*, and it was here they learned their lessons from Hollywood.

Writing in his journal for June 1950 Brecht lamented the way his work was interpreted by a well-known working-class writer. His verdict was crushing – 'ideology, ideology, ideology' – and the reason was surprising: 'nowhere an aesthetic concept'. Brecht insisted that 'the first thing we have to do [in the GDR] is institute exhibitions and courses to develop taste, i.e. for the enjoyment of life.' These are the basic themes – aesthetics, pleasure, education for taste – addressed by Eisler in these conversations held over fourteen sessions between 1958 and 1961, the last conversation taking place within days of Eisler's death (the original 1975 publication was called *Ask me more about Brecht*).

For Eisler, as for Brecht, one of the standing threats to the new state was 'aesthetic barbarism', Eisler's 'new catchphrase' against 'over-politicizing in the arts'. 'Brecht was always complaining about the decline of aesthetic categories', Eisler says. Throughout the conversations Eisler is at pains to displace the effort to 'turn Brecht into the theoretical showpiece of Marxism' at the expense of his 'poetic brilliance'. 'I read Brecht because he's beautiful', Eisler declares, not because he's a Marxist. When Brecht returned to

Europe in 1947 he made a calculated shift from political lessons to aesthetic theory. We read that Brecht 'especially valued most' his aesthetics and that they were in danger of being 'forgotten' at the moment when they were most necessary as a bulwark against ideology. None of which is to say that Brecht practised a 'special or personal Marxism'. More like the opposite. No distinction could be made between the 'poet Brecht and the Marxist Brecht'. Speaking of *Galileo* Eisler reflected upon how Brecht's 'relentless political position becomes aesthetically attractive' and how this itself 'turns into politics'. Brecht's turn to aesthetics was tactical, situation-specific. 'We Marxists often behave like barbarians when it comes to aesthetics', Eisler warns. And if Brecht could ever be accused of aesthetic barbarism – consider *Der Jasager* – it was intended as a tactical response to Weimar products like *Die Welt ist Schön*. When Brecht arrived in the GDR, it called for an equally appropriate response: aesthetic pleasure.

Just prior to his return to Germany Brecht completed his major theoretical statement, the *Short Organum for the Theatre*. In that text he defined theatre as an 'aesthetic enterprise', one where a 'critical attitude to the social world' would be dissociated from the 'unsensual, negative, inartistic'. Most famously Brecht claims that the 'proper business of theatre' is pleasure. What kind of pleasure? The pleasure of theatre comes from education, knowledge, instruction. Theatrical pleasure had to compete with, and learn from, Hollywood's brand of immediate gratification. For Brecht and Eisler there was little difference between film and music in their shared capacity to generate strong affective responses. (Eisler and Adorno considered this problem in their Los Angeles collaboration *Composing for the Films*.) In fact, Brecht and Eisler were notoriously sceptical of the affective power of music. 'Music is all about feelings', Eisler writes, 'and unfortunately they become polluted through music'. By its very nature music tends to 'manipulate us into abstract and decadent behaviour'. The 'Protean character of music' invites the worst forms of aesthetic 'idiocy'. ('Stupidity in Music' – a peculiar late essay sequence by Eisler – is the subject of several conversations here.) Eisler affirms the famous declaration by Thomas Mann's Lodovico Settembrini in *The Magic Mountain* that music is 'Politically Suspect'. Brecht was shocked to find something he agreed with in Mann's writings, even if Mann didn't agree with his character.

Hollywood was masterful at exploiting music's capacity to manipulate audience response. As Eisler

observed in a lecture delivered during his first trip to Los Angeles in 1935, the ‘apparent aimlessness of bourgeois music has in reality the very important function of supporting capitalism. People are diverted from their troubles.’ The owners of capital used music as ‘a psychological substitute for activities and experiences’ that were deprived the masses in reality. Alternately, the socialists’ task was to ‘influence the practical actions of the audience’ towards progressive ends. Eisler was caught up with GDR authorities around this question. He passionately argued against the reigning vision of the state that ‘American influence has to be fought *politically*, and not aesthetically.’ Political education – teaching the dangers of capitalism and the values of socialism – should be the state’s aim, not policing artworks. ‘Let’s educate our young people politically so that they can (a) dance to boogie-woogie and (b) resist the political influence of America.’ Or, more forcefully still: ‘Let’s emphasize politics and not aesthetics.’

Brecht and Eisler were of course products of the bourgeois tradition that was under scrutiny. In the conversations Goethe comes up as much as Marx, and Hegel comes up more than any other author. Hegel is ‘peerless’ when it comes to ‘pure facts, to real descriptions of art’. Eisler has to ‘call upon [his] beloved master Hegel’ when he enters into the ‘field of pure aesthetics’. Eisler would prefer to protect even the most decadent forms of bourgeois art than succumb to a state-enforced ‘politicization of aesthetics.’ ‘A Leninist’, he says, ‘is not unworldly after all. If we turned the entire world’s stupidity into a political question, we wouldn’t be able to see the wood for the trees.’ In other words, policing stupidity would become a full-time job, and the job of policing might just filter into the making of art.

And this is exactly the path Eisler ends up following. Hints of the danger of politicization emerge with his weirdly fine-tuned distinction between boogie-woogie and jazz. Warning that ‘you can’t politicize every aesthetic phenomenon’, he goes on to say that the ‘mass hysteria ... generated by American jazz’

should be ‘forbidden’. And he means it: ‘I’m all for police intervention in such case.... I’d turn myself into a hard-nosed sergeant-major.’ Eisler was not averse to calling in the police to enforce the *good* kind of music either. If education was at stake with the new state, then ‘We Marxists have to take care that our people get some culture, whether they want it or not. We Marxists have to stuff culture down the people’s throats, you know what I mean?’



The most fascinating and perplexing aspect of the conversations turns on the effort to ‘study the effect of art on human beings’. Eisler suggests that the state should ‘conduct trials in the effect of music on people’, something enacted in humanities departments across the globe today under the banner of affect theory or neuroaesthetics – without state threat, but often with state funding. Eisler awaits the day when the ‘medical profession’ will conduct ‘research into the physiological effects of music’. Wait no longer, that day has arrived. Eisler draws all the right conclusions of the study of affect. If you believe that works of art generate negative affective states in the listener, then it would logically follow that they should be closely monitored. Here is Eisler:

effects have to be confirmed psychologically and physiologically. And suppose we discover that certain music is harmful. What do we do then? Certain music raises the blood pressure. When you reach fifty you shouldn’t listen to this music anymore because arteriosclerosis will have set in and certain pieces should no longer be played because they lower the blood pressure in people

who already have low blood pressure. That sounds barbaric but I think it's only reasonable.

Bunge cites a journal entry by Brecht where he notes that 'a clinical thermometer is one of the most important instruments for judging music.' After listening to music one should immediately take one's temperature to see whether the 'temperature rises when the music is stormy, fervent or simply powerful'. Brecht admired Bach above all because the indicator did *not* rise or fall. The latter point is important, and it is crucially missed by Eisler. Brecht valued the *static* effects of music on him, or simply the lack of physiological effect. Eisler fought to say that if you studied Brecht's biology closely enough it would show that Bach's *St John Passion* actually made his temperature rise. Eisler's vision of aesthetic judgement appears to cast off the historical, rational and cognitive bases of Brecht's project. Brecht's basic affirmation of the 'social rather than biological' is at stake. Nonetheless, Eisler pursues the logic of affect to its conclusion:

Not once has anyone, not even a scientist, really investigated the effect of a piece of music on people. Not even the most primitive trials have been undertaken: whether the blood pressure falls if one hears music of a certain style; whether Brecht's blood pressure falls or rises; what physical and psychological changes occur in a person.

Eisenstein would have revelled in the same set of data. How to build an aesthetic device capable of generating solid communist viewers? How to engineer a counter-Hollywood selling communist anti-products? The danger is that the crucial link between the physical and psychological on one side and the social and historical on the other is missing. It is the danger Eisler spells out, but also misses, in the difference between aesthetics and politics. If the composer is checking his (or anyone's) blood pressure and thermometer while writing or performing his piece, then the aesthetic really has become politicized. Eisler sees the trap he laid for himself and seems to withdraw his assertions; he is only 'joking' after all. More soberly, he sees that 'a better mood is not a matter of art but one of personal well-being.'

Alongside Eisler's quasi-scientific stress on the effects of art on audiences, he reflects on the determined *lack* of audience for his and Brecht's works. He quotes his teacher Arnold Schoenberg to the effect that 'I can tolerate audiences as space fillers, but I could do perfectly well without them.' This was in fact the setting for Brecht and Eisler's greatest

work. Eisler describes their time in Los Angeles as unrelenting production of 'unperformable things' (something which would be better said of Brecht's Scandinavian period). The lack of audience was not just a fact but a principle. As Eisler observes, Brecht sharply distinguished between the artwork and its reception. Brecht 'was interested only in the construction of a play', while 'the production ... he saw as by-product, as an extra'. In its most terse formulation, Brecht identified the work itself with its construction: 'You know, once we've got the framework, the rest is nothing.' The framework, how people and things interacted in a world, was at the heart of the artwork and was also the *idea expressed* by the work. Understanding the framework of capitalism was the meaning of the work of art. The 'rest' of the work – that which 'dazzles people so much' – were the character details, the aspects of the work that might potentially solicit *empathetic response*. Being committed to the framework meant that Brecht was *not* committed to making works productive of theatrical effects. Eisler describes the 'outstanding importance' of Brecht's 'distinctive aesthetic judgment concerning pompous, false and artificial gestures, pathos and sentimentality', noting that Denis Diderot's 'achievements of genius ... influenced Brecht enormously'; Diderot's work about the theatre 'exactly expresses Brecht's theories'. Here, Brecht and Eisler found support for their anti-theatrical position in the historical avant-garde. It was the work of the great French modernists – Flaubert, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Apollinaire – that give expression to 'great dialectics'.

The lesson of the great modernists was the lesson of socialism. In other words, ending capitalism was the precondition for making and understanding great art. One of the more poignant moments in the conversations is where Eisler recalls 'discussing for hours on end the punctuation of Shakespeare's quarto editions'. He calls this a 'tribute to Brecht', one that the 'younger generation may learn something from'. At the most tense moment of World War II, while exiled in Hollywood in what seemed hopeless conditions, questions about punctuation were at the centre of their concerns. 'When the Russians were beating the fascists at Stalingrad', Eisler reflects, 'we were preoccupied with commas in Shakespeare's quarto. Those are correlations, not contradictions. The battles were fought so that we could diagnose the commas.'

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