

## CULTURAL VALUES AND THE PURPOSES OF THE THEATRE: SPECTATORS, BRECHT AND BENJAMIN

Bertolt Brecht, arguably the most important theorist in the twentieth century of the social purposes of the theatre, developed his ideas in a period - from the 1920s to the early 1950s - that had already been converted well and truly to the cinema, but had not yet invented television. Thus Brecht's concept of "epic" theatre, which he distinguishes from "dramatic" or "bourgeois" theatre, draws on the world of films so as to define more sharply those features of stage work that are the most attuned to modern times.

Take, for example, Brecht's use of montage, "splicing" and voice-over techniques for both writing and staging plays. These techniques were commonplace in the cinema, but were extremely rare in the theatre. Or, again, take Brecht's insistence on presenting surface facts and events without recourse to complex explanations as to the "deep" or "inner" psychological motives of characters who bring about events or are caught up in facts. The way films externalize rather than internalize whatever is necessary for narrative is an aspect of film that Brecht admired immensely. He admired this procedure not least because, on the one hand, it corresponded with his own ideas on making theatre and, on the other, allowed him to intensify his criticism of "dramatic" theatre, which theatre, in his view, dwelt on the psychological sub-surfaces or "hidden" motives behind actions, thereby condemning the theatre to an antiquated, regressive form that was neither good for the art nor good for society. "Dramatic" theatre is the "culinary" theatre, alias the theatre of consumerism, that Brecht despised.<sup>1</sup>

Now, Brecht's awareness of the technical and technological advances made by the new medium of film is not to be taken out of context, namely, the context of Brecht's socialist convictions. While Brecht

appreciated the innovations of film, he linked innovation with film's capacity to reach mass audiences. We should remember that the term "mass" has a specific colouring for Brecht: it refers to the large bulk of the common people whom the arts under capitalism had ignored and whom the theatre, like film, can serve, educate and inspire - preferably to change the existing social structures. Consequently, the notion of "mass communication", when communication has a didactic-political-social purpose, is by no means a pejorative in Brecht's framework of ideas. This helps explain why, in his twenties and thirties didactic pieces (*Lehrstücke*), Brecht cast hundreds of performers in Greek-style choruses and attempted, as well, to play to hundreds of spectators. These spectators constituted a "mass" audience ("mass" defined in numeral terms) who, like his performers-workers on stage, came from the popular classes (the "masses" in political terms).

What all this suggests is that Brecht's production values were not only aligned with his particular theatrical vision, which was inseparable from his social vision, but were also directly engaged with the great debates in Europe during the inter-war and, then, post-war periods. And, as is clear from the cataclysmic upheavals of the time, the debates at issue, which can be crudely discussed in ideological terms as fascism versus socialism, were not merely a matter of images and words. Just how pertinent this context was to Brecht's definition of his theatre, understood as both social purpose and aesthetic form, is illuminated by his negative experience, as a man *of* the theatre, in America. His texts, whether plays or film scripts, as well as his directing approach, were considered too "experimental", too "European" both for Broadway and Hollywood. They were, in other words, out of step with the sociocultural conditions of America which made *x* rather than *y* accessible to American audiences and, therefore, appropriate to them.<sup>2</sup>

The general issue being raised, then, by these preliminary remarks is that the cultural values ascribed to the theatre, and from which can be derived the purposes attributed to it, are bound to time and place, as well as to the social space occupied by those who evaluate the theatre in the way they do. The convergence of time, place and social space occupied by social actors goes a long way towards explaining why Brecht's conception of the theatre is quite different from that of Stanislavsky, his *bête noire*. Stanislavsky did not espouse a revolutionary cause for the theatre. He was content to have it stay in touch with psychological and emotional "depths". The principle of particular convergence referred to here also helps explain why, say, Artaud, who saw the emergence of fascism, turned his back,

unlike Brecht, on the potential for social intervention of the theatre; and why, say this time, Vilar, who in the early fifties preached the virtues of a "theatre for all" in France (thus supporting what could be called a democratic "mass" theatre), enveloped his mission in the language of moderation and reform. Such a language, and the political perspective which it articulated, were foreign to Brecht at the Berliner Ensemble in the GDR. Time, place, social space and social agents all pulled together differently, distinguishing the Berliner Ensemble from the Théâtre National Populaire occurring, so to speak, in parallel under Vilar's leadership.

Similar contrasts could be drawn between directors and companies who command attention today. Look, for example, at Jean-Pierre Vincent and the Comédie Française, Peter Brook and the CICT, Georgio Strehler and the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, Tadashi Suzuki and his Company of Toga, and so on. An interactive process, as happens in the cases just cited, can be discerned between the artistic objectives of these ensembles and the cultures, broadly speaking, which generate their work, and the cultures, more narrowly speaking, to which they address this work. It is a truism, for sociologists, that individuals are members of identifiable social groups, castes, strata, class fractions or whole classes - in short, members of a collectivity of some sort. It is equally true that collectivities of the kind referred to here fashion and define their specific character through the activities, values and mores that are integral to them, this being the narrower notion of culture from which broader notions such as "national culture" can be distinguished. In other words, the culture of a specific class, for example, which is only part of a society, cannot be confused or merged with the culture of a whole nation as such. Brecht did nothing less than point out this difference when he argued that dramatic or culinary theatre was *bourgeois* theatre, a theatre created by and for the middle class in accordance with its world view and tastes. Epic theatre, then, was far more than an alternative theatre contesting the dominant artistic procedures from the sidelines of society while nevertheless sharing its space and the values filling it. It was a theatre with a high vocation that attacked from within the very heart of the social bastion in order to accomplish, hand in hand with political action, the revolutionary transformation of society, in which process the bourgeoisie would lose its political and economic power and thus also its cultural hegemony.

Walter Benjamin, one of Brecht's first commentators, was quick to reiterate his friend's theses, not so much on the political goals of epic theatre as on the linkage between its purportedly filmic qualities and its educational function and effects. The 1939 second version of Benjamin's

essay "What is Epic Theatre?" shows very clearly how Benjamin opposes the empathetic experience that he and Brecht believed was undergone by audiences for dramatic theatre to the experience of recognition and, consequently, of learning supposedly undergone by spectators at epic performances. Thus audiences for epic theatre respond with what Benjamin calls "astonishment" to the display on stage that they nevertheless fully recognize as being pertinent to them, and do so precisely because performances incarnate their didactic purposes without effort.<sup>3</sup> Performances, Benjamin seems to be saying, communicate their didactic intentions easily when they and the actors performing them are as relaxed as the audiences supposedly anticipated and formed by epic theatre as such. Benjamin sets a good deal of store by Brecht's idea that the attitude of spectators towards what they see should be "a considered and therefore a relaxed one", this considered relaxation being possible - according to Benjamin - because didactic play, which is the very stuff of epic theatre, is predicated on the "interchangeability of actors and audience, audience and actors".<sup>4</sup>

The interchangeability at issue has nothing to do with a symbiosis between actors and audience (which, in Benjamin's terms, would be a matter of empathy between them). It has to do with a capacity they share in common, namely, that of grasping and understanding what they are about and what they are doing in the social world of their making. And if Benjamin links epic theatre too closely to film (arguably more, in fact, than Brecht does), it is because film provides him with the most useful metaphor for explaining why epic theatre does not seek to arouse deep emotions but aims, instead, at the thinking and critical faculties of its viewers. Film, he argues, works in fits and starts and relies on interruptions to the narrative which keep audiences alert as well as make them aware of the fictitious and factitious character of the procedures (that is, "art") before them. Being aware of the technical or of what could be called the "making" processes of a stage production is, in Benjamin's view, essential to the role of spectator or at least to the spectator worthy of this name. It may be possible to extrapolate further from Benjamin's argument - Brecht's own arguments helping us along the way - and suggest that Benjamin implicitly posits a distinction between the spectator as understood above and the audience for dramatic theatre who, by supposedly being unthinking about her/his world (as well as being unaware of the factitious procedures on stage), is merely a consumer.

In fact, the notion of the spectator as a critical observer is probably better explained by Benjamin in his reflections on film than on Brecht. In his defence of film and of the "mechanical equipment" that is integral to

this new medium (which, Benjamin argues, provides the perfect occasion for a fusion between art and technology-science), Benjamin notes how incomparably precisely film can represent the environment, analyze human behaviour, reveal aspects of reality that do not appear to the naked eye (or have become invisible for having been seen too often), and, as well, reveal the underlying structure of the subject of presentation, thereby penetrating through to the very reasons for the phenomenon's being what it is. This might well fit what Brecht meant by his (in)famous *Verfremdungseffekte* (translated as "alienating" or "distancing" technique). It is certain that Benjamin's discussion of how a film actor's work is split "into a series of mountable episodes", making his creation a composition of "many separate performances" and obliging her/him to present an acting self to the public rather than getting inside the skin of somebody else, corresponds with Brecht's idea of how the epic actor should work so as to prevent facile identification between the actor and her/his character, and the character and the audience.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the whole thrust of Benjamin's attention to the mechanics of film-making is to point out the virtues of the "age of mechanical reproduction" of which film appears, in his eyes, to be the paradigm. Film, by the very way it operates (giving the precision, analysis, grasp of reality, and so on, as noted above), puts the public in the position of knowing spectator and therefore of critic. The public is also in this position because mechanical reproduction takes away the cult or ritual value of art, leaving spectators free to stand outside the art process and survey and seize it. These spectators, who supply the "increased mass of participants" created by the mass art of film, necessarily have a collective experience, the "public", as Benjamin understood it, being a positive collective force. Brecht's notion of spectators is similarly oriented to the idea of a collectivity pulling together rather than separating off into isolated individuals. A fairly straight interpretation of Brecht gives us the following axioms. Dramatic theatre isolates people, closing them in on their emotions. Epic theatre, by contrast, is able to create a collectivity because it fosters perceptiveness and comprehension and inspires action for a common cause. By doing so, it also gives theatre spectators a status that they had never enjoyed before but which, in the modern age - or in "mass society" - is commensurate with the task of intelligent restructuring and construction required by the age.

These considerations are among many underpinning my research on theatre audiences, of which a very small part is summarized in this essay. My research was spurred on by the fact that all of the stage directors here

cited - Brecht foremost among them - presuppose the existence of an interactive relationship between spectators and the stage. Their presupposition is based on hypotheses as to who their audiences *might* be, or who desirably they *should* be, given the objectives incarnated in the works presented to their audiences' gaze. Thus, what is assumed is an ideal audience, an imaginary group of spectators built out of the information theatre practitioners have about their society in general, and, in particular, about the selected groups or even coteries that go to the theatre - or who are thought by practitioners to be theatregoers.

Yet ideal audiences are not necessarily real ones, as even the artists most confident about the identity of their public are aware. Nor do targeted audiences necessarily agree with theatre artists' view of the purposes of the theatre. It would be instructive to know, for instance, whether Brecht's view of the theatre as an instrument for social change was shared by his spectators. Were they as convinced as he that theatre in the age of mass communication was not merely a transmission channel? Further, that in an age of commodity exchange, theatre was not merely an item for consumption? I embarked on my research with questions like these in mind; and based it on the hypothesis that the social composition of audiences made most sense when it was linked with spectators' evaluations of what they saw, and with what they thought to be the purpose of the theatre as such. My aim, in other words, was to flesh out a demographic profile so as to see what the theatre meant to which people, and why it had a particular value for them.

Of course, the issue of the social composition of spectators calls upon the variables usually used in surveys, that is, gender, age, education and occupation. I have used an additional one, which is the category of ethnic identity. This category generally appears in surveys only when researchers are involved in, or focus on, ethnic studies. I have used it in the area of the arts for three main reasons: firstly, because in a country of immigration like Australia the ethnic composition of the population is far from homogeneous and certainly not exclusively tied to the Anglo/Celtic origins of its colonizers and early settlers; secondly, because one of the crucial questions to ask about the arts in Australia is whether non-Anglo/Celtic minorities, in all their ethnic diversity, both contribute to and benefit from artistic activity; thirdly, whether, as a consequence of their minority status, they are included in a predominantly Anglo/Celtic established culture while, at the same time, attempting to preserve and/or develop their own culture of origin as part of Australian culture as a whole.

These questions are contingent on a number of facts determined by the

1986 Census, namely that (a) 40% of Australian residents have at least one overseas-born parent; (b) residents of non-Anglo/Celtic background who emigrated in the post-war period mainly came from Southern Europe and Eastern Europe: they are now increasingly from the Middle East and Asia; (c) Australia's multi-ethnic population has given rise to an officially endorsed multicultural policy, including a policy for the arts. The term "multicultural arts" thus refers to the arts generated by the non-Anglo/Celtic communities.

The next methodological point to make as regards this essay is that two different types of theatre and also of stage production are involved in my discussion. The first, the Sydney Theatre Company, is a state theatre and enjoys the governmental subsidization, status and prestige of its institutional rank. The second is the Belvoir Street Theatre which, although not altogether out of the mainstream, is considered to be more innovative, more adventurous and politically less conservative than the STC. The productions whose audiences I have surveyed are *Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov at the STC and *Love and Magic in Mamma's Kitchen* by Lina Wertmuller at Belvoir Street. The first is a frequently performed classic. The second is written by a well-known film director, this being one of only two little-known plays by her, neither of which is performed frequently.

*Three Sisters* was staged in a traditional, realistic way with relatively detailed sets and costumes that reconstructed the sociohistorical context of Chekhov's protagonists. This gave resonance to the psychological and emotional structures of the characters which the actors developed thoroughly. Whether looked at from a directorial, acting, scenographic or musical point of view, the whole conformed to familiar images of Chekhov. The production deviated from the norm, however, in that it sought a more vigorous and optimistic interpretation, particularly of the end of the play, than is usually visible on a non-Russian stage. Even so, its performance processes were hardly calculated to challenge the Stanislavskian conventions that are integral to the STC's work in general, give or take "Australianized" variants of these conventions.

*Love and Magic*, by contrast, was designed to question a number of theatre practices, not least that of performing in one language. The English translation of Wertmuller's text was readjusted by director Teresa Crea. Crea translated segments of dialogue back into Italian and put key lines into Neapolitan with suggestions, here and there, of other regional languages from the south of Italy. She also inserted a number of Italian folk songs and political songs which increased the Italian-language

component of the production. All told, there would not have been more than 20% of the total dialogue and songs delivered in Italian. However, this was enough to convey the impression that the production intended to be bilingual; and enough to solicit commentary from quite a few spectators who, when noting down their evaluation of the production, either wished they knew some Italian or wished that the lines comprehending spectators were laughing at had been said in English.

It must be added that, for all its openness to new plays and off-beat playing groups, this was the very first time that Belvoir Street had hosted a bilingual production. This was also the first time that Teresa Crea had directed an all-female cast in a mainstream theatre and in rehearsal conditions quite unlike those she enjoys with her bilingual ensemble, Doppio Teatro, in Adelaide. For instance, Doppio Teatro researches and prepares a work collectively. Furthermore, it takes much longer to mount a work than the four weeks of rehearsal assigned to *Love and Magic*. Doppio also devises its own playtexts, which are invariably based on aspects of Italian immigrant life in Australia. Its members are also accustomed to performing bilingually. *Love and Magic* was performed by seven women of whom all but one were of Italian background. Only two of the women had any experience of performing in Italian, one being a permanent member of Doppio, who had come across with Crea for the show. Another woman of Italian background had buried her ethnic roots so deeply that she virtually had to learn Italian to deliver the lines in the language accurately.

Apart from the novelty, for Belvoir Street, of a production in Italian and English, *Love and Magic* relied on a rhetorical, rather declamatory style of presentation which had little in common with the inward-looking refinements of Stanislavskian realism. Play was very physical, demonstrative and extroverted. It used a whole array of cinema effects (montage, zoom shots, flashbacks, break-up of sequences, and so on). None of this is surprising given that Wertmuller's text has the "feel" of a script for the cinema, her principal medium. The production's cinematographic quality, along with its theatricality, bring it into the sphere of Brecht. So too does its bizarre, larger-than-life story which is set in Naples during the fascist period. The story tells of Leonarda who, having buried twelve children, later secretly kills and dismembers three of her friends in order that her thirteenth child may live. The deaths are due, she believes, to a curse placed on her by her mother. The tale of ghosts, magic and superstition is interspersed with brief, sharp scenes that evoke the fascist period and refer, particularly, to fascist support for the war

(hence the singing of *Giovinezza*, a rallying fascist march). Wertmuller is said to have based her play on the true story of Leonarda Cianciulli, whose macabre case went to the courts in 1945.

Now, given these different theatre houses and two quite different productions, what kind of audiences did they attract? And how, after having seen such productions, did these spectators formulate their ideas on the purposes of the theatre?

The audience of *Three Sisters* is predominantly composed of the social elite - thus described because of its high level of education and occupation. Of the 551 total who completed questionnaires (distributed over four performances), 60% belong to the upper two occupational classifications, "managers and administrators" and "professionals", defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The largest group in the 40% left are clerks and students (8% each). Of particular note, where distribution by social class is concerned, is that only two people go into the category of "labourers and related workers".

Breakdown by ethnic grouping gives the following: 67% are Anglo/Celts; 14% are residents and/or naturalized citizens from other origins, the largest group among them being Hungarian-Australians; 10% are from English-speaking backgrounds but do not describe themselves as "Australian" (among them are American and Canadian tourists); 5% are from non-English-speaking backgrounds, but do not describe themselves as "X-Australian" (e.g., Hungarian-Australian) and therefore cannot be grouped with the 14% above. In short, Anglo/Celts are very well represented in proportion to their percentage of the total population of Australia. Minority Australians (X-Australians) are proportionally very under-represented. It should also be noted that 51% of X-Australians are university educated while 53% are in the upper two occupational categories. Compare this to 61% and 63% for Anglo/Celts. The majority of non-Anglo/Celtic Australians at *Three Sisters*, then, are similar to Anglo/Celts in that they belong to the same social elite.

Their status rather than ethnicity appears, in fact, to be the determining factor in why they come to the STC. When asked in the questionnaire what interests them about STC productions, members of the two ethnic groups here discussed uniformly refer most to the "variety", "mixture", "selection", "choice", "range" or "diversity" of shows. Similarly, when asked about the purpose of the theatre, they converge most on the term "entertainment". The terms that then appear most frequently, and can be grouped in one bloc, are "education", "instruction", "enlightenment" and "information". It must be noted that, whilst the words "entertain" and

“entertainment” appear relatively frequently as single-word answers, they are more frequently linked with something else. More often than not, the linking words are “education” or “thought-provoking”. The first tends to be the preferred term of non-Anglo/Celts; the second of Anglo/Celts. Hungarian-Australians almost without exception state “entertain and educate”, but add nothing else. Occasionally, a more eloquent spectator elaborates, as does this Austrian-Australian: “to entertain, to educate and stretch the boundaries of our thinking and imagination, i.e. to hold a mirror up to life”. Or take this Anglo/Celtic Australian: “entertain, challenge, provoke, inform, provide a social microcosm or surreal view of society”.

When we take the 551 total of spectators, we find “entertainment” at the top of the list. It is cited 402 times. “Education” and variations of the same notion form a bloc of 155. That the theatre aims to present or explore values, ideas or issues is recorded 48 times. That it strives to express or touch feelings is recorded 15 times. That it has anything to do with culture also has a low score at 15 times. But lowest of all, at 8 times, is the view that the theatre is a means of communication.

The huge discrepancy between the top and the bottom of the scale suggests that our spectators place the theatre well and truly in the “entertainment industry”, which industry today incorporates film, television, video, recordings, rock concerts, and so on - including the Three Tenors! Yet what kind of entertainment is it for those in the sample? The terms “enjoyment” and “pleasure” appear 39 times, which is a paltry figure compared with the score for “entertainment”. Does this suggest the idea of entertainment *without* pleasure? Or is the notion of pleasure, for the sample spectators, built into the term “entertainment”, therefore not requiring specification for them? It is certain that our spectators believe that the purpose of theatre is *instructive* entertainment.

It is now useful to note that more spectators in the sample see more theatre than films annually. However, when it comes to seeing more than 20 stage productions or films annually, the 20+ filmgoers exceed by far their theatre-going counterparts. Put differently, this means that there are more great enthusiasts for film in the sample than for theatre. When viewed in proportion to their number in the sample, non-Anglo/Celts are foremost among these great enthusiasts.

In order to follow up the data on the theatre in relation to the cinema, I asked other audiences at the STC, this time for Racine’s *Phèdre*, to explain why they went more frequently to the cinema. (The play, directed by Australian playwright Michael Gow, had never been performed before

in the country.) The spectators, on this occasion, could be described as belonging to the intellectual stratum of the social elite. Two-thirds of this stratum goes more often to the cinema than to the theatre. The overwhelming reason is cost, that is, the cinema is cheaper. Among the secondary reasons, which are all cited roughly the same number of times, is a preference for the cinema because it is "often better than the theatre". However, all told, this kind of evaluative-aesthetic-cultural judgement is outweighed by an ensemble of pragmatic concerns which, apart from the price of tickets, include the convenience of sessions and locations for film, and the fact that seat reservations are not required.

How do spectators at *Love and Magic* compare? We are here dealing with a 353 total, also over four performances. There are, for a start, marginally more non-Anglo/Celtic Australians (18% compared to 14% for *Three Sisters*). These spectators are also concentrated in the younger age bracket (21-30 years old), which was not the case at the STC. This may well suggest that the younger generation of non-Anglo/Celts who, unlike their parents, feel relatively empowered vis-à-vis the dominant culture, are nevertheless more inclined to go to a theatre perceived as "alternative" rather than "establishment". The choice of play is bound to have influenced them, as probably did its bilingual presentation - unheard of in "straight" mainstream theatre. The fact that well over half of the non-Anglo/Celts are Italo-Australian and Italian (36 of them compared to a mere 4 at the STC) supports my contention. It also suggests how, in an era of television where people surmount cultural obstacles by staying in the privacy of their home, ethnic minorities might be drawn out of their houses and into the theatres: namely, by the theatres' appealing to their cultural parameters, no matter how discreetly (or inadequately) these parameters are defined by the theatres themselves.

This, of course, still leaves us with the vexed question of whether, in an age of mass communication and art industries (with art commodified as never before - Brecht turn over in your grave!), the theatre is increasingly condemned to being a luxury item for elites of one kind or another. We have seen how the intellectual elite at Gow's production of *Phedra* nominated cost as the most important reason for going less frequently to the theatre than to the cinema. Now, while it is well known that traditional intellectuals are today pauperized, economic factors go hand in glove in society with cultural ones. And art culture is necessarily linked to education, if only because inculcation and instruction expose people to the arts, develop their capacity to absorb the arts and, occasionally, refine critical apprehension of them. Pierre Bourdieu, needless to say, has

hammered home these points long enough. They have stuck and continue to be valid, despite the fact that his critique of “distinction”, which is conferred upon individuals by virtue of their “bourgeois” education, undercuts those aspects that he concedes are positive in “bourgeois” education, even if it is profoundly inegalitarian.<sup>6</sup>

In the framework of these issues, it is relevant to note that exactly half of the Italo-Australians and Italians at *Love and Magic* are tertiary-educated, professional people. Moreover, none of them is from the lower occupational categories. Which data suggests once again, as in the case of the STC, that ethnic minorities who either objectively have access to the theatre or subjectively choose to have access to it are predominantly from the middle classes.

Reflections, by this group, on the purpose of the theatre revolve around “cultural development”, “to be exposed to a different frame of reference to mine”, “to see people’s different viewpoints” and “to communicate ideas”. Yes, “entertain” appears with these observations. It also appears with “educate” or “enlighten”. Italo-Australians and Italians are not particularly distinguished, as a group, by their viewpoint, except for the fact that none of them refers to the theatre as a forum for social commentary or for social change. On the other hand, this type of Brechtian observation distinguishes Anglo/Celts. Secondly, when offering their assessment of *Love and Magic*, Italo-Australians and Italians almost invariably approve the use of two languages in the production. None of them, however, goes so far as to say that one of theatre’s goals in a multicultural society could be the dissolution of cultural-ethnic distance and fear. It takes a number of Anglo/Celts to voice strongly their approval of how “our multicultural society” is celebrated by the production. One of them proclaims triumphantly: “all women, all wogs - only at Belvoir!”

When taken as a whole, the audience orders and ranks its terms much like the audience for *Three Sisters*. Thus “entertainment” comes out on top, followed by “education” and its collocations (quoted 204 and 82 times respectively). What distinguishes the perspective of the audience of *Love and Magic* is, firstly, its proposal of a much wider range of purposes, and, secondly, its emphasis on the theatre as a medium for showing social conditions, developing social awareness and working for social change. In these respects, Belvoir Street spectators may be said to have a Brechtian streak. The range of purposes, apart from the socially oriented ones just mentioned, and which are fifth in order after “entertain”, “educate”, “provoke thought” and “stimulate”, are the following (most repeated ones only): “artistic expression”, “portrayal of life”, “presentation of ideas”,

“challenge”, “communicate” and “express emotions”. Emotions are towards the bottom of the list, as for *Three Sisters*.

Is it possible to conclude anything about the cultural horizons, if not expectations, of *Love and Magic* spectators? Is entertainment the prime value of their national culture, as well as of their group/class culture? It is clear that they share this value with spectators at the STC; and, like STC spectators, they place cognitive apperception above creativity and emotions. A few spectators, unsolicited, refer to “old Italian movies”, which *Love and Magic* reminds them of, or to Lina Wertmuller’s films. Or else, when not directly speaking of Wertmuller, they refer to the cinema, stating, for example, that the theatre is “more spontaneous” and “more in the present . . . of what is happening”. One respondent (New Zealander) who cites entertainment last in his commentary explains that the theatre’s purpose is to “discuss/reflect on issues in society in a personal/direct way (compared to film/TV, for example)”.

It would be hard to resist, in the context of a discussion where Brecht is relevant, the reference to Brecht from a German woman academic when she speaks of the production’s *Verfremdung*. As is well known, Brecht invented the concept in order to help define what he meant by “epic” theatre. *Verfremdung*, then, was the principle of non-sentimentality, of direct communication and appeal to reason which allowed spectators to grasp the sense and significance of what they were viewing and encompass in their comprehension of theatrical fiction a critical understanding of social realities. This so-called “distancing” principle or “effect” (*Verfremdungseffekte*) was a prerequisite for the development of the spectators’ consciousness of themselves as agents of action belonging to some larger social whole. The spectator here quoted who refers unpretentiously to Brecht’s celebrated concept is just as direct in her assessment of the theatre’s role in society. For her, the theatre’s purpose is to “overcome individual isolation, create group-consciousness”. This, too, is suitably Brechtian.

## NOTES

1. For a detailed statement by Brecht on the difference, as he understands it, between "dramatic" and "epic" theatre, see "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre". *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willett. London: Methuen, 1964, pp. 33-42, and especially p. 37 for the famous table drawn up by Brecht in which he itemizes the characteristics of each type of theatre, each item defined in terms of its opposite in the opposing category. Needless to say, all of the writings by Brecht which are translated and annotated by Willett in the book cited are relevant to the discussion above, as are Brecht's commentaries and essays on the cinema. For the latter, I especially refer to Bertolt Brecht, *Sur le cinéma*, trans. Jean-Louis Lebrave and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre. Paris: L'Arche, 1970 and *Journal de Travail: 1938-1955*, trans. Philippe Ivernel. Paris: L'Arche, 1976.
2. For an illuminating account of Brecht's differences of opinion with women and men of the theatre, though certainly not only with them, on matters of art, society and politics, see James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America*. London: Methuen, 1980.
3. Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock. London: New Left Books, Verso Editions, 1983, pp. 15-22.
4. *ibid.*, p. 15 and p. 20 respectively.
5. Reference here is to Benjamin's celebrated essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn. London: Collins/Fontana, 1973, pp. 219-53. The phrases cited are on p. 232.
6. The "classic" work by Pierre Bourdieu on the subject is, of course, *La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979.