

The paper addresses Brecht's concept of Gestus and proposes an original reading of it, parallel to Roland Barthes's semiological theory. It proposes the view that a gesture becomes a Gestus when it is interpellated into myth. It follows that the Gestus also interpellates into relations, which is, at the same time, its connecting and disconnecting power. The author presents some insights from the theory of ritual and unpacks them to identify some of the ritual's key characteristics that simultaneously correspond to Brecht's epic theatre. He does this with an awareness of the ontological differences between ritual and theatre and without the intention of locating Brechtian theatre at any specific locus in the ritual-theatre relation. He intends to think about this relation so that it reveals further insights into the conceptual and practical nature of Brecht's estrangement effect. Finally, the author recognises its experimental and pedagogical power in its persistent, repetitive intervention in social myths and taboos, which is not only a matter of method but also a matter of initiating in and practising a specific ontology.

Keywords: epic theatre, Gestus, experiment, ideology, ethics, taboo, ritual

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Gestus and Taboo: A Study of Bertolt Brecht

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“I am at the barber’s, and a copy of *Paris-Match* is offered to me. On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour” (Barthes 115). So says Roland Barthes in *Mythologies*. He goes on:

All this is the *meaning* of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (*a black soldier is giving the French salute*); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the signified through the signifier (Ibid.).

First, a prologue. According to Barthes, it is characteristic of myth that the relation between the volume of the signifier and the volume of the signified is not proportional. If it is characteristic of language that this relation is limited to certain concrete units (e.g., words), it is different in myth, where a concept can extend to a very large area of the signifier (e.g., an entire book can be the signifier of a single concept). Myth is imperative and interpellative in nature, and I myself am exposed to its intentional force: “It comes and seeks me out in order to oblige me to acknowledge the body of intentions which have motivated it and arranged it there as the signal of an individual history” (Ibid. 123). Barthes says that myth is a second-order semiological system. That is, it is based on a semiological schema (language as a system of signs) that existed before it. In language, the sign is made up of a signifier and a signified, whereas in myth, the signifier (of the myth) is identical to the sign of the preceding schema and therefore manifests itself in two ways; simultaneously as a concept (full) and a form (empty). In order to illustrate how people receive myths, Barthes shows three ways of reading myths in the example we provided earlier. If we focus on the empty signifier, then the black man saluting becomes an example or symbol of French imperialism. If we focus on the full signifier, it becomes its alibi. However, if we focus on the entire signifier of the myth, then the black man who salutes becomes for us the very *presence* of French imperialism (170–182).

Mladen Dolar offers another but in many ways related example when he defines the alienating characteristic in capitalism as a turn from transparency; suppression of the actuality of certain real processes that form the social bonds and through which modern exploitation is carried out. Dolar gives the example of a capitalist who steps on stage and loudly says he wants to exploit workers and maximise profits. He argues that such a move would loosen the social bonds that are based on the consent of the oppressed and that the point of modern ideology is how it disguises the pursuit of interests “behind a formal façade of shared values, whether in the form of the universality of human rights, high ethical ideals, love of mankind, the pursuit of progress and the general welfare, democracy, tolerance, freedom, etc.” (Dolar 53). For Barthes, the challenge is identifying the form of mythic discourse, as it takes the sign of a previous discourse and transposes it into the mythic, attaching new meaning to it. On the other hand, Dolar focuses on the interest that motivates the conscious translation between discourses and the ensoulment with different meanings. I have given both examples to illustrate two elements – interest and myth – that are also central to the ontology and the mental-synesthetic apparatus of a third thinker: Bertolt Brecht, the developer of epic theatre.

In this essay, I will focus on some elements of Brecht’s theatre and his personal philosophy, drawing on the literature and thematisations that have already been written. We associate with Brecht a number of concepts that he liked to use; some of them remain from his notes, but he never theoretically refined them. Nevertheless, we often interpret his theatre in terms of Brecht’s own concepts, which means that there is always considerable room for interpretation and also ambiguity as to what exactly we mean when we use them. I also claim this freedom for myself. The ambition of this paper is to conceptually grasp what we all feel to be the extraordinary performative power of Brechtian theatre. However, as I feel that this task requires me to approach the thinker’s credo, my take will at times stray from the expected paths. I will first address some of the political and ethical dimensions of Brecht’s conceptual apparatus and thematise why exactly (and how) they can be thought of as political or ethical. Next, I will show how these aspects are embedded in the lived, transformative experience that characterises Brechtian theatre – the particular practice and philosophy Brecht designed for the actors (whom he often refers to as apprentices). In order to define what exactly the Brechtian subject is doing and what is happening to him, I will engage with anthropological repertoire and recall the concept of ritual and taboo. This is a liminal exercise because the theory of theatre is rather reluctant to make parallels between theatre and ritual. Nevertheless, I hope that the reader will bear in mind my intention to focus on the actor and his particular role in Brechtian theatre, where these two concepts can be helpful.

Brecht and Gestus: Unmasking Morality

One of the key concepts in the Brechtian vocabulary is Gestus. It is one of Brecht's central working concepts, which he used to think about theatre and socio-political reality. Only a few fragments about Gestus have been preserved from Brecht's pen. Among them: "The term Gestus does not denote gesticulation; it is not a gesture of the hands to emphasise or explain, but an overall posture. A language is gestural if it is based on gesture, if it indicates certain attitudes that the speaker adopts in relation to other people" (*O gestični glasbi* 22). Brecht goes on to explain the concept of *social Gestus* and gives some examples:

Not every gesture is a social Gestus. A defensive posture towards a fly is not a social Gestus, to begin with, but a defensive posture towards a dog can be, if it is used to express the struggle of a poorly dressed man against guard dogs. A man's attempt not to slip on a smooth surface becomes a social Gestus only if the slip would make the man "lose his face", lose his prestige and his importance. [...] A social Gestus is a Gestus that is important for society, a Gestus that allows us to make inferences about the social situation (*Ibid.*).

Brecht wanted the individual, whatever his role in society, to take a political position. "To do this, he must shape a social Gestus" (*Ibid.*). The social Gestus is therefore not something that arises only spontaneously and outside the conscious control of subjects; subjects can also intervene in it and intentionally (co)shape it. Is the social Gestus, thus, something of our own or something shared? What constitutes the Gestus in Brechtian terms can, reading Barthes' schema, be understood as a gesture that has been transposed into a mythic (meta)language. A particular warning is needed here: the schema I am about to offer is not a strict application of Barthes's semiology *but refers to it externally*. Gesture is not itself a language, and Gestus can be effective in both first-order and second-order semiological systems. My argument is as follows: every gesture becomes a Gestus as an effect of its *interpellation in myth*. The argument is based on the awareness that "the attitudes that a speaker adopts in relation to other people" (*Ibid.*) are always a reflection of personal and collective myths that influence his reading of a situation – regardless of whether the language of a gesture itself would be classified as such of the first or the second semiological order. As spectators of our own and others' actions, we are always readers of the Barthesian myth since, in every gesture, we see a "leakage", as Barthes would say, an interpretative excess that cannot be reduced to the schema of the signifier, signified and sign. In the act of the fellow human being and in our own treatment of the other, we always already see the myths, personal and collective, of what it means to be human, of what a specific site means – and so on.

We could say, then, that the Brechtian transformation of gesture into Gestus is due to the intervention of a specific myth. Not just (one) myth, but a mythological complex (*mythology*), namely, that which – alongside and together with lived practice – co-shapes and reveals itself in relation to other people. The power of Gestus, therefore, lies in the fact that it is not only a gesture that communicates but also a gesture that *interpellates* [in the specific relation from which it emerges and which it consolidates]. The gesture can interpellate in a way that confirms already existing relations or intervenes in them and forms new relations. Social Gestus, on the other hand, is a gesture that interpellates one to become a *subject* – a gesture (conscious or automatic) by which the individual can identify himself as involved in social relations; as a stakeholder in his own or the group’s myth about what is the social reality. Social Gestus is thus not (merely) a pre-existing network of relations, not even an individual’s gesture alone (or merely the attitude from which it derives), but is above all the *efficacy* of behaviour within that network – from what is expected and taken for granted, to what happens if I break that “etiquette”, and what intrinsically motivates me to break it in the first place. Brecht thus considers that a mythological complex, which envelops real social relations, is interwoven across the field of sociality. Given his deep respect for Karl Marx, perhaps we are not entirely wrong to call this complex simply: *ideology*? And yet: just as not every gesture is already a social Gestus, not every social gesture is already an ideology. After all, the addressing and exposing of an ideology (can be) a social Gestus. Because of the load of the term ideology, I will be using the term social Gestus. However, with the understanding that it is not a synonym but a general mythological social structure of which ideology, and its manifestations, are a part.

The uses and understandings of what is an ideology are, of course, different. Michel Foucault has even argued that ideology as a concept is more distracting than helpful because “it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth” (60). Whereas for Foucault, the key is to explore how the effects of truth are produced in history within discourses that are neither true nor false in themselves. He says, however, that every society has its own “regime of truth”, that is,

the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (73).

Although Foucault had many disagreements with the Marxists of his time, his starting point can be useful for the present discussion since Brecht, too, is more interested in the “regime” of truth than in truth itself – the discourses which (we are now back with Brecht) are a form of social myths and as such provoke conditioned responses

from subjects. Even in terms of his fascination with the role of science in modern society, Brecht made most of the associations between science and art not at the level of revealing, resolving, or justifying truth but at the level of disturbing and interfering with the taken-for-granted: “Science has carefully developed a technique of disturbance in the face of events which are ordinary, “taken for granted” and never questioned, and there is no reason why art should not take up this position, which is so infinitely useful” (Brecht in Milohnić, *Historični* 164). He was more interested in utility than in truth – and it is utility that is the hallmark of his *estrangement techniques*. Ideology overlays real relations precisely in the way that it manifests itself as something taken for granted. The individual experiences his existence in a mythological social reality as automatism. “I was wiping around the room, and when I came around again, I walked over to the divan and couldn’t remember whether I had wiped it or not” (Tolstoy in Milohnić, “Historični” 161). Brecht wants to make these reflexes conscious. “Therefore, the ‘semantics’ of Brecht’s thought, the organisation and structure of the poem, the parable, and the story, are attached to a specific Brechtian knot, which disturbs ‘causality’ and forms from it a Gestus, a specific effect, a specific ‘intervening” (Berger 11). In dramatic practice, he achieves this by “constantly breaking the illusion, presenting the play as a play, using prologues, epilogues, means of linguistic shaping, countering contradictions, the important appearing as self-evident, what is taken for granted acquires an exaggerated significance” (33).

Brecht, therefore, formulates a method: an “intervening” in a Gestus, in the manner of estrangement; an interruption and reversal of presupposed logics and automatisms, and the establishment of a contrast that discloses ideological discourses. What we call the estrangement-effect is, therefore, always already a *complex of facts* revealed by the intervention in social Gestus. This is what is meant by “play as play”, namely, the most direct play of living reality and the play with living reality itself, not merely its representation (theatre as an artistic medium). In this reality, however, the submissive relations are, as we have said, often hidden. Subversion is, therefore, an alternative that escapes from the illusion of ideology and dances on its shards with (at times bizarre) Brechtian joy. Epic theatre imitates – or more precisely: performs – reality in order to expose and influence it. Brecht writes: “The interpretation of the story and its transmission by means of appropriate alienations is the main task of theatre” (*Fragmenti* 24).

This puts us on the ground of ethics. To repeat a quote from earlier, “A language is gestural if it is based on a Gestus, if it indicates certain attitudes that the speaker adopts in relation to other people” (Brecht, *O gestični glasbi* 22). If Gestus is, therefore, a quality or attitude of attitude, then it is also, at its core, an ethical determination. And if epic theatre is an intervention in a social Gestus, it is at the same time an intervention

in an ethical code and, thus, (can) indirectly interpellate new ethical codes. But ethics, as Dolar discusses, “often began to serve as a substitute for the political (especially after the collapse of socialism), as a discourse of the good rich and the good poor, the hegemony of morality began to act as a substitute for the absence of politics” (56). Brecht’s position is similar. He writes: “I hear them say: one must be truthful, one must keep promises, one must fight for the good. But the trees do not say: one must be green, one must make the fruit fall vertically to the ground” (Brecht in Dolar 56). Brecht is critical of moralism because he sees it as the flip side of interest. Brecht is interested in *practices and their effects* – not in the morality that legitimises them. But every practice is motivated by something, and for Brecht, it is inevitable that this is *interest*. Brecht’s character Mr. K. says: “There never was a thought whose father was not desire. We can only argue about this: which desire?” (Brecht in Dolar 59).

If desires and interests are what drive thinking, then Brecht wants us to keep these conditions before our eyes. Thinking is useful in this respect; it serves a purpose. Mr. K. illustrates this idea with the example of the (non-)existence of God: “If [your behaviour] would not change [whatever the answer], then the question can be dropped. But if it did change, then I can only help you by telling you that you have already made up your mind: you need God” (Brecht in Dolar 60–61). Slavoj Žižek also comments on this point in Brecht, saying that we are “never in a position of directly deciding between theism and atheism because the choice as such is already placed in the field of belief” (Žižek in Dolar 61). Or, turning to Jurgen Habermas, the gulf between knowing and believing cannot be bridged mentally (see Habermas 18). Žižek adds that the true atheist *does not choose* atheism because, for him, “the question itself is irrelevant” (Žižek in Dolar 61). Therefore, Brecht focuses not on the matter of ethical *choice* but of ethical *intervention*: he intervenes in an existing ethos that presents its answer as monolithic and self-evident. Brecht’s ethics is not so much ethics as it is a method: an intervention that triggers epistemic doubt – yet another correlate between Brecht and his fascination with science. An intervention in social ethos is an intervention in social relations – *and vice versa*. As Miklavž Komelj also notes, Brecht was convinced that every value must be subjected to a dialectical analysis of the social relations underlying that value (Komelj 88). Thus his method in the theatre is, above all, dialectical analysis of the dramatic material, which should be as much as possible the “living” material of social reality, presented in contradictions and paradoxes through simplification, repetition, exaggeration, or falsehood.

We are therefore situated in a schema where interests manifest real effects. At the same time, the function of interest in the process is concealed, often by moral concepts which, according to Dolar, conceal the absence of politics. For Brecht, it is therefore crucial – if we cannot get rid of the creation of reality according to our interests – to at least, by

intervening in the social Gestus, repeatedly draw attention to its structure and to the (especially systemic) interests that create it “from behind the scenes”. This is where Brecht’s characteristic paradox emerges: his opposition to all ethics as pretension is nevertheless articulated as a specific attitude. But is it really? Brecht is more interested in the effects of intervening in existing relations than in the establishment of his own (new) relations, which are always, by definition, already an ethical question. His “attitude” is non-relation, and his “ethics” is the unmasking of all ethics and especially of public morality. I will not discuss whether Brecht’s model, in its focus on the demolition and much less on the rebuilding of relation, is a matter of theoretical weakness/dogmatism (as a counterpoint to practical efficacy) or of starting from a particular ontology. In one sense, the decision about what *presences* (as Barthes puts it) should be irritating us, or how to go about creating a new myth by exposing the old one, is also a matter of a certain – Brecht might have said political – freedom.

The Gesturality of Ritual: The Rituality of Gestus

It is clear by now that Brecht’s Gestus is constituted in analogy and communication with theories of ideology, which can (also) be thematised as ethical moments in relation to social myths. We began our discussion with Barthes and semiology, with the thesis that a gesture becomes a Gestus when it is interpellated into a myth. At this point, however, I would like to use the word “myth” to leap into another conceptual framework. In order to present the actor, or what I call the “Brechtian subject”, as a subject in a role that is not merely a play but is also playful and experimental and, above all, transcends the ontological (and many other structural) frameworks of theatrical play, I will gradually translate the concepts already introduced into a parallel vocabulary. By linking the actor’s rehearsal (theatrical – and at the same time greater than theatre) to ritual and ideology and Gestus to myth and taboo, the fundamental matrix in Brechtian theatre is pointed to without making reductions. I will show that the performative power of Brechtian theatre can be linked to a strongly personal process, which Brecht thought of more broadly than just a case of a play and actors – and has always considered it as ontology and mode of sociality.

In his essay, “Der KINHAKEN – Šus v brado” (“Der KINHAKEN – A Shot to the Chin”), Lev Kreft compares theatre with sports and articulates the similarities and differences between the two, with particular reference to Brecht and his theatre. It is no coincidence that he writes about Brecht in this very relation: “Sport is the opposite of a socially recognised ‘cultural good’, such as an existing society might choose: it is unhealthy, it is uncultivated, and it is an end in itself. And it is this kind of theatre, unhealthy, uncultivated, and an end in itself, that Brecht favours” (132–133). To shed light on this proposal, Kreft points to Clifford Geertz’s famous study of cockfighting

in Bali, on which Geertz based the concept of “deep play”. This is “a game of risk in which you can only succeed if you are willing to risk more than others and more than you can afford to: you stake your social status entirely in a game that is an end in itself” (135). The concept and reality of deep play are not without parallels to the epic theatre. In sport, not even the players (athletes) know the outcome of a match or a showdown, whereas in theatre everything is – as Krefl suggests – mere “pretending” that the actors are not acting and that the audience does not know that they are acting. Brecht’s epic theatre should be understood not only as an alternative but also as a critique of classical theatre. Estrangement not only interrupts “classical” conspiracies but also teaches about the conspiracies that form bonds outside of theatre – social bonds and social myths. Krefl writes:

The poetics of theatre is not in the literary text but in the misleading relationship that emerges between the actors and the audience, and the poetics of sport is not in the rules but in the pleasure produced by the total investment of all forces, skills, and abilities in something that is not really serious and at the same time is very risky. Bertolt Brecht wanted more of this other, sport-like poetics in the theatre (143).

Brechtian estrangement can be understood as *poetics*: the simultaneous necessity and pleasure in the *experimental intervention* in the social Gestus. The latter implies a set of routinised rules of behaviour, and alienation (analogous to Krefl’s comparison) occurs as the total investment of all forces and skills – physical, mental and verbal – in the breaking of these rules. This is a *risky procedure* in that its effects (e.g., the reactions of the audience in the theatre, the people on the street) are unpredictable. As Krefl puts it, “the estrangement-effect is the opposite of the effect of the sublime, whose condition is that we are safe. It is a shot to the chin that tells us that even in the theatre, we are not safe. Especially not in the theatre” (Ibid.).

Mary Douglas argues in her study of taboos from the 1960s that taboo acts as a way of protecting categories by confronting the obscure, the “dirty”, and relegating the latter to a special category. She defines taboo as a spontaneous coding practice that establishes a vocabulary of spatial constraints and physical and verbal signals aimed at barricading vulnerable relationships. Each culture, according to Douglas, must have “its own notions of dirt and defilement which are contrasted with its notions of the positive structure which must not be negated” (160). The dirt that was “created” by the differentiation of the mind in the creation of order threatens the emerging distinctions. Brecht’s estrangement is thus a specific method of detabooing: the “disorder” or “unclean” is the “something” that Brecht “injects” into the social Gestus – especially in those places where it occurs as a matter of course. Brecht is not interested in an indifferent instigation of order. For him, it is about the controlled introduction of doubt into relationships whose order is shielded by taboos. Against what? – that is the crucial question for Brecht.

Kreft points to the crucial link between rules and risk, the confrontation and experimentation that take place within the rules. On the one hand, this resonates with the previous discussion about Brecht's *Gestus* as a way of addressing ethical relations. At the same time, it opens up a new dimension, as suggested by the reference made to Mary Douglas. Namely: the *ritual dimension of Gestus*. This is not to say that we are dealing with ritual when we address or establish a *Gestus*. The delicate relation between theatre and ritual has been addressed by many theorists, and to date, several branches and discourses have emerged on how to think about this relationship. If ritual was initially thought to be merely a form of performing myths, it has over time acquired the status of an epiphany in its own right and of a play of relations – something similar to the emancipation of theatre from the primacy of the text. A segment of this development is genealogically illustrated by Aldo Milohnić in *Teorije sodobnega gledališča in performansa* (Theories of Contemporary Theatre and Performance) (27–36). As Milohnić summarises, the 20th-century theatre studies postulate that theatre is created when ritual is “theatricalised”, that is, when it is transformed into theatre. Whereas in the second half of the 20th century, and especially in the 1960s, we recognise numerous attempts to renew the theatre, attempts rooted in ritual practices or, in other words, practices that “ritualise” theatre (27).

However, attempts to define ritual are often full of controversy. One would already encounter difficulties when deciding to what extent to take into account the practitioners' point of view (even if their interpretation of ritual is the product of “mythical” thought) versus the observers' point of view (e.g., that of the “rational” Westerner) in the definition. The extent to which ritual relates to religion and its origins is also an issue. Roy A. Rappaport, in his *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, argues that not every ritual is religious, nor is every religious act already a ritual (25). Max Gluckman distances himself from the religious underpinnings of ritual, describing it as “a more embracing category of social action, with religious activities at one extreme and social etiquette at the other” (Bell 39). Indeed, many theories of ritual have long taken into account secular rites, not only religious ones. In his essay “Ritual Remains”, Simon Coleman gives examples of individuals who are not themselves religious but occasionally attend pilgrimages with their families. Seeking to relativise ideas of a ritual “core”, he writes, referring to ritual, that “it is also contained in those ubiquitous but fleeting acts where the uncommitted stumble against and try to make sense of conventional liturgical forms, or glance at rituals as they are also trying to construct relations of kinship or friendship” (306). Some interpretations of ritual also take into account behavioural patterns that ethologists have observed in animals – not only mammals but also fish and even insects.

With this in mind, it is quite different to compare theatre with classical rituals, as we know them – in all their variety – from primitive communities, or with the Catholic ritual of the Mass than it is to compare it with today’s secular, even political rituals, such as state ceremonies, or with aspects of sporting events and even people’s personal morning routines and other “rituals”. Although theatre has most often been associated with shamanistic rituals (or rituals as elements in mythical thought) in order to explain its origins, even these are not a matter of such a single category since we know of many practices in primitive communities which are not connected with a state of trance or ecstasy, nor do they contribute to the relationship to the sacred or taboos and may be “only” symbolic acts or material means. However, they are nevertheless called rituals by anthropologists. The ontological difference between ritual and theatre is succinctly described by Eli Rozik in the introduction to *The Roots of Theatre*:

Whereas ritual is a mode of action in the real world, theatre is a kind of medium (i.e., a particular system of signification and communication). Because of their ontological difference, this is not a binary opposition. Ritual and theatre are mutually independent: ritual can use different media, including theatre; and theatre may or may not describe rituals. Theatre may even create fictional rituals (4).

It is worth noting that in epic theatre, as Kreft also addresses, the difference between actors and the audience implies the latter’s distancing from what is happening on stage and its reticence to experience the play as a completely authentic, real event. Here, the key ontological status of Brecht’s theatre is revealed: it seeks to abolish the spectator’s sense of security by putting something on stage that will shake and concern him too much, and he will not be able to “immerse” himself in the Aristotelian sense. There is no longer a unity between stage and spectator, but this is precisely what gives the latter an active role. At the same time, Brecht also changes the role of the actor, even the nature of acting. Brecht understands actors as apprentices: students who are themselves transformed by performing specific *Gestuses* and *estrangements* on stage. To paraphrase Brecht himself, the “great pedagogy” completely changes the role of acting. It only recognises the actors, but they are also the ones who are studying (see Komelj 109). The *transfiguration* of the (social) *Gestus* simultaneously implies the *transubstantiation* of the subject – in theatre as well as in everyday life. This was Brecht’s project. His method is, therefore, not only a *way* – it is also an *ontology*. Brecht achieved all this under a renewed understanding of who the playwright actually is. His resolution of the crisis of playwriting, on the one hand, and the crisis of the individual, on the other, materialised through the new role of the dramatist, who, in accordance with Brecht’s doctrine, became the organiser of social experiments (see Toporišič). I think that the specifically Brechtian framing of theatre *as pedagogy and experiment* sheds light in a particular way on the (epic) theatre-ritual relationship previously discussed. For this reason, I will mention Jean Cazeneuve and

his rather general and “unburdened” definition of ritual, which seems to capture the two essential trajectories of what sanctifies a practice into a ritual. Cazeneuve writes:

The Latin word *ritus* denoted both ceremonies connected with belief, which were linked to the supernatural, as well as simple social customs, traditions and habits (*ritus moresque*), that is to say, ways of behaving that are reproduced with a certain constancy. Ritual in the true sense of the word, as we shall see, differs from other customs not only in the special nature of its supposed efficacy, but also in the more important role that repetition plays in it (14).

Ritual is constitutive of a more or less binding order of actions, which is maintained as a form over time. The role of repetition, both of the ritual itself and of the words and gestures during the ritual, is key. What Cazeneuve identifies as the “special nature” of the supposed efficacy of ritual, he elsewhere identifies as a partially “extra-empirical”, invisible efficacy (17). In this, we can see several things: an efficacy that presumably *affects* non-empirical entities, or rather: an efficacy that is presumably *mediated* from non-empirical entities – but above all, an efficacy (or also: a need, a relevance) that is not empirically evident *but is evident to the subject*.

Final Thoughts: From Myth to Ritual

This brings us to the final argument. Brecht’s intention to represent the gesture as interpellated into myth (and to subject the latter to his method, thus unmasking it) is the method of how the actor in Brechtian theatre defines the relations in the field of the play. At the same time, it is also a transformation that has a typically ritual function. It is a repetitive “creating” and addressing – and thus becoming aware – of relations that already exist. It is a repetitive pattern that is a matter of a specific consciousness and a specific modus, in which a movement, a gesture, a word (etc.) intervenes not only in empirical realities but also, again and again, in symbolic realities. And last but not least, in *the reality of the myth*, which always means a *simultaneous reading of both* – that is, repeatedly deliberate and conscious. The ritual is not theatre as such, at least not in the strict sense, because the duality of actors-performers means that it is never a matter of a single ontology. The peculiarity of Brecht’s theatre lies precisely in the desire to transmit, at least to the actors-apprentices, a specific way of learning and acting, the consolidation of an important exercise or modus operandi. It is not just a play; it is a posture – a life posture. A way of life, especially a social one; that is, a political one.

In the article, I have argued that Brecht’s method is ritual in that it is a never-perfected exercise in what initiates and constitutes (transsubstantiates) the subject

into a “Brechtian” subject. This is not just about theatre. “Pure” Brechtian theatre only happens outside the theatre, outside the actors-audience relationship, on a unified terrain, where the social Gestus appears as a reality and the intervention in it as a risk – completely without the security of a “backdrop”. There is no theatrical representation, no “as if”. The ritual of theatre, as Brecht conceived it, therefore lies, above all, in its unmistakable potential for what is in the theatre a mere rehearsal to come alive upon the actor’s exit from the theatre. That is, as something that clearly resembles a personal ritual: a posture and at the same time already a practice, a method, and at the same time already an ontology – a repetitive “intervening” as an inwardly felt necessity.

The linking of gesture to ritual and taboo is interesting because the structure of ritual in Brecht’s work is methodologically inverted: it does not establish or reinforce social bonds, nor does it push their content into the collective unconscious, but – on the contrary – it lays bare their foundations and deliberately opens up a space of awareness and doubt. It is true, of course, that the relationship between the multiple practices in primitive communities and the parallels between the latter and the contemporary secular or religious, collective or personalised practices remains the subject of many attempts at systematisation, as well as attempts to dismantle existing systems. We do not know of a final, complete collection of the elements of what constitutes the form and reality of ritual. Perhaps this is because, in the last instance, it is a collection of elements around something that is important for human beings to renew in their short- and long-range routines, and the set is inexhaustible. However, if Brechtian “ethical” “intervening” is also to be called “ritualistic”, then its ritual modus and, at the same time, its value is that it is a *persistent addressing of social myths and taboos*, a showering of the “unknown” into the “known” – a mixing of the “pure” with the “impure”. Such Brechtian “ritual”, which has the opposite modality as most rituals of primitive communities, is not an attempt in the social order but is always primarily an experiment – an attempt in *anti*-ritual. In this essay, I wanted to dive into the universals of what we call “Brechtian” and thus show Brecht in the light of what he had always been: *creative*. Never a follower of schematisation and conventionality, but instead (their) productive transgressor and questioner.

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