

we are translated to the sphere of the irrational. (If the audience sang at the sight of him the case would be different.) The more unreal and unclear the music can make the reality – though there is of course a third, highly complex and in itself quite real element which can have quite real effects but is utterly remote from the reality of which it treats – the more pleasurable the whole process becomes: the pleasure grows in proportion to the degree of unreality.

The term 'opera' – far be it from us to profane it – leads, in *Mahagonny's* case, to all the rest. The intention was that a certain unreality, irrationality and lack of seriousness should be introduced at the right moment, and so strike with a double meaning.<sup>1</sup>

The irrationality which makes its appearance in this way only fits the occasion on which it appears.

It is a purely hedonistic approach.

As for the content of this opera, *its content is pleasure*. Fun, in other words, not only as form but as subject-matter. At least, enjoyment was meant to be the object of the inquiry even if the inquiry was intended to be an object of enjoyment. Enjoyment here appears in its current historical role: as merchandise.<sup>2</sup>

It is undeniable that at present this content must have a provocative effect. In the thirteenth section, for example, where the glutton stuffs himself to death; because hunger is the rule. We never even hinted that others were going hungry while he stuffed, but the effect was provocative all the same. It is not everyone who is in a position to stuff himself full that dies of it, yet many are dying of hunger because this man stuffs himself to death. His pleasure provokes, because it implies so much.<sup>3</sup>

In contexts like these the use of opera as a means of pleasure must have provocative effects today. Though not of course on the handful of operagoers. Its power to provoke introduces reality once more. *Mahagonny* may not taste particularly agreeable; it may even (thanks to guilty conscience)

<sup>1</sup> This limited aim did not stop us from introducing an element of instruction, and from basing everything on the gest. The eye which looks for the gest in everything is the moral sense. In other words, a moral tableau. A subjective one, though ...

Jetzt trinken wir noch eins  
Dann gehen wir nicht nach Hause  
Dann trinken wir noch eins  
Dann machen wir mal eine Pause.

– The people who sing this are subjective moralists. They are describing themselves.

<sup>2</sup> Romanticism is merchandise here too. It appears only as content, not as form.

<sup>3</sup> 'A dignified gentleman with an empurpled face had fished out a bunch of keys and was making a piercing demonstration against the Epic Theatre. His wife didn't desert him in this decisive moment. She had stuck two fingers in her mouth, screwed up her eyes and blown out her cheeks. The whistle was louder than the key of the safe.' (Alfred Polgar on the first production of *Mahagonny* in Leipzig.)

## THE MODERN THEATRE IS THE EPIC THEATRE

make a point of not doing so. But it is culinary through and through. *Mahagonny* is nothing more or less than an opera.

## – WITH INNOVATIONS!

Opera had to be brought up to the technical level of the modern theatre. The modern theatre is the epic theatre. The following table shows certain changes of emphasis as between the dramatic and the epic theatre:<sup>1</sup>

## DRAMATIC THEATRE

plot  
implicates the spectator in a stage situation  
wears down his capacity for action  
provides him with sensations  
experience  
the spectator is involved in something  
suggestion  
instinctive feelings are preserved  
the spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience  
the human being is taken for granted

he is unalterable  
eyes on the finish  
one scene makes another  
growth  
linear development  
evolutionary determinism  
man as a fixed point  
thought determines being  
feeling

## EPIC THEATRE

narrative  
turns the spectator into an observer, but  
arouses his capacity for action  
forces him to take decisions  
picture of the world  
he is made to face something  
argument  
brought to the point of recognition  
the spectator stands outside, studies

the human being is the object of the inquiry  
he is alterable and able to alter  
eyes on the course  
each scene for itself  
montage  
in curves  
jumps  
man as a process  
social being determines thought  
reason

When the epic theatre's methods begin to penetrate the opera the first result is a radical *separation of the elements*. The great struggle for supremacy between words, music and production – which always brings up the question 'which is the pretext for what?': is the music the pretext for the events on the stage, or are these the pretext for the music? etc. – can simply be by-passed by radically separating the elements. So long as the expression 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (or 'integrated work of art') means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be 'fused' together, the various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will

<sup>1</sup> This table does not show absolute antitheses but mere shifts of accent. In a communication of fact, for instance, we may choose whether to stress the element of emotional suggestion or that of plain rational argument.