

**HANDS-ON REALISM:
PERCEPTION, IMAGINATION, AND SPEECH
IN BRECHT'S POETRY**

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PREFACE

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in this preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in this preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics Degree Committee.

ABSTRACT

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Robert Britten

Brecht's somewhat idiosyncratic conception of realist art appears to pit "Erlebnisse" unfavourably against "Kenntnisse". With all that is encompassed by the term *Verfremdung*, Brecht is understood to have looked to thwart would-be passive spectators. But while it is tempting to think of Brecht in opposition to experience-based art, and to draw sharp distinctions between supposedly naïve experience and critical thought, or between passive spectating and active intervention, my thesis highlights the shortcomings of this approach. Even many of Brecht's most politically acute poems are in fact remarkably evocative of rich perceptual experience. Landscapes in and between seasons, everyday scenes and objects, trees, clouds, bodies of water, form the backdrop to large-scale historical events. Crucially, the figures that populate these poems are precisely not just spectators, but they are keen and active perceivers: they squint their eyes or turn their heads, they notice one thing and not another, they are not limited to what happens to be in view any given moment, but supplement what they encounter with recollections from the past and simulations of possible futures. In such poems, against the tempting fiction of the passive spectator, Brecht shows us perceivers in action, who bring reality dynamically and critically into view.

Chapter One outlines the striking echo of such poems in recent work on perception and action in psychology and the philosophy of mind. Against the still pervasive idea that perceiving is a kind of spectating in relation to a head-internal theatre, in which perceptual information accrues to form a picture of the external world, theorists of the so-called pragmatic turn situate perception in much closer proximity to action: perceivers are not passive spectators of a world from which they are at a remove, but engage with one that 'shows up for us in experience only insofar as we know how to make contact with it, [...] only insofar as we are able to bring it into focus' (Noë). The following two chapters attend to poems that thematise or are structured around acts of mental simulation (Chapter Two) and acts of speech (Chapter 3). Where those that speak in Brecht's poems imagine or remember, they meet the world half-way, self-generating alternative contexts that open up space for critical reflection. Where Brecht

exhibits, juxtaposes and critically examines the utterances made by different speakers from different perspectives, he reminds us that the function of language is not exhausted in naming, or in representing different objects in the world, but that, with language, we do things. Chapter Four, finally, brings this idea of active world-engagement to the question of *Verfremdung*. If Brecht was wary of excessive familiarity that would bias readers and audiences into accepting the reality that simply presents itself, this is not a concern about passive or impotent perceivers, but about highly efficient ones: familiarity and habit determine everyday perception *precisely because* skilled and active perceivers reach out to the world and bring their own expectations and prior knowledge to bear on the encounter. Framed in this way, however, *Verfremdung* does not side-step such perceptual mechanisms: surprise and shock, uncertainty, attention – all themselves felt as striking or peculiar experiences – are built into a perceptual apparatus that is efficient, but also, at need, flexible and adaptable.

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INTRODUCTION

Wir hören sagen, daß Brecht ein großer Dichter, einer unserer größten Dramatiker überhaupt sei, aber man müsse freundlichst vergessen oder heftig bedauern, daß er Kommunist war. Barbarisch gesagt: Hauptsache, daß die schönen Worte da sind, das Poetische, das ist gut, das gefällt uns, besonders die Pflaumenbäume und die kleine weiße Wolke.¹ – Ingeborg Bachmann

1. Hands-On Realism

Writing from exile in 1938, Brecht suggests as a programme for his artistic practice that ‘wir werden alle Mittel verwenden, alte und neue, erprobte und unerprobte, aus der Kunst stammende und anderswoher stammende, um die Realität den Menschen meisterbar in die Hand zu geben’.² It is an apt remark, reflecting the great variety of different forms, genres and media that had made up Brecht’s work through the years: as a playwright and stage director Brecht was ‘prolific, collaborative, [...] and seriously playful’;³ his theatre is shaped by a great range of techniques, instructions for actors, collaborators, and Brecht’s keen interest in different genres, art styles and media. Embracing narrative forms and music, and adopting masks and acting styles from Chinese and Japanese theatre in his stage work, Brecht also collected and collated photographs and other kinds of newspaper cut-outs in his journals, and is said to have kept a book of Bruegel paintings open in his lap during rehearsals,⁴ while, in the *Kriegsfibel*, bringing to bear his ‘long-standing interest in photography’ in combination

¹ Ingeborg Bachmann, *Werke, Vol. 4*, ed. by Christine Koschel, Inge v. Weidenbaum, and Clemens Münster (München, 1978), p. 194.

² Bertolt Brecht, *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe, Vol. 22*, ed. by Werner Hecht and others (Frankfurt a.M., 1993), p. 408. Quotations from the *Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe* are hereafter referenced in the format BFA, 22, 408.

³ Meg Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht* (Oxford, 2009), p. 48.

⁴ See Tom Kuhn, ‘Brecht reads Bruegel: Verfremdung, Gestic Realism and the Second Phase of Brechtian Theory’, *Monatshefte*, 105.1 (2013), 101–22 (p. 118).

with quatrains written in an often artificial and high-register verse.⁵ Brecht's wider body of poetry, which will be the focus of this study, is remarkably diverse in its own right: as David Constantine summarises, Brecht paid 'close and unprejudiced attention to the poetic forms and possibilities placed at his disposal by tradition', and was quite willing to embrace whatever seemed suitable for his purposes: '[h]e wrote ballads, chorales, music-hall songs, marching songs; psalms, epigrams, odes, elegies, idylls; he wrote in iambics, trochaics, hexameters, free verse; he rhymed when it suited him, didn't when it didn't [...].'⁶

While testifying to the plethora of his means (and practically precluding a definition of Brechtian Realism in formal or stylistic terms), Brecht's remark also offers some sense of the purpose that runs across these different artistic projects. The tangibility metaphor he deploys ('die Realität den Menschen meisterbar in die Hand [...] geben') gives this thesis its title and testifies to a realist stance that is not interested in experiencing – and artistically rendering – reality in any straightforward sense, still less to create illusions or effects of it. Speaking not only of a 'realistische Betrachtungsweise' but also a 'realistische Handlungsweise' (BFA 22, 638) Brecht is interested in active readers and audiences that do not stop at experiencing as a kind of spectating, but go on to scrutinise, to learn about and, ultimately to act upon the realities to which the artworks pertain and from which they emerge. Brecht's realist project is thus no small (and certainly no humble) undertaking, and neither is the task of delineating it. With a definition in stylistic or genre terms neither particularly desirable nor seemingly attainable, it proves fruitful to adopt what David Barnett calls a 'method over means' approach: that is, to understand what Brecht did as a poet, or playwright or stage director, and indeed as a theorist, too, as a product of the way he thought about the world.⁷ That is to say, where we might, elsewhere, make recourse to the idea of a reality

⁵ Tom Kuhn, 'Poetry and Photography: Mastering Reality in the *Kriegsfibel*', in '*Verwisch die Spuren!*' Bertolt Brecht's *Work and Legacy. A Reassessment*, ed. by Robert Gillett and Godela Weiss-Sussex (Amsterdam, New York, 2008), pp. 169–90 (p. 177).

⁶ David Constantine, 'Brecht's Sonnets', in *Empedocles' Shoe: Essays on Brecht's Poetry*, ed. by Tom Kuhn and Karen J. Leeder (London, 2002), pp. 151–73 (p. 157).

⁷ See David Barnett, *Brecht in Practice. Theatre, Theory and Performance* (London, 2015), p. 5.

effect, or of verisimilitude, to define Realism, Brecht is interested, broadly speaking, in truth. Where we could conceive of the engagement of readers with a realist text as a kind of ‘imagining spectating’ of fictitious objects and events in a furnished fictional world,⁸ Brecht ultimately demands action and change in the real world instead. Seeking to understand why Brecht does what he does as a practitioner and how he does it, it seems, then, that we must contend with rather bigger and broader questions: not what reality looks like from a given perspective (and how a text or another artistic medium might recreate it), but what reality comprises, how it is structured, and how it continues to come about over time; not just how we come in contact with the world around us, but how we learn, argue, and teach about it, and act in it.

Much has already been done, by Brecht himself, and in the scholarship to date, to tease out the means and devices of this somewhat idiosyncratic, but certainly hands-on Realism, particularly in respect of Brecht’s stage work, which often sought not, or not only, to portray but to interrogate and to pick apart reality with experiments and models and montages. In the *Brecht-Handbuch* Astrid Oesmann emphasises the fact that, to Brecht, learning and scrutinizing the world are ‘nicht geistige, sondern [...] körperlich-soziale Tätigkeit[en]’,⁹ that active intervention is not just predicated on and preceded by knowledge and understanding, but that the relationship between knower and known goes both ways. Brecht notes on the topic of *Erkenntnis* ‘daß wir nichts erkennen können, was wir nicht verändern können, noch das, was uns nicht verändert’ (BFA 21, 413). In other words, we only know the world in interaction, and we tend to pay attention to changes more than to a constantly repetitive status quo. Referring to Kant’s *Ding an sich* as an entity outside of and prior to human apprehension, Brecht adds: ‘dieses Ding an sich ist unverwertbar uninteressant, wirkt auf den Wahrnehmenden tatsächlich gar nicht ein [...]’ (BFA 21, 413). Citing Brecht’s fondness for the saying ‘The proof of the pudding lies in the eating’, Meg Mumford emphasizes how, indeed, all of Brecht’s potential epistemological worries about truth and the possibility of finding and speaking it, can, in principle, be resolved in practice:

⁸ Emily Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism* (New York, 2014), p. 55.

⁹ Astrid Oesmann, ‘Schriften 1924-1933. Zur Philosophie’, in *Brecht Handbuch. Schriften, Journale, Briefe. Vol. 4.*, ed. by Jan Knopf (Stuttgart, Weimar, 2003), pp. 117–24 (p. 117).

Brecht employed the proverb to endorse the pragmatic view that we can test and correct our sense-perception of objects and qualities (the pudding or epic drama and theatre) by putting the objects to use (by eating or staging). Did the spectator have a revolutionary, life-altering meal?¹⁰

While taking a similar approach to Brecht's practice, and revisiting this pragmatic view as a distinctly hands-on attitude to pudding, theatre, and wider reality alike, the present study focuses on another large corpus, one he rarely ceased to expand, in Brecht's oeuvre: the (more or less) lyric poetry and, in particular, the kinds of poems that may be thought of as diverting from the rigorously analytical and even empirical or experimental programme that is in evidence elsewhere. There are plenty of them: observing nature and everyday life (of which the memorable white cloud and the plum trees evoked by Ingeborg Bachmann in the opening quotation are only a small sample), and showing, among many perspectives, the 'alltägliche[...] Optik des Dichters'.¹¹ On one hand, these poems might be viewed as presenting a challenge to conceptions of Brechtian Realism in other contexts, in which almost a wariness towards artworks with a focus on sensations and experiences can be discerned. Precisely the emphasis on practice, on a robust worldliness, could be mustered into an argument against lyric poetry: not only are the senses at least potentially epistemologically impoverished (the world that shows up in perceptual experience is not the world at large), but mere gazing out at the world in a lyrical mode is also, or so one might feel, a rather passive stance that lacks the kind of critical engagement Brecht sought to practice and encourage. There is another viewpoint, however, from which these poems come to be key evidence of Brecht's stake in action and intervention: as much as they concern themselves with vistas of landscapes and trees, they also concern themselves with, and pay close attention to, the ways in which their speakers perceive and experience them. Crucially, with this close attention comes the insight that perceiving is precisely not (just) spectating: it is bringing things into view, listening and reaching out to the world with deliberation. And it is not just plain perceiving that Brecht's poetic speakers get up to: they imagine, remember, and speak, continuously co-constructing the world they inhabit

¹⁰ Mumford, p. 51.

¹¹ Peter Paul Schwarz, *Lyrik und Zeitgeschichte. Brecht: Gedichte über das Exil und späte Lyrik*. (Heidelberg, 1978), p. 55.

in an unfolding cycle of such acts of world-engagement. Attention to these kinds of poems offers us not just a reappraisal of the sheer richness of life and lived experience in Brecht's poetic oeuvre, of the multitude of things to see and to do in the world. They are evidence of, and they are a guide to, not just Brechtian realist theory, but to a lived and practised pragmatic attitude as it builds and develops throughout his working life. They offer an opportunity to anchor Brecht, the pragmatic thinker and practitioner, in discourses that have long since, and particularly recently, broken down rigid distinctions between *Erlebnisse* and *Kenntnisse*, thinking and feeling, perceiving and acting.

One such tradition begins with Wittgenstein, with whom Brecht shares a commitment to the idea that epistemological worries about truth and meaning can be resolved in active practice. In both thinkers' approaches, the question of what something is or means is superseded by the question of what it does, and how it could be used. Exploring Brecht's philosophical allegiances and his brand of Marxism, Wolfgang Fritz Haug has already established potential points of connection between Brecht and Wittgenstein, through other thinkers and by comparing various passages of their works.¹² In what follows, I will focus more on the ordinary language tradition that has since emerged from Wittgensteinian thought, and on what this tradition can do for our reading of Brecht's poetry. Drawing on J.L. Austin's speech act theory, and the philosophy of Stanley Cavell, Toril Moi's recent *Revolution of the Ordinary* will be a particularly important point of reference, outlining as it does the benefits of thinking about (literary) language not as acts of representing the world or naming the objects in it, but of doing something to and with the world. This approach allows us to appreciate in very concrete terms that where the speakers in Brecht's poems speak, they act. The poems themselves, as literary utterances, are not mirror images of but actions of sorts within the reality they pertain to. In the same sense that, for Wittgenstein, 'to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life',¹³ Brecht imagines (and poetically enacts) what people say, thus imagining their lives, and their worlds, as well.

¹² See Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Philosophieren mit Brecht und Gramsci* (Berlin, Hamburg, 1996).

¹³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen. Philosophical Investigations. Revised Fourth Edition*, ed. by Peter Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. by Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Oxford, 2009), p. 11.

Another more recent research paradigm may seem further afield, but yields a surprising outlook on a question that seems almost perfectly tailored to Brecht's realist and interventionist concerns, namely, 'how creatures like us get to know the world and to act in it.'¹⁴ With what has been called a 'pragmatic turn' in the cognitive sciences,¹⁵ a terminology and analytic framework is made available to us that allows us to situate perception in much closer proximity to action (where action is used to also include acts 'not involving any overt movements', such as thinking, imagining, scrutinising).¹⁶ Existing on a spectrum from radical so-called enactivist views to more moderate and mainstream approaches, this paradigm rejects a view of perceptual processes as a kind of model-making of the world, but rather 'as subserving action and grounded in sensorimotor skills'.¹⁷ In other words, the world that shows up for us in perceptual experience is not some kind of static picture or representation of the perceptible world in our brains (or, more moderately put, is not exclusively based on such brain states), but arises in an unfolding process of active world-engagement on the part of the perceiver: '[t]he world shows up for us in experience only insofar as we know how to make contact with it, or, to use a different metaphor, only insofar as we are able to bring it into focus.'¹⁸ If Brecht's is a perspective on the world in which action matters the most, this angle is valuable not just for its noticeable similarities in tone and in the emphasis on interaction and practice as a path to acquaintance with, and to knowledge and understanding about the world. If Brecht, ultimately, has a stake in how 'creatures like us', different kinds of human minds and bodies, come to know our world and act in it, another path towards an understanding of Brecht's realist project, is, in fact, to scrutinise what perceiving is and how it serves these purposes.

¹⁴ Andy Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty. Prediction, Action, and the Embodied Mind* (Oxford, 2016), p. 1.

¹⁵ See Andreas K. Engel, Karl J. Friston, and Danica Kragic, 'Introduction: Where's the Action?', in *The Pragmatic Turn: Toward Action-Oriented Views in Cognitive Science*, ed. by Andreas K. Engel, Karl J. Friston, and Danica Kragic (Cambridge, MA, 2015), pp. 1–18 for an overview.

¹⁶ Engel, Friston, and Kragic, p. 4.

¹⁷ Engel, Friston, and Kragic, p. 1.

¹⁸ Alva Noë, *Varieties of Presence* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), p. 2.

2. Hands-On Poetry and its Readers

The organisers of a recent conference panel titled *Ecocriticism and Brecht / Ecocriticism of Brecht* attest to Brecht a ‘remarkable affection for nature’.¹⁹ This is certainly evident in many places in the poetry, where plant life, the weather, and landscapes in and between seasons all make their appearances. No fewer than 223 individual trees, groves, and woods are dotted across the poetic oeuvre, and various bodies of water, too, leave a trace of wherever and whenever it is that Brecht writes poems:

the river Lech and the chestnut trees of Augsburg in the *Domestic Breviary*; in the *Svendborg Poems*, the fruit-trees in the garden and the arm of the sea which separates Fyn from its neighbouring islands and, beyond, from Germany; the poplars and firs and the lakes around his country retreat in Brandenburg in the *Buckow Elegies*.²⁰

But even beyond the natural world, the poet Brecht proves remarkably affectionate, and remarkably attentive, to the world he and others inhabited, to its spaces and objects, and to different people and their endeavours. Such poems can be found right across Brecht’s oeuvre, in some places more numerous than in others: it is a corpus definable less by a single style or method, or even by a specific time and place, than by an overarching theme and preoccupation, and, as will become clear in due course, by a particular kind of realist attitude, where Brecht’s poetic voices are observers, where they get the bearings of their surroundings or square their experiences with others (‘Was hast du gesehen, Wanderer?’, BFA 15, 57-58). Radios and smoking paraphernalia, theatre props and tools of day-to-day life, different kinds of prized possessions are taken stock of. Houses and cities, forests and fields, ‘the views from his various study windows’ form the backdrop to an enlarged reality of historical events.²¹ Even where explicit

¹⁹ Kristopher Imbriggotta and Elena Pnevmonidou, ‘Introduction and Context’, in *MLA Panel Series “Ecocriticism and Brecht / Ecocriticism of Brecht”*, 2021.

²⁰ Tom Kuhn, ‘Introduction’, in *Empedocles’ Shoe: Essays on Brecht’s Poetry*, ed. by Tom Kuhn and Karen J. Leeder (London, 2002), pp. 5–36 (pp. 30–31).

²¹ Kuhn, ‘Introduction’, p. 14.

autobiographical markers are missing, Brecht's poems are frequently constructed around everyday objects and activities. Doves of poet-speakers, but also farmers, manual labourers, housewives, soldiers populate them. Their speakers, or those of whom they speak, see and hear, remember and imagine, dream or deliberate. They converse with each other or talk to the reader or to themselves. What also stands out from this impressively broad oeuvre by an author whom we often associate with jerkiness and deliberate difficulty, with cold politics or even, at times, with blunt didacticism, are certain poems that are attentive to and evocative of sometimes strikingly relatable sensations and experiences: among the sometimes brutal themes of the *Hauspostille*, a white cloud that stands out saliently in the memory of an afternoon spent with a lover (BFA 11, 92-93); in exile, a sparse inventory of different personal items which are invested with, and manifest the lack of, another person: 'Du bist sehr da und du fehlst' (BFA 15, 94); later, in Buckow, the irrational impatience waiting for a change of tyres or the sudden prominence of a trail of smoke rising from a chimney to the backdrop of the realization of how desolate the scene would be were it not there. Brecht's poetic engagement with this everyday world is evidence not just of affection but of affect: he does not, as a poet, show us landscapes and trees by themselves, but those living in and among them.

In many contexts where such poems are discussed (as indeed in the previous paragraph) there is an implicit or explicit "despite" to be heard: the conference proceedings just mentioned tell us that Brecht had a 'remarkable affection for nature' '[f]or someone whose artistic persona, politics, and aesthetic praxis are so inextricably associated with the large metropolitan cityscape'.²² Tom Kuhn, describing the influence of particular landscapes in the major collections from all phases of Brecht's working life, rightly notes that this may seem 'surprising in a poet whose focus appears to be not nature, but the social'.²³ As is evident in the (occasionally free-handed) use of the term Brechtian,²⁴ there are strong associations with that name, against the backdrop of which such poems, richly evocative of the 'alltägliche[...] Optik des Dichters' may well come

²² Imbrigotta and Pnevmonidou, n.p.

²³ Kuhn, 'Introduction', p. 30.

²⁴ Barnett quotes two pieces of theatre criticism, where the term "Brechtian" stands in for two of the most common associations with Brecht's stage work: breaking the fourth wall and "alienation", see Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, p. 1.

to seem surprising or remarkable.²⁵ We often think of Brecht in terms of the jerky or the crude, of playful or scornful mockery, of satire and irony. Particularly, but not exclusively, in the context of Brecht's more widely known capacity as a playwright and stage director, terms like *Verfremdung* or *Gestus* suggest themselves in place of conventional realist principles; devices like breaking-the-fourth-wall and historicization come to mind, taking the place of rich imagery and sensation. Brecht sets his epic theatre apart from Aristotelian, that is, from classical drama, and keeps a distance, for the most part, from realist and naturalist practitioners of his own time. Against the ideal of creating in art a kind of organic unity (think of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*²⁶), Brecht favours a *Trennung der Elemente*, deploying montages and creating sharp contrasts between different aspects of a performance.²⁷ In place of familiarity and recognition, Brecht seeks to defamiliarize, not just in the theatre; the poetry, too, has often been read in terms of *Verfremdung* and, for instance, explored for its gestic character.²⁸ Not least in Brecht's theorizing about Realism, many detect in his writing a certain wariness towards experience-based art: while there can be no doubt that Brecht sought, with his work, to pertain to reality, his realist project appears nonetheless to be aimed at active intervention rather than towards experience; towards knowledge and understanding hard-won through an almost scientific scrutiny, such as when Brecht's Galileo tells his apprentice, who is puzzled by the idea that the sun was not revolving

²⁵ Schwarz, p. 55.

²⁶ Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, p. 70.

²⁷ See Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, pp. 69–70; Roswitha Müller, 'Montage in Brecht', *Theatre Journal*, 39.4 (1987), 473–86.

²⁸ For an early approach to this, see Gordon L. Tracy, "'Das Gestische" and the Poetry of Brecht', in *Essays on German Literature*, ed. by Michael S. Batts and Marketa Goetz Stankiewicz (Toronto, 1968), pp. 218–35. See also Daniel Frey, *Rosen in finsternen Zeiten. Zur politischen Bildlichkeit bei Bertolt Brecht* (Bern, 1988), for an exploration of the poems' *Sprachgestus*. More recently, Philip Thomson has echoed such readings in arguing that 'Brecht's poetry is not introspective in the traditional lyrical mode. His personal utterances tend to have the function of self-projection, even of self-staging. He presents himself to an audience, his readers', Philip Thomson, 'Brecht's Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. by Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 225–41 (p. 202).

around the earth when it had clearly, visibly, changed its position, that merely “gawping” is not proper “seeing”, not the kind of active and critical engagement with the world that is required to understand it.²⁹ That is to say, if we assume, along with Barnett, that Brecht seeks to show the world as changing and changeable, or along with Kuhn, that he aims to dissect it as a ‘complex totality of structures and relations’³⁰ which are subject to constant human intervention, this assumption is usually complemented by the implicit or explicit supposition that everyday perceptual experience is somehow in opposition to such a critical stance. It is on this basis, after all, that Brecht repeatedly dismissed work, in which ‘man “alles” riechen, schmecken, fühlen kann’ (BFA 22, 408), or which simply creates the illusion ‘dies sei der [...] Gegenstand’ (BFA 22, 181), and that he appears, at one point at least, to have rejected the idea of lyric poetry as mere ‘Ausdrucks- oder Erlebniskunst’.³¹

In light of this, scholars reading these poems that pay such careful, and, indeed, affectionate, attention to the natural world and to more or less ordinary life, have often had to caution against and to seek to avoid a number of potential fallacies: on one hand, it feels jejune (or, indeed, barbaric, in Ingeborg Bachmann’s words) to seek to exempt these poems entirely from Brecht’s more overtly political project.³² When Jan Knopf writes that ‘ohne den Künstler Brecht ist der Politiker [...] nicht mehr zu diskutieren’,³³ the same is very much true vice versa, and in his reappraisal of Brechtian theatre practice, David Barnett emphasises that Brecht was not, as had been occasionally claimed, ‘a dramatist first and a Marxist second’ (here, “dramatist” could easily be

²⁹ See BFA 5, 11.

³⁰ Kuhn, ‘Brecht reads Bruegel’, p. 114. See also Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, p. 5.

³¹ Dorothee Ostmeier, ‘Schriften 1933-1941. Zur Lyrik’, in *Brecht Handbuch. Schriften, Journale, Briefe. Vol. 4.*, ed. by Jan Knopf (Stuttgart, Weimar, 2003), pp. 247–57 (p. 251).

³² This had also happened to Brechtian theatre in West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s, when ‘nearly all stylistic elements of Brecht’s theatre were adopted [...]’ while ‘neatly separat[ing] Brecht’s means from his ends’, John Rouse, *Brecht and the West German Theatre: The Practice and Politics of Interpretation* (Ann Arbor, 1989), p. 83.

³³ Jan Knopf, *Brecht-Handbuch. Theater* (Stuttgart, 1980), p. 6.

replaced by “poet”).³⁴ As is widely acknowledged, and as I hope to reaffirm in what follows, many of these poems constitute a fitting backdrop to Brecht’s sociopolitical reflections and they fulfil the role of what he called ‘historische Selbstbetrachtung’ (BFA 18, 188). Also, formally speaking, these poems certainly do not constitute a kind of naïve *Erlebniskunst*, but often appear carefully crafted at the second glance at the very least: as Kuhn observes, they form tensions both internally and between each other,³⁵ and they frequently draw their lifeblood from contradictions and juxtapositions, however subtle. Many commentators have also identified countless different instances and given varying accounts of the principle of *Verfremdung* in the poetry: Ockenden, for instance, points to ‘the use of wit and parody, the disappointing of readers’ expectations, the trivialising and degrading metaphor and the simplified, epigrammatic style [as] evidence of *Verfremdung* at work’.³⁶ In different places and at different times of Brecht’s working life, this may be more or less subtle, more or less intentional. It may be manifest in formal aspects such as rhyme or metre, or on the topical level of the poems. From early attempts to shock and provoke, and to turn common forms and narratives on their head, via the urgently political poems on war, fascism, and exile in the 1930s and early 1940s, to the often minimalist poetic reflections of the older Brecht which are at least not definitely just ‘Alterslyrik’.³⁷ Brecht, the poet, frequently demonstrates the same interest in educating and stirring readers into action, the same resistance to, in Ockenden’s words, ‘[d]irectness and obviousness’, as Brecht, the playwright and director.³⁸ Most accounts also agree on something like this: they gesture

³⁴ Michael Billington, ‘B is for Brecht’, *The Guardian*, 21 December 2011. See also Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils* (London, 1959).

³⁵ See Kuhn, ‘Introduction’, p. 32.

³⁶ Ray Ockenden, ‘Empedocles in Buckow: A Sketch-Map of Misreading in Brecht’s Poetry’, in *Empedocles’ Shoe: Essays on Brecht’s Poetry*, ed. by Tom Kuhn and Karen J. Leeder (London, 2002), pp. 178–205 (p. 178). See also Schwarz, pp. 60–64.

³⁷ See Hugo Dittberner, ‘Die Philosophie der Landschaft in Brechts Buckower Elegien’, in *Bertolt Brecht I. Sonderband aus der Reihe Text + Kritik*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (München, 1972), pp. 54–65; Jörg Wilhelm Joost, ‘Gedichte 1947–1956. Buckower Elegien’, in *Brecht Handbuch. Gedichte. Vol. 2*, ed. by Jan Knopf (Stuttgart, Weimar, 2001), pp. 439–53 (p. 440).

³⁸ Ockenden, p. 182.

towards or explicitly point at Brecht's interest in engaging the reader's own critical thinking, in a kind of "Besonders-Machen" or even 'Schock', and aimed, ultimately, at 'Überlegung' or 'Einsicht'.³⁹

It does equally not do, of course, to take Brecht's theorizing about Realism, truth, and so on, too much at face value: one might, irrationally, be tempted to fall for the misleading self-characterization in *Schlechte Zeit für Lyrik* in which a poet-speaker describes a scenario that we might recognise as Brecht's own situation in his early Danish exile, and dwells at length on the problem that poets face in the 1930s, namely, that they must no longer express 'Begeisterung über den blühenden Apfelbaum', or the 'grünen Boote und lustigen Segel des Sundes' (BFA 14, 432), and that there are things that are simply more important, more urgently in need of voicing than these personal impressions of nature and landscape; things that may not be obvious, visible, or immediate, but rather obscured in the sheer complexity of socio-political structures, relations, and causes ('Nur das Zweite / Drängt mich zum Schreibtisch', the poem concludes). However, as Ockenden points out, the poem's *spiel* is misdirecting:⁴⁰ it is not, he suggests, about Hitler's speeches at all, but about the contention between horror and delight.⁴¹ And, in any case, there is perhaps nothing inherently alarming about this apparent tension between overarching theory and specific practice: as has long been pointed out in the scholarship, where Brecht's theoretical reflections on the means and methods of art strike a rather adamant tone, an altogether more practical, indeed, a more pragmatic attitude shows in his various forms of artistic practice.⁴² Where he invariably

³⁹ Philip Brady, 'Der verfremdete Krieg in der Lyrik Bertolt Brechts', in *Krieg und Frieden in Gedichten von der Antike bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Theo Stemmler (Mannheim, 1994), pp. 157–73 (p. 158).

⁴⁰ See Ockenden, p. 184.

⁴¹ See Ockenden, p. 193.

⁴² See John Fuegi, *Bertolt Brecht: Chaos According to Plan* (Cambridge, 1987), p. xiii. In keeping with the theme of pragmatism, we might also look to Brecht's approach to theatre in the GDR: what could, on one hand, be described as a kind of softening towards more conventional (or here: socialist realist) forms of staging, Barnett considers 'pragmatic': after all, Brecht and Weigel both had an interest in obtaining and maintaining official support for the *Ensemble* as an independent theatre, David Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 87.

rejects the broadly-conceived realist project of creating or re-creating the world of experience in writing, Brecht, the practitioner, readily collaborated and compromised, played with genres, styles, and media, and adapted all kinds of material from numerous literary and other cultural traditions to suit his purpose.

This study expands on existing accounts which pursue this kind of nuance. Its approach is informed, however, not just by Brecht's pragmatism about his means, but by a pragmatist lens onto the thematic focus of these poems: perceiving, imagining, speaking, all of them ways of being in the world and acting in it. It is crucial here not to overlook the fact that some of these poems are ultimately *sinnlich*, that they afford rich mental imagery, and that they can be beautiful and moving and emotionally charged. It is the purpose of this study to put forward the idea that precisely in their attention to these forms of active world-engagement, they achieve Brecht's aim. In that they concern themselves with ordinary lives and ordinary experiences, they are strikingly realist not just about the world their speakers inhabit, but about perceiving it: the landscapes, the plant life, and the many ordinary objects encountered in Brecht's poetry are portrayed in context, or, indeed, in action. The poems tell stories about how we experience as well as interact with them, or they reflect on the different ways in which we might put our experiences into words. Their voices are not necessarily philosophers or left-wing critics, but poets, refugees, parents, travellers (and sometimes they are several at once). In short, many of Brecht's poems deal with the question of just how we can be critical thinkers and political agents *within* our concrete experience of the world. They do reflect on the limits, but also explore the potential of perception and of language. They consider the intersections, or, in fact, the interdependent relationship, between perception and action, between *Erlebnisse* and *Kenntnisse*. They show: when the speaker of a poem looks out of a window, they act by bringing the world into view; when another compares the immediate present to a recollection of the past or to a simulated future, they act by generating their own artificial contexts for critical reflection. When someone speaks in a poem, they, too, act: utterances are expressions about and actions in the world, leaving their mark on and effecting change in the world in which there are uttered.

3. A Note on (Everyday) Scepticism

Before setting up the methodological framework for the project on which we are about to embark, it will be necessary to establish just why this pragmatic perspective should be so crucial to Brechtian Realism. After all, the matter of Brecht's alleged wariness towards, or his worry even, about perception, perceptual experience, and experience-based art is none too straightforward: on one hand, Brecht's stake in Realism, in truth, in "taking reality in hand", and in real, tangible intervention seems certainly to warrant questions and potentially concerns about how we, human beings, realise this robust contact with the world. He does, for instance, reflect on the potential limitations to the scope of human perceptual experience, particularly clearly expressed in his assertion that '[die Realität] ist längst nicht mehr im Totalen erlebbar' (BFA 21, 469). And when it comes to representational artefacts (particularly language or imagery), which might serve the function of putting reality on display according to Brecht's realist aims, he does also caution that these, as mere snapshots of a wider totality, might only further obscure its complexity and changeable nature.⁴³ On the other hand, and this adds a significant note of caution to this line of argument, Brecht hardly had time for a deeply committed sort of scepticism about the possibility to get at and to communicate truth, about acting on and changing the world. As and when he does worry about it, his response is to bring to the table solutions, to work with whatever is at his disposal, and to demand the same pragmatism from others. Where concerns about perception and perceptual experience, about the limitations or misleading character of language and imagery are discussed in the literature,⁴⁴ they therefore come up mostly as a way of framing and situating Brecht's practical innovations. For instance, as Kämper highlights, Brecht did not mistrust language per se, but thought it could be deliberately abused, which implies, of course, that he believed also that it could and should be used

⁴³ See the remark: '[e]ine Fotografie der Kruppwerke oder der AEG ergibt beinahe nichts über diese Institute' (BFA 21, 468).

⁴⁴ See Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, pp. 55–58 for an account of Brecht's 'problem of visibility'. See Heidrun Kämper, 'Bertolt Brecht, der Nationalsozialismus und die Sprachkritik', in *Die deutsche Sprache in der Gegenwart. Festschrift für Dieter Cherubim zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by Stefan J. Schierholz (Frankfurt a.M., 2000), pp. 233–41, for an account of Brechtian language criticism.

productively and critically.⁴⁵ He did not doubt that our senses could ever put us into meaningful touch with the world, but saw a necessity to foster and to practice “proper seeing” (think again of Galileo). And if Brecht was not a committed sceptic, neither, presumably, are most Brecht scholars, at least not occupationally: Cartesian, Nietzschean and other strands of sceptical thought, from fundamental philosophical scepticism about our ability to know anything empirically at all, to the more specific concern that our allegedly superficial everyday engagement with the world is denying us access to authentic or poetic truths, to the philosophy classroom’s discussion about whether we all see the same thing when talking about the colour “red”, seem, for the most part, to have very little bearing on the Brechtian project or on subsequent readings of it.

It will be helpful, however, not just to challenge but, in the first instance, to examine the concerns occasionally present in Brecht’s writing; to view them, not as evidence of a fully-fledged philosophical scepticism, but rather a set of concerns that we, readers and commentators, may well implicitly share in, or even, which we ourselves might bring to bear on Brecht’s work simply by virtue of how pervasive they are in ordinary life. Particularly when setting out, in a project like this, to understand Brecht’s realist aims, and when entertaining his idea for a useful, interventionist literature that renders but also has a purpose in a changing and changeable world, we may be tempted to bring these concerns along for the ride. Many of Brecht’s concerns of the 1930s have not lost – or have gained yet again – relevance and urgency. How, as agents in society, can we keep up with rapidly shifting meanings, with the complexity of reality as a whole, with the many discrepancies between the world that shows up for us and the totality of truths, facts, laws and relations? How do we learn, or deal with contradictions, how do we communicate and organise? Worries about whether our knowledge of the world (especially obtained through the senses) suffices – or whether the language we have at our disposal suffices to communicate, to organise, to teach and to argue – are so common, that we all engage in it from time to time, at least in the way we speak: we report that “I just couldn’t believe my eyes”, and reassure others that “it’s not what it looks like”. Just think of how pervasive it is to talk about critique as a kind of moving beyond the perceptible surface of things: seeing through an argument, uncovering deeper truths or meanings, revealing someone’s true colours, exposing a

⁴⁵ See Kämper, p. 239.

liar.⁴⁶ More to the point of Brecht's interest in society and politics, we talk about viewpoints, perspectives, and bigger pictures, make attempts to see a matter through the eyes of the other person (or, beyond vision, to walk in their shoes), value transparency in organisations and institutions, and berate the clouded or short-sighted judgement of others. In this way, worries about the reliability and scope of our perceptual experience, and particularly about the supposed naivety or impotence of everyday familiar perception and language come from a range of different perspectives or outlooks: they are not just a matter for critics or philosophers, and they manifest not only in scholarly discourse but in the everyday ways we think and speak about our relation to and our interactions with the world we inhabit.

Paying attention to these metaphors throughout, this study highlights a number of pervasive, folk-psychological assumptions about perception (as well as imagination and language as closely related capacities) that underpin the kinds of worries occasionally present in Brecht's reflections, those which his pragmatism answers to. One central assumption in particular warrants a brief introduction here, namely that perception is essentially some kind of passage from the world "out there" to the inside of one's head, and that perceptual experience (i.e. the way the world shows up for us as a result of perception) happens there, internally, in what the philosopher Daniel Dennett describes (with reference to the belief that all sense impressions come together in a certain area of the brain to form consciousness) as a 'Cartesian theatre'.⁴⁷ Develop this

⁴⁶ Rita Felski gives an enlightening account of the idea of critique (as practiced, for instance, by literary scholars and theorists) as essentially a hermeneutics of suspicion: '[t]he task of the social critic is [...] to expose hidden truths and draw out unflattering and counterintuitive meanings that others fail to see' (Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago, 2015), p. 1), which itself rests on the pervasive assumption 'that language itself, just by being language, is always hiding something; that words, sentences, utterances themselves always wear masks; that there is always something else beneath or behind or words, a shadow of meanings covered up by the words themselves.' (Toril Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary. Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell* (Chicago, London, 2017), p. 178).

⁴⁷ Daniel C. Dennett, 'Reflections on Language and Mind', in *Language and Thought. Interdisciplinary Themes*, ed. by Peter Carruthers and Jill Boucher (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 284–94.

metaphor further and we arrive at a whole range of idiomatic accounts of what happens when we perceive, imagine, or remember: we have access to the world, and can imagine or recall it, in the form of images, or perhaps moving images in our minds, an idea that is latent in many common turns of phrase, of which Emily Troscianko gives these examples: ‘the place was just how I’d pictured it’, ‘the landscape was spread out before me like a picture’.⁴⁸ Crucially, with attention to this metaphor and its implications comes a sharpened sense of what *could* have made Brecht wary of perception and perceptual experience: first, as can already be discerned from certain passages of Brecht’s own writing, there is the idea that pictures can be epistemologically impoverished and do not convey much that seems useful to the Brechtian critic. Secondly, that, if “we” are “in our heads” and the world is always at a remove from us, then there is cause to wonder if, indeed, the scope of human experience is too limited to serve Brecht’s critical purpose. But a third implication of these metaphors even eclipses these others, and Dennett’s invocation of a head- or mind-internal *theatre* helps illustrate this point particularly well: if we think of perception in these terms, we think of perceivers, perhaps of ourselves, as passive spectators, which jars, of course, with Brecht’s ubiquitous notion that mere spectating to a performance, or imagining spectating (on the part of readers), is an altogether impotent and bourgeois stance which must be discouraged, or even denied, in the kind of useful art he sought out and demanded.

While Brecht may not have explicitly reflected on these metaphors and assumptions, seeing his concerns in these terms is productive: it allows us to reappraise Brecht’s concern as being not about the inherent impotence of perception, but about the firm and pervasive impression, enforced in language and other representational artefacts, that perceiving is picture-viewing, and that these pictures – just like photographs – can often seem to us, treacherously, to be complete, and veridical representations of just what the world is like. As Brecht cautions at one point:

[...] Das riesige Bildmaterial, das tagtäglich von den Druckerpressen ausgespien wird und das doch den Charakter der Wahrheit zu haben scheint, dient in Wirklichkeit nur der Verdunkelung der Tatbestände. (BFA 21, 515)

⁴⁸ Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 41.

And this is the crux of the matter: when we ascribe to images a character of true representation, that is because we already think of perceptual experience as pictorial, and images and other kinds of graphic representations may well, in turn, reinforce this impression. This throws Brecht's pragmatism into sharper relief and shows how invaluable it is to his project: time and again, and across multiple lines of work from theoretical reflections to poetry, we can trace Brecht's resistance to these impressions and assumptions about what it is, and how it works, to be in the world. Think of how Barnett phrases one of Brecht's key goals as showing the world as changing and changeable so that people might change it. Appreciating the various pervasive forms of scepticism about perception and language, we might also think of his project of one of showing otherwise.

4. Brecht, Pragmatics, and the Pragmatic Turn

Already a year after Brecht's death, and in the years following, commentators speak of 'pragmatische Gedichte',⁴⁹ and of 'praktikable Literatur',⁵⁰ and the focus on the use-value in and of Brecht's work has been ever-present since. Introducing a 2002 collection of essays on the poetry Kuhn is explicit about this: '[...] his poems can be treated as a very tangible, earthly, concrete legacy. It is now up to us to work out what we want to do with them.'⁵¹ It is thus not an entirely fresh angle to read the poet Brecht, or Brecht more generally, as a pragmatist of sorts, but the case can be stated yet more strongly: in fact, Brecht seems to fit into a number of the different brackets denoted by that term, from its common meaning "to act practically, sensibly",⁵² to various strands of philosophical pragmatism,

⁴⁹ Volker Klotz, *Bertolt Brecht. Versuch über das Werk* (Bad Homburg, 1957), p. 75.

⁵⁰ Hans Mayer, *Bertolt Brecht und die Tradition* (Pfullingen, 1961), p. 13.

⁵¹ Kuhn, 'Introduction', p. 11.

⁵² Anecdotes from Brecht's life are the primary source here (think of the way in which Brecht obtained a Steyr car by writing an advertisement poem), but his theoretical writings betray a similar attitude: in the context of the *Expressionismusdebatte*, Brecht suggests, albeit jokingly, that it might be easier to simply breed a few blue horses to confound the critics of such artistic innovations (BFA 22, 350).

a philosophical tradition that – very broadly – understands knowing the world as inseparable from agency within it. This general idea has attracted a remarkably rich and at times contrary range of interpretations, including: that all philosophical concepts should be tested via scientific experimentation, that a claim is true if and only if it is useful (relatedly: if a philosophical theory does not contribute directly to social progress then it is not worth much), that experience consists in transacting with rather than representing nature, that articulate language rests on a deep bed of shared human practices that can never be fully ‘made explicit’.⁵³

Any paths into Brecht’s philosophical pragmatism usually run through his theorizing, which, Meg Mumford emphasizes, can itself be understood as a form of practice.⁵⁴ Haug, for instance, emphasizes Brecht’s conception of the dialectic as a pragmatic stance, citing Brecht’s description of a

Denkmethode oder vielmehr eine zusammenhängende Folge intelligibler Methoden, welche es gestattet, gewisse starre Vorstellungen aufzulösen und gegen herrschende Ideologien die Praxis geltend zu machen. (BFA 21, 519)

Besides tracing this back to Marx’ *Feuerbach-Thesen*, to ‘die sinnlich-menschliche Tätigkeit, Praxis als Schlüsselbegriff für das Project der Umwälzung des Theorie-Praxis-Verhältnisses – und zwar in Theorie und Praxis’,⁵⁵ which in turn, he suggests, may link to the Brechtian notion of ‘eingreifendes Denken’,⁵⁶ Haug also explores potential points of contact with Wittgenstein:

⁵³ ‘Pragmatism’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

<<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pragmatism/>> [accessed 30 March 2021].

⁵⁴ She defines “‘practice” [...] as the action of doing something, so theorizing - i.e. thinking or writing about ideas and principles of practice - is *a part of*, inseparable from, practice, and not *apart from*, in opposition to, it. While it is true that theory involves a much greater degree of written or verbal *observation and analysis of* activities, it does share common ground with other forms of language-based creative practices’, see Mumford, pp. 49–50.

⁵⁵ Haug, p. 37.

⁵⁶ Haug, p. 43.

Wenn Brechts Empfehlung, ‘die Philosophie sollte sich mehr mit den Reden der Leute als mit den Reden der Philosophen beschäftigen’ [BFA 21, 402], von Ludwig Wittgenstein inspiriert sein könnte, so gilt dies erst recht für den Satz: ‘Erkenntnistheorie muss vor allem Sprachkritik sein’ [BFA 21, 413].⁵⁷

It is not the aim here necessarily to expand this literature on Brecht’s place in the history of pragmatic thought – particularly on the open question of Brecht’s own perception of and relationship to contemporarily emerging analytic philosophy⁵⁸ - so much as to allow ourselves to be pointed in a certain direction for our reading of the poetry. The question has been raised here and there – most recently in Toril Moi’s *Revolution of the Ordinary* (2017) – of what the ordinary language tradition beginning with Wittgenstein can do for literary inquiry.⁵⁹ One way of answering that question in the Brechtian context is to invert it: we might ask what Brecht’s poetry does for its readers and discover that, for one, in exhibiting language and often showing it in situ, the poems serve as a powerful (and, indeed, invaluable) reminder that meaning is not in faithful correspondence to the world but is rooted in effecting changes within it; that speech is not exhausted in acts of naming, or representing, let alone picture-painting, but that utterances (poetic or otherwise) are actions in a more robust sense. Here J.L. Austin’s theory of speech acts suggests itself, and particularly the observation he begins with in *How to Do Things with Words*: that descriptions or statements of fact

⁵⁷ Haug, p. 69.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, Ulrich Sautter, ‘Brechts logischer Empirismus’, *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 4 (1995), 687–709 (p. 693), who takes certain of Brecht’s remarks as evidence of an ‘intensive[...], zumindest über einen weiten Bereich affirmativ verlaufende[...] Rezeption analytischer Philosophie’.

⁵⁹ See Moi. See also the earlier Joseph Peter Stern, ‘Vom Nutzen der Wittgensteinschen Philosophie für das Studium der Literatur’, *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 50 (1976), 557–74, and, with reference to Brecht, Christine Hamm, ‘Über Kriterien in Werturteilen und Textinterpretationen. Bertolt Brechts Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis und Ordinary Language Philosophy’, in *Wendezeichen? Neue Sichtweisen auf die Literatur der DDR*, ed. by Roswitha Skare and Rainer B. Hoppe (Amsterdam, 1999), pp. 99–134.

form only a small part of the range of utterances.⁶⁰ Most well-known is Austin's conception of performative utterances, which directly constitute the actions they describe (such as "I hereby christen..." or "I promise..."), but he conceives of a much wider range of utterances as locutionary (or illocutionary or perlocutionary) acts: the constative "I'm too hot" is an act of informing one's interlocutor of this state of affairs; the question "Does this window open?" can be an illocutionary request for it to be opened – both utterances, in their perlocutionary function may enlighten an interlocutor, or persuade her to take action. While Austin considered poetic or theatrical utterances 'parasitic upon [...] normal use',⁶¹ the idea of locutionary acts is clearly valuable in the present context. The (albeit fictional) speakers of Brecht's poems ask questions, make requests, they argue and teach, and turn established narratives on their heads, and as readers we can be persuaded, enlightened, inspired, or made to think or act in response to such fictional acts of speech. Additionally, if Brecht imagines the utterances of a wealth of different poetic speakers, then we might say with Wittgenstein that he imagines their forms-of-life and their worlds as well, and this gives these poems a powerful claim on a kind of Realism: in a poem that asks a question, we encounter the world in which that question needs to be asked. From a poem in which a speaker imagines the future emerges the present which situates their act of imagination. In holding different, or even contradictory utterances up against each other (a device copiously deployed by Brecht), a poem compares alternative visions of what reality could be. Brecht's poetic Realism is not (often) a Realism only of description, but of what the manner, the style, and the nature of the description reveals about who gives it and the world in and of which it is given.

Meanwhile, it is primarily the other strand of pragmatism, evident as defining a recent research paradigm in psychology and philosophy of mind (or more broadly: the cognitive sciences) that is in need of some justification and some setting up here. On one hand, this study is hardly the first instance of what is sometimes called a cognitive approach to literature, which Peter Stockwell in 2002 describes as 'still relatively new as a discipline, though it makes clear reconnections back to much older forms of analysis such as classical rhetoric.'⁶² Drawing on insights from a whole spectrum of

⁶⁰ John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford, 1962), p. 1.

⁶¹ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 22.

⁶² Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (London, 2002), p. 8.

disciplines ranging from cognitive neuroscience and experimental psychology to philosophy of mind and cognitive linguistics, cognitive-literary scholars have sought to ‘understand processes of textual creation and reception, as well as textually evoked cognition’⁶³ from a variety of perspectives and in response to questions and themes recurrent in the study of literary texts. Michael Burke’s book on *Literary Reading, Cognition, and Emotion* is one example, theoretically and empirically exploring how it happens that literary texts can affect readers emotionally and even bodily.⁶⁴ Charlotte Lee’s essay on movement and embodiment in poetry is another: drawing on theories of embodiment via their application in musicology, she demonstrates that ‘[i]n poetry too, [...] movement is both non-literal and literal’,⁶⁵ that the way in which poems move, and move us, is a matter, partly, of our own sense of and attunement to our physical bodies in the physical world. Mental imagery is another promising theme, given the ‘rise to prominence of imagination within twenty-first-century mind and brain science, along with its rich literary and philosophical pedigree’:⁶⁶ insights on vision, visual imagination, and visual (episodic) memory, as well, to a lesser degree, on other sense modalities, have yielded fruitful readings of literary fictions and of how readers interact with them. Partly through the vision lens, Emily Troscianko’s *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism* makes a contribution with particular relevance to this study: she explores what makes a text (seem) realist by taking into consideration, and critically assessing the stories we do and might tell about how reality beyond the page shows up for readers in the first place.⁶⁷

⁶³ Michael Burke and Emily Troscianko, ‘Mind, Brain, and Literature: A Dialogue on what the Humanities might offer the Cognitive Sciences’, *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 42.2 (2013), 141–48 (p. 141).

⁶⁴ See Michael Burke, *Literary Reading, Cognition and Emotion: An Exploration of the Oceanic Mind* (New York, 2011).

⁶⁵ Charlotte Lee, ‘Movement and Embodiment in Klopstock and Goethe’, *German Life and Letters*, 70.4 (2017), 506–15 (p. 507).

⁶⁶ Alan Richardson, ‘Imagination: Literary and Cognitive Intersections’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, ed. by Lisa Zunshine (Oxford, 2015), p. 225.

⁶⁷ See Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*.

Brecht has received little attention from cognitive literary scholars to date.⁶⁸ This may partly be due to the fact that approaches of this kind do not seem to chime particularly well with many of Brecht's ideas and purposes: if with this methodology we are able to shed light on such phenomena as mental imagery, immersion, or even the bodily enaction of literary texts, if, by drawing on the study of mind, perception, emotion and so on, we come to understand how texts achieve what they achieve, we seem to be veering quite far from the kind of analytical Realism that Brecht advocates.⁶⁹ Troscianko's project, for instance, is explicitly a study of verisimilitude and of reality effects achieved in literary fiction, rather than a pursuit and a critique of actual and factual reality in art of the kind that Brecht had in mind.⁷⁰ In fact, when Steve Giles proposes the term 'cognitive realism' for the Brechtian context he appears to situate Brecht in a behaviourist mode of approach instead: 'cognitive realism will concentrate on the typical external behaviour of figures performing specific functions',⁷¹ a sentiment which is echoed by Barnett: most prominently as a theatre maker, Brecht did not concern himself much with "inner" or mental life, instead inviting actors 'to explore a figure's behaviour in context from the outside and understand relationships (between

⁶⁸ An exception may be Roy Connolly and Richard Ralley, 'Brecht and the Disembodied Actor', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 28 (2008), 91–110, in which the authors suggest that while Brechtian theatre practice and acting methods can productively be read through the lens of current psychology of embodiment, Brecht's own ideas underpinning the practice are problematic and over-conceptualising.

⁶⁹ A line from Dickens' *Great Expectations* comes to mind in this context which could almost be read as a variation on Brecht's 'Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral' (BFA 11, 144): Abel Magwitch, a prisoner in Dicken's novel, recounts examinations by phrenologists with the comment that 'they measured my head, some on 'em, - they had better a measured my stomach'. (Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (New York, 1998), p. 578).

⁷⁰ See Troscianko, *Kafka's Cognitive Realism*, p. 2.

⁷¹ Steve Giles, *Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory. Marxism, Modernity and the Threepenny Lawsuit* (Bern, 1997), p. 176.

figures or between figures and events) as defining elements in building the dramatic figure'.⁷²

But there is a world of difference, of course, between the kinds of introspective methodologies and folk-psychologies that Brecht sought to steer clear from in the theatre and the work done in recent decades which concerns us here, and when we call Brecht a behaviourist, this is not necessarily in opposition to the cognitive sciences that have since followed and largely supplanted *psychological* behaviourism. Giles, Barnett, and Kuhn are right of course, to point to Brecht's interest in external causes and relations, rather than the "inner" life of experience, but particularly such strands of research that have defined the pragmatic turn in the fields of psychology and philosophy of mind have a lot to offer to Brecht, and to us, his readers, if we do not want to make the strict distinction between 'cognitive' and 'experiential' in the first place. Partly to keep the main bulk of the text uncluttered by various definitions, a few key concepts are introduced here; most prominently the so-called 4E-Cognition framework, in the nexus of which cognition is taken to be variously (and in various combinations) "embodied", "enactive", "extended" and/or "embedded". The term "embodiment" is perhaps the most well-known to literary scholars at this point, and is, as an idea, the oldest of the four and the most general.⁷³ It also plays a role the present context, because it offers a key challenge to the kinds of folk-psychological assumptions discussed above: we cannot account for perceptual experience as head-internal picture-viewing if the body and the world are involved as well. Or to put the case more positively: we need not worry about being spectators to a world that is at a fundamental remove from us,

⁷² Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, pp. 59–60. See also Kuhn, 'Poetry and Photography', p. 189, where the attribute 'cognitive' is placed next to the attribute 'interventionist'.

⁷³ In Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates engages with a proposal attributed to Anaxagoras, that 'one could explain his decision to remain in prison by a purely material or physical explanation in terms of bodily mechanisms'. While Socrates is not convinced, the idea that the body plays some role or other for the mind is picked up by Aristotle (assigning a particularly important role to one's hands), and can be traced from Aquinas to Spinoza, all the way to phenomenologist and pragmatists of the twentieth century, see Albert Newen, Leon de Bruin, and Shaun Gallagher, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*, ed. by Albert Newen, Leon de Bruin, and Shaun Gallagher (Oxford, 2018), pp. 3–18 (p. 3).

because as whole cognitive agents we are bodily situated within the world. This we might take as the premise of Brecht's pragmatic, or hands-on Realism: it is hands-on because the perceiving of, and the artistic engagement with the world we inhabit relies on our bodies bringing it into view through action (or in Brechtian terms, through *Praxis*); for instance, by rendering it in all manner of representational artefacts.

The other E's are relatively more specific: there is no single overarching theory that sets them all out, and they can overlap or represent more radical and more conservative versions of the same basic idea. For instance, in the seminal 1990's text *The Embodied Mind* Varela et al. set out an enactive account of cognition, which supplements the basic idea of embodiment with the idea that perceptual experience is actively brought about through constant acts of embodied world-engagement.⁷⁴ Of this view in particular, there exists a wide range of variously radical and more moderate versions: some enactivist theorists do away with the idea not just of pictorialism (expressed in the metaphor of head-internal pictures) but the idea that the brain encodes representations of some external world at all;⁷⁵ others are content to argue that perceptual experience is not *exclusively* based on such representational brain-states, but that embodied interaction with the environment plays a role *as well*.⁷⁶ A systematic review of these various action-oriented views and their relative faults and merits is outside of the scope of this study, and it would detract from its primary focus – Brecht's hands-on Realism – to attempt to offer one. For the present purpose it is enough to state why the basic idea behind enactivism, again, matters to Brecht and Brechtian Realism: when Brecht describes the act of reading poetry as 'eine Operation so gut wie etwa das Sehen oder Hören, d.h. viel mehr aktiv' (BFA 26, 418), he is, in one sense, talking about a certain kind of demand of his reader: rather than painting a complete and detailed "picture" of what he wants to say, Brecht often demands of her to supply her

⁷⁴ See Francisco J. Varela, Eleanor Rosch, and Evan Thompson, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA, 1991).

⁷⁵ See Daniel D. Hutto, 'Knowing What? Radical versus Conservative Enactivism', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 4.4 (2005), 389–405.

⁷⁶ See Robert A. Wilson, 'Extended Vision', in *Perception, Action and Consciousness*, ed. by Nivedita Gangopadhyay, Michael Madary, and Finn Spicer (Oxford, 2010), pp. 277–90.

own ideas, her own answers and questions to the material.⁷⁷ With that in mind, note the explicit parallel Brecht is drawing between reading and perceiving more generally. Not only does Brecht, as elsewhere, appear dissatisfied with the pictorialist notion of perception as passive spectating, but here he also, remarkably, anticipates the alternative view offered by enactivism. Like the reader who approaches the poem with her own expectations, reflections and scrutiny, perceivers more generally constantly reach out to the world with their senses, but also through the movement of their whole bodies.

Here the remaining E's add a further dimension. From such influential texts as Hutchin's 1995 *Cognition in the Wild*, which assumes not only individual cognitive agents but cognitive whole systems including 'external structures, collectives, and artifacts'⁷⁸ as performing tasks (he gives the example of navigating a US naval vessel, a task achieved by no single person on the ship, but by the crew and the ship's functional organisation as a whole), and from Clark and Chalmers' 1998 *The Extended Mind*,⁷⁹ we can draw the idea that cognitive tasks are not just achieved by a single human mind and body: they are either embedded within (the conservative view) or extended into (Clark and Chalmers' more radical proposal) a world of all manner of props and tools. In the present context, where we are talking primarily about the kinds of tasks demanded by Brecht's Realism – bringing the world into view, learning and teaching about it, and so on – we could take this notion of extension or embeddedness to mean that the material world serves us in this aim: tools (like Brecht's radio, or Galileo's telescope) are different ways of bringing a spatially extended world closer; language, as a cognitive and a cultural artefact, does not just serve a representational function (as a way of "painting pictures") but is a kind of structural aid, a scaffolding to what we see and do.

On one hand, then, the perspective on perceptual processes as variously embodied, enactive, or even extended, resolves some of the potential concerns with Brecht's project: from this point of view the kinds of things that Brecht is, in fact,

⁷⁷ See Peter Hutchinson, 'Uncomfortable, Unsettling, Alienating: Brecht's Poetry of the Unexpected', in *'Verwisch die Spuren!' Bertolt Brecht's Work and Legacy. A Reassessment*, ed. by Robert Gillett and Godela Weiss-Sussex (Amsterdam, New York, 2008), pp. 33–48 (p. 33).

⁷⁸ Newen, Bruin, and Gallagher, p. 4.

⁷⁹ See Andy Clark and David Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind', *Analysis*, 58.1 (1998), 7–19.

interested in – behaviour and action, social relationships – are not matters apart from the study of the mind, which has become the study of whole cognitive agents and, even, their environments. We are not tied, here, to either the purely experiential, nor to the cognitive in the sense that Giles, Barnett, or Kuhn use it. If, with Brecht, we want to know how we get from perceiving (from watching a play, from reading poetry, from looking through a telescope, or from hearing news on the radio) to acting in the world, it is worth paying attention to the idea that perceptual activities not only crucially serve, but phase into, and are themselves kinds of actions. That said, the reason for their application to this study is not exhausted in this kind of simple and straightforward resolution. Beyond the folk-scepticism about fundamentally passive and impoverished perceptual experience, the cognitive-scientific perspective can also help shed light on, and clarify, a concern for which there is more substantial and convincing evidence in Brecht’s thought, namely, that perceptual experience of the familiar everyday may be automated or habitual, and thus its critical potential is stunted. *Verfremdung*, or defamiliarisation, is of course almost a byword of Brecht’s name, and in this context he proposes that ‘[d]amit aus dem Bekannten etwas Erkanntes werden kann, muß es aus seiner Unauffälligkeit herauskommen [...]’ (BFA 22, 655). As public interest in the neuro- and cognitive sciences continues to grow, *such* questions about the reliability of the world as it shows up for us in perceptual experience are increasingly being marked with a new, more or less accessible terminology: the human mind takes shortcuts where it can to be maximally efficient; we suppress repetitive stimuli, get accustomed to particular patterns, and will actively select information from the environment that is either behaviourally relevant or fits with our pre-established model of what things are like. For example, when we encounter contradictory sensory input or other kinds of information, that is, when we experience *cognitive dissonance*,⁸⁰ ‘we will use all kinds of strategies to make them more consistent in order to reduce the discomfort that arises from dissonance.’⁸¹

⁸⁰ For the classic exposition of this term, see Leon Festinger, ‘Cognitive Dissonance’, *Scientific American*, 207.4 (1962), 93–107.

⁸¹ Emily Troscianko, ‘Cognitive Humanities Bibliography’, *Cognitive Classics*, 2020 <<https://cognitiveclassics.blogs.sas.ac.uk/cognitive-humanities-bibliography/>> [accessed 14 April 2021].

Crucially, an exploration of the concern behind Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung* in these terms produces interesting results: for one, we discover that it is a concern targeted not at passive or impotent perceivers, but at highly efficient ones. Familiarity plays a role in how the world shows up for us, for better or worse, *precisely because* skilled and active perceivers reach out to the world and bring their own expectations and prior knowledge to bear on the encounter. In the broad nexus of action-oriented views of perception a particular strand of theorizing, referred to as Predictive Coding or Predictive Processing, makes this case. The brain, according to this view, is a probabilistic prediction machine that constantly meets the incoming (“bottom-up”) signal with (“top-down”) predictions based on prior knowledge – squaring them and sending prediction errors up to the next higher level of representation for according adjustments. Note that Predictive Processing and 4E Cognition do not follow from each other automatically, and that they are strands of research separately pursued, but some of the proponents of PP, particularly Andy Clark, do connect them: he locates the brain, ‘the inner prediction engine in its proper home [...]’: ‘a mobile embodied agent located in multiple empowering webs of material and social structure’.⁸² This framework not only offers a novel gloss on the problem of familiarity in which many of Brecht's artistic innovations under the broad term of *Verfremdung* appear to be rooted; but it also, crucially, yields a pragmatic resolution to it. If this strand of theorizing has it right in conceiving of perceptual (and, therefore, of reading) processes as complex operations achieved by whole cognitive agents and to the backdrop of all sorts of bodily and mental capacities and prior knowledge, then such processes are not just efficient but also highly error-prone, as well as flexible and adaptable. An omitted musical note in a familiar, well-predicted melody, or a missing foot in an otherwise metrically regular poem, for instance, stand out saliently in a listener's or reader's experience because the “top-down” prediction has gone amiss and has manifested in sensation that might be called strange, or surprising, or even, in some cases, shocking (though of course not all prediction errors manifest at this conscious level). And such errors phase directly into what might be described ordinarily as a sharpening of attention: the less reliable the “top-down” stream of predictions is judged to be at any given moment, the more weight is assigned to the incoming signal itself. In such instances, we are forced, however briefly, to switch off the perceptual auto-pilot.

⁸² Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. xvi.

This brings with it a key innovation on existing accounts of *Verfremdung*: on one level of description it rings true what others have said of V-devices; that, in their various forms, they are intended to shake readers and audiences out of a lull, and to break or obfuscate perceptual habits. But in another sense, we might also appreciate that this “lull” is not much of a “lull” in the first place. V-effects happen to, but are ultimately achieved by highly efficient, active perceivers, who bring prior knowledge to the task in the first place.

5. Corpus and Road Map

Some of the most iconic of Brecht’s poems about nature and day-to-day life, those that sit at the curious intersection between momentary human experience and an enlarged reality in fast and constant motion, were written in exile: think of the whistle tune of the jaunty cherry thief (BFA 12, 96), about whom the mural painter Skip Pahler reported a sudden, shocking realization when preparing to adapt the poem at the behest of the East German Ministry for Culture: ‘der Knabe muss in den Krieg.’⁸³ Think of the small act of covering an apricot tree to protect it from a late frost, an intervention as diligent and hopeful (or as futile?) as writing verse against the ever-tightening grip on Europe of the Nazi regime (BFA 12, 95). Not least Brecht’s *Radioapparat* has to be mentioned here, transmitting dire news from Germany into the relative safety of exile: it is not just, rationally, a source of information, one poem suggests, but almost a reassuring lifeline like the sound of sloshing water to the sailor on shore leave (BFA 15,30). Not just because of a dense concentration of such poems in the *Steffinische Sammlung*, and other parts of the *Svendborger Gedichte*, then, is it intuitive to begin with these poems: they are written in a period in which concerns about the limitations and impotence of art, the treacherousness of language are most acute; where there is most at stake in knowing about the world and intervening in it.

Accordingly, Chapter One takes us right to the source of the main bulk of Brecht’s theorizing: in the 1930s, with circumstances now rapidly accelerating as the Brecht family and their various friends and associates begin a journey first northwards through Scandinavia and Finland and via Moscow to the United States of America,

⁸³ Quoted in Helena Piontek, ‘Kirschen gegen Kriege’, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 9 October 2018.

terms like Realism and truth gain traction alongside those theatrical principles that had already informed much of Brecht's pre-exile practice. It is of course partly an idiosyncratic Realism that Brecht sketches, informed not just by the ultimate aim for art which has an educational and an interventionist use-value, but a desire to uncover and dissect the socio-political structures and relations that make up reality. But in outlining the kinds of assumptions which inform more conventional definitions and principles of Realism, we discover that Brecht's rejection of more conventional methods is not rooted in scepticism about experience or even experience-based art per se, but in a positive, pragmatic challenge to the idea of perceivers (and readers) as passive, head-internal picture-viewers, whose perspectives are thus fundamentally limited. In fact, whenever the speakers of Brecht's poems report on their experiences we find they can be characterized by two or more (sometimes contradictory) aspects at once, can encompass things near and things distant, that they are infused with a sense of past and future. Crucially, it is the perceivers themselves (and the reader by proxy) that achieve and bring about these experiences, by engaging with the world (or the text) in an active, or enactive, fashion. Even though Brecht thematizes in some of these poems sentiments such as that the poet must no longer pay attention to the apple tree in bloom all the while Hitler is giving ever more incendiary speeches, the texts themselves are evidence for the possibility of a much simpler response: why not pay attention to both?

Chapters Two and Three then move on to consider a wider range of poems along two broad themes: imagination and speech respectively. Again, the body of exile poetry is a rich source here, with poems frequently imagining the future, and, in some cases, imagining it by way of what will, in future, be said of the present, or, famously, framed as speech addressed to those born later. But before and after exile, Brecht produces work that is invested in imagining, recollecting and speaking. In the much discussed *Erinnerung an die Marie A.* Brecht arguably negotiates the possibility for acts of episodic recollection, and the *Buckower Elegien* similarly situate the poet-speaker's observations of the present along complicated, and sometimes ambiguous temporal lines. In *Der Rauch*, a short poem divided through the middle by an equally brief but impactful hypothetical ('Fehlte er', BFA 13, 308), a tangible still-life is thrown into imaginative disarray. The theme of speech is similarly omnipresent: a police officer who has just beaten a man to death in *Liturgie vom Hauch* usurps the first line of the refrain, suddenly turning what is already adapted from Goethe into a rather harrowing quotation: 'So! Jetzt schweigen die Vögelein im Walde' (BFA 11, 51). In the *Lesebuch*

für Städtebewohner poems are marked as “the kinds of things people say”, even if they are fabricated and improvised upon by a mediating and impersonal poetic speaker. And the *Kriegsfibel* concerns itself not just with the exhibition and critical examination of photographic imagery but with the various journalistic descriptions that come with them, too, while the quatrains that are placed alongside them also speak in different voices and from different perspectives.

In thematizing and enacting such instances of imagination, recollection and speech, Brecht’s poems address the two capacities most relevant to the readers and writers of literary texts, and, co-incidentally, two key capacities attendant to and entangled with perception proper beyond a literary context. Perceivers are not limited to what happens to be in view at any given moment in time not only because they can, in principle, move their bodies around and shift their attention from one thing to the next, but also because their ability to mentally simulate puts them in touch with a reality enlarged along spatial and temporal scales, which opens up a space and supplies the material for critical reflection. Crucially, the imagination is not separate from, and independent of, perception proper, but comes as a part of a ‘cognitive package-deal’:⁸⁴ like perceiving, it is not picture-viewing, but a world-involving activity. Exploring how the speakers of Brecht’s poems and how readers imagine, we discover how imagining ties in directly with the pragmatic project of Brechtian Realism: to imagine an object, one imagines interacting with it, to imagine the future, one has to imagine bringing that future about.

Speech, too, perhaps more obviously so, is a form of action, and again we can read Brecht’s poems to the backdrop of this idea. Where Brecht exhibits, juxtaposes and critically examines the utterances made by different speakers from different perspectives and with a range of intentions, he reminds us that the function of language is not exhausted in naming, or in representing different objects in the world, but that, with language, we do things *in* the world. On one hand, this constitutes Brecht’s critique of language: language can be and is being deliberately abused, and we risk being fooled if we do not catch on to the fact that meaning is not so much a fixed relationship between word and world but arises in its concrete uses to concrete purposes. But a more positive case can be discerned from the poems as well. From the showcase of utterances of poet-speakers, city-dwellers, refugees, and so on, a reality emerges from which these

⁸⁴ Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. 85.

utterances emerge, in which they make sense and have a purpose, and on which they leave a mark.

In Chapter Four, finally, we address an implicit red thread that has run through the argument from the start: Brecht's principle of *Verfremdung*, which has often informed readings of the poetry, if perhaps not quite as much as it has interpretations of the stage work. We do this, partly, by considering a few examples from the *Hauspostille* which fall somewhat outside of the corpus outlined above, which has as its essential characteristic an attention to the perceptual, imaginative, and linguistic activities of its speakers. That is to say, in this final chapter the focus is less on how Brecht portrays acts of perceiving, imagining, and speaking, but how readers themselves, to the backdrop of these capacities, encounter poetry and how Brecht's poems produce V-effects by different means, or, more pertinently, how V-effects are achieved by active readers. We discover that, while *Verfremdung* may ultimately be aimed towards prompting critical reflections, such effects manifest as sensations and experiences in the first place: the perceptual strangeness of a salient omission, the surprise at a defied expectation (for instance, when a poem departs from a previously established metre, or plays with a well-known poetic tradition), the uncertainty that results from such shocks and surprises. This angle yields productive readings of individual poems, but crucially, it also tells us something about the principle of *Verfremdung* more generally: we experience shocks and surprises, which sit at the root of careful attention and critical scrutiny, not when we are prevented by design on the part of a poet from drawing on prior knowledge and a skilled attunement to the environment, but rather, we experience them precisely because we (inevitably) do draw on them and when, by design on the part of a poet or not, things go amiss in the process. *Verfremdung*, in other words, utilises ordinary perceptual mechanisms and habits, and it does not make the familiar strange, so much as draw attention to the inherent (perceptual) strangeness of the familiar.

1 REALISM, PERCEPTION, BRECHT

1.1 Brecht and Realism

When Brecht left Berlin on 28 February 1933, one day after the *Reichstag* fire, not only was he headed, like so many others, into an exile journey that would span years and continents, but he also left behind a phase of intense productivity in the theatre. With few opportunities for continuing this work on the many stops and stations of his exile, this departure marks an uptick in the production of what we might call Brechtian theory: a vast catalogue of essays, letters, notes, and snippets in which Brecht sets out the key concerns and artistic principles – *Verfremdung* and the epic theatre – that had already informed much of his pre-exile stage practice. Also prominently featured in these writings, unsurprisingly, is the term “Realism”: art, in these circumstances radically changed since 1933, needed, more than ever, to be politically interventionist and educational,⁸⁵ and truth (however contentious a term) would have seemed to Brecht’s community of newly exiled thinkers and artists to be of ever-increasing urgency. Accordingly, in the essay *Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus*, Brecht justifies his call for realist writing thus: ‘Die herrschenden Schichten bedienen sich offener der Lüge als ehedem und dickerer Lüge. Die Wahrheit zu sagen erscheint als immer dringendere Aufgabe’ (BFA 22, 406). But at the same time as more urgently committing art to some form of truth to reality, Brecht rejects many, if not most, conventional realist ideas and approaches, and sometimes rather polemically. Coining the term *Sensualismus* for art through which ‘man zum Beispiel “alles” riechen, schmecken, fühlen kann’ (BFA 22, 408), or where the illusion is created ‘dies sei der [...] Gegenstand’ (BFA 22, 181), Brecht reacts particularly against the notion of “mirroring” reality in the way it looks or feels. With Benjamin, he had already targeted, for example, the *New Photography* emerging as a popular art movement in the 1920s and spearheaded notably by Renger-Patzsch. This movement, with its allegedly ‘naïve documentary claim[...]’ to truth, offered an essentially ‘impotent and context-less mimetic realism’,⁸⁶ a sentiment that Brecht once offered about the medium of photography more generally, writing that ‘[e]ine Fotografie der Kruppwerke oder der AEG ergibt beinahe nichts über diese

⁸⁵ See Ockenden, p. 180.

⁸⁶ Kuhn, ‘Poetry and Photography’, p. 178.

Institute' (BFA 21, 468). Elsewhere, Brecht mocked the literary Realism of Thomas Mann as the mere copying of an 'Erlebnisvorgang', devoid of insight and based on nothing but banal momentary experience: 'Du bekommst einen Tritt, sag: au! Er bekommt einen Tritt, laß ihn "au" sagen. O Einfalt!' (BFA 26, 313). While there are questions to be asked about the validity of such blanket criticism,⁸⁷ these concerns form an important link in Brecht's thinking: asserting famously that '[die Realität] ist längst nicht mehr im Totalen erlebbar' (BFA 21, 469), he appears, once more, to pit 'Erlebnisse' against 'Kenntnisse' (BFA 22, 109).

In light of this, Brecht's Realism is usually taken to be more of an idiosyncratic label for a body of work that can be quite far removed, formally or aesthetically, from what is more commonly associated with the term. As Kuhn has it: 'Brecht thought of all his work as "realist" because, however far it might be from conventional mimetic Realism, it crucially engaged with reality, not merely concerned to describe the surface, but rather to penetrate beyond that and to analyse social reality.'⁸⁸ To talk about how Brecht's realist purposes are realised in practice is almost invariably to invoke his anti-illusory stage work in the epic theatre: a common first association with Brecht's name is "breaking the fourth wall", a device intended to preclude immersion into the fictional events on stage and draws attention, instead, to the stage apparatus itself. Another is the "separation of elements": again, instead of aiming towards a coherent and unified whole created from different aspects of the performance (e.g. music, lighting, costume, vernacular), Brecht looked to contradictions and contrasting elements, set commentaries of contemporary social or political issues into other eras, and made sure occasionally to

⁸⁷ Gelderloos points out, for example, that Renger-Patzsch's photobook *Die Welt ist schön* is used by Brecht (and by Benjamin), somewhat unfairly as a 'synecdoche for the photography of *Neue Sachlichkeit* more generally, and even for broader tendencies or possibilities of photography at large' and that they engage with it 'only obliquely and dismissively', rather than enter into mutual debate with it, or with Renger-Patzsch himself, see Carl Gelderloos, 'Simply Reproducing Reality—Brecht, Benjamin, and Renger-Patzsch on Photography', *German Studies Review*, 37.3 (2014), 549–73 (p. 550). There is also the fact, of course, that Brecht did not always dismiss photography out of hand, but, elsewhere, showed great interest in the medium, see again Kuhn, 'Poetry and Photography'.

⁸⁸ Kuhn, 'Brecht reads Bruegel', p. 115.

interrupt the plot action on stage with narrative passages or songs. It has been rightly argued that, in drawing attention in this way to the labour behind a stage production, to the difference between performer and historical character, to the change and changeability of society, and not just to the events but the causes behind them, Brecht's stage is less interested in the world we look out at ordinarily, but in aspects that may not be visible in day-to-day perceptual experience.⁸⁹

But this is hardly the full story. Not only did Brecht have anything but humble goals as to what art might have to set against the forces of capitalism and fascism,⁹⁰ but he was also a pragmatic thinker who claimed of himself that he would embrace any means – artistic or otherwise – that he might find at his disposal. As much as Brecht might have harboured a reasonable degree of wariness towards unreflected day-to-day perceptual experience and to art which he believed sought merely to re-create such experience, he also had a stake in how people, in their everyday lives, come to be in touch with the realities they inhabit. That is to say, in order to scrutinize reality, on as well as beyond the stage or page, we need our senses (as well as our wits) about us in the first place. And as much as Brecht's theatre dissects and scrutinizes the familiar world, cuts it into fragments and combines and contrasts different elements, Brecht's empiricism extends to plain, ordinary life, too. A poem in 1934 begins thus by setting against the NSDAP's large-scale narrative of an awakened Germany the much narrower, but much more concrete testimony of a single person: 'Ich bin eine alte Frau. / Als Deutschland erwacht war / Wurden die Unterstützungen gekürzt [...]' (BFA 14, 202). The poem then goes yet further in establishing the value of this concrete and hands-on experience: the first, shorter stanza relates the old woman's initial response – to stay away from the grocery shops she can no longer afford to buy from – whilst the second emphasizes the importance of "seeing", and of "being seen":

⁸⁹ See Mumford, p. 176; Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, pp. 69–70.

⁹⁰ Ronald Speirs, in reference to conversations recounted by Walter Benjamin, emphasises just how ambitious Brecht's project can be taken to be: 'it aimed at nothing less than wresting the control of history from the hands of the fascists. If they had plans for the next 30,000 years, then so did Brecht [...]', Ronald Speirs, 'Poetry in Dark Times: Brecht's Svendborger Gedichte', in *'Verwisch die Spuren!' Bertolt Brecht's Work and Legacy. A Reassessment*, ed. by Robert Gillett and Godela Weiss-Sussex (Amsterdam, New York, 2008), pp. 191–204 (pp. 191–92).

Aber eines Tages dachte ich nach und dann
Ging ich doch wieder täglich zum Bäcker, zur Grünkramhändlerin
Als alte Käuferin.
Sorgfältig wählte ich unter den Eßwaren
Griff nicht mehr heraus als früher, doch auch nicht weniger
Legte die Brötchen zum Brot und den Lauch zum Kohl, und erst
Wenn zusammengerechnet wurde, seufzte ich
Wühlte mit meinen steifen Fingern in meinem Lederbeutelchen
Und gestand kopfschüttelnd, daß mein Geld nicht ausreiche
Das Wenige zu bezahlen, und ich verließ
Kopfschüttelnd den Laden, *von allen Kunden gesehen*.
Ich sagte mir
Wenn wir alle, die nichts haben
Nicht mehr erscheinen, wo das Essen ausliegt
Könnte man meinen, wir brauchten nichts
Aber wenn wir kommen und nichts kaufen können
Weiß man Bescheid.

(BFA 14, 202, my emphasis)

The time and space spent here on setting out the woman's pre-pondered performance and describing in some detail its various props and gestures is, on one hand, highly reminiscent of the idea of *Gestus* practised and theorised on Brecht's stage. On the other hand, the poem's setting serves as a reminder that "seeing" is as important outside the theatre as it is within, and that facts and truths are somewhat toothless if they are not conveyed to, understood by, and acted upon, ultimately, not just by theatre audiences but by perceivers of all stripes – living and feeling people who see the world through their eyes first. If Brecht's stage, his models, montages, and experiments give rise to understanding, and, ultimately, to intervention, so, too, if we pay attention, does ordinary life.

If would be an oversight, for this reason not least, in the context of Brechtian Realism to look past a body of work that is strikingly rich in and evocative of day-to-day experience: Brecht's poetry, while not at all a homogenous corpus in terms of style or form, makes reference frequently and throughout not only to plant life, weather,

landscapes in and between seasons, and to episodes of more or less ordinary life, but crucially, to the way these poem's speakers experience them, how they are impacted by the world around them, and how, in turn, they impact upon it. Prior to exile, the *Lesebuch für Städtebewohner* is a reappraisal (albeit a distinctly literary one) of "the kinds of things people say", in the GDR the *Buckower Elegien* are closely tied to the surroundings of Brecht's country residence, its lakes and fir trees. While these collections and other various poems get a closer look-in in later chapters, it is the exile poetry in particular that comes to mind in the present context, having been written at a time that, in spite of everything, was emphatically no *Schlechte Zeit für Lyrik*.⁹¹ After an initial phase of writing agitational texts that are still characterised by some degree of optimism that fascism might yet be overcome, Brecht through the later 1930s gradually turned to producing what has been described as a new 'Formtypus'⁹² of often brief poems that are set as per the descriptions of landscape, architecture and plant life, in Scandinavia, Finland, and America, and which concern themselves, seemingly, with a kind of 'alltägliche[...] Optik des Dichters'.⁹³ This body of work feels intimate, even sometimes explicitly autobiographical, with references to places Brecht stayed at, people that surrounded him, and possessions he discusses elsewhere in writing. The speakers of these often personal poems, or sometimes those of which they speak, are exiles, and on occasion, they seem to be poets, too. One contemplates a well-stocked pantry in Finland, wishing dearly to be able to invite those left behind in war-ridden Germany to supper (BFA 12, 99). Another, in 1940, struggles at first to advise his young son to keep up his school work: 'Soll ich Mathematik lernen? / Wozu, möchte ich sagen. Daß zwei Stück Brot mehr ist als eines / Das wirst du auch so merken' and then, defiantly does so anyway: 'Ja, lerne Mathematik, sage ich / Lerne Englisch, lerne Geschichte!' (BFA 12, 97-98). Another speaker again wakes up in a sweat from a dream of Germany, realising with relief that '[i]ch war in der Fremde' (BFA 12, 97). A fourth (this one unmistakably autobiographical) remembers an earlier refuge in Denmark and wonders if it, and its famous inscription, have survived the air raids:

⁹¹ See Hans Peter Neureuter, 'Gedichte 1933-1941. Einführung', in *Brecht Handbuch. Gedichte. Vol. 2*, ed. by Jan Knopf (Stuttgart, Weimar, 2001), pp. 210–20 (p. 210).

⁹² Schwarz, p. 55.

⁹³ Schwarz, p. 55.

Sag, Haus, das zwischen Sund und Birnbaum steht:
Hat, den der Flüchtling einst dir eingemauert
Der alte Satz DIE WAHRHEIT IST KONKRET
Der Bombenpläne Anfall überdauert?

(BFA, 12, 99)

In more than one of this type of poem (BFA 12, 109; 15, 42), a refugee takes inventory of their sparse but meaningful possessions:

Vor der weißgetünchten Wand
Steht der schwarze Soldatenkoffer mit den Manuskripten.
Darauf liegt das Rauchzeug mit den kupfernen Aschenbechern.

(BFA 12, 98)

And repeatedly (BFA 12, 98; 12, 109; 15, 30), the radio – that has been carried along with great care (BFA 12, 109) – is transmitting dire and yet strangely desired news from Germany: ‘die Siegesmeldungen meiner Feinde’ (BFA 12, 98).

Being less obviously interventionist, and less analytical in their approach than some of Brecht’s pre-exile stage work (or even earlier poetic work), these poems seem to call into question a polar antithesis between *Kenntnisse* and *Erlebnisse*, that is, between critically informed knowledge and supposedly naïve perceptual experience: *Erlebnisse* here are not only rich, complex and wide-ranging beyond what happens to be in view at any given moment in time, but also entangled with the kinds of acts that bring them about. The speakers of these poems (or those of which they speak) imagine, recollect, dream; they turn on the radio for news, express themselves or reflect on what others are saying, make lists and comparisons. Their experiences are, crucially, not the result of a passive and impotent spectating of the kind that Brecht eschewed in theatre audiences or readers, but of complex and intertwining forms of world-engagement ranging, as we are about to see, from “looking around” via “imagining” to “turning one’s head to bring things into view” or “turning on the radio”. Once we understand experience in this way, as arising from and underpinning the ways we come in contact with the world, how we learn about, scrutinise and impact upon it with our actions, we

begin to discover its relevance to Brecht's realist project, which is at once about truth and critical analysis, but also frequently about *begreifen* (see BFA 22, 121) in more than a purely abstract, intellectual sense: it is about 'den Menschen die Realität meisterbar in die Hand [...] geben' (BFA 22, 408).

Before engaging more closely with the kind of poem of which examples have been given above, the purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, to set out Brecht's realist project in more detail and to explore the points of contention with conventional realist ideas and methods. Since even now scholars contend with the sense that '[f]ew literary phenomena are as elusive and yet as persistent as realism',⁹⁴ it makes sense to briefly revisit not just Brecht's own conception of it, and his (occasionally rather broad-sweeping) assessments of what this conception entailed, but to think more generally about what we mean when we talk of mirroring or recreating reality, by the terms "representation" or "truthfulness", and even by "reality" itself. Such a broader perspective will open up onto the kinds of assumptions we make about perception, that is, about the capacities that put us in touch with reality in the first place. Why is it so tempting, for example, to think of perceptual experience in pictorial terms, in terms of head-internal images, which, in turn, produces a wealth of metaphors with which we refer to the degree of realism in art (e.g. mirror-images or quasi-photographic accuracy)?

If perceptual experience indeed matters to Brecht's realist aims – if the poet (and the theorist, too) have a stake in the way we navigate and critically engage the realities that our senses put us in touch with – then reading his artistic practice solely through the lens of this wariness towards mimetic approaches can only get us so far. In a second step, therefore, this chapter explores the alternatives to these assumptions. If we want to unravel the polar antithesis posited in some places between supposedly naïve perception and the kind of critical thought and intervention Brecht advocates, we ought to cast about for a terminology that allows us to talk more easily about perception as an active pursuit, one that enables us to reach out to and engage our environments, or, in terms of Brecht's metaphor, to "take reality in hand". This is where Brecht's pragmatism meets the so-called pragmatic turn as set out in the introduction: if we reject the pervasive idea

⁹⁴ *Landscapes of Realism. Rethinking Literary Realism in Comparative Perspectives. Vol. 1: Mapping Realism*, ed. by Dirk Göttsche, Rosa Mucignat, and Robert Weninger (Amsterdam, Philadelphia, 2021), cover text.

that '[t]he reality I want to know is outside the mind; my knowledge of it is within'⁹⁵ and adopt instead an action-oriented view of what it means to be in the world, where perceiving is the constant embodied, enactive and world-involving practice of bringing reality into view, we are able to rediscover Brecht's richly evocative poetry in these terms. His landscapes and trees, and everyday objects and spaces do not come in the form of pictures, but as environments populated by perceivers who are agents at the same time. In other words, Brecht's poetry does not amount to picture-painting, even at its most evocative, but pays keen attention in its portrayal of the world to the very act his Realism demands: bringing reality about and taking it in hand.

1.2 Realism and the Real

Bandyng the term "Realism" many times in his theoretical reflections, Brecht in fact sets out, at one point, to purge it of all existing definitional meaning: '[w]ir werden uns hüten, etwa nur eine bestimmte, historische Romanform einer bestimmten Epoche als realistisch zu bezeichnen, [...], so für den Realismus nur formale, nur literarische Kriterien aufstellend' (BFA 22, 408). He, unsurprisingly, dismisses the nineteenth-century novel and such notable practitioners as Balzac, Tolstoy or, in the twentieth century, Mann as default standards for *the* realist method, and also frequently finds himself at odds with other left-wing thinkers and practitioners. The *Expressionismusdebatte* of the 1930s, centred largely around contributions to the Moscow-based emigrant publication *Das Wort*, exemplifies the awkward position he occupied between formal experimentation and the more conventional realist principles espoused notably by Georg Lukács. While Brecht was keen to stress that there should not be further rifts in left-wing discourse, he somewhat slyly defends what Lukács had criticised under the broadly conceived label of Expressionism:⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), p. 2.

⁹⁶ Lukács in fact admits, in *Es geht um den Realismus*, that the term "Expressionismus" serves him less as a label for particular artists or writers but for a principle, or 'Richtung' which he detects as a recent trend in literary history, see Georg Lukács, 'Es geht um den Realismus', in *Die Expressionismusdebatte. Materialien zu einer*

Mir gefallen die blauen Pferde [...]. Und ich ärgere mich, wenn den Malern zugerufen wird, sie dürften Pferde nicht blau malen; [...] die Gesellschaft wird diese leichte Entstellung der Wirklichkeit verschmerzen. Ja, im Notfall, sagen wir, um die Maler nicht zu verstimmen, könnten unsere Biologen sogar versuchen, blaue Pferdefelle zu züchten, wenn es nicht allzu viele Zeit nimmt, in kleinstem Umfang natürlich. (BFA 22, 350)

Brecht's argument is about more than formal diversity and playfulness for its own sake, and the intention behind these remarks is likely not a defence of Franz Marc in particular:⁹⁷ claiming to reject form for form's sake altogether, he instead traces artistic engagement with social and political realities across a much broader field. He invokes Shelley's allegorical ballad *The Masque of Anarchy* as a reference to the 'von der Bourgeoisie blutig unterdrückten Unruhen in Manchester (1819)' (BFA 22, 425): '[s]o verfolgen wir den Zug der Anarchie auf London zu und sehen große symbolische Bilder und wissen bei jeder Zeile, daß hier die Wirklichkeit zu Wort kam' (BFA 22, 430). Elsewhere, he posits Cervantes' *Don Quixote* as a 'realistisches Werk, da er die Überholtheit des Rittertums und des ritterlichen Geistes zeigt, und doch haben niemals Ritter gegen Windmühlen gekämpft' (BFA 22, 368). Since reality is 'weit, vielfältig, widerspruchsvoll' (BFA 22, 432), so must a definition of realist art be similarly broad

marxistischen Realismuskonzeption, ed. by Hans-Jürgen Schmitt (Frankfurt a.M., 1973), pp. 192–230 (p. 192).

⁹⁷ In fact, it is potentially more a defence of himself, given that Brecht was accused of formalism in his own practice, particularly when seen in the context of the later *Formalismusstreit* in the GDR of the early 1950s, a state-led intervention that promoted what had since been established as a programme of Soviet Socialist Realism. But in his own journal as early as 1938, he finds himself denying the charge of formalism through decidedly gritted teeth. He writes: 'Da ich auf meinem Gebiete ein Neuerer bin, schreien immer wieder einige, ich sei ein Formalist. Sie finden die alten Formen nicht in meinen Arbeiten, schlimmer, sie finden neue, und da meinen sie, es sind die Formen, die mich interessieren. Aber ich habe herausgefunden, daß ich das Formale eher geringschätze. Ich habe die alten Formen der Lyrik, der Erzählung, der Dramatik und des Theaters zu verschiedenen Zeiten studiert und sie nur aufgegeben, wenn sie dem, was ich sagen wollte, im Weg standen' (BFA 26, 315-16).

and varied; since reality is changing and changeable, art must occasionally adapt its strategies to depict it (BFA 22, 410). ‘Ein Rat “Schreibt wie Shelley!” wäre absurd; so wäre ein Rat “Schreibt wie Balzac!”’ (BFA 22, 433).

Brecht’s case only highlights that Realism is, in general, notoriously difficult to define, escaping all too easily the definitional bounds of a single literary epoch, a single genre, form, or medium, or even a single aesthetic.⁹⁸ Indicating as much, Erich Auerbach’s standard work on Realism, *Mimesis*, is subtitled simply ‘Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen *Literatur*’,⁹⁹ and treats the question of how the world is represented in works from the Bible and Homer, via Shakespeare, all the way to Modernist writers like Virginia Woolf. Throughout literary history and the histories of all kinds of “high” art to folk art, the goal of ‘making models of the things of the world’,¹⁰⁰ of pouring what there is in our lives into representational artefacts, all by a variety of means and for a variety of purposes, seems almost to be a human universal.¹⁰¹ For these reasons, the 1930s *Expressionismusdebatte*, sometimes also called *Realismusdebatte*, is only one iteration of ‘a rich and long-standing tradition of competing conceptions of realism’.¹⁰² By the time we get to Brecht’s working lifetime, and certainly since, we have to contend with ideas of Psychological Realism and Naturalism, and other variants and deviations, such as Magical Realism and Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Metafiction, from Realism’s central premise of representing or

⁹⁸ See Ulrich Plass, ‘Antinomie. Realismus und Realität in Literatur und Theater’, *Positionen*, 108 (2016), 35–37 (p. 35).

⁹⁹ See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern, 1946), my emphasis.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven, London, 2005), p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Quite outside of a Brechtian context, Peter Brooks points to one such purpose in a curious echo of Brecht’s metaphors of “taking reality in hand” or “mastering reality”: ‘The pleasure that human beings take in scale models of the real – doll houses, ships in bottles, lead soldiers, model railroads – must have something to do with the sense these provide of being able to play with and therefore to master the real world. The scale model [...] allows us to get both our fingers and our minds around objects otherwise alien or imposing’, Brooks, p. 1.

¹⁰² John J. White, ‘Bertolt Brecht’s *Furcht und Elend des III. Reiches* and the Moscow “Realism” Controversy’, *Modern Language Review*, 100 (2005), 138–60 (p. 145).

pertaining to the world we know and inhabit.¹⁰³ And a clear-cut distinction between Realism and Modernism is likewise only useful at first glance for the present purpose. In Brecht's time, even while Modernism and the Avantgarde were, and are in certain contexts, understood in opposition to the particular kind of Realism that preceded and co-existed with it, it cannot be denied that many (if not most) of the prolific forms emerging at the turn of the twentieth century are concerned, to some degree or other, with real, external circumstances as they rapidly evolved around and with them.¹⁰⁴ Brecht, of course, not only gestures towards this with reference to other artists (and not just contemporary ones), but is himself a particularly testing case.

This difficulty in delineating Realism persists, in part, because in its very basic idea it is derivative of the much more general notion of representation: one thing (say, a cultural artefact) reproduces, mirrors, corresponds or pertains to another (for instance, an object, a concept, an event). Only, while all kinds of 'different styles [in Western art] from the reproductive to the abstract play off the notion of representation',¹⁰⁵ definitions of Realism in particular invoke the idea of representing, or corresponding to "reality" or "the real". For example, when asked to define "realistic" in a study conducted by Emily Troscianko, readers of fiction said:

Realistic would be [...] something which corresponds to reality, [...] a description of how things really are.

[...]

Something that mirrors reality; something that reproduces what exists, what actually exists around us.

Within art and literature, realism is the actual description of the way things are, so a realist story and a realist painting would be almost photographic, if that makes sense.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ See Brooks, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ See Troscianko, *Kafka's Cognitive Realism*, esp. pp. 3-8, for a contribution to such debates surrounding Realism and Kafka.

¹⁰⁵ Brooks, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ See Troscianko, p. 1; for details of the study, see *ibid.*, appendix 1. I am grateful to Emily Troscianko for making further, unpublished data from this study available to me.

But this is where things get muddled. If Realism is to be measured against reality, or against “how things really are”, then different conceptions of reality are likely to yield, and have yielded across literary history, different conceptions of realist art. Or to put it the other way around, to define an artwork as realist (that is, to claim that it pertains or corresponds to, is accurate or truthful about, faithfully represents, mirrors, imitates, or even, creates an illusion of reality) is, somewhat inevitably, to make a claim about what that reality entails and what its qualities are: ‘[d]as Grundproblem der Realismus-Definition liegt in der Unschärfe des Begriffs “Realität” (oder "Wirklichkeit“).’¹⁰⁷ And the question is not just what we mean when we say “reality”, but also in what different ways one thing might represent, correspond to, reproduce, mirror, or imitate another:¹⁰⁸ definitions of Realism must be concerned with ‘Gegenstand’ and ‘Gestaltungsweise’ alike.¹⁰⁹

Circumventing all kinds of epistemological and ontological problems that arise in dealing with categories like reality and representation, we are used, today, to measuring the realism of a text or image not against whatever can be meant by reality but rather in whether or not it seems realistic to its reader. Doing so we are able, as Troscianko puts it, to narrow down questions of ‘unlimited “reality” being evoked, to the (only slightly) more manageable cognitive question of what factors are involved in creating an *effect* of reality.’¹¹⁰ We need not look for truth, faithfulness or accuracy in a realist work, in other words, but for ‘verisimilitude’: whether or not it is ‘recognizable as “true to conceivable experience”’.¹¹¹ Or invoking Roland Barthes’ “reality effect”, we might treat Realism as a kind of ‘Fetisch des Realen’: ‘[e]ine Erzählung kommt uns realistisch vor, weil ihre Zeichen sich eines Codes bedienen, den wir alle kennen, was nicht heißt, dass das Erzählte auch der Wirklichkeit entspricht.’¹¹² For Barthes, it is the small insignificant details of a rich literary account that constitute reality effects, such as the mention of the circumstance that ‘on an old piano, under a barometer, there was a

¹⁰⁷ Monika Ritzer, ‘Realismus’, *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft. Vol.3. Neubearbeitung*, 2007, pp. 217–21 (p. 217).

¹⁰⁸ See Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ritzer, p. 217.

¹¹⁰ Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Jerome S. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA, 1986), p. 52.

¹¹² Plass, p. 35.

pyramid of boxes and cartons', or that there was 'a little door behind her'.¹¹³ The fact that these structurally superfluous fillers are being mentioned at all despite serving no particular function in the narrative, serves as a kind of authentication of the whole text: in real-life fashion, these things are simply there and the "real" is assumed not to need any independent justification [...]. [I]t is powerful enough to negate any notion of "function", [...] and [...] the *having-been-there* of things is a sufficient reason for speaking of them.'¹¹⁴

Of course, considering the proximity of the word "Realism" in his writing to the word "truth", a solution of this kind would hardly have satisfied Brecht. When he defines Realism as 'der Realität Rechnung [tragend]' (BFA 22, 633), or insists that '[r]ealistisches Schreiben kann von nicht realistischem nur dadurch unterschieden werden, daß man es mit der Realität selber konfrontiert, die es behandelt' (BFA 22, 424), he may be drawing on the same broad notion of truthful representation that underlies the definitions given by Troscianko's participants. Yet his own definition of Realism in the 1938/39 essay *Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus* (BFA 22, 406) reads rather differently from their responses:

Realistisch heißt: den gesellschaftlichen Kausalkomplex *aufdeckend* / die herrschenden Gesichtspunkte als die Gesichtspunkte der Herrschenden *entlarvend* / [...] / das *Moment der Entwicklung* betonend [...]. (BFA 22, 409, my emphasis)

Brecht does not mean to record and document all that the reader already believes to be the case, or could conceivably imagine to be the case. He is not interested in what *seems* real, or what resembles in look or feel a world already familiar. Brecht, in other words, does not seem to have in mind any old truth, and, by extension, any old Realism. In 1934/35, in a response to a call for essays by a French newspaper, entitled *Dichter sollen die Wahrheit schreiben* (BFA 22, 71-4), he writes:

¹¹³ Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect', in *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*, ed. by Tzvetan Todorov and R. Carter (transl.) (Cambridge, Paris, 1982), pp. 11–17 (p. 11).

¹¹⁴ See Barthes, p. 15.

So versinkt z.B. jetzt, sichtbar vor aller Welt, einer der großen zivilisierten Staaten nach dem anderen in die äußerste Barbarei. [...] Das ist zweifellos eine Wahrheit, aber es gibt natürlich noch mehr Wahrheiten. So ist es z.B. nicht unwahr, daß Stühle Sitzflächen haben und der Regen von oben nach unten fällt. Viele Dichter schreiben Wahrheiten dieser Art. (BFA 22, 71)

Casting the net widely, from Shelley and Cervantes, all the way to Bruegel the Elder, Brecht instead defines as realist any work of art that makes salient some important state of affairs, sheds light on socio-political relations and hierarchies and on the causes behind them, rather than, as per the examples Brecht gives here, what is merely obvious. While it is unlikely that Brecht saw this function being fulfilled in Marc's blue horses in particular, the implied argument stands nonetheless: it may not be so imperative for the artist committed to truthfulness to reality to accurately portray horses as black, chestnut, or dapple grey when the work might instead tell its audience something about, say, the lives and circumstances of those grooming, harnessing, steering, shodding, slaughtering the animals (see BFA 22, 350).

And an additional dimension sets him apart from other realist projects: even while Brecht, in principle, has a stake in "how things really are", he is not only interested, as such a relatively loaded word as "truth" might suggest, in how things really are in any given moment ('die Welt, wie sie ist'¹¹⁵). At least an account of the world "as it is" might have seemed an insufficient or impoverished account to Brecht where it fails to point also to how such a status quo comes to be the case, why things are the way they are, and indeed, if they have been or could be different at other times. Commenting that Brecht has too often been read as an artistic genius *in spite of* his Marxist ideas, David Barnett points to Brecht's 'belief in the dialectic'¹¹⁶ as yielding an insight central to his conception of artistic Realism, namely, that the way society is set up, its hierarchies, values, and rules – and whatever happens to be true at any given moment - are neither inevitable, nor indefinite, nor natural.¹¹⁷ Capitalism, to use an obvious example, does not have to be the inevitable outcome of natural human propensities towards acquisition and conflict. Human nature itself is not timeless or

¹¹⁵ This is in opposition to 'die Welt, wie sie wird' (BFA 22, 83).

¹¹⁶ Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, pp. 57–58.

¹¹⁷ See Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, p. 74.

universal; its expression in any time or place is dependent on locally contingent material conditions and circumstances. Reality is radically processual and unfixed, and constantly unfolding in the dialectical progress of history. Given this, we must think of Brecht's Realism not simply as a matter of uncovering hidden truths, or explicating complex states-of-affairs as they are at any given point in time: '[d]ie Welt konnte und mußte nunmehr dargestellt werden als eine in Entwicklung begriffene und zu entwickelnde [...]' (BFA 22, 218), and, more importantly, as one in which we can intervene. When he proposes that 'wir werden alle Mittel verwenden [...] um die Realität den Menschen meisterbar in die Hand zu geben' (BFA 22, 408), or 'um die Wirklichkeit beherrschbar zu machen' (BFA 22, 638), he is talking about reality as 'a complex totality of structures and relations'¹¹⁸ in need of being uncovered and clarified, not just in any given instance but over time as well. And much more than identifying and articulating momentary truths, Brecht's intention is not for artists just to write 'von der Realität bewußt beeinflusst' but also 'die Realität bewußt beeinflussend' (BFA 22, 626) and for audiences not just to spectate to (or imagine spectating to) a fictional world, but to engage with it (and the actual reality to which it pertains) in a more active fashion: '[e]ine realistische Beobachtungsweise ist eine solche, welche die treibenden Kräfte studiert, eine realistische Handlungsweise eine solche, welche die treibenden Kräfte in Bewegung setzt' (BFA 22, 638).

1.3 A Problem of Visibility?

Barnett dubs Brecht's issue here a 'problem of visibility':¹¹⁹ art that is made to resemble the reality that shows up for us in subjective perceptual experience is impoverished or impotent because perception itself is: the status quo at any given moment may appear to be unchanging and inevitable to an individual observer because changes (in a person, a relationship, an environment, a society and so on) can be gradual and occur over long periods of time. For example, the way we perceive gender roles in society may be simply taken for granted because the evolution of such values is outside of the scope of an individual lifetime. Only when we critically analyse, for example, women's rights in the eighteenth century in comparison with women's rights today does a picture emerge

¹¹⁸ Kuhn, 'Brecht Reads Bruegel', p. 114.

¹¹⁹ Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, p. 56.

of just how much has changed, and might we get a sense of how much might yet change in future. Other changes may be invisible at a glance because they are highly contextual: a person might look the same as they did five years ago, but their attitudes, values and behaviours – and, in fact, the material circumstances that determine them - might be completely different.¹²⁰

And we might add to this another, underlying worry occasionally evident in Brecht's writing, right across the shift 'from the earlier critique of art as Genußmittel to a critique of experienced-based art' which Brecht performs in his essay on the *Dreigroschenprozeß*.¹²¹ a distinction is drawn in his thinking between passive, consumerist spectating and the kind of active and critical intervention beyond the page and the stage that seemed, especially since the early 1930s, so desperately wanting. One of the "photo-epigrams" in Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*, published in 1957 after some years of intermittent work, accurately captures this sense of dissatisfaction with photography as the quintessential example art that, supposedly, mirrors reality in its visual features. Its four-liner, pieced together with a montage taken from an English-language publication of six portraits of Nazi generals, reads:

Das sind sechs Mörder. Nun geht nicht davon
Und nickt nicht, lässig murmelnd ein "ganz recht":
Sie zu entlarven kostete nun schon
An fünfzig Städte uns und ein Geschlecht.

(BFA 12, 189)

¹²⁰ Barnett gives the example of one of Brecht's parables about Herr Keuner, which shows Brecht playing with this notion in conjunction with his belief that change, contrary to the man's implication that not having changed amounts to a compliment, it is desirable and, in fact, essential: 'Ein Mann, der Herrn K. lange nicht gesehen hatte, begrüßte ihn mit den Worten: "Sie haben sich gar nicht verändert." "Oh!" sagte Herr K. und erbleichte' (BFA 18, 21).

¹²¹ J. J. Long, 'Paratextual Profusion: Photography and Text in Bertolt Brecht's War Primer', *Poetics Today*, 29.1 (2008), 197–224 (p. 201).

The scenario sketched out in the first two lines – a viewer standing before the portraits, acknowledging what it is they show, “Das sind sechs Mörder”, nodding to herself as if to say “Quite right!” and walking on – is almost an archetypical description of the kind of passive response to art that Brecht sought to forestall. If perceiving is essentially like picture-viewing, then perceivers are nothing but passive spectators to their own experience, separated from the world “out there”, and if art mimics such perceptual experience by supplying actual or virtual pictures of its own, it improves nothing. Critical reasoning and action, which Brecht frequently demands, are fundamentally separate processes for which this terminology provides no clear description.

Now Brecht was of course no committed sceptic, nor had much time for worrying about the epistemological value of subjective experience: as Meg Mumford reminds us, cited in the introduction, he would gladly seek the proof of the pudding in the eating, and the reason Barnett discusses the ‘problem of visibility’ in the first place is because it sheds light on what is, arguably, much more relevant: Brecht’s artistic innovations and solutions. But it is worth paying attention to these concerns precisely not as specifically characteristic of the Brechtian, but with an eye to how they inform our thinking much more generally. What we can discern in Brecht’s realist project as a certain emphasis on reality as a complex totality rather than a perceptible surface, for one, is hardly unique, and the critique of Realism as only showing the latter stretches back at least to Plato’s view of art as an imitation of an imitation, ‘of shadows, appearances, rather than true reality’.¹²² And Brecht is certainly not alone with the concern about the inherent passivity, indeed, the inherent privacy and remove of perceptual experience. Often when we give folk-psychological descriptions of perceiving, we describe a rather simple and straightforward process: our senses pick up information from our surroundings and build up representations, or more simply images, of them in our heads, which amount to ‘a detailed, stable, extended, and veridical display that corresponds to the scene before us’.¹²³ “I”, or in other words, the self, am (in) my head, while the world is out there, and information passes through a boundary between me and it. Perceiving, on both of these assumptions, is a kind of

¹²² Brooks, p. 7.

¹²³ Zenon W Pylyshyn, *Seeing and Visualising: It’s not what you think* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), pp. 2–3.

picture-viewing in a ‘Cartesian Theatre’,¹²⁴ in ‘the nonexistent place in the brain where everything (i.e., all our sensory inputs) comes together and “consciousness happens” as a private show watched by “me”’.¹²⁵ Representationalism, as this view is sometimes referred to in literature on perception, goes back to the seventeenth century,¹²⁶ but representations remain a mainstream notion in research that seeks to determine just how neuronal populations encode information in the brain, and are implicitly present in ordinary language about perception. Pictorialist metaphors in particular – that is, representations in the form of detailed images – are pervasive in everyday speech not least because vision *feels*, to most sighted people, like ‘the primary human sense: the one by which we obtain our most precise sensory information about the world around us’,¹²⁷ but also because the ‘large cultural heritage of graphical representation (maps, drawings, paintings, photographs, diagrams, film and video) [...] biases us into thinking that our representations of reality have a similar iconic quality’.¹²⁸

It is no co-incidence that photography and mirror metaphors, that is, metaphors of pictorial media dealing ‘in sensory and particularly in visual detail’,¹²⁹ also feature centrally in the definitions given by the participants of Troscianko’s survey. It is on this implicit basis that the ideas behind much of traditional mimetic Realism operate: if we know the real world in that we have pictures of it in our heads, then photographs or realist paintings, naively speaking, correspond to more or less that world that shows up for us in experience. Literary texts, though themselves not pictorial in nature, can be

¹²⁴ Dennett, ‘Reflections on Language and Mind’, p. 284.

¹²⁵ Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 43.

¹²⁶ For Hobbes, ‘the thoughts of man [...] are every one a representation or appearance of a quality or accident of a body without us’, while Hume contends ‘that nothing is really ever present with the mind but its perceptions or impressions and ideas, and that external objects become known to us only by those perceptions they occasion’, see Jonathan Kramnick, ‘An Aesthetics and Ecology of Presence’, *European Romantic Review*, 6.3 (2015), 315–27 (p. 316).

¹²⁷ Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 29.

¹²⁸ J. Kevin O’Regan, ‘Solving the “Real” Mysteries of Visual Perception: The World as an Outside Memory’, *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 46 (1992), 461–88 (p. 475).

¹²⁹ Brooks, p. 3.

conceived of as working in a similar way: minimally, readers perceive, process and comprehend words on the page,¹³⁰ but such linguistic cues afford *mental imagery* that may introspectively resemble perceptual experiences of the real world. The idea is that the way a realist text represents, corresponds to, or imitates the world is by imitating or evoking the act of perceiving it: ‘[d]urch Darstellungsweisen, die den Vorgang der Wahrnehmung [...] nachvollziehen, entsteht eine Vergegenwärtigung gegenständlicher Wirklichkeit’.¹³¹ This idea underpins a wide range of common principles such as the maxim “Show, don’t tell!”, which in turn reflects the distinction in Plato between *diegesis* (narration) and *mimesis* (imitation): well-written novels, or so guides to creative writing sometimes tell us, do not just inform us that “she walked in the woods”, but they afford imagery of the particular dark green of leaves, the smell of pine, the feel of the mossy ground. In the early history of the term *mimesis*, Aristotle’s *Poetics* speaks of ‘utmost vividness’ [enargestata]¹³² with which both the poet and her audience are to imagine scenes, a term which is used both ‘to describe words as clear or distinct, and to describe sensory phenomena as visible or palpable.’¹³³ In other words, imagining a fictional world is equated with seeing the real one; “vividness” is attained by imagining “spectating”.¹³⁴

It is equally no co-incidence that photographs and mirror images feature in Brecht’s problematisations of mimetic Realism, of what he explicitly refers to a number of times as Aristotelian methods (for instance, BFA 22, 168-70; 22, 171-72; 22, 227). First of all, when Brecht objects to photographs, or other examples of the mirror aesthetic, this is because they are to him at risk of being just inadequate snapshots of what happens to be in view from a single perspective at a single moment in time: ‘eine[...] Wiedergabe, die den Zusammenhang wegschminkt’ (BFA 21, 443). Pictures

¹³⁰ Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 39.

¹³¹ Ritzer, p. 218.

¹³² Troscianko points out that Butcher’s 1987 translation (Aristotle, ‘Poetics. Translated by Samuel Henry Butcher.’, *Internet Classics Archive*, 1987

<<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.mb.txt>> [accessed 15 August 2021]), is particularly useful here for its ‘more literal translations of terms relating to perception and representation’, (Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 93).

¹³³ Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 55.

¹³⁴ Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 55.

are static and two-dimensional, and thereby at risk of epistemological impoverishment.¹³⁵ Brecht's famous example, the photograph of the Krupp factory, depicts only the façade of the building, revealing nothing about, for instance, the social hierarchies and relations and material conditions it represents. As Long has it:

Brecht argues that reality cannot be reduced to the visible surface of things but has to be understood as a set of functional and abstract social relationships that are inseparable from the workings of advanced capitalism. Consequently, a putatively 'realistic' aesthetics based on mimetic reproduction, of which the photograph (in Brecht's view) is an incarnation, is no longer adequate to the reality it claims to represent.¹³⁶

Again, however, it is not just the idea of a representational surface inadequate to the complexity of reality that is at issue here: where reality is projected onto a two-dimensional canvas, only reflecting a single perspective, in a single moment in time, and, thus, rendered an 'impotent and context-less' sensory surface,¹³⁷ we cannot engage with it other than to look at it, nod, and move along. Despite a photograph's powerful illusory character, it lacks reality's possibilities for interaction, and – or so Brecht warns – might tempt us to engage with the actual reality it depicts in a similarly passive fashion.

But this is the crux of the matter: as is well documented in the literature, Brecht's pragmatism is not just a pragmatism about his artistic means, and not just a practical approach to life in which solutions matter more than problems. It is also, in philosophical terms, an attitude which sets store by 'Praxis' (BFA 21, 510) not just as the end-result of having gained, or conveyed in art, insights about the complex and dynamically evolving structure of reality, but as a means of obtaining these insights in the first place.¹³⁸ From Marx he takes not only the idea that reality is grounded in material circumstances, but also the profoundly pragmatist conviction, as Haug puts it, that

¹³⁵ See Long, p. 201.

¹³⁶ Long, p. 201.

¹³⁷ Kuhn, 'Poetry and Photography', p. 178.

¹³⁸ See Haug, p. 62. See also Oesmann, p. 117.

[r]eality is not our vis-à-vis, and we are not sitting across from it, in what Nietzsche ridiculed as a ‘Hinterwelt’—a world behind the world, with a connotation of backwardness of who believes in it. We are not looking into the world like through a keyhole into another room. We are thrown, without any reserve, into the historical world of the social [...].¹³⁹

To Brecht we are not, in other words, sitting across from reality, not looking into it as if through a keyhole, or, in our earlier metaphors, we are not viewing the world on a head-internal screen, or through our eye sockets. As we are about to see, it is less perception and perceptual experience that Brecht takes issue with, than it is the terms in which we speak and think about them; the pervasive impression that perceiving is like spectating (or, as his Galileo has it, that “seeing” is often exhausted in merely “gawping”).¹⁴⁰ That is to say, while Brecht occasionally deals in the same pictorial metaphors that we often use to talk about perception and perceptual experience to set out the problems to which he demands artistic solutions (even purely, perhaps, by virtue of how readily they suggest themselves), it seems to be these metaphors themselves that his Realism must,

¹³⁹ Haug, p. 153.

¹⁴⁰ Compare to the scene in the play (BFA 5, 9-14) Elizabeth Anscombe’s retelling of a conversation with Wittgenstein: ‘He once greeted me with the question: “Why do people say that it was natural to think that the sun went round the earth rather than that the earth turned on its axis?” I replied : “I suppose, because it looked as if the sun went round the earth.” “Well”, he asked, “what would it have looked like if it had looked ‘as if the earth turned on its axis?’” This question brought out that I had hitherto given no relevant meaning to “it looks as if” in “it looks as if the sun goes around the earth”’, Elizabeth Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus. Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (South Bend, 1971), p. 151. Part of what we come to see here is that it is not perception itself that is faulty or misleading. Rather, Anscombe at first voices a confused idea of what it is that the senses present us with – the mistake is with what we take our experience to be on first reflection, and is put right by further, more critical reflection. A general lesson we can take from this (one that will be at work in the background throughout this study) is that sometimes limitations attributed to perception are in fact limitations only of a certain mistaken conception of what perceiving is.

and is intended to, challenge. Consider, again, that Brecht's realist project is aimed not just at truth of any kind (even if it is truth obtained through critical observation and analysis), but at the exposition of a reality that is fundamentally changeable, which shows up for us not only as a snapshot but as a spatially and temporally extended environment. For Barnett, for instance, it is this goal which provides a crucial clue to Brecht's innovations: they are intended to portray reality as changing and changeable. We can add to this now: if it matters to Brecht that we take reality in hand, that we reach out to it and bring it into view, he takes on a commitment to challenging the tempting fiction of pictorialism; he is committed to showing us that we are in fact able to (and must) take reality in hand, and that perception is so much more than picture-viewing.

1.4 Beyond "Imagining Spectating"

If support for this line of argument can be drawn from clues in Brecht's own theoretical writings, or supplied by tracing direct and indirect connections to other thinkers in a widely conceived nexus of pragmatist thought, this study looks primarily to the poetry, and what *it* can tell us about Brecht's intuitions about perception and perceptual experience. It is none too difficult, of course, to imagine that Brecht's distrust of and dissatisfaction with the senses and perceptual experience, to the degree that they play a role, would have been particularly rife (and perhaps, for the first time, a source of genuine concern) in the context of his increasingly changed political outlook since 1933. He writes from exile: 'Ich gehe nicht mehr "im Walde vor mich hin", sondern unter Polizisten' (BFA 26, 323), echoing the famous question-exclamation in *An die Nachgeborenen*: 'Was sind das für Zeiten, wo / Ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist / Weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt!' (BFA 12, 85). Of course, police spies, and the oppressive totalitarian structures they represent are, by definition, invisible in everyday experience. The very idea of a spy is of a person – a neighbour or colleague perhaps – whose identity as such is not given away in any of their perceptible features. Similarly language (or photographs or other kinds of pictorial representations) can only, to Brecht, obscure the bigger picture: to talk of trees, or to say that rain falls downwards, or, indeed, that horses are, really, such and such a colour, means, at the same time, to not talk about the atrocities committed by the incumbent

Nazi regime. Far from remedying this, much of conventionally conceived Realism seems, to Brecht, to aggravate this problem:

[...] Das riesige Bildmaterial, das tagtäglich von den Druckerpressen ausgespien wird und das doch den Charakter der Wahrheit zu haben scheint, dient in Wirklichkeit nur der Verdunkelung der Tatbestände. (BFA 21, 515)

If '[o]ne of the dominant concerns of Brecht's writing during the exile period, especially in the early years, is learning and teaching - now conceived on a much broader scale than was implied in the term *Lehrstücke* [...]',¹⁴¹ in response to the new circumstances under which Brecht found himself, and the changed outlook in exile for his literary work, then there is a certain temptation to take the assertions in poems like *Schlechte Zeit für Lyrik* somewhat at face value, in which a poet-speaker describes a scenario that we might recognise as Brecht's own situation in his early Danish exile, and dwells at length on the problem that poets face in the 1930s, namely, that they must no longer express 'Begeisterung über den blühenden Apfelbaum', or the 'grünen Boote und lustigen Segel des Sundes' (BFA 14, 432).

But, as we have seen already, this deceptively apparent poetological programme does not ring quite true in the case of some of these poems. In their portrayal of landscapes and plant life (islands, fruit trees, the Sound), as well as everyday objects and activities, these poems rarely dwell for long on particularly rich and detailed imagery, but they certainly have a lot to say about perceiving and experiencing. Their speakers take in their surroundings, smell '[e]iner dunklen Tanne / Geruch' mixed with 'dem süßer Milch' and 'dem des Räucherspecks' (BFA 12,99), see '[d]ie grünen Boote und die lustigen Segel des Sundes' (BFA 14, 432), even though the poem performs a stubborn turn of the head away from them. The focus on a whole variety of sensory experiences is perhaps nowhere more explicit than in *Finnische Landschaft* from 1940, a time that has even been described as the proper onset of a 'Phase neuer Sinnlichkeit'.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Ockenden, p. 179.

¹⁴² Neureuter, p. 217.

Fischreiche Wässer! Schönbäumige Wälder!
 Birken- und Beerenduft!
 Vieltoniger Wind, durchschaukelnd eine Luft
 So mild, als stünden jene eisernen Milchbehälter
 Die dort vom weißen Gute rollen, offen!
Geruch und Ton und Bild und Sinn verschwimmt.
 Der Flüchtling sitzt im Erlengrund und nimmt
 Sein schwieriges Handwerk wieder auf: das Hoffen.

(BFA 12, 110, my emphasis)

Some attention has been paid here to the nuances of such experience, for instance in likening the freshness of the air to the smell of fresh milk, or to conflate the different sounds of the scene simply into the image of a ‘vieltonig’ wind. The almost solemn, polysyndetic sixth line takes time and space not only to list smell, sound, and image as impressions, but adds ‘Sinn’ more generally, suggesting a rich, multimodal experience of which only some of the more prominent aspects can be isolated: ‘verschwimmt’, indeed, suggests that some work on the part of the perceiver has gone into picking up on, disambiguating and manifesting in language the handful of precise objects and events described in the preceding lines. In this way, perhaps this sixth line even acts as a nod towards the kind of lyric poetry that Brecht might consider a result of merely “gawping” at the world, while the refugee, the speaker of the poem, gets up to something entirely different: he observes milk containers and the growing crops, but pays attention, as if with a turn of the head or the mind, also to the workers – ‘derer auch, die Korn und Milch nicht nährt’. He watches a ferry transport of logs go by, but it is an experience suffused with the imaginative association with wooden legs. In the first three phrases of the poem, each marked as a distinct exclamation, certain specific descriptions are wrested from the blur of impressions evoked later. Just like the sense of hope that can be drawn from the continued life and productivity of ordinary people, “looking” (not at some pure and untouched world of impressions, but at specific objects, people, and activities) is a ‘schwieriges Handwerk’; it is not achieved in indulging in the senses alone but bringing things deliberately to view and to mind.

To be sure, earlier commentators have already staked out the place this and other such poems occupy in Brecht’s project, viewing the experiences evoked and perceptual

acts portrayed in them not by-products of these poems' central concerns, but as crucial in their own right: Ockenden and Hutchinson both make a case that 'even when Brecht writes of such apparently harmless or potentially idyllic occasions as swimming in lakes or climbing in trees',¹⁴³ he engages his readers in a demanding reading exercise with sudden changes of mood,¹⁴⁴ or by writing highly economically, fostering active and attentive readers who must keep on their toes and supply their own material to the text.¹⁴⁵ Brady in particular emphasises the crucial import of these themes. Only in the vividness of a beautiful spring morning or a fragrant pantry does the horror of the war become salient: 'der Krieg wird vom Lyriker Brecht verkleinert, wird angedeutet, aus der Distanz gesehen, muß sogar öfters gesucht werden',¹⁴⁶ he writes, referencing Brecht's commentary on Bruegel the Elder's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, in which the fallen figure is a tiny detail in the background of a wider landscape. As Brecht observes on this occasion:

Die Figuren wenden sich von dem Ereignis ab. Schöne Darstellung der Aufmerksamkeit, welche das Pflügen beansprucht [...]. Besondere Schönheit und Heiterkeit der Landschaft während des grauenhaften Ereignisses. (BFA 22, 272)

In the second stanza of *Finnische Landschaft*, the war only shows up hidden in a small detail; in the log transport which the refugee associates with wooden legs: 'Ist dies das Holz, ohn das kein Holzbein wäre?' (BFA 12, 110). In *Der Lautsprecher*, the war is only present in the constant transmissions of the radio, yet it holds a much firmer claim to reality than the speaker's immediate surroundings: '[z]wei wesensfremde Welten werden gegenübergestellt, und die eine - der Krieg - gewinnt durch die andere, die Welt des friedlich einschlafenden Seemanns, unerwarteterweise an Wucht':¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Hutchinson, p. 35.

¹⁴⁴ See Ockenden, p. 183.

¹⁴⁵ See Hutchinson, p. 33; 36.

¹⁴⁶ Brady, p. 159.

¹⁴⁷ Brady, p. 161.

Mehrmals am Tage
Höre ich den Lautsprecher mit den Kriegsnachrichten
Um mich zu vergewissern, daß ich noch in der Welt bin.
So
Bittet der heimgekehrte Seemann seine alte Mutter
Aus einem Kübel Wasser auszuschütten
Bis er einschläft.

(BFA 15, 30)

Both Brady and Ockenden suggest in their discussions that these techniques represent instances of *Verfremdung*, and as we have seen already, Brecht himself was keen to stress that *Verfremdung* is not aimed at ‘context-less abstraction’ when he writes:¹⁴⁸

Es besteht nicht das mindeste Interesse daran, die darzustellenden Dinge in den Bereich des Kuriosen, tatsächlich Unbegreiflichen zu rücken; sie sollen ja, im Gegenteil, eben begriffen werden. (BFA 22, 121)

That is to say: there is no abstract sense in which the war can be fully grasped, in which its consequences and implications for the lived realities of millions can be represented. The portrayal of ordinarily perceptible features of reality does not get in the way of what Brecht wants to say; rather, it lends a tangible form to the intangible, distant or abstract, to features of reality that are not currently in view.

These readings, particularly those that situate Brecht’s poetic strategies in the wider nexus of the *Verfremdung* principle, are suggestive, and Chapter Four engages with their argument in more detail. Crucially, however, from what these poems tell us about the episodes of perceiving they describe, we may also discover that it is not just to Brecht’s readers – the beneficiaries of such instances of *Verfremdung* - that an extended and complex reality is available: as these poems deal with the complex, or even contradictory experience that Brecht’s exile must have been, of the simultaneity of (at least relative) safety and worries about the expanding powers of Nazism, of peaceful landscapes and the threat, then the horrors, of a war, they also remind us that such

¹⁴⁸ Kuhn, ‘Poetry and Photography’, p. 180.

experiences are always accessible to perceivers. The strength of their sometimes harrowing, sometimes moving portrayal of the reality of war and exile, and thus, ultimately, their claim to a particularly forceful kind of Realism, lies in their attention to the complex and even contrasting features of the experience of its speakers, the (more or less) ordinary people which populate them, but crucially, also in the poems' attention to the acts of world-engagement on the part of these ordinary perceivers: think again of the refugee sitting in the alder grove, who perceives and imagines, soberly reflects and hopes at the same time, or of the sailor, who is made to feel comfortable on land by the simulation of the sounds of waves, and of the speaker of the poem who is perversely reassured by the mediated presence of the war through the radio, 'das nicht nur die Verbindung zum eigentlichen Krieg herstellt, sondern jede andere Verbindung relativiert.'¹⁴⁹ on either side of this simile – connected, so as to leave no doubt about the straightforwardness of the comparison, by a simple “so” in the middle line – the speaker and the sailor inhabit one kind of surroundings, but reality to them has a much wider scope. What they perceive as “their” worlds, the sea and the war, is distant yet present because, with the help of certain tools (the radio) or props (the sloshing water), they can bring them to mind. And others, too, experience in ways that are not directly linked to their immediate surroundings: they turn on the radio to find out what is happening, or dream that they are, five-hundred miles south. They imagine the future, weighing their chances of escape or of a defeat of the Nazis, and they remember friends in different countries. In paying attention to perceptual experience beyond the simple notion of picture-viewing, they convey a more apt sense of the way in which perceivers access and relate to their immediate surroundings and the temporally and spatially extended world beyond it.

Indeed so much do these accounts of “perceiving” go beyond “seeing” (or even worse, “gawping”) that they call for an entirely different vocabulary about perception to account for this: the framing of Brecht's concerns as a ‘problem of visibility’ – addressed in his work, allegedly, by simply side-stepping ordinary perceptual experience – proves too simplistic.¹⁵⁰ Or to put this point the other way around, the metaphors often used to talk about perception do not quite seem to be able to do justice to the range of phenomena these poems evoke: the strange experience of standing by a

¹⁴⁹ Brady, p. 160.

¹⁵⁰ Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, p. 56.

bay on a quiet spring day but also, in some other sense, on a war-swept continent, listening to bird-song into which seems to seep the far-off thundering of manoeuvring war-ships (BFA 12, 95), observing a fruit tree in bloom, but at the same time, training one's attention to recalling the latest of Hitler's demagogical speeches (BFA 14, 432). Such experiences are not only possible as the result of an act of *Verfremdung* on the part of the poet, but remarkably recognizable to perceivers of all kinds. And they cannot satisfactorily be explained by the account on which perceiving is passive and head-internal picture-viewing of what happens to be in view at any given moment in time, a kind of passage from "out there" to "in here". Here a pragmatist view has more to offer us, both for reading the poems and for rethinking the perceptual activities in which their speakers engage: conceiving of perceptual (and cognitive) processes variously as embodied, extended, and enactive, theorists of this stripe explain how perceptual experience comes about by referring not just to head- or mind-internal processes but taking into account the body and the world at large as playing a role. The world, according to this view, is not a visible surface, but we experience it complete with the backs or inner workings of objects, and even, as Brecht's poems powerfully demonstrate, with an almost tangible sense of the reality that extends spatially and temporally beyond the here and now. The philosopher and cognitive scientist Alva Noë, discussing such phenomena of 'perceptual presence', stresses that strictly imperceptible scenes, objects, or parts of objects in our environment are not 'somehow mysteriously seen without being seen, or [...] represented visually without being seen'. They are not objects beyond ordinary perceptual experience. Rather, they are:

present, now, in that [they are] available now. We have access now to [them]. And not just any old access. We experience the presence of what is out of view by understanding, implicitly, that our relation to what is out of view is such that movement of the eyes, or the body, brings it into view [...].¹⁵¹

This is a persuasive response – an antidote – to both of the key concerns that have been addressed above: the fundamental limitations of the scope, or the perspective, of human perceivers, and the strong impression of an inherent passivity of "looking out" into the world. Because if we move away from the idea of our seeing selves as homunculi,

¹⁵¹ Alva Noë, 'Experience of the World in Time', *Analysis*, 66 (2006), 26–32 (p. 26).

somehow sitting inside our own heads and relying on our senses to deliver to us iconic messages from the outside world, a simpler story emerges: perceivers reach out to the world using all manner of tools, move their bodies among objects, shift their attention from one to the next, and call on the backdrop of their own prior recollectible knowledge as well as their aptitude for imagining. And if Brecht delivers instances of *Verfremdung* on one level of description, he also delivers this antidote by showing us perceivers at work. For this is what the speakers of Brecht's poems do when they turn on and listen to the radio (or, like Galileo, look through the telescope), when they engage their imaginative and associative capacities to envision the future or remember the past: they look out on, but, doing so, they bring about the reality in which they find themselves. And if we, as readers, are imagined spectators to the episodes and scenarios evoked in the poems, we are also imagined perceivers in this wider sense.

With this in mind, recall once more the iconic *Schlechte Zeit für Lyrik*, which has already served as an example earlier for the tempting, but unsatisfactory poetological message that there is now no time for rhymes, nor for rich accounts of sensory experience, of colourful boats and sails, warm breasts, handsome voices and faces:

Ich weiß doch: nur der Glückliche
Ist beliebt. Seine Stimme
Hört man gern. Sein Gesicht ist schön.

Der verkrüppelte Baum im Hof
Zeigt auf den schlechten Boden, aber
Die Vorübergehenden schimpfen ihn einen Krüppel
Doch mit Recht.

Die grünen Boote und die lustigen Segel des Sundes
Sehe ich nicht. Von allen
Sehe ich nur der Fischer rissiges Garnnetz.
Warum rede ich nur davon
Daß die vierzigjährige Häuslerin gekrümmt geht?
Die Brüste der Mädchen
Sind warm wie ehemals.

In meinem Lied ein Reim
Käme mir fast vor wie Übermut.

In mir streiten sich
Die Begeisterung über den blühenden Apfelbaum
Und das Entsetzen über die Reden des Anstreichers.
Aber nur das zweite
Drängt mich zum Schreibtisch.

(BFA 14, 432)

Others have already pointed out that the poem's claim of the final two lines, namely, '[t]he implication that the poet only writes about Hitler's speeches' may be an attempt to mislead readers, to make difficult the extraction of the poem's true point.¹⁵² In fact, Ockenden suggests, the poem is about "“things contending”":¹⁵³ it deals with the competing emotions of delight and horror, and the poet's struggle as he has ceased to be '[d]er Glückliche' with a handsome face and a likable voice, metaphorically rendering himself instead as '[d]er verkrüppelte Baum im Hof' that points downwards at the bad soil: 'Die Vorübergehenden schimpfen ihn einen Krüppel / Doch mit Recht.' This tone of lament about the poet's duty to address the harsh and uncomfortable realities seeping into the otherwise lush and peaceful surroundings is also reflected in the constantly alternating line lengths and metrical changes throughout, signalling hesitation or even uncertainty about just what it is that ought to be written down: the third stanza begins by describing, in a lightly bouncing metre, '[d]ie grünen Boote und die lustigen Segel des Sundes', only to be followed in the second line by the almost prosaic phrase 'Sehe ich nicht'; not only a stark change of metre but also a dramatic shift in imagery, as though the poet has suddenly changed his mind, has suddenly realised that these things must no longer matter. But this choice, emphasized also in the final stanza, does not really have to be made: throughout this central third stanza, the poet's attention (or, indeed, imagined gaze) wanders back and forth; from the boats and the merry sails, to 'der

¹⁵² Ockenden, p. 193.

¹⁵³ Ockenden, p. 193.

Fischer rissiges Garnnetz', from the hunched-over woman to the 'Brüste der Mädchen'. Misleading us, in Ockenden's terms, by a poetological stance of cool, analytical politics that does not care about the world as it shows up in perceptual experience, the poem actually narrates perception *in situ*. From squinting one's eyes, or turning one's head to bring something else into view, Brecht's meandering lines of alternating lengths and competing imagery evoke a whole range of movements that constantly bring a complex reality into view. Evoking these metrically, Brecht renders the scene not in the form of competing snapshots, but as a temporal thread of dynamically unfolding experience.

2 FROM IMAGINATION TO CRITIQUE

2.1 Asking “Why this?”

In the first chapter, which examined Brecht’s later exile and war poetry for its ‘Sinnlichkeit’,¹⁵⁴ and for its expression of an ‘alltägliche[...] Optik des Dichters’,¹⁵⁵ we discovered that those who speak in these poems are often perceivers, but they are not confined to what happens to be in view at any given moment. Perceiving there, as we have seen, is a form of active world-engagement; it uses a variety of bodily capacities and even external tools to continuously bring the world into view, and the poems frequently portray and enact instances of this: from turns of the head, metrically performed, to the radio that repeats news from Germany into a Scandinavian garden in bloom, the poems evoke not spectating in a narrow sense but richer forms of engagement that afford richer forms of experience, thus drawing attention to the many ways in which perceivers bring the world into view and act upon it: in engaging a ‘realistische Handlungsweise’ as much as a ‘realistische Betrachtungsweise’ (BFA 22, 638), readers assume the role not just of imagined spectators but imagined agents. If we are on track so far, if Brecht has a stake in the kinds of acts with which perceivers “take reality in hand”, then he must be invested in the various forms of imagination, too: like physical actions on the world, imagery and recollection, both intentional and unintentional, determine the way in which the world shows up in experience: in pondering the potential consequences of an action, or comparing the status quo to a better alternative, for example, one might imagine a number of possible futures. In order to compare the past to the present (thus reflecting on what has changed), one is usually able to recall the past in some form or other. Or when thinking through a complex ethical question, it may be useful to come up with an entirely artificial scenario or thought experiment that simplifies it.

This capacity for mental simulation is essential to Brecht’s project: in the same instance that he sets apart the epic from conventional dramatic theatre by way of the distinction between ‘Erlebnisse’ and ‘Kenntnisse’, Brecht tells us that what ought to be of interest to the theatre maker is ‘die Welt, wie sie wird’, rather than ‘die Welt, wie sie

¹⁵⁴ Neureuter, p. 217.

¹⁵⁵ Schwarz, p. 55.

ist' (BFA 22, 109). That is to say, Brecht does not propose to neglect the status quo, or to banish any portrayals of it from the stage, but calls for a critical attitude towards it: when confronted with a stage character's action or utterance, with a verse of poetry, or any other object or state of affairs, for that matter, he wants readers or audiences to ask the question that, for philosopher Stanley Cavell, is essential to all criticism: "Why this?"¹⁵⁶ And more importantly, rather than simply acknowledge the way things present themselves, to consider alternatives: "Why *this* and not *that*?" Or, in Brecht's own words:

Wie, alles ist so, weil es so sein muß? Wo wir doch gerade wissen, daß es nicht so sein muß! Warum also alles, was wir darstellen und womit wir nicht zufrieden sind, mit möglichst unwiderlegbaren Gründen versehen, allem den jede Hoffnung zerstörenden imposanten Anblick und Titel der *Natur* verleihen? (BFA 22, 219)

In fact, as this next quote suggests, Brecht's entire epistemological strategy rests on this notion of what he calls 'vergleichsweise Wahrheiten':

Beim Erkennungsvorgang hat der Intellekt außer dem Organisieren des Erfahrenen oder der (erst zu tätigen) Erfahrung noch die Funktion des Auffälligmachens der Vorgänge, einer Konfrontierung derselben mit einer gedachten Negation. Das 'Es ist so' wird *staunend* aufgenommen als ein 'Es ist also nicht anders'. (BFA 21, 410)

Put simply: to enact this kind of critical attitude means to supplement 'die Welt, wie sie ist', or, indeed, the world as it shows up for us in perceptual experience, with alternatives. To ask "Why *this* – and not *that*?" one must be able to imagine what *that* could be. To make critical sense of the world *as it is*, one must be able to compare it to something else. That is to say, what is put to work in instances of asking "Why this, and not that?", of conceiving of options and possibilities, alternatives and contrasts to the present one inhabits, is the capacity for mental simulation.

The terms "imagination", and, more recently, "mental imagery" are, of course, no newcomers to literary discourse. When Troscianko describes the mode by which

¹⁵⁶ See Moi, p. 181.

readers engage with the fictional realities of all kinds of literary texts as a kind of ‘imagining spectating’,¹⁵⁷ she refers us back all the way to Aristotle’s description of the ‘utmost vividness’ of poetry, which in turns relies on his pictorial description of the imagination as ‘that in virtue of which an image arises for us’.¹⁵⁸ With ‘the development of the novel, particularly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the influence of the Romantic revolt against Enlightenment rationalism’ informing our modern sense of imaginative literature,¹⁵⁹ we now still speak of fiction capturing our imagination, or, in a slightly more uptown fashion, of fictional texts affording it. Language, and literary language in particular, seem to come in handy as tools to manipulate and guide one’s inherent ability to self-generate “offline” experiences: in some basic sense, readers are able to experience fictional worlds richly and vividly, because the words and phrases on the page prompt them to imagine the kinds of objects and events they might, in fact, be used to describe. And it is certainly possible to ascribe a certain critical potential to the kind of imagery prompted and fostered in this way. Aristotle, after all, not only describes the imagination in terms that have lastingly reverberated through much of Western aesthetic thought, but engages with the topic at least partly in defence from Plato’s charge against poetry, namely that it trades in mere images, or even false images, of particular objects rather than universal truths. In Aristotle’s defence of poetry the imagination plays a key role: by his account a poet does not falsely, deceptively describe a ‘thing that had happened’, but ‘a kind of thing that might happen’, and it is the imagination, poetic or otherwise, that makes this “kind of thing” available in the first place.¹⁶⁰ And ‘some variant of this response to Plato’¹⁶¹ is a red thread through the history of aesthetics, notably in the German context. Kant, in

¹⁵⁷ Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 55.

¹⁵⁸ Aristotle, ‘On the Soul’, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Richard McKeon (Oxford, New York, 1941), p. 587.

¹⁵⁹ John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister, ‘Literature, Philosophy and Political Theory’, in *Literature and the Political Imagination*, ed. by John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister (London, 1996), pp. 1–31 (p. 7).

¹⁶⁰ Aristotle, ‘Poetics’, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Richard McKeon (Oxford, New York, 1941), p. 1463.

¹⁶¹ ‘Eighteenth Century German Aesthetics’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-18th-german/> [accessed 5 March 2022]

the *Critique of Judgement*, discusses the aesthetic experiences of the sublime and the beautiful (the judgement of each bearing distinctive connections to morality, rather than springing from utility or personal pleasure) as arising from a free play between reason and the imagination.¹⁶² In the gist of the matter, Kant, too, is very much on theme for the present context: even if apprehension (perception) fails to take in the vastness of a sublime landscape in a single image, aesthetic pleasure arises from the very effort accomplished by the imagination that grants access to, and by reason, which enables one to formulate a concept of this vastness beyond apprehension.

We have one further step to make, however, from discovering traces of these ideas in Brecht's notes on *Erkenntnis* and 'vergleichsweise Wahrheiten' to exploring what role the imagination plays for readers of Brecht's poetry. There are also, after all, more dismissive, more pessimistic outlooks onto the literary imagination and those appear particularly close at hand in the Brechtian context. It is not the first impulse to conceive of Brecht's ideal readers as imaginative readers who bring to mind landscapes and trees, who 'imagine spectating'. Brecht worked stolidly against what he saw as the bourgeois mode of spectating an evening's entertainment at the theatre, where the audiences re-emerge into the outside world unchanged, and similarly, we might think of the literary imagination as a limited form of illusion that ends as soon as we snap the book shut and get on with our lives. Against the truism that fictions can be used as artificial scenarios for asking questions about morality or values, society or identity; that they can widen readers' perspectives, challenge their world views, and educate them on matters removed from their own life, the kind of imagining readers of fictions do may be seen as mere 'wish-fulfilment, fantasy, escapism', to the point of ascribing to literature the role of 'cognitive pornography'.¹⁶³ When texts portray the suffering of others, readers may be tempted into a merely voyeuristic rather than critical form of engagement. Or to think that one glimpses into the unique mind of a poet, may ultimately come to no more than a wholly private experience that reveals nothing

¹⁶² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, ed. by Nicholas Walker, trans. by James Creed Meredith (Oxford, 2007), pp. 81-87.

¹⁶³ Terence Cave, *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford, 2016), p. 140.

whatsoever about a shared, knowable world.¹⁶⁴ If the imagination is private, it is therefore unverifiable. If it is head-internal, it veers off from external, material and factual reality, rather than disclosing it. Since, in mental imagery, there is no empirical feedback from the world at large, it may recapitulate what we already know or believe rather than offer any new insights or material for reflection.

For this reason, Brecht's critical project may appear to be less a matter of imaginative readers of lyric poetry than of historicization and montage, of not-but acting, and so on: devices designed to supply to theatre audiences the kinds of alternative scenarios and contexts that facilitate critical reflection.¹⁶⁵ Instances of what Brecht termed *historicization* (and which he at times, used 'as a virtual simile for *Verfremdung*'¹⁶⁶) allow us to get a different look at certain contemporary issues or conflicts by setting them in another era:

The present looks different through the eyes of the past, the past looks different through the eyes of the present. The stories we tell about either can be usefully shaken up by what Brecht was calling *Verfremdung*.¹⁶⁷

In other words, a contemporary practice, institution, or series of events comes to *look* alien or strange to us is by setting it in another historical period; behaviours which appear wholly ordinary, and closely familiar, in a contemporary setting, stand out by contrast. We begin questioning what in the context of our contemporary lives we simply take for granted: why is society set up in the way it is today? Is capitalism natural? Is

¹⁶⁴ Again the idea of the "private" experience of reading fiction or poetry is originally a Romantic one (see Horton and Baumeister, p. 7).

¹⁶⁵ Think of the 'obvious comment on contemporary war in *Mutter Courage*', the 'allusions to the situation of contemporary intellectuals in *Leben des Galilei*', or, indeed, Brecht's notes on Bruegel the Elder, where he comments that the juxtapositions of southern landscapes and Flemish costumes, late antiquity narratives and Bruegel's contemporary political imports function as a cunning social commentary on the Spanish rule and the influence of the Catholic church in Wallonia, see Kuhn, 'Brecht Reads Bruegel', p. 105.

¹⁶⁶ Kuhn, 'Brecht Reads Bruegel', p. 105.

¹⁶⁷ Kuhn, 'Brecht Reads Bruegel', p. 105.

the relationship between the sexes God-given?¹⁶⁸ Rather than spectate to the world at hand and say “This is how things are!” we are supposed to ask: “Why is it like this? Was it ever different? And – could it be yet different again?” Another typical example of *Verfremdung* in the theatre is the so-called ‘not – but’ technique Brecht recommended to his actors, designed ‘to open up behaviour on stage as changeable. The actor performs difference: the difference between not doing one thing but another.’¹⁶⁹ Again, one possible way of framing this is to say that such a portrayal makes alterity artificially “visible”, thus enabling us to reflect critically on each of the different possible behaviours. Because we have been shown the actor/figure’s choice in her performance, we are prompted to realise that things as they happen to be are not universal, inevitable, or even natural, but that the world as we see it is shaped by its circumstances, often enough by human action or inaction. Or by separating and juxtaposing different elements of a performance, rather than harmonising them, Brecht draws attention to the fact that there is not a single, inevitable, and continuous “way things are”. And a similar case might also be made regarding Brecht’s poetry, which has often been discussed in the same nexus of *Verfremdung*: that Brecht, the poet, works with artificial contrasts and juxtapositions which open up and supply to readers the material for critical distance, scrutiny, and comparison of the status quo.¹⁷⁰

But while these strategies undoubtedly form one key aspect to Brecht’s work (and *Verfremdung* gets another look-in in Chapter Four), the literary imagination, or, more pertinently, imaginative readers, warrant their own closer look first. This is motivated, for one, by the simple given fact that (at least some) readers of Brecht’s poetry likely do imagine the episodes told, the scenarios evoked, the trees and landscapes pictured, to permit the use of a metaphor that we have been scrutinising

¹⁶⁸ See Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, pp. 56–57, 74.

¹⁶⁹ Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, p. 62–63. For instance, an actor might be exiting the stage to the left, but not before looking to the right, to emphasise that she is *not* exiting on the right, *but* on the left. A manager might be portrayed as *not* treating staff decently, *but* treating them poorly. Or a performance from Richard III might emphasise that Richmond is *not* sparing the king, *but* killing him.

¹⁷⁰ Ockenden, Brady, and Hutchinson, among others, demonstrate how Brecht showcases an enlarged reality by creating contrasts of mood or between theme and literary register. See Chapter 1 for a cursory discussion.

already.¹⁷¹ As the first chapter has already begun to outline, experiences on the part of readers and on the part of the perceivers that themselves speak in the poems, are hardly accidental by-products to some abstracted critical project. What's more, far from just inevitably prompting readers to imagine, many of Brecht's poems, from different points of his working life, thematise, are structured around, and indeed, are remarkably evocative of acts of recollection or imagination: an early (and much discussed) poem, *Erinnerung an die Marie A.*, embodies a fleeting moment of intimacy, remembered by a white cloud; in the exile period numerous poems negotiate not only the spatial distance between the peaceful landscapes of the North and the advancing war. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s Brecht envisions the future, often enough, surprisingly, with an adamant sort of hopefulness; either reflecting on the present through future eyes, as in *An die Nachgeborenen*, or by setting out the conditions under which the future can be brought about. Some examples appear to be quite personal: the poet ponders his own relevance after death, or, particularly in later poems, recalls past episodes and experiences. In other words, Brecht's poetry not only affords imagery, but it also frequently thematises instances of imagining or recollecting, paying close attention to the phenomenology and the functionality of mental simulating alike: in instances in which the speakers of these poems dream, remember, and imagine, it becomes abundantly clear that the imagination is not only a form of momentary 'mental pretense' or 'make-belief',¹⁷² an activity performed on occasion by readers of fiction, by children, or by day dreamers, but that it seeps into all the ways in which we come into contact with and make sense of the world we inhabit. When, as per the title of one poem, '[d]er Anstreicher spricht von kommenden großen Zeiten', the appearance of whole landscapes and cities, images of forests and fields that suggest permanence and

¹⁷¹ It ought also to be acknowledged here that this is likely to vary considerably across different readers: even assuming a sighted reader, there are such phenomena to contend with as aphantasia, a term which describes the self-reported reduction or complete absence of mental imagery (see Adam Zeman, Michaela Dewar, and Sergio Della Sala, 'Lives without Imagery: Congenital Aphantasia', *Cortex*, 2015), and even more generally, though this is difficult to study, neurodivergence likely makes for a whole range of subtle and not-so-subtle differences in how we read and imagine.

¹⁷² Elisabeth Camp, 'Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 33 (2009), 107–30 (p. 107).

recurrence, transform in an instant, in brief moments of premonition embodied in the text by the mono-syllabic 'noch'.

Die Wälder wachsen noch.

Die Äcker tragen noch.

Die Städte stehen noch.

Die Menschen atmen noch.

(BFA 12, 10)

Connecting 'Frühjahr' to 'Furcht' by attaching an interrogative 'Wann' to the end of the line making an observation about seasonal change, the poem *1940* similarly shows the present to be infused, and its aspect radically altered, by imaginative foresight:

Mit Furcht

Erwarten die Völker das Frühjahr.

Die Buchten entschälen sich des Eises. Wann

Werden die Schlachtschiffe einlaufen?

[...]

(BFA 15, 10)

In other places, we find deliberate and complex forms of imagining the future (both hopeful or pessimistic) or recollecting the past, and of comparing the local present to somewhere temporally distant: *An die Nachgeborenen* (BFA 12, 85-87) is an account of dark times framed as an explicit address to a projected future generation. The similarly themed *In finsternen Zeiten* reflects on these dark times by predicting what, in future, will be said of (and thus, what will be marked out as defining) them:

Man wird nicht sagen: als da der Nußbaum sich im Wind schüttelte

Sondern: als da der Anstreicher die Arbeiter niedertrat

Man wird nicht sagen: als das Kind den flachen Kiesel über die Stromschnelle

springen ließ

Sondern: als da die großen Kriege vorbereitet wurden.

Man wird nicht sagen: als da die Frau ins Zimmer kam

Sondern: als da die großen Mächte sich gegen die Arbeiter verbündeten.

[...]

(BFA 14, 364)

There are two sets of imaginers at work in this example: the poet-speaker himself, who envisions the present through future eyes (and voices), and the reader, who, by way of these contrasting statements is able to call to mind some of the complex reality from which the poet-speaker does so. In the explicit comparisons, here, between each one thing that may be said and another, the capacity to imagine of both is thus set to work, and neither represents an inconsequential private activity. What may be salient and tangible in the present is not supplanted but augmented by a much more distant perspective, and its relation to and its impact on the here and now is powerful. Indeed, the simulation of future eyes and future voices is not mere armchair speculation about what may or may not be thought or said once: framed as future speech, the poem *does* speak in the present, fulfilling now the very purpose that will, it imagines, be demanded of it:

Aber man wird nicht sagen: die Zeiten waren finster

Sondern: warum haben ihre Dichter geschwiegen?

This attention paid by Brecht to acts of imagining and recollection, enacted by readers perhaps, but achieved by the speakers of the poems themselves in the first instance, proves crucial: it shows Brecht interested not necessarily only in how theatre audiences or readers of literature might be supplied with imaginative material for critical reflection, but how, short of being presented with such explicitly formalised contrasts on the stage or page, perceivers realise this access to options and possibilities, to the past, the future, and a reality enlarged beyond their immediately perceptually available environment. After all, while historicization, for example, puts difference and alterity (between the values and behaviours in societies from different eras) visibly before the audience, while Brecht's theatre is conceived as a space that explicitly promotes the exercises of critical reflection that arise from such contrasts, it is important

to appreciate that much of what we all do every day to make sense of the world around relies on the capacity to augment the immediate present with self-generated content. And crucially, it is worth paying attention to the fact that perceivers do achieve this on an ongoing basis. We can always ask “Why this, and not that?” by supplying our own contexts and scenarios, and enrich our own experience with mental imagery as well as reconstructions of the past and predictions of the future. And, in fact, this happens not just at will but constantly and inevitably, particularly on the view that perceivers are not passive spectators but bring the world into view from within their own horizons, bodily capacities, and projects. As Andy Clark, whose extensive theoretic work in the philosophy of cognitive science sets out a version of action-oriented perception, writes:

Perception of this stripe [...] has an important and (mostly) life-enhancing spin-off. For such perceivers are thereby imaginers too: they are creatures poised to explore and experience their worlds not just by perception and gross physical action but also by means of imagery, dreams and (in some cases) deliberate mental simulations.¹⁷³

This is to say, capacities for imagination are thoroughly implicated in perception. And, on the emerging framework advocated by Clark and others, this implication is thoroughly mutual: imagination emerges as an offline enaction of our perceptual capacities. Equipped with these, perceivers and imaginers take advantage of a ‘cognitive package deal’,¹⁷⁴ acting on and in imagined perceptual environments informed by a history of interaction with their real-world analogues. In other words, imagination is interaction, at most at one degree removal (and unalienated from) the active, world-engaging processes of perception. It is not then best thought of as occasional and episodic pretence, but has a pervasive influence on the lives and worlds of ordinary perceivers, with a bearing on experience across stage, page and the world beyond. As such, it makes sense to treat the imagination not as an exercise for theatre audiences and readers of fiction alone, in which the “real” world made available in “real” perceptual experience is temporarily suspended; to take into account that it is not just in a Brechtian theatre-setting, or before a particularly well-crafted poem, that critical

¹⁷³ Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. 84.

¹⁷⁴ Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. 85.

distance to and reflection on the immediate present is possible. The imagination, as we will see, is steeped in day-to-day perception, and vice versa. To recollect a past experience, to imagine, or to deliberately simulate another place or time, or an entirely different world is not to leave the realm of such everyday perceptual experience. Rather, these faculties all calibrate how and what we perceive in the first place. Thus, perceptual experience is always, to some degree, infused with contrasts, with possibilities and potentials, as well as with stored knowledge from past experience, and also seeps into more deliberate forms of abstract reasoning.

If we want to think, along with and beyond Brecht, about the ways in which literary texts might foster critical thought, by engaging their readers' imaginative powers, by supplying artificial contexts and new kinds of virtual experiences, then this perspective is essential, and Brecht's poetic oeuvre makes for not only a likely, but an ideal context, for exploring it. In fact, once we begin to think of mental simulation in the terms set out above, as one of many possible acts of world engagement, then Brecht's poems begin to offer us a chance to overhaul a common, in many ways romantic, literary outlook on the imagination altogether. As Brecht's readers, we do not imagine pictures of trees and landscapes, but enlarged realities, not objects but their functions and uses and their potential for interaction. Crucially, the literary imagination is not limited to imagining perceptual episodes: readers also imagine acts of imagining and recollecting, along with the various poems' speakers. Like actual perceptual experience, the literary imagination is complex and layered, comprising things near and distant, present or past or future. As such, the capacity for different kinds of mental simulations is at the source of more abstract forms of reasoning for imaginative readers as well as actual perceivers: if '[l]ocal [...] perception thus phases gently into richer and richer forms of understanding, apt to support new forms of agency and choice',¹⁷⁵ so does a reading exercise characterised by the complex interplay of the real and the imagined. Just as literature is not discontinuous with language at large, the literary imagination does not only serve as an ornamental flourish to "real" percepts. The capacity to imagine here is not presented as an adjunct to perception proper, furnishing escapist fantasy or 'cognitive pornography'.¹⁷⁶ On the contrary, to imagine is to make sense of reality as it presents itself, to put it into context, or, indeed, into contrast. In revealing

¹⁷⁵ Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. 107.

¹⁷⁶ Cave, p. 140.

this about the imagination, Brecht's poems sketch the beginning of critical thought and action. And in sketching and evoking instances of imagining, recollecting, simulation, they sketch the fundamental first acts on the world.

2.2 Perception, Recollection, Imagery

Readers of narrative fiction imagine. So do readers of poetry. So do children playing make-believe, or day dreamers, or excessive worriers. We all engage the capacity to imagine constantly, intentionally and unintentionally, to varying degrees of quality, intensity, and duration, and for any number of conceivable purposes. This variety encompasses different forms of imagining: one could, for example, suppose 'a set of propositions to be true (make-believe)' or else find oneself in 'an experiential state of imagining a scenario as if it were before one (imaging)'.¹⁷⁷ And often enough these modalities, cognitive and experiential, intertwine: imaging tasks may draw on some recollected factual knowledge about the kind of thing one is imagining. Factual knowledge about an event, in turn, may be closely associated with the episodic recollection of one's own experience of the event. Thus, semantic memory (the recollection of facts) and episodic memory (the recollection of past events) are also always nearby, with the latter's phenomenal qualities appearing particularly close to imaging.¹⁷⁸ And both imaging and episodic memory, in turn, are linked to actual sensory perception: experiments focused on visual memory and visual imagination have yielded findings which suggest that processes of visual memory and imagery rely, in

¹⁷⁷ Camp, p. 107.

¹⁷⁸ While semantic memory (i.e. the recollection of facts) is needed for an agent's informed choice-making and the successful navigation of her world, episodic memory (i.e. the memory of past events) is a prerequisite for a coherent sense of self, see Martin A. Conway, 'Memory and the Self', *Journal of Memory and Language*, 53 (2005), 594–628 (p. 595). Specifically episodic memory is relevant here: a 'type of memory that allows people to reflect upon personal experiences', or even to 'relive happenings from the past', Mark A. Wheeler, 'Episodic Memory and Autonoetic Awareness', in *The Oxford Handbook of Memory*, ed. by Endel Tulving and Fergus I. M. Craik (Oxford, New York, 2000), pp. 597–608 (p. 597). See also Endel Tulving, *Elements of Episodic Memory* (New York, 1983) for context.

part, on regions in the brain tasked with visual perception, which is to say that they all share at least some portion of neural infrastructure between them:¹⁷⁹ ‘though in visual imagery there is no perceptual feedback from the world itself [...], the two experiences are phenomenally and functionally alike in many respects.’¹⁸⁰ This is to say, percepts, recollections, and imagery are deeply entangled, and although they may differ on introspection, they also bear striking phenomenal similarities.¹⁸¹ For example, while, thankfully, we are usually able to tell imagery or recollections from real, occurrent percepts, it is much easier to think of cases where the former become confused: memories can become modified or altered over time, or merged into one another, or someone might swear (wrongly, but with some justification, for they may well have a “crystal-clear image” in mind) that a certain event happened in such and such a way, or that they last saw a lost object in such and such a spot.

If matters are complex in most ordinary experiential episodes, things get rather more so when we think specifically about what (and how) readers imagine. Both “make-believe” and “imaging” certainly play a role in encounters with narrative fiction, for example: readers can, on one hand, temporarily suppose that there is or was indeed a family of grain merchants called Buddenbrook, that they had certain sums of capital, that a marriage was indeed formed between Toni Buddenbrook and Bendix Grünlich. They can also, perhaps, “see” Grünlich, his outfit or his mannerisms; they may be able

¹⁷⁹ See, for instance, Scott D Slotnick, William L Thompson, and Stephen M Kosslyn, ‘Cognitive Neuroscience Visual Memory and Visual Mental Imagery Recruit Common Control and Sensory Regions of the Brain’, *Cognitive Neuroscience*, 3.1 (2012), 14–20.

¹⁸⁰ Lucia Foglia and & J Kevin O’Regan, ‘A New Imagery Debate: Enactive and Sensorimotor Accounts’, *Rev.Phil.Psych.*, 7 (2016), 181–96 (pp. 181–82).

¹⁸¹ There are, of course, functional and phenomenological differences between actual perceiving and imagining: real percepts, as we have seen, show up as stable, determinate, and discrete objects, while imagery often remains vague and cannot be clearly delineated. Wolfgang Iser describes the relatable experience of vaguely resenting the visual depiction of a favourite literary character in its film adaption along these lines: ‘[i]f I ask whether my imaginary Tom Jones was big or small, blue-eyed or dark-haired, the optical poverty of my images will become all too evident, but it is precisely this openness that will make me resent the determinacy of the film version’, Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore, 1978), p. 138.

to imagine him from Johann's and Toni's perspective respectively (which features of his appearance would each of them pay attention to?), and use this to understand why he is delighted and she revolted at the prospect of a marriage. But not all forms of literary imagination consist in this kind of sustained mental pretense. The name Grünlich, for instance, might afford all manner of much less explicit imagery based on readers' own sense or past experience of the colour "green" or the attribute "greenish". It would certainly not be a standard response to picture him as actually being green or greenish, or engage in the make-believe that he in fact is, yet, somehow, the word and what we associate with it quite literally *colours* the way we imagine Bendix Grünlich to be. Then there are metaphors, which, in literature and elsewhere, are also prolific cues for the imagination, and yet they may not always lead to straightforward make-believe or even discrete mental imagery. Instead we engage in what might be described as 'seeing-as':¹⁸² rather than 'imaginatively endowing [one object] with [another object's] important properties [...], a metaphorical interpretation uses [one object] to filter or frame [one's] characterization of [the other].'¹⁸³ This still requires the imaginative task of bringing both objects and their relevant properties to mind, but it also affords a subtly restructured understanding or insight about one or both of them. A look at poetry offers further nuance here: especially where we take the focus of lyric poetry to be more on the poet's consciousness, or her experience, rather than the truth of a poem's propositions, imaging and "seeing-as" by way of poetic metaphors take the centre stage over straightforward make-believe. Upon reading Brecht's *Der Kirschdieb* (BFA 12, 96), for instance, we may not invest too much effort into supposing there to be an actual cherry tree, with an actual thief in it, which play a role in a larger unfolding of events, while imagery of both tree and thief may still be vivid in our experience.

As a matter of fact, *Der Kirschdieb* is an interesting case in the context of the question of what role the literary imagination might play for Brecht and his readers. Even located as it is in amongst many much more explicit anti-war poems, *Der Kirschdieb's* place and function in Brecht's political and interventionist realist project may not be immediately clear. When Skip Pahler was commissioned in 1987 by the GDR culture ministry to create a mural based on the poem and consulted academics at

¹⁸² Camp, p. 111.

¹⁸³ Camp, p. 112.

the Brecht-Archiv as to its meaning or imports, he found out little at first.¹⁸⁴ If we take Brecht's notion of the use-value of poetry at full face value, even for a moment, we might be tempted into asking the somewhat audacious question: What is the point, then, of imagining a cherry tree with a thief sitting in it? Or as Pahler recounts asking himself: 'Brecht, was willst du?'¹⁸⁵ Perhaps it is for this reason that, when we talk about the role of the imagination in projects of critical reflection and active intervention, such remarks by Brecht as the one about 'vergleichsweise Wahrheiten' (BFA 21, 410) are usually more closely associated with the principle of *Verfremdung*, and most prominently, the theatrical devices associated with it, rather than the more conventional ideas of imaginative readers who immerse themselves in vivid textual landscapes and episodes seen through a poet-speaker's eyes.

However, if we do pay attention to the fact that readers imagine on the occasion of poems like this one, and ask not just if, but *how* they do it, the question of purpose or usefulness of the exercise comes to look rather misguided. Compare seeing a cherry tree, and recalling seeing a cherry tree, and, again, reading Brecht's poem about the cherry thief:

Auf meinem Kirschbaum, Dämmerung füllte den Garten
Saß ein junger Mann mit geflickter Hose
Und pflückte lustig meine Kirschen. Mich sehend
Nickte er mir zu, mit beiden Händen
Holte er die Kirschen von den Zweigen in seine Taschen.
[...]

(BFA 12, 96)

Many readers of these lines, to be sure, presumably imagine the thief and the cherry tree in their heads, as some form of mental imagery. The text is suggestive of certain details: perhaps the reader, consciously or not, images a tree particularly laden with cherries, since the thief is able to pick them with both hands (and even without paying much attention, his gaze turned towards the window). But perhaps the tree she imagines, and

¹⁸⁴ See Piontek.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Piontek.

the details of its features, are also partially informed by a cherry tree she has seen in real life, or by her recollection of an occasion of cherry picking, or what she has learned in school about the anatomy of such plants, or even something apparently unrelated. And perhaps the next time she encounters a cherry tree, or sees one on television, or eats a cherry, her reading of the poem and the resulting mental image will, in turn, have some form of impact on her experience. Even a reasonably straightforward example involving a reasonably uncomplex object such as a tree reveals a web of interactions between perception and imagery/memory that goes beyond mere pictorialist correspondence. The imagination appears to be steeped in perception so fundamentally here that it is difficult to disentangle all the various ways in which each informs and calibrates the other. And like perceiving, imagining is not very much like picture-viewing, perhaps even less so: the imagined tree is neither quite stable nor complete in detail; perhaps it is not even coherent or without contradictory elements. Its size or the number of cherries may change as the text goes on and provides new cues, prompting further associations that may be brought to bear on the episode. More importantly, on this note, the process of imagining is just as active as perceiving, relying on a vast range of acts beyond vision alone. To imagine a tree is as much about “seeing” it, as it may be about touching it, climbing it, or picking cherries from it.

It is true that this kind of imagining is not exactly robustly factual: someone imagines the tree in a certain way, one could say, because they are biased by their own past experiences.¹⁸⁶ But more importantly, this entangled relationship between imagery and real percepts also holds the other way round. The literary imagination, along with other forms of mental simulation, is part of the “real” world, adding richness and depth to it, furnishing a spatially and temporally extended reality in which things happen and in which we might act. Imagined scenarios and episodes are contexts to which we can hold up our own lives and our actions, and that of others. To Skip Pahler, ultimately, came the realization about the jaunty cherry thief that ‘der Knabe muss in den Krieg. [...] der würde womöglich gar nicht mehr oder wenigstens versehrt wiederkehren und

¹⁸⁶ In fact, it need not even be past experiences of a cherry tree, or any kind of tree in particular: there exists, always, a vast and unaccountable backdrop of possible associations, imagery, facts, sensations and, indeed, a given neural infrastructure, that could play into what, and how, we imagine.

vielleicht nie wieder auf einen Kirschbaum klettern können.¹⁸⁷ This, of course, is just the result for this one reader, but what has happened to Pahler holds more generally: to read a poem and, in the process, to imagine a cherry tree is not some kind of one-off episode or moment of escape from the real world. In the same way as seeing a real cherry tree gives us some kind of anchor to the world around us and adds to our repertoire of knowledge about the world, so the instance of imagining one, imagining anything at all, is also a genuine experience that will continue to have a bearing on future experiences and actions.

2.3 (Re-)constructing the Past, Constructing the Future

To make such observations about the deep entanglement of the imagination with all else we do in the world, is to embark on much the same project in relation to imagery as the first chapter has done for perceptual experience at large: we set out to challenge certain assumptions about the imagination which, in turn, are expressed in much the same, or very similar metaphors to those that frequently appear in reflections on perception. For instance, the simplest terms in which to account for the phenomenal similarities between “seeing” and “imagining” is to invoke the so-called *same content* or *same image thesis*: a certain fruit and the mental image or recollection of it appear similar, because the ‘image or picture-like items [...]’ of it in the mind are similar.¹⁸⁸ Think about the way memories or dreams are sometimes realized in films as blurry, foggy, or fragmented images, to signify that they are not quite real, yet, conveyed in basically the same medium. Or in Humean terms:

the ‘impression’ produced in the mind by a strawberry, and the ‘idea’ produced in the mind when one visually recalls the strawberry, or visualizes a strawberry, ‘differ only in degree, not in nature’.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Piontek.

¹⁸⁸ Alex Byrne, ‘Recollection, Perception, Imagination’, *Philosophical Studies*, 148 (2010), 15–26 (p. 18).

¹⁸⁹ Byrne, p. 18.

As per Chapter One, it is such pictorial metaphors that bring along with them ideas of perceiving as passive and removed; as mere picture-viewing or spectating in a head-internal theatre. To cast the imagination in similar representationalist (or even pictorialist) terms by invoking the *same content* or *same image thesis* is only to revert to that original problem: if readers (and perceivers more generally) imagine by generating “offline” images that correspond to a degree to real objects or events, then imagining is even more so a wholly private experience, at an even further remove from the world than perception proper.

So again, it makes sense for us to look beyond the model of “pictures in the head”. It has proven helpful in the previous chapter to consider alternative research paradigms about perception and perceptual experience: enactivism and its nearby strands of theorizing have allowed us to talk about Brecht’s realist mode as one of active engagement with the world, rather than passive picture-gazing, which has resolved some of the potential worries about the impotence of *Erlebnisse*. If we want to embark on a similar project with regard to the imagination, Brecht’s poetry in fact offers a promising case-study; reciprocally, refiguring the imagination in a non-pictorial mode, offers new insights into this body of work. If the pictorialist account does not allow imagination to hold much value for Brechtian critique, it is also, on closer inspection, not very much what imagining, perceiving, and recollecting are like. This is one reason why Brecht’s poems make for such an ideal corpus for exploring these questions: in the same way as they make for remarkably realist portrayals of what perceiving is like and what it involves, they also do the same for imagery and recollection. Brecht shows us perceivers in action, who are usually imagining in one way or another at the same time; whose experiences are infused with a keen and critical sense of the past, with a range of possible futures, with the options to act in one way or another, and so on. And with his attention, as a poet, to the imagination as an ongoing accomplishment of both readers and perceivers more generally, Brecht has one more thing to show us, and here we return once more to the pragmatic (or hands-on) attitude that has informed this study so far: not only does the imagination constantly enrich experience, and seep into the world at every turn, but imagining, in turn, relies on a robustly world-engaging stance.

This becomes clear in an early, but particularly remarkable verbal account of an act of remembering, given in *Erinnerung an die Marie A.* (BFA 11, 92-93). As Müller

et al. note, the poem can be read as describing a genuine ‘conversational situation’,¹⁹⁰ marked by the introduction of the fictional interlocutor in the second stanza: ‘Und fragst du mich [...] / So sag ich dir [...]’. In other words, the poem may not be ‘an example of naïve love poetry’, not a ‘purely contemplative’ form of memory itself but an attempt, from one speaker to another, to make sense of and to do verbal justice to that peculiar phenomenon of remembering.¹⁹¹ After the first stanza sets the scene of the day to be remembered, ‘im blauen Mond September’, of a lover’s embrace, and a white cloud in the summer sky, the conversation in the second stanza is marked by distance and uncertainty about that scene. Many months, or years perhaps, have passed. The plum trees have, most likely, been cut down. And to the question of love the answer is simply: ‘Ich kann mich nicht erinnern.’ While the speaker can no longer picture his lover’s face, he knows that he has once kissed it. Thus, between its first two stanzas the poem moves from the concrete and the sensory to the abstract: from a particular day in September, to the passage of time; from the embrace under a plum tree to an off-hand, pragmatic assumption about agricultural development; from the dream-like lover to the weak assertion about love in general, ‘gewiß, ich weiß schon, was du meinst’; and, finally, from the lover’s face, pale and quiet, to the merely factual knowledge of the kiss. But as can be said of so many of Brecht’s poems, we are possibly being misled by the emphasis, in the second stanza, on forgetting, distance, and abstraction. The third stanza, after all, not only returns to much of the sensory detail (and the cloud, in particular) seen in the first; it also connects these recollections firmly to the continuing present, in which the trees are perhaps still there, and the former lover may since have had many children:

Und auch den Kuß, ich hätt ihn längst vergessen
 Wenn nicht die Wolke da gewesen wär
 Die weiß ich noch und werd ich immer wissen
 Sie war sehr weiß und kam von oben her.
 Die Pflaumenbäume blühn vielleicht noch immer

¹⁹⁰ Hans-Harald Müller, Tom Kindt, and Robert Habeck, ‘Love - Not - Memory: An Interpretation of “Remembering Marie A.”’, in *Empedocles’ Shoe: Essays on Brecht’s Poetry*, ed. by Tom Kuhn and Karen J. Leeder (London, 2002), pp. 56–70 (p. 62).

¹⁹¹ Müller, Kindt, and Habeck, p. 62.

Und jene Frau hat jetzt vielleicht das siebte Kind
Doch jene Wolke blühte nur Minuten
Und als ich aufsah, schwand sie schon im Wind.

(BFA 11, 92-93)

Commentary on this poem has converged on a number of questions: whether we have a love poem on our hands or a parody of one, whether we are dealing with genuine ‘Erlebnisdichtung’,¹⁹² or a deliberate play on ‘Kitsch’.¹⁹³ Most notably, Jan Knopf disagrees with earlier readings on these points, fielding evidence from the poem’s origin as a potentially parodic variant of a popular hit song, and pointing to its original title *Sentimentales Lied No. 1004* as an indication that the lover is, in fact, just a further number to an entire corpus of anonymous literary lovers who are not only not remembered but exist only as meaningless props.¹⁹⁴ In the present context, a third question may be tacked onto the existing controversy: whether Brecht’s poem shows us memory in action – genuine remembering that bears a meaningful relationship to a real past – or whether it is, indeed, only sentimental fabulation. Albrecht Schöne’s early and influential reading picks up on the image of the cloud (‘*Wolkenbild*’¹⁹⁵) as instrumental to the possibility of remembering, stating ‘daß gerade dieses Sinnbild der Flüchtigkeit durch die Kühnheit der Sprache, die Kraft des Rhythmus, den Zauber des Klanges und die Steigerung der Bildwiederholung sich verwandelt ins eigentlich Dauernde und Gegenwärtige.’¹⁹⁶ By contrast, Knopf’s line of argument can be deployed to say the opposite:

¹⁹² Jan Knopf, *Brecht-Handbuch. Lyrik, Prosa, Schriften* (Stuttgart, 1984), p. 35.

¹⁹³ Jan Knopf, *Gelegentlich: Poesie. Ein Essay über die Lyrik Bertolt Brechts* (Frankfurt a.M., 1996), p. 78.

¹⁹⁴ Knopf observes that the number 1004 may be an allusion to the 1003 lovers mentioned in the libretto of *Don Giovanni*, see Knopf, *Gelegentlich: Poesie*, p. 80.

¹⁹⁵ Albrecht Schöne, ‘Erinnerung an die Marie A.’, in *Die Deutsche Lyrik. Form und Geschichte*, ed. by Benno v. Wiese (Düsseldorf, 1957), pp. 485–94 (p. 489).

¹⁹⁶ Schöne, p. 494.

Die angeblich ‘erinnerte’ Marie A. ist vom lyrischen Ich als Person, damit als geliebtes und liebendes Du, nie wahrgenommen worden. Das angebliche Liebesglück – sei es bewahrt im Sinnbild der Wolke oder aufgelöst im Strom des Alltags – hat es nie gegeben. [...] Die gesichtslose Frau [...] ist lediglich Objekt für den Selbstgenuß des Mannes, der es sich im Rückblick leistet, ihn, seinen Selbstgenuß, nochmals lyrisch zu feiern und im Bild der Wolke bedeutungsvoll zu überhöhen.¹⁹⁷

As we have seen already, this charge must be addressed as a note of caution to the idea that imagery, self-generated or recollected, can underpin and supply the material for useful critical reflection: there is no way to be sure that memories have not been modified, or altogether fabricated, to fit and complement one’s own sense of self.¹⁹⁸ Memory may be more of a reconstruction informed by all manner of different factors, rather than a reliable recollection of factual objects and events, and the poem, as a fictional text, highlights this: as Knopf rightly points out, even if we did assume an autobiographical reference to Brecht’s early lover, Marie Rose Aman, the act of remembering enacted in the third stanza is more a textual reconstruction of the altogether fictional elements of the previous two. And even on the fictional level, one might infer from these potential concerns that the kind of episodic memory attempted in *Erinnerung an die Marie A.* is inherently sentimental and therefore useless, compared to the abstract facts that remain. Particularly when the poem’s speaker ventures that, meanwhile, ‘[d]ie Pflaumenbäume sind wohl abgehauen’, it may appear that memory cannot hold up against the actual reality that really matters.

But even while Knopf makes, in one sense, a good case – perhaps the idea of mutual intimacy or love is put under a certain amount of strain here by the young Brecht – there is a rather less cynical point to be made about memory. Consider again how the memory of what is described in the first stanza is reconstructed in the second and the third, from the tangible act of the kiss, from the fleeting vista of the cloud, the continuing existence of plum trees, and of life that goes on. There is, indeed, nothing to forget (and nothing to recollect) about the lover’s face from the reader’s perspective, since it was not really there in the first place. The reader has merely supplied her own

¹⁹⁷ Knopf, *Gelegentlich: Poesie*, p. 81.

¹⁹⁸ See Conway, p. 595.

mental imagery, and that mental imagery has been reinforced, scaffolded by the poem that has occasioned it, by its textual cues, and motifs. The cloud, highlighted in the first stanza, becomes the occasion, in the third, to revisit the scene in all the detail there exists of it, to repeat this deliberate act of simulation once again. From this perspective, neither side of the controversy has it quite right: we need not believe in the possibility of a picture-perfect memory preserved ‘in the pictorial patterns of the cloud’,¹⁹⁹ but neither is it a sentimental and private exercise apart from reality. The reader *does*, after all, perform the (albeit imagined) act of recollection, or of reconstruction, by imagining the scene once and then again, scaffolded each time by all manner of textual cues and props, by imagined trees, sky and cloud. In the telling of the poem, too, its speaker recollects not images but actions (such as the kiss), and whole environments in an ongoing and enlarged reality: indeed, ‘[d]ie Pflaumenbäume blühn vielleicht noch immer / Und jene Frau hat jetzt vielleicht das siebte Kind’. That is to say: recollections, or indeed, reconstructions need constructors in the first place. They need someone to bring them about and they rely on an ongoing present, in which they can be anchored and by which they can be informed. The poem thus shows, and its readers enact, memory (or re-construction) in action.

The same is true, perhaps even more relevantly, of imagining the future. As ever with Brecht, it is a key concern in many poems that look to the future to make audiences and readers aware of having a hand in bringing it about, and here, too, the imagination must be robust and world-involving, rather than private and inconsequential. In the first part of *Über die Bauart langdauernder Werke*, the future is being imagined through the question of endurance of the objects of the present. We get a sense here that the future is not, like that present, a fixed point in time, but rather a continuing process, or a construction, in the poem’s own terms:

Wie lange
 Dauern die Werke? So lange
 Als bis sie fertig sind.
 Solange sie nämlich Mühe machen
 Verfallen sie nicht.

¹⁹⁹ Müller, Kindt, and Habeck, p. 57.

(BFA 14, 34)

If we recall again Brecht's suggestion 'daß wir nichts erkennen können, was wir nicht verändern können, noch das, was uns nicht verändert' (BFA 21, 413), the same principle is applied here to the future, and "imagining" is at stake here rather than "perceiving" or "registering": one's grasp on the future, that is, one's capability to imagine it, is entirely dependent on it being unfinished, on the possibility, indeed the demand, for construction and use:

Die nützlichen
Verlangen Menschen
Die kunstvollen
Haben Platz für Kunst
Die weisen
Verlangen Weisheit
Die zur Vollständigkeit bestimmten
Weisen Lücken auf
Die langdauernden
Sind ständig am Einfallen.
Die wirklich groß geplanten
Sind unfertig.

(BFA 14, 34-35)

In other words, readers may not imagine pictures of different works or objects (it remains vague what they are), but instead imagine their functions, their uses, and what they, or others, might do with them, just as Brecht suggests in the following 'Zeichenaufgaben':

Zeichne einen Baum, auf den du klettern könntest.
Zeichne einen Baum, auf den du nicht klettern könntest.

Zeichne einen Baum, der vor deinem Haus stehen könnte.

Zeichne eine Landschaft, in der du an einem schönen Tag im Juli kempieren und im Freien essen wolltest.

Zeichne ein Fahrrad, das fährt!

(BFA 22, 11)

Whether this piece of advice was intended for practical implementation or not, Brecht, in giving it, shows himself to be alive to this embeddedness of the artistic imagination, and by extension, the imagination in general, in an enacted, real environment: imagining and recollecting both are bound up with action in the world. The very condition under which it is possible to recollect the past or simulate a possible future is not in some abstract sense representational, but is achieved dynamically in the form of interaction and possibility. And vice versa, the imagination is not separate from the world because it is itself a kind of action. It is, as per *Über die Bauart langdauernder Werke*, an initial act of construction.

2.4 Imagining Imagining

Returning now from what Brecht's poems demonstrate about recollecting and imagining to the question of how readers imagine, we can keep this idea in mind: that imagining is not pictorial and detached, but dynamically world-involving. That is to say, while we might well invoke pictorial metaphors to say that readers of Brecht's poems bring to mind cherry trees and landscapes and so on, as though seeing them, there are activities beyond seeing at play, too. Brecht does not just invite his readers to imagine looking out of a window at the cherry thief, or out over the Sound and its merry little boats: he depicts not just episodes of perceiving, but of imagining and recollecting as well. Or, more explicitly put, whenever Brecht shows us speakers, perceivers, agents, who look out onto their world, observe and scrutinize it, he inevitably shows us imaginers at the same time. The first seven lines of *Frühling 1938*, for example, offer a detailed description of budding plants, the sea and the sky. All of them visual phenomena, they give the poem an ekphrastic quality; the description moves fluidly from detail to detail and implies a harmonious composition of clouds and sun, water and

land, of things near (such as the white flowers on the cherry trees) and things far (the small boat in the Sound):

Über dem Sund hängt Regengewölke, aber den Garten
Vergoldet noch die Sonne. Die Birnbäume
Haben grüne Blätter und noch keine Blüten, die Kirschbäume hingegen
Blüten und noch keine Blätter. Die weißen Dolden
Scheinen aus dürren Ästen zu sprießen.
Über das gekräuselte Sundwasser
Läuft ein kleines Boot mit geflicktem Segel.

(BFA 12, 95)

As each line reveals new details, as various flowers and leaves, small boats and water ripples are dotted into the composition, it is perfectly intuitive to make recourse to pictorial metaphors, to describe this experience as similar to that of viewing a painting. But the metaphor only goes so far. The eighth line is arguably still part of this composition, but it somewhat disturbs the pictorial whole of the previous seven by introducing bird song, and, more importantly, by ushering in the distant thunder of the ninth line, which in turn, resolves into the distant thundering of the manoeuvring guns of German warships:

In das Gezwitscher der Stare
Mischt sich der ferne Donner
Der manövrierenden Schiffsgeschütze
Des Dritten Reiches.

(BFA 12, 95)

Something has suddenly happened with that initial change from “imagining seeing” to “imagining listening” that readers engage in here. What might be described, with Ockenden, as a change of mood,²⁰⁰ contrasting, in a classic example of *Verfremdung* in

²⁰⁰ See Ockenden, p. 183.

the poetry, the idyllic and peaceful garden with the looming threat, is also a change of *mode*: rather than picturing the scene of the poem, we are now listening, too. And into the relative quiet of chirping starlings seeps another noise, far louder and yet ominously distant, possibly not quite audible at all, but imagined. The tension in the poem is not (or not only) between the immediately perceptible (the idyllic scene) and the abstractly known (the looming war), but between the manifestly real and the imagined, which is almost as vivid. Thus we quickly become entangled in the phenomenological differences and similarities between things seen and imagined. On one hand, the manifestly real scene we imagine is less stable in our mental simulation of it, or of a subtly different quality, than it might be in actual perception. On the other, the distant thundering (if, indeed, the poem's speaker is only imagining it) can almost be heard in the stillness of the scene. Because both elements to the text – the “real” and the “imagined” – are *only* present in the reader's imagination they are much closer together and perhaps they are not clearly distinguishable at all. Drawing attention to the inherent closeness between them, Brecht's poem creates an uncertainty that strikes the tone of anxiety that presumably characterised many, not just his own, experience of exile. And even beyond the specific historical setting of the poem, he shows us this: that experience at any given moment in time is always layered, that sense impressions are always infused with all manner of imagery that perceivers have themselves supplied.

Think again about how dream imagery or recollections are sometimes signified in film – as a slightly blurrier or hazier version of genuinely perceived reality, as different in degree not kind. In the poem above, the phenomenological quality of imagery seems both more accurately captured, and, at the same time, much harder to single out from the manifestly “real” of the scene it infuses and enriches. Besides creating a striking effect in this way, Brecht here makes of his readers more than imaginative spectators to a scene. We become entangled in imagining not only a picture but a reality enlarged by further imagining, and called to the task of carefully negotiating and evaluating the realness and immediacy of each element. Another example does this well: *Zufluchtsstätte* is another one of these poems which is a depiction, at first glance, of one of Brecht's stations in exile:

Ein Ruder liegt auf dem Dach. Ein mittlerer Wind
Wird das Stroh nicht wegtragen.
Im Hof für die Schaukel der Kinder sind

Pfähle eingeschlagen.
Die Post kommt zweimal hin
Wo die Briefe willkommen wären.
Den Sund herunter kommen die Fähren.
Das Haus hat vier Türen, daraus zu fliehn.

(BFA 12, 83)

Again however, on closer inspection, the present tense of the poem quickly gives way to uncertainty. Realised metrically, and in the line breaks, straightforward images are being unsettled: from the first to the second line, and with a sudden lapse into prosaic metre, the wind turns into a mere conjecture: ‘Ein mittlerer Wind / Wird das Stroh nicht wegtragen’, *should it arise*. The same happens again: the third line mentions ‘die Schaukel der Kinder’, and again, with a sharp metrical change, the fourth line changes the entire picture: ‘Im Hof für die Schaukel der Kinder sind / Pfähle eingeschlagen.’ *It has not actually been built yet*, only the poles for it have already been driven into the ground. The poem, it turns out, is not really descriptive of the immediate present at all, it is not a straightforward account of things that the poem’s speaker can see, but rather it shows (or imagines) a lot of things that are yet to be, or perhaps to be: the roof is not simply a roof, the posts are not simply posts, and the doors not simply doors. The reader need not imagine seeing these things at all, at least not in such visual detail as might be gained from looking at, and studying, a picture. In each case, the poem renders these objects *in situ* – a roof withstanding a breeze (or *not* withstanding a storm?), a swing that has been constructed from the posts (or even the children swinging on it?), the flight through one of the backdoors at the arrival of (as yet) faceless pursuers. Again, Brecht is not picture-painting. Rather the perception of the momentary scene in the present is infused with imaginations of the future. And, in fact, the ‘Schaukel’ may be more vivid to the reader than the ‘Pfähle’, the event of pursuit more strongly salient than the doors described.²⁰¹ To “see” the house and its surroundings is to hope, to

²⁰¹ This has served as another prime example for *Verfremdung* in the poetry, see Schwarz, p. 61.

worry, or to fear.²⁰² Think also of the *Werke* again: only in their significance for future actions and events do they make sense, do they stand out, can the reader picture them.

Poems of this kind seem to anticipate the kind of theorizing of the imagination that puts it in close quarters with other deliberate forms of reasoning. One potential constraint of perceptual apparatus by itself is that we seem to be able to only see one “way things are” at once, and it is a hallmark of Brecht that his work seeks to disrupt such singularity: with split stages Brecht, the theatre maker, shows two courses of action at once; by drawing attention to the stage apparatus behind the performance, the audience sees both the actor and the figure portrayed. But where literary texts are attentive to and evocative of the imagination as the capacity to generate complex, and even contrasting or contradictory imagery, they also fulfil this same purpose. The poems we have just seen, and many others like them, tackle the problem of unitary perceptual experience head-on: they show that most experiences do not possess pictorial unitary in the first place, but are enriched with all kinds of knowledge, with past experiences, abstract concepts, and the like. Where mental imagery and deliberate mental simulations seep into an episode of present experience, it is very possible for two things to become salient, alive at once. Of course, literary texts in particular tap this wellspring of ambiguity: as readers imagine “spectating” and also imagine “imagining”, experiences are revealed to be more rich and complex than they may *appear* in most ordinary contexts. That is to say, if we are imagined perceivers to Brecht’s landscapes as well as imagined imaginers of the past and the future at the border of which these poems sit, then we are also on our way to becoming imagined critics: enacting the kind of scrutiny, and the kind of abstract reasoning that seeps into the experiential episodes portrayed: for instance, in *Frühling 1938*, quoted above, the first eight lines seem in fact almost to become retroactively revised and cast into a whole other light by the final

²⁰² Compare this to a similar motif in another nearby poem (BFA 14, 429), where the same associations are made more explicit, and curiously, less effectively stimulating for the reader’s own imagination: ‘[...] So wie zur Linken, wo sie etwas zurücktritt / Ist eine grüne Holztür auch in dem Anbau / Und da auf der andern Seite des Hauses der Sund anfängt / Dessen Wasserfläche nach rechts zu im Nebel liegt / Holzschuppen und Sträucher vor sich / Hat das kleine Haus wohl im ganzen drei Ausgänge. / Das ist gut für die Bewohner, die gegen das Unrecht sind / Und von der Polizei geholt werden können.’

three, all the while retaining and bringing to bear their earlier idyllic connotations. In *Zufluchtsstätte*, the hypothetical wind, the future swing-set, the desired letters, and the feared persecution, as much as the house itself, its roof and its doors, the posts driven into the ground, the Sound and the ferries all make up the reality of the scenario. Or to draw once more on *Finnische Landschaft* as the previous chapter has discussed it: by the power of the imagination the refugee in the poem, and its readers, move from wooden logs to wooden legs.

In this way, Brecht's poems – even such poems that are, at first glance, brief, elegiac observations – may thus unfold the kind of critical potential that we usually ascribe to such works of Brecht that are more obviously deliberately crafted to this purpose. A later poem, taken from Brecht's *Buckower Elegien*, makes for a good example, where, in a simple negation, the objects of a sentence can be remarkably present, and their absence or their not-being-the-case salient:

Ein kleines Haus unter Bäumen am See.
Vom Dach steigt Rauch.
Fehlte er
Wie trostlos dann wären
Haus, Bäume und See.

(BFA 13, 308)

Starting out from a vivid, almost painterly landscape – a small lake house, smoke rising from the chimney – the third line of *Der Rauch* may well yank the reader away from that picture with disruptive force like a record scratch and evoke an altogether different scene, this time deserted and 'trostlos': the smoke, previously unreflected perhaps, or registered as nothing more than a small detail as if dotted in by a painter, is revealed, by its sudden absence from the picture one might have imagined, as highly significant. It comes to mean the presence of another living being – a realisation that is (to most people and many other animals, to be sure) fundamentally exciting, curious, or, in this case, oddly solacing. Then there is undeniably some discomfort as well: perhaps the reader does not entirely trust the initial depiction of the smoking chimney. Perhaps the smoke itself is a detail imagined by the poem's speaker. In any case, the poem's structure around its central third line pits these competing images against each other,

each as vivid as the other, each there as a possible reality, and, more importantly, both compatible with each other as reality is revealed in its temporal spread. The poem hovers ambiguously over a possible present, past, or future: the presence of others right here and now, just on the other side of the lake, but also, perhaps, a now-deserted house, in a slowly depopulating countryside, or an empty house, which the speaker of the poem invests with the hope of future dwellers. One may consider *Der Rauch* politically ‘unverfänglich’,²⁰³ and for all intents and purposes at the time it may well have been: it was one of the few elegies Brecht had published during his lifetime without concern about an unfavourable reception in political circles.²⁰⁴ One may also, by extension, consider its poignant imagery similarly innocuous. In the present context, however, the force behind it should stand out saliently as a key device for Brecht’s critical purpose: the contrast here between the two starkly different scenarios, and the ambiguity over the past, present, or future of either, must be brought about in the first place by readers who imagine spectating but also imagine imagining; dealing with this ambiguity they must juggle the real and the hypothetical, the immediate and the enlarged reality in their minds. It is never far from this complex imagining task to critical reflection. Or to put the case more strongly: the critical potential of a poem like this one is only realised because its readers are skilled imaginers.

These instances of ‘mental time travel’²⁰⁵ are constitutive, as we have just seen, of deliberate critical thought, of a keen awareness of the past and the rolling present, of an understanding of how reality flows, and changes, and develops. The same goes for time-travel in the other direction, since, not far off from mental imagery (that is, from self-generated content without feedback from the world), is recollection: the retrieval of stored information from past experience. Episodic recollection, in particular, is a key tool for the kinds of critical world-engagement that lie at the heart of Brecht’s project, because it allows perceivers to scrutinise and understand the present, and to acknowledge change (or lack thereof): being able to retrieve past episodes from our lives, we are able to make comparisons and to critically assess past and present alike. In

²⁰³ Joost, p. 439.

²⁰⁴ See Joost, pp. 439–40.

²⁰⁵ See Thomas Suddendorf and Michael C. Corballis, ‘Mental Time Travel and the Evolution of the Human Mind’, *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 123.2 (1997), 133–67.

this capacity, a memory makes up much of the body of the 1953 poem *Tannen*. After a rather prosaic observation about nature, typical for Brecht in this period, the image of the fir trees is framed as a memory, ‘eine leicht elegische, alltägliche sogar’,²⁰⁶ as Brady puts it:

In der Frühe
Sind die Tannen kupfern.
So sah ich sie
Vor einem halben Jahrhundert
Vor zwei Weltkriegen
Mit jungen Augen.

(BFA 12, 313)

Once again, this poem unlocks its critical potential by making it somewhat uncertain what is present and, in this instance, what is recollected: what is now (still) the case, what was the case, what has changed. The present tense of lines one and two suggests immediacy; a direct observation, a straightforward mental image for the reader, of the fir trees, and of the morning light rendering them luminously copper-hued. The past tense report in the third line that, ‘[s]o sah ich sie’ does not exactly divert from this image, but it adds a temporal dimension and introduces a degree of ambiguity about the timescale of the speaker’s observations. Is the speaker really looking at the firs in the present, recollecting an earlier experience on the occasion; or are the fir trees entirely in the speaker’s memory, yet nonetheless present, vividly, in their sensory qualities all these years later and thus warranting the present tense? The fourth line furthers the distance between past and present even more and, by noting that fifty years lie between them, adds some force to the image of the trees as old or even timeless in human terms. A resolution to the ambiguity becomes more pressing now: if the speaker is really looking at the same, or very similar, fir trees now and in the past, has really nothing changed (not even, as the fifth line strikingly notes, after the two disastrous wars)? But while the poem opens up a rich temporal dimension along the lines of which readers are able to keep track of and to scrutinise the world as changed or unchanged, it is never

²⁰⁶ Brady, p. 159.

resolved: the sixth and final line only completes the claim of the third, reinforcing the reading of the poem as a memory: ‘So sah ich sie / [...] / Mit jungen Augen.’

Thus, the poem not only affords rich and layered imagery along various temporal lines, but it also demands rather a lot of work from its reader: the initial present tense statement, which itself may produce a fairly straightforward mental image, is modified by each following line in turn. Each elliptic line dismantles, or at the very least modifies, the suggestion that the first two simply depict, or even mirror, what just happens to be the case: the poem’s speaker’s experience of the trees in the present is influenced to a large degree by past experience not just of the fir trees themselves but everything that has happened in the meantime (again, the two world wars fit in almost inconspicuously amongst the indeterminate stretch of occurrences). On the other hand, the memory of the fir trees seen ‘[m]it jungen Augen’, if that is how we choose to read the poem, may be modified by the present view of them, or the present view of them modified by the experience of the past. In the same way as actual perceptual experience is not a complete and veridical recording of everything that is “out there” in the world, but constructed in active and selective world-engagement, memory is not so much reproductive as re-constructive. And once again, because readers of *Tannen* are called to accomplish the task of not just imagining a straightforward image, but an image infused with and complicated by an ambiguous temporal dimension, they partake in this active and constructive process themselves. Throughout Brecht’s oeuvre this is realised in different ways: by imagining even the most innocuous-seeming episodes, readers imagine spectating but also imagine remembering and imagining, and they are always faced with the challenging task of keeping track of these different layers as they modify, qualify, or even contradict one another, are subtly changed or transformed line by line, and blur into each other so that they must be looked for. Crucially, it is this hard work that invests these poems with a kind of Realism: it is the same hard work we do as perceivers and imaginers more generally: to construct and re-construct, to continuously bring about, to scrutinise, and to keep revising the world we encounter.

3 FROM PERCEPTION TO POETRY

3.1 What Did You See?

The poems we have been considering thus far present episodes of perceiving in context and, as it were, in action. They remind us, time and again, that perceivers are not limited to what happens to be on the scene at any isolated moment. They use their bodies to bring things into view over time or pick things up to examine them, they imagine distant or future events, recall the past, use radios, for example, to extend the scope of their perceptual field. In paying attention to these different acts that bring about the world of experience in the first place, such poems serve as a reminder of just how richly complex experience is: indispensable for and entangled with much that we do in the world. The speakers in Brecht's poems variously read about the wheelings and dealings of world politics while watching the kettle boil (over?) (BFA 12, 123), cover up a small tree against a late frost while mentally rehearsing a verse of poetry in the making (BFA 12, 95), or feel simultaneous delight over the sight of a garden in bloom and horror at Hitler's speeches (BFA 14, 432). These poems prompt us to discover that *Erlebnisse* are not as limited or as impotent as one might be tempted to think. Indeed, once we understand them as the result of continuous world-engaging action, we see all the more clearly how crucial they are to Brecht's realist project, a project that is conceived in terms of a 'realistische Betrachtungsweise' as well as 'Handlungsweise' (BFA 22, 638): where these poems portray and draw attention to the richness and the complexity of experience, they unpick the fiction of pictorialism, urging that the real world beyond the stage or page is more than a series of snapshots to be passively perused, that it is open for exploration and critique, and, crucially, that it is apt to and calling out for intervention.

Meanwhile, Brecht has another, perhaps more immediately practical realist concern to contend with: while he allows in 1940 that one purpose of art, indeed one criterion for useful works of art, might be 'ob es noch die Erlebnismöglichkeiten irgendeines Individuums bereichern kann' (BFA 26, 417), this project is not exhausted in simply reaffirming that (real-life) perceivers are, in principle, able to experience richly and widely. The 'Erlebnismöglichkeiten' which a work of art might itself supply, are, after all, closely tied to its 'Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten' (BFA 26, 418). That is to say, whatever the poet Brecht hopes to make salient about reality, he must make salient in

language. And even once we are rid of the simplistic, and, for Brecht's purposes, inadequate, notion of poetic language as picture-painting, there is a sense in which it is limiting, or even treacherous: any given utterance (a description of trees, or the statement that rain falls downwards, come to mind as Brechtian examples) is at risk of conveying a distorted or distorting glimpse of a wider totality, let alone of the complex, and dynamically evolving social structures, and the root causes of values and behaviours that mattered to Brecht. As Chapter One outlines in brief, the pervasive impression of the world as manifested in a single and stable "way things are" seem only to be reinforced by such representational artefacts as images or texts.²⁰⁷ Partly because language serves us day-to-day as a helpful tool for getting around and for deconstructing the environment into bite-size parts, it also threatens to close up or narrow down the complexity of reality, or, indeed, the richness of one's experience of it. It plays a key role in what Raymond Williams described as an 'immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products', 'into formed wholes rather than forming and formative processes'.²⁰⁸ In language, what Williams names as 'contemporary life, [...] relationships, institutions and formations in which we are still actively involved', and which, in Brechtian terms, we might call the changing and changeable structures and relations that make up reality, are rendered in a kind of 'habitual past tense': 'in that produced past, only the fixed explicit forms exist, and living presence is always, by definition, receding.'²⁰⁹ This is the crux of the matter: if 'living presence' is receding, so is the potential for action in the present.²¹⁰ That is to say, even where the world shows up as a complex and dynamic environment,

²⁰⁷ See Chapter One, Section 3.

²⁰⁸ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1977), p. 128.

²⁰⁹ Williams, p. 128.

²¹⁰ In fact, Williams suggests that this habitual past tense is at the root of the distinction between the social and the personal, between the shared knowable world and subjective experience, in the first place: 'And then if the social is the fixed and explicit - the known relationships, institutions, formations, positions - all that is present and moving, all that escapes or seems to escape from the fixed and the explicit and the known, is grasped and defined as the personal: this, here, now, alive, active, "subjective"', see Williams, p. 128.

immediately available for interaction, there is still the task of conveying a sense of this world in a poem, in language.

To be sure, the impulse to be thus concerned about language as a potentially flawed representational artefact, one that imposes its own structural limitations on any realist project, does not seem particularly Brechtian. He held a firm conviction that language simply had to, and could, be put to good and productive use: however flawed it may be, language to Brecht is an essential tool, and, not least as a poet, he appears to have used it with considerable skill and gusto. Indeed, the *Brecht-Handbuch* cautions that *Sprachkritik*, in Brecht's context, ought not to be understood 'im philosophischen Sinn',²¹¹ not in the pessimistic sense of Nietzsche, Mauthner, or Hofmannsthal, for example, as a fundamental worry about the inherent limitations and inadequacies of language and the barriers it presents to knowledge and understanding.²¹² He had, Kämper emphasises

kein uneingeschränktes Vertrauen in die Sprache. Aber er versteigt sich andererseits auch nicht - wie etwa Hofmannsthal - in intellektuelles Lamentieren über das Auseinanderfallen von Sprache und Wirklichkeit und über die daraus sich ergebende Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache.²¹³

To the degree that Brecht did engage in language critiques of his own, notably in writings from 1934 and 1935, this is informed predominantly by the idea that language (and representations of other kinds, such as images) could be and were being deliberately abused. And so Kämper is right when she points out the pragmatic dimension to Brecht's attitude towards language as a predominant element to his approach,

²¹¹ Jan Knopf, 'Schriften 1933-1941. Zu Politik Und Gesellschaft', in *Brecht Handbuch. Schriften, Journale, Briefe. Vol. 4.*, ed. by Jan Knopf (Stuttgart, Weimar, 2003), pp. 262-72 (p. 269).

²¹² See Kämper, p. 237.

²¹³ Kämper, p. 238.

wenn er für ‘fruchtbare’ Sprachkritik diejenige hält, die zeigt, was Menschen mit Sprache tun: ‘in großem Maßstab fruchtbar wird die kritische Prüfung der Sprache, wenn sie als Werkzeug der Schädigung angewendet betrachtet wird‘.²¹⁴

Accordingly, Brecht was interested in more of a productive kind of critique; rather than agonising about its inability to do justice to the world of experience, he intended to subject language to constant revision, continuously correcting and rewriting the false narratives of capitalism and fascism.²¹⁵

For the most part, Brecht’s obvious distance in outlook and response to more pessimistic language critics or language sceptics has precluded a closer look at his poetry in these terms. And yet, as we are about to discover, there is much to be gleaned about Brecht’s outlook on and use of language from entertaining certain language worries in the first place; by asking, along with and beyond Brecht, how language aids and potentially hinders us (all) as we reach out to and share a world with others: how does language serve the project of taking reality in hand, and how might it obfuscate it? How do we avoid being fooled by the deceptive words of others, or indeed, by our own, into thinking of the world and of linguistic, artistic, poetic meaning as fixed and determinate? Such questions are not necessarily exclusive to some form or other of abstract philosophical language scepticism, but they arise as a by-product of the simple fact that once we have brought the world into view, and as part of actively engaging with it, we rely on language, and plain ordinary language not least, to dissect and

²¹⁴ Kämper, p. 240. See also BFA 19, 432. Even though Brecht had a few points of friendly contact to Karl Kraus and his thought, he takes a critical stance also towards Kraus’ critique of language which, he writes, amounted to not much more than a ‘Kritik derer, die sich schlecht ausdrücken’ (BFA 22, 35). Indeed, Brecht observes that, while Hitler had been ridiculed for his ‘53000 Sprachschnitzer in seinem Buch’: ‘Inzwischen siegt er draußen’ (BFA 17, 26).

²¹⁵ Peter von Polenz sees in Brecht’s approach here a ‘Vorwegnahme der Methoden text- und argumentationsanalytischer Sprachkritik der post-1968er-Zeit’ (Peter v. Polenz, *Deutsche Sprachgeschichte vom Spätmittelalter bis zur Gegenwart, Vol. 3* (Berlin, New York, 1999), p. 313.), in that he did not engage in a ‘Kritik von Einzelwörtern [...], sondern [...] mit Sätzen oder ganzen Äußerungen als den kleinsten Sinn- und Handlungseinheiten der Sprache [...]’, Polenz, p. 314.

document, to teach and to argue about it. And Brecht *does* toy with the notion of language as an all but perfect tool for this endeavour, with the sense of the impossibility of giving an account in language of reality as a whole, or even of everything within reach over a short episode. In the poem *Überall vieles zu sehen*, for instance, he toys almost literally with this idea by rehearsing an exchange in which the question ‘Was hast du gesehen, Wanderer?’ (BFA 15, 57) is repeatedly asked and answered. It is never specified whether the same voice responds or if different speakers are involved, but each response appears, in any case, to describe a particular landscape from different perspectives and in different registers: one notes with some scientific interest the geological fabric of the hillside, another assesses the area for its strategic military benefits, a third uses rather more fanciful metaphors to describe the landscape as comely, the house as leaning against the hillside as a wife against her husband. A fourth contrasts this image, in turn, by evoking a house so decrepit that it is only just held upright by the hill, noting the absence of any smoke from the chimney as the absence of a warm meal:

Was hast du gesehen, Wanderer?

Ich habe eine anmutige Landschaft gesehen. Da war ein grauer Hügel vor einem hellen Himmel und das Gras wiegte sich im Wind. An den Hügel lehnte sich ein Haus, wie sich ein Weib an einen Mann lehnt.

Was hast du gesehen, Wanderer?

Ich habe einen Höhenzug gesehen, gut, um Kanonen dahinter zu stellen.

Was hast du gesehen, Wanderer?

Ich habe ein Haus gesehen, das war so auffällig, daß es nur durch einen Hügel aufrecht gehalten wurde; aber so lag es den ganzen Tag im Schatten. Ich kam zu verschiedenen Stunden vorbei und niemals stieg aus dem Kamin Rauch, als ob Essen gekocht würde. Und ich sah Leute, die dort wohnten.

Was hast du gesehen, Wanderer?

Ich habe ein dürres Feld auf felsigem Grund gesehen. Jeder Grashalm stand einzeln. Steine lagen auf der Wiese. Zuviel Schatten von einem Hügel.

Was hast du gesehen, Wanderer?

Ich habe einen Felsen gesehen, der seine Schulter aus dem Grasboden erhob wie ein Riese, der sich nicht besiegen läßt. Und Gras, das steil und gerade stand, mit Stolz, auf dürrer Boden. Und einen gleichgültigen Himmel.

Was hast du gesehen, Wanderer?

Ich habe eine Bodenfaltung gesehen. Hier müssen vor Jahrtausenden große Bewegungen der Erdoberfläche vor sich gegangen sein. Der Granit lag offen zutage.

Was hast du gesehn, Wanderer?

Keine Bank. Ich war müde.

(BFA 15, 57-58)

The combination (or juxtaposition) of these different accounts seems intended to make a point about the relationship between each description and reality more widely: regardless of the level of detail, of the style, or the perspective, each account, taken in context with the others, comes to sound incomplete, tendentious, or naïve. To invoke romantic metaphors about house and hill is to ignore the poverty of its inhabitants. To call the range of hills comely is to obscure the fact that it may soon become a zone of battle. With an apparent wink, the final iteration of question and answer mocks the scientific, militaristic, or even class-critical observations alike: of course, a tired traveller looks for, and speaks about, a bench first and foremost. While doing so playfully in this instant, Brecht gestures towards a concern here that is about more than the possibility of language being deliberately abused and manipulated. How we speak and what we say, he shows us here, is fundamentally entangled with our lives, with our

needs and projects. And if Brecht's hands-on realist project entails us reaching out to the world with our bodies and minds, it also entails us speaking about it; if it is about bringing the world into view, it is also about bringing it into the view of others by communicating about it. He has a stake, quite straightforwardly, in how this happens, and in the perks and pitfalls of the tool, language, that is available to us for this purpose.

To this backdrop, it is the purpose of this chapter to demarcate the site at which these two impulses, concerns about language and a keen sense of its crucial importance to active world-engagement, meet in Brecht's poetry. On one hand, in line with the existing scholarship, we might say of *Überall vieles zu sehen*, for instance, that Brecht is not really using language descriptively at all, but rather quoting (or, indeed, exhibiting) the different and differing descriptions. Framed explicitly as a reiterative dialogue, or as several dialogues placed side by side for comparison, the poem acts as a kind of examining table on which the various tendentious or flawed or incomplete utterances can be held up to one another, held up, also, to the shared reality we understand them all to pertain to in one way or another.²¹⁶ This is an attractive reading because it chimes with a tendency right across Brecht's poetic oeuvre to showcase different voices and speakers, registers and perspectives and manners of speaking:²¹⁷ while we often seem to hear Brecht, the poet, there is not necessarily a particular lyrical I that speaks, but rather, one that is being quoted, their statements put through a range of poetic filters: a woman speaks about an affair in plain and sober prose (BFA 11, 170), an SA-man tells of his hunger in metrically clumsy yet evenly rhymed verse (BFA 11, 209). The 'Rollengedichte'²¹⁸ of the *Lesebuch für Städtebewohner*, many marked in their final line as quoted speech, seem oddly general and impersonal (even explicitly

²¹⁶ This line of argument feeds into the "Behaviorismus"-These sometimes held about Brecht: the observation and examination of different utterances falls within a more general practice, a 'Beobachtung menschlichen Verhaltens', see Hans Vilmar Geppert, "Wenn ich mit dir rede kalt und allgemein"? Bert Brechts Lesebuch für Städtebewohner im Kontext von Rundfunk, Film und Roman der 20er Jahre', in *Brechts Lyrik. Neue Deutungen*, ed. by Helmut Koopmann (Würzburg, 1999), pp. 49–73 (p. 63).

²¹⁷ See also Thomson, p. 202 for the argument that Brecht's personal poetic utterances are less introspective than self-staging.

²¹⁸ Tom Kuhn, 'Brecht als Lyriker. Einführung', in *Brecht Handbuch. Gedichte. Vol. 2*, ed. by Jan Knopf (Stuttgart, Weimar, 2001), pp. 1–22 (p. 8).

‘[k]alt und allgemein’, BFA 11, 165), yet they purport to exhibit the “kinds of things people say” and to reveal the circumstances and conditions behind what they say and how they say it. In Los Angeles in the 1940s, similarly, Brecht reflects on capitalist American society by quoting examples of the supposed use of ‘verkaufen’ in place of ‘überzeugen’ or other kinds of words: ‘Von der jungen Mutter / Die dem Neugeborenen die Brust weist, sagt man: / Sie verkauft ihm die Milch’ (BFA 15, 60). Class differences are occasionally emphasized by noting differences of expression (e.g. BFA 12, 11; 12, 12). *In finsternen Zeiten* (BFA 14, 364), quoted in the previous chapter, makes salient these dark times by envisioning what will (and will not) in future be said about them.²¹⁹ Rather than portraying (or representing or evoking) reality itself, these kinds of poems concern themselves with the ways in which they might be spoken about. They portray and scrutinise speech, comparing different accounts of the same event or state of affairs, or highlighting the different circumstances that influence what someone would say. Occasionally they demonstrate that language can be deliberately abused, or are themselves deliberately misleading (such as when the poet-speaker tells us that ‘[d]ie grünen Boote und die lustigen Segel des Sundes / Sehe ich nicht’, BFA 14, 432).

In a crucial addition to such readings, however, this chapter explores another purpose to, and effect, of this technique of quoting or exhibiting speech: Brecht is not only showing acts of speech as potentially treacherous, as culturally, historically, and materially situated, but he demonstrates also that much more generally, and for worse *or* for better, utterances are actions. That is to say, language is shown in many of these poems as quite the opposite of ineffectual or limited, and not only as potentially deceptive. In critically exhibiting different utterances, regardless of whether they are truthful or accurate, Brecht reveals what language, in fact, does (and does not) do. The different descriptions of the landscape are not a kind of picture-painting, nor a complete and veridical representation of a totality. No utterance corresponds neatly to some objective reality *in-itself*, but is made by a particular speaker, in particular circumstances, in service of a particular project or intention. Even where landscapes and cities, utterances and speakers are fictional, in placing them bluntly side by side, Brecht

²¹⁹ Margarete Steffin appears to have directed Brecht’s attention to such differences when editing *Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe* and suggesting ‘die Gutsbesitzer und Staatsbeamten von “Pferden”, die Bauern jedoch von “Gäulen“ sprechen zu lassen’ (BFA 4, 482; see Ostmeier, p. 252).

draws attention to this much more contextual basis for meaning. Even as a poem like *Überall vieles zu sehen* exposes the flawed and treacherous relationship between language and the world, it does not encourage us to worry very much about it, but forces us to take a wholly different approach to meaning, and brings us to appreciate

that sentences, utterances, texts don't generate themselves; that they are spoken or written by someone at a particular time, in a particular place; that words reveal the speaker; that once words are uttered they can't be undone; that utterances, just like other actions, have consequences, ripple effects spreading far beyond the original moment of utterance.²²⁰

This point chimes, first of all, with the pragmatic theme under which we have so far been reading Brecht. J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts (of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts), as one of the most widely received and reproduced ventures in twentieth-century pragmatist language philosophy, opens up one way into thinking this through: the speakers of Brecht's poems don't primarily engage in constative utterance, in descriptions of fact that would require excessive worry about their truth value, and, given that they are made by fictional speakers, the degree of their realism conceived in this narrow sense. But as ordinary language philosophy goes, there is no reason not to go yet further back. When Brecht holds that 'Erkenntnistheorie muß vor allem Sprachkritik sein' (BFA 21, 413), it pays to notice the similarity of this sentiment to the early Wittgenstein's proposition that '[a]lle Philosophie ist "Sprachkritik"'.²²¹ In the later Wittgenstein's pragmatism about language (he, too, emphasizes that he does not mean *Sprachkritik* 'im Sinne Mauthners'²²²), we discover again the recurrent theme of this study: Brecht's hands-on attitude which prompts him to look not for deep truths, or, indeed, deep meaning, but use-value. If perceiving is a form of action, as well as its attendant capacities, imagining and recollecting, so is speaking; and speech is as intricately interwoven with these others. In language, speakers do not just represent or paint pictures. To be sure, it is certainly possible, and not uncommon, to use language to

²²⁰ Moi, p. 196.

²²¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by C. K. Ogden (Oxford, New York, 1981), p. 62.

²²² Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, p. 62.

“paint pictures”, to speak or write in such a way that the object that is being described comes to the fore, vividly, in another person’s imagination. We can describe objects and events in great (e.g. visual) detail. In- and outside of literature, we can use words or phrases to represent things in a fictional world or the real one. But this representational function of language is accompanied or even, in some contexts, eclipsed by others: think of a child uttering the word ‘Mummy’. Where it is tempting to think that ‘Mummy’ is a name for the person Mother, or even to assume that the child understands that ‘Mummy’ signifies Mother, the later Wittgenstein paves the way for a more fitting and more useful account: the child understands that saying ‘Mummy’ tends to have the effect of bringing Mother into view. From this pragmatic standpoint, language is ‘not a tool for representing the world or expressing one’s thoughts but a tool for effecting changes in one’s environment’.²²³ And crucially, it is not just communicative uses of language that serve us in this way (e.g. calling for mother, giving an instruction). Language in various supracommunicative functions acts as a scaffolding for much that we do in the world.²²⁴ For better or for worse, language seems to have a profound influence on the way we reach out to and experience the world around us, structuring, stabilising, or simplifying a complex environment.²²⁵

Once we begin explicitly thinking about language not as (or as more than) a representational artefact, we discover anew just how essential speech is to Brecht’s more broadly conceived realist project, to critical and active world-engagement. Just as much as Brecht explores what perceivers do (and the variety of actions they perform that puts them in contact with the world), he portrays them speaking; he examines and exhibits different utterances, statements, questions. In these portrayals, to speak is to act. Even where that means to lie or misdirect, or to describe inadequately, or to obscure

²²³ Christopher Gauker, ‘How to Learn a Language like a Chimpanzee’, *Philosophical Psychology*, 3.1 (1990), 31–53 (p. 31).

²²⁴ See Andy Clark, ‘Magic Words: How Language Augments Human Computation’, in *Language and Thought. Interdisciplinary Themes*, ed. by Peter Carruthers and Jill Boucher (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 162–83, for a helpful account of various supra-communicative functions of language.

²²⁵ Using language we may ‘enforce on the environment certain kinds of stable properties that will lessen our computational burdens and the demands on us for inference’, Ron McClamrock, *Existential Cognition* (Chicago, 1995), p. 88.

one fact by drawing attention to another, speech is active and constructive. It is something we do in and to the world with consequences. If one sentence does not convey enough about some state of affairs, it must be complemented with others. If a particular meaning is no longer sufficient, it must be reworked. We benefit from this view because it enables us to think of Brecht's realist practice in much more concrete terms: Brecht, the poet, describes, evokes, even, perhaps, paints pictures, with language, but he also states, refutes, corrects, argues. His 'direkte Ansprachen, Monologe, Aufforderungen' are realist *actions*.²²⁶ But crucially, it is also Brecht's evocative Realism that benefits from this implicit understanding of speech as action in the world: seeing the utterances of various speakers, quoted, placed side-by-side, examined, or even literarily altered, we are the better placed to imagine the world in which they are uttered. In other words, the kinds of things the speakers of Brecht's poems say furnish the textually evoked realities that we, readers, imagine. Such furnishings can be anything: brief prosaic observations about seemingly inconsequential details, loudly voiced dissent or critical questions which highlight the world in which they are necessary, or hopes and fears for the future, spoken aloud, which bring to mind the present that kindles them. If to speak is to act in the world, then Brecht's portrayal of speakers and their utterances enables us to bring to mind the world in which they are acting, and in which their language is deeply embedded.

3.2 Brecht and Language Scepticism

As Wittgenstein begins his *Philosophical Investigations* by pointing out, there exists a simple and pervasive idea about language, namely that different words are names for different objects – and particularly, of course, for material, perceptible objects – in the world. Augustine's *Confessions*, quoted by Wittgenstein, tell such a story from the perspective of a young child acquiring language for the first time:

When grown-ups named some object and at the same time turned towards it, I perceived this, and I grasped that the thing was signified by the sound they uttered [...]. In this way, little by little, I learnt to understand what things the words, which I heard uttered in their respective places in various sentences, signified.

²²⁶ Kuhn, 'Brecht als Lyriker. Einführung', p. 8.

And once I got my tongue around these signs, I used them to express my wishes.²²⁷

It is not difficult to intuitively agree: we all start out, it seems, by pointing to dogs, or toys, or people, and naming them. Foreign language learners, too, sometimes begin by compiling vocabularies of words like “train station” or “hotel room” or “breakfast”. But not far out from this simple idea of simple beginnings, matters soon get more subtle and complex. We are constantly faced, in our private and not least our political lives, with language trouble: imprecisely converging definitions of an unfamiliar term can lead to misunderstanding or disagreement. Words can be felt to be exclusionary, or else, too unspecific. Terminologies shift over time, are appropriated and re-appropriated. And even beyond such issues with public meanings, our lives and experiences occasionally push language to its apparent limits: we might fail to adequately describe a complicated feeling or strange sensation (to others or ourselves), or feel that a description could not possibly do justice to an experience. Language, writes Marxist critic Raymond Williams, forcibly disambiguates ‘all that is present and moving, all that escapes or seems to escape from the fixed and the explicit and the known[...]: this, here, now, alive, active, “subjective”’.²²⁸

It is unsurprising, then, that a wide range of different philosophical, theoretical, and, of course, poetic projects have been kept busy with various forms of language criticism or language scepticism: in the seventeenth century, the proto-scientists of the early Royal Society obsessed over creating artificial or universal languages,²²⁹ which might, unlike flawed ordinary language, directly represent the order of thought, and by extension, the order of things. Much more recently, Marxist critic Herbert Marcuse

²²⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 5.

²²⁸ Williams, p. 128.

²²⁹ The most complete and ambitious example is John Wilkins’s *Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (1668), see James D. Fleming, *The Mirror of Information in Early Modern England: John Wilkins and the Universal Character* (London, 2016).

advocated for a specialist philosophical language as opposed to the language of the ‘chap on the street’.²³⁰

Critical analysis must dissociate itself from that which it strives to comprehend; the philosophic terms must be other than the ordinary ones in order to elucidate the full meaning of the latter.²³¹

Other positions are altogether more pessimistic about the ability of language to signify things in the world, to refer to reality, or to elucidate truth. Nietzsche, for instance, points to the existence of different natural languages as evidence for the fact that ‘es bei den Worten nie auf die Wahrheit, nie auf einen adäquaten Ausdruck ankommt’,²³² and Mauthner considers ‘Wortaberglaube’ the idea that the existence of a word is ‘ein Beweis für die Wirklichkeit dessen [...], was es bezeichnet’.²³³ In yet a different approach, poets at various times and with various methods have been invested in a language that is freed from some of its usual functions, unconstrained by the usual need to be straightforward, and, instead, rich in ambiguity. Within the nexus of early twentieth-century *Sprachskepsis*, for instance, a pervasive sense that language is insufficient or superficial, or no longer adequate in light of rapid technological advances and societal change, had given rise to various poetic projects of this kind, birthing notions of *poesie pure*, of ridding poetry of the preconceptions and presuppositions inherent in ordinary language.

It goes without saying that Brecht is not a language sceptic of any of these stripes, and that his work ought not to be read as resting comfortably against this backdrop, given that his treatment of language differs considerably from any of these responses: for one, it is often precisely the language of the ‘chap on the street’ that Brecht has an interest in. In *Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus* he emphasizes that it is imperative for

²³⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, 1964), p. 174.

²³¹ Marcuse, p. 193.

²³² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe. Vol. 1*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (München, 1999), p. 879.

²³³ Fritz Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache. Vol. 1* (Frankfurt a.M., 1982), pp. 158–59. 9

writers ‘sich an das Volk zu wenden, und nötiger denn je, seine Sprache zu sprechen’ (BFA 22, 406).²³⁴ It is also not difficult to see Brecht in league with Jonathan Swift, who satirizes the pursuit of a universal language in *Gulliver’s Travels*, where, at Lagado Academy, the belief that ‘Words are only the Names for Things’ leads to a harebrained scheme for linguistic reform: to get rid of words altogether and for everyone to simply ‘carry about them, such Things as were necessary to express a particular Business they are to discourse on.’²³⁵ Unsurprisingly for the early eighteenth century, “everyone” here does not mean everyone. The reader quickly learns that

this Invention would certainly have taken Place [...], if the Women in conjunction with the Vulgar and Illiterate, had not threatened to raise a Rebellion, unless they might be allowed the Liberty to speak with their Tongues, after the manner of their Ancestors; such constant irreconcilable Enemies to Science are the common People.²³⁶

And it goes without saying that, in opposition to proponents and practitioners of various forms of autonomous poetry, Brecht had no interest whatsoever in a language freed from some of its usual constraints and purposes: whatever its shortcomings, language always served him as a crucial tool for education, for critical thought, for argument. In *Über die Wiederherstellung der Wahrheit* in 1934 Brecht characterises critical reading practice as critical speaking practice:

Was [der Denkende] liest und hört, spricht er leise mit, und im Sprechen stellt er es richtig. Von Satz zu Satz ersetzt er die unwahren Aussagen durch wahre. Dies übt er so lange, bis er nicht mehr anders lesen und schreiben kann. (BFA 22, 89)

But if Brecht did not share in some of the more common forms of language scepticism and did not emulate other kinds of responses to it, it is precisely in this

²³⁴ See also the essay on *Reimlose Lyrik mit unregelmäßigen Rhythmen* (BFA 22, 357-65) for an interest in the formal aspects of oral speech.

²³⁵ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, ed. by Robert Jr. Demaria (London, 2001), p. 172.

²³⁶ Swift, p. 172.

pragmatic attitude that certain underlying concerns about language show through. It is necessary constantly to put language to this repeated critical use, precisely because it can be treacherous. As *Überall vieles zu sehen* makes clear above, sentences can, like images, offer a limited view, are, in fact, necessarily perspectival and tendentious. In the same way that visual deceptions can obscure certain truths (for instance, a costume hiding someone's true identity), so can words be deployed to deliberately misdirect. Kämper is right, up to a point, when she specifies that, to Brecht, the fault is not with language itself, but with its speakers;²³⁷ and, prominently, with the fact that language can deliberately be abused. Once again, this observation is particularly pertinent to the late 1930s, as when Brecht writes about fascism in 1937:

Wir wissen, daß sich um die faschistischen Staaten eine enorme, dichte Mauer von Geschwätz, Geschmier, abgestandener Philosophie erhebt, hinter der die Geschäfte getätigt werden. Diese Gasmauer ist ein Wunderwerk der Vernebelungstechnik. (BFA 22, 341)

Or a year or so later, when he says of the Nazi regime:

Ihre Heerstraßen taufen sie Autostraßen. Ihre Tanks sind bemalt, daß sie wie die Büsche des Macduff aussehen. Ihre Agenten zeigen Schwielen an den Händen vor, als seien sie Arbeiter. (BFA, 22, 410)

But while this does not constitute a worry about the inherent inadequacy of language, neither is it merely about the issue of language being abused by any particular group of people, or with any particular agenda in mind. It is a concern about how we all, speakers, listeners and readers think about language, and, by extension, how we deploy it, if we subscribe to what Wittgenstein relates to us as the Augustinian picture. In the context of the above remarks Brecht calls attention to the fact that meaning is precisely not straightforward: it can be and is constantly being overhauled and expanded in use, and if we do not catch on, if we keep to the simple Augustinian story in which words and sentences correspond firmly and reliably to objects and concepts, we risk being

²³⁷ See Kämper, p. 235.

fooled.²³⁸ That is to say, the reason language came as a helpful tool to Fascists and National Socialists is because it is simply so tempting, and, indeed, usually practical, to think of the meanings of words and phrases as fixed and reliable, to think of words as names for things, to think of utterances as truthful representation of something or other that really is the case. Consider the following poem, where Brecht appears to demonstrate the semantic power, and, indeed, the patience and resilience of a single, repeated word:

WENN DER ANSTREICHER DURCH DIE LAUTSPRECHER ÜBER DEN
FRIEDEN REDET

Schauen die Straßenarbeiter auf die Autostraßen
Und sehen
Knietiefen Beton, bestimmt für
Schwere Tanks.

Der Anstreicher redet vom Frieden.
Aufrechtend die schmerzenden Rücken
Die großen Hände auf Kanonenrohren
Hören die Gießler ihm zu.

Die Bombenflieger drosseln die Motore
Und hören
Den Anstreicher vom Frieden reden.

Die Baumfäller stehen horchend in den stillen Wäldern
Die Bauern lassen die Pflüge stehn und halten die Hand hinters Ohr
Die Frauen bleiben stehn, die das Essen aufs Feld schleppen:
Auf dem umgebrochenen Acker steht ein Wagen mit Schalltrichtern. Von dort

²³⁸ In the form of a more general point, which we might apply to language and meaning, Brecht writes: 'Die Unterdrücker arbeiten nicht zu allen Zeiten auf die gleiche Art. Sie können nicht zu allen Zeiten in der gleichen Weise dingfest gemacht werden.' and 'Es verändert sich die Wirklichkeit; um sie darzustellen, muß die Darstellungsart sich ändern' (BFA 22, 410).

Hört man den Anstreicher Frieden fordern.

(BFA 12, 11)

In the repetition of the word ‘Frieden’ in each stanza, and in relation to each new scenario, comes a sense of just how robust meaning is, even when a word seems to stand in direct contradiction to tangible reality (and indeed to all that we associate with ‘der Anstreicher’ who repeatedly utters it). By invoking the experiences and activities of the different workers, Brecht emphasizes this disconnect; by juxtaposing word and world in each stanza, he reveals the fundamental fragility of their relationship. By shifting the word about, and placing it at different positions and in slightly varying sentences in each stanza, Brecht creates an effect of testing and probing into this resilience, while ultimately gesturing at its utter meaninglessness: to talk of peace, in the first three stanzas, may count as clever deceit; to demand it, as per the final line, is another matter: in this last stanza the word ‘Frieden’ is not juxtaposed with war preparation and bombers but is transmitted out into ‘stille[...] Wälder[...]’, populated by farmers and forestry workers: ‘[v]on dort / Hört man den Anstreicher Frieden fordern’ (my emphasis). One intention behind this poem, no doubt, is to expose Hitler’s deceptive talk of peace: this is successful but not particularly subtle. Another, however, is to show that the stark contrast between the word and the contexts in which each stanza places it, does almost nothing to stop it from playing its conventionally semantic role. This is cleverly done: readers set out with presumably a fairly confident understanding of the word’s meaning (even if, as knowing readers after the fact, we are already aware that ‘der Anstreicher’ is using it deceptively). We are well acquainted with the word; we have heard it on the news, or know that it translates to “peace” in English, or “paix” in French. We may have used it ourselves in various contexts. We understand that, among other things, it is the antonym to “Krieg”. In this way, words, like images, are irresistible in making us feel that they represent “how things really are”.²³⁹ But much rather than simply try to do away with this certainty on the part of his readers, Brecht, the poet, relies on it. As a matter of fact, his juxtaposition of Hitler’s

²³⁹ Think again of Roland Barthes’ theorizing of the “reality effect”, in which he describes the effect of “speaking about something” as a gesture towards its realness, its simply-being-there (see Chapter One, Section 2).

talk of peace with the construction of tank roads and war machinery only works *because* we understand, and only because the word retains all this meaning and these associations. The poem tells a story of deception but also, more fundamentally, of the power of words to withstand robust contradiction to the world into which they are uttered. Even while we understand Brecht's more obvious message here (that Hitler is a deceitful demagogue), we are unsettled because 'Frieden' (especially as reinforced by the scenery of the final stanza) refuses to lose its effect.

3.3 Language on Display

One collection in particular, Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*, is a good example for this ambiguous outlook on language, swaying between the usefulness and essential role of language in Brecht's critical project, and its own pitfalls as a potentially misleading force of its own. Ruth Berlau's introduction to the collection, in which quatrains of verse are attached to, for the most part, magazine or newspaper cuttings, describes the purpose of this exercise thus: 'Dieses Buch will die Kunst lehren, Bilder zu lesen' (BFA 12, 129). While the images in themselves are invaluable documents of the war and its consequences – images, in other words, which it was necessary at the time of publication to preserve and display – Berlau likens them to hieroglyphs, whose meaningful and critical analysis requires training. In the fifth edition's dust cover text originally intended as a longer introduction she writes of one example:

Ein amerikanischer Soldat steht an der Leiche des japanischen Soldaten (Bild 47).
Der Betrachter sieht den Triumph über das dem Hitler verbündete Japan. Aber das
Foto enthält noch eine andere, tiefere Wahrheit: Der amerikanische Soldat ist das
Werkzeug einer Kolonialmacht im Kampf mit einer anderen Kolonialmacht.²⁴⁰

In Berlau's telling, echoed also by later commentators on the *Kriegsfibel*,²⁴¹ language offers precisely what pictures may lack, particularly where they are taken to be

²⁴⁰ Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel*. 5. (1. erweiterte) Auflage (Berlin, 1994), n.p.

²⁴¹ See Jan Knopf, 'Zur Entstehung der Kriegsfibel', in *Kriegsfibel*. 5. (1. erweiterte) Auflage (Berlin, 1994), p. 98: 'Die Epigramme sollen die Bilder "zum Sprechen

contextless, epistemologically impoverished snapshots. In “reading”, that is, in challenging and correcting the images using language, Brecht’s quatrains overwrite their surface view, offering a much more complex structural analysis than the merely experiential documents could supply by themselves.

It is notable, for one, that poetry in particular should serve Brecht in this way. As Kuhn observes, despite the collection’s stated educational purpose and, according to Berlau, its intended broad audience of ‘unsern Arbeitern der volkseigenen Industrie, unsern Genossenschaftsbauern, unsern aufbauenden Intellektuellen, [...] unserer Jugend’ (BFA 12, 129), many of the quatrains make use of a relatively high literary register.²⁴² But this may not be so strange, after all. Despite the fact that language serves Brecht in this way, as an instrument for a constant practice of critical engagement, language itself comes to be on trial too. As has been pointed out, the *Kriegsfibel* is not at all a straightforward case of pitting image against verse. Many of the photo-epigrams come with journalistic headlines, descriptions, and other bits of text: Nr. 31 (BFA 12, 191), in any case, is a clipping of a Swedish news article and, does not feature an image at all, but, as some others do, a translation printed on the opposite left page. Brecht’s epigrams frequently critically engage these journalistic descriptions rather than the photographs themselves, challenge their false or one-sided interpretation rather than what is depicted, and play off the words and phrases that feature in the German translations. For instance, in the case of photo-epigram Nr.47, mentioned by Berlau above, Brecht’s quatrain takes issue explicitly with what is said in the journalistic caption of the photograph (cut out along with it): citing the idea of “force” from the caption (‘An American soldier stands over a dying Jap whom he has just been forced to shoot. The Jap had been hiding in the landing range, shooting at U.S. troops’, BFA 12, 223), Brecht puts a different spin on the word, shifting the lines of opposition from the two soldiers involved in an unquestioned violent conflict to the colonial powers at play in the war and the exploited working classes forced to enact it. From the idea of having

bringen”, und zwar meist gegen den in den Medien damit verbundenen (illustrativen oder heroisierenden) Zweck.’

²⁴² Kuhn observes a complex syntax and a free use of various ‘O’s and ‘ach’s and notes ‘how productive the “verfremdet” relationship [...] can be between the high literary [...] and the primitive, surface, comparatively “real” world’, Kuhn, ‘Poetry and Photography’, p. 182.

one's hand forced by immediate and, in the undertone of the caption, inevitable circumstances (being shot at and having to return fire) Brecht thus moves the attention to a kind of force not inevitable at all:

Es hatte sich ein Strand von Blut zu röten
Der ihnen nicht gehörte, dem noch dem.
Sie waren, heißt's, gezwungen, sich zu töten.
Ich glaub's, ich glaub's. Und frag nur noch: von wem?

(BFA 12, 223)

The poem's speaker takes issue not with the image's potential affordances, such as memory or emotion, nor with its status as authenticating or documenting the war, but with a tendentious linguistic analysis of it, already supplied by the journalistic context. On a content-level, but also stylistically, where Brecht's quatrains are composed in a distinctly literary diction, they clash not just with the supposedly surface-level images, but more readily with the various bits of neutrally phrased paratextual information that, along with any translations, is printed on the otherwise blank left page besides each photo-epigram.²⁴³

That is to say, it is not just the images that are in need of scrutiny, of recontextualization, of critical examination, and, if required, of correction: different kinds of utterances do, as well. Spanning several years of intermittent work collecting, writing, and collating its different components, the *Kriegsfibel* by itself is evidence of

²⁴³ Photo-epigram Nr. 17 makes for another good example: the German translation of the Swedish newspaper caption, printed on the left page, reads: 'Der Hafen von Liverpool, Englands zweitgrößter, ist bekanntlich das Ziel mehrerer deutscher Bombardements gewesen und hat viele Treffer abbekommen. Hier sehen wir ein gutes Bild vom Hafen, und der Feuerrauch im Hintergrund zeigt, daß die Hafenanlagen kürzlich Besuch deutscher Bomber hatten.' Brecht's quatrain, on the right, offers a very different "reading" of the image, assuming a striking first-person perspective: 'Noch bin ich eine Stadt, doch nicht mehr lange. / Fünfzig Geschlechter haben mich bewohnt / Wenn ich die Todesvögel jetzt empfangen: / In tausend Jahr erbaut, verheert in einem Mond' (BFA 12, 162-63).

Brecht's long-standing interest in different forms of expression, different utterances and statements, and registers. Brecht critically exhibits and examines utterances made by different kinds of speakers, he experiments and pieces them together, juxtaposes different styles and registers and viewpoints, and puts words into the mouths of different figures and groups of people. The *Kriegsfibel's* composition, indeed, its conception as an educational primer, makes it a particularly plain example for this practice: alongside images and newspaper clippings the collection showcases purportedly neutral descriptions and translations from editors and the various unnamed paratextual contributors,²⁴⁴ journalistic headlines (and even, once, a letter to the editors about a home-grown carrot which resembles a pin-up girl), and the quatrains themselves, comparing and combining them in different configurations, both within individual photo-epigrams and through the composition of the book as a whole.²⁴⁵ The quatrains alone also comprise a plethora of different voices and perspectives: in some places a poet-speaker makes sober requests, gives advice or instructions: 'Das sind sechs Mörder. Nun geht nicht davon / und nickt nicht, lässig murmelnd ein "ganz recht"' (BFA 12, 189); 'Seht unsre Söhne, taub und blutbefleckt / [...] / Wärmt sie, es ist ihnen kalt.' (BFA 12, 251). In others, he addresses those pictured, asking them questions, interrogating them. Another epigram takes the shape of a dialogue in which two metal workers are questioned about their labour towards military mobilization:

'Was macht ihr, Brüder?' – ‚Einen Eisenwagen.‘
 'Und was aus diesen Platten dicht daneben?'
 'Geschosse, die durch Eisenwände schlagen.'
 'Und warum all das, Brüder?' – 'Um zu leben.'

(BFA 12, 132)

The dead speak (BFA 12, 139; 143; 195) and are spoken to (BFA 12, 141), German soldiers (pictured in an aeroplane bomber) address a mother afraid for her children (BFA 12, 159). Nearby, and from a suddenly broadened perspective, personified cities lament their own destruction (BFA 12, 161; 163). Several Nazi officials, meanwhile,

²⁴⁴ See Long, p. 207.

²⁴⁵ See Kuhn, 'Poetry and Photography', pp. 171–74.

including Hitler himself, are given first-person accounts of themselves which seem transparently fabricated, bearing the poet-speaker's sardonic tone and, in part, a distinctly literary character (BFA 12, 131; 177; 179; 181).

Beyond the *Kriegsfibel*, too, there is a more general tendency to showcase words and utterances all across Brecht's oeuvre.²⁴⁶ Even in the 1920s, prior to the urgency with which the systematic linguistic deceptions of the Nazis had to be exposed, Brecht exhibits a more general taste for "things people say". The majority of the poems in the *Lesebuch für Städtebewohner*, for instance, are marked by their bracketed final sentences as quotations:

(Das wurde mir gesagt.) (BFA 11, 157)

(So sprechen wir mit unseren Vätern.) (BFA 11, 159)

(Das habe ich eine Frau sagen hören.) (BFA 11, 162)

To be sure, these poems do not, in actuality, imitate the "kinds of things people say" or "how they say them". Like the *Kriegsfibel*, they are carefully crafted, and contrast sober prose meter and a relatively simple vocabulary with more conventionally literary stylistic devices, which, in turn, bring into relief an almost excessive brutality of theme:

Und du sollst verschwinden wie der Rauch im Himmel
Den niemand zurückhält.

[...]

Die Städte dürfen sich ändern
Aber du darfst dich nicht ändern.
Den Steinen wollen wir zureden

²⁴⁶ Of *An die Nachgeborenen* (which itself, as we have seen, reflects on the implications of a 'Gespräch über Bäume'), Max Frisch says that Brecht writes 'Worte zeigend, wie man Kieselsteine zeigt', Max Frisch, *Tagebuch 1946-1949* (Frankfurt a.M., 1950), p. 226.

Aber dich wollen wir töten
Du muß nicht leben.

(BFA 11, 159)

But despite these literary overtones and influences, they purport to be quoted speech. They are plainly not descriptions of a world supplied by a poet-speaker or a lyrical I, but rather, if we choose to read them as such, utterances which imply a context in which they have been made. This is plainly the case, for instance, in *Vier Aufforderungen an einen Mann von verschiedener Seite zu verschiedenen Zeiten* (BFA 11, 164-65), where an invitation to stay is extended four times in different ways, with different conditions attached and in different social contexts, marked, in part, by vocabulary ('Heim', 'Stube', 'Kammer', or 'Bett' and 'Schlafstelle') and by the sort of things that are said by the by, which give away those conditions, relations, and the social contexts in which they are spoken: in the first iteration, the man is told 'Stelle die Möbel um nach deinem Geschmack', in the next 'Du kannst mitarbeiten am Hof' and 'Du hast deinen eigenen Teller', while the prostitute in the final stanza remarks 'Übrigens bin ich nicht krank.'

In the 1930s, too, Brecht puts a similar technique more bluntly to use. *Überall vieles zu sehen* being one example of the method of showcasing contrasting statements side by side, a handful of poems from the later 1930s are structured entirely around such direct comparisons. In one example, as per the previous chapter, Brecht envisions what future generations will have to say about the dark times of the present, juxtaposing sober descriptions of Nazi crimes with what is painted as the performatively literary observations about nature and ordinary life by poets who turned a blind eye:

Man wird nicht sagen: als da der Nußbaum sich im Wind schüttelte
Sondern: als da der Anstreicher die Arbeiter niedertrat
Man wird nicht sagen: als das Kind den flachen Kiesel über die Stromschnelle
springen ließ
Sondern: als da die großen Kriege vorbereitet wurden.
Man wird nicht sagen: als da die Frau ins Zimmer kam
Sondern: als da die großen Mächte sich gegen die Arbeiter verbündeten.
Aber man wird nicht sagen: die Zeiten waren finster
Sondern: warum haben ihre Dichter geschwiegen?

(BFA 14, 364)

In another rather compact example, Brecht evokes an extreme rift between the working class and those likely to profit from the war by rewriting a slogan about military glory:²⁴⁷

DIE OBEREN SAGEN:

Es geht in den Ruhm.

Die Unteren sagen:

Es geht ins Grab.

(BFA 12, 12)

And there are other poems besides *Wenn der Anstreicher durch die Lautsprecher über den Frieden redet*, in which Brecht juxtaposes not two utterances, but an utterance and the world at large:

DER ANSTREICHER WIRD SAGEN, DASS IRGENDWO LÄNDER

EROBERT SIND

Aber ihr werdet euch in die Küchen setzen, da

Wo die Kohlrüben gekocht werden.

Der Anstreicher wird sagen

Daß er keinen Fußbreit zurückweichen wird

Und ihr werdet prüfend die Jacken aus Papier anfassen.

Wenn da Siegesglocken läuten sollten

Werdet ihr die Verlustlisten austragen.

(BFA 12, 14)

²⁴⁷ It is worth noting that here, too, the hand of the poet is clearly visible: while the original sentence could conceivably be something that was actually said (not least by many working class Germans in the early days of the war), the latter phrase of clarity seems almost to be wishful thinking.

As in the previous example, empty speech is contrasted here with a tangible reality of turnips and paper, and, indeed, of death, bearing no discernable relationship to them. Both poems suggest a critical almost-empiricism: we can only get at the truth by ‘sehen’ and ‘hören’ and ‘horchen[...]’ (BFA 12, 11), by the touch of one’s hand, by practical work, rather than by the power of words alone.

3.4 Language in Action

On one hand, then, we may well regard this practice as an indication of and a response to a certain kind of language criticism, both in the sense that previous commentators had already identified (a kind of exposing of the linguistic deceptions of fascism), and in a broader sense, too: in contrasting utterances about something made from two sides of the class divide, or at different points in time, or in two different styles or registers, Brecht reminds us that language is not congruent with reality. It does not, and cannot, as the seventeenth-century proto-scientists would have desired, directly correspond to the order of natural objects, and the basic picture of language sketched in Augustine’s *Confessions* of the child learning to associate signifiers with signifieds does not hold out very long before it is all too easily unravelled. In contrasting and juxtaposing the ideological – but also conventional and everyday – word and the material, intractably political world Brecht exposes the failure, and the concrete consequences of this failure, of the Augustinian picture of language. The speakers in these poems do not forge reliable and stable connections between names and objects, and their speech does not become for their hearers a tool for expressing and achieving innocent desires.

But if we take Brecht’s enactments of speech as a push beyond the Augustinian picture, we might also take it, therefore, as a push towards a fully embraced pragmatist view of language. That is to say, while Brecht’s keen awareness of language as a tool for fascism falls within the nexus of this view, attention is warranted also to other, productive uses of language. Think again of the child’s use of the word “Mummy”, the meaning of which, to her, is not too usefully sought in the relationship of the word to her mother, but in the effect of bringing mother into view. Instead of asking questions like “What does this utterance mean?”, “Is this description faithful and accurate?” and so on, the Brechtian critic, that is, the critic inhabiting Brecht’s method in the way that this study sets out, may ask instead: “What does this utterance do?”; “Does it get the job done?”; “Does this description reveal anything that will be of use to my interlocutor or

reader?” There is, then, an enormous advantage for Brecht in losing the Augustinian picture: losing it makes speakers much less vulnerable for linguistic misdirection or deception. Take the following example:

WENN DIE OBEREN VOM FRIEDEN REDEN

Weiß das gemeine Volk

Daß es Krieg gibt.

Wenn die Oberen den Krieg verfluchen

Sind die Gestellungsbefehle schon ausgeschrieben.

[...]

(BFA 12, 11)

Brecht sketches the ideal case in this poem: ‘das gemeine Volk’ has wised up to its leaders’ tricks, understanding that ostentatious talk of peace very often heralds the nearing end of diplomatic negotiations prior to war. The word has nothing to do, in this context, with its dictionary definition, but is uttered as a common practice of diplomacy. It is not that ‘Frieden’, in this poem, no longer has any meaning at all, but its meaning is in its use; it does not signify some abstract concept, but furnishes a reality in motion, and indicates speakers in action. Think again of *Wenn der Anstreicher durch die Lautsprecher über den Frieden redet*, which, on one hand, juxtaposes word and world in order to expose the treachery of Hitler’s speeches: there and here, there is another aspect besides this apparent contradiction, namely, the odd sense that, really, talk of peace and preparations for a war are not that contradictory at all, that they go rather harmoniously together and that one fits the context of the other because we, as readers, are not only competent users of language, but have a strong, if implicit, sense of the complicated ways in which language and world intertwine. We have a notion, so to speak, that war mongering demagogues “always” talk about peace. And Brecht utilises, and puts an emphasis on this understanding that the relationship between language and the world, which is anything but straightforward. And there is more to be achieved than just this awareness of language as a powerful tool, more than just “finding out” those

who use it for deceptive purposes. Brecht reminds us, in yet another short poem from the mid-1930s, that

DEN KUNDGEBUNGEN DES REGIMES

Folgen wie Schatten

Die Gerüchte.

Die Regierungen brüllen

Das Volk flüstert.

(BFA 14, 323)

Again with a degree of adamant hopefulness (and yet a sense of proportion in the assonant juxtaposition of ‘brüllen’ and ‘flüstern’), Brecht insists that not only can we see through the claims and statements if we give up on the idea of fixed and reliable meaning, but that utterance begets utterance, and that language is a tool not just for deceit but for contradiction and correction, for argument, for questions.

This is another way in which Brecht’s poetry is firmly situated in his interventionist project. These poems may be representations (and they may occasionally paint pictures) but they are also, themselves, utterances. Following a pragmatic programme himself, speaking, and, naturally, writing poetry is to Brecht a realist practice not of description but of making use of language in a variety of ways. The poems themselves speak, setting the record right, correcting common narratives and scrutinizing common words, as, for instance, in *Über die Bezeichnung Emigranten*, which fittingly ends in the lines: ‘Das letzte Wort / Ist noch nicht gesprochen’ (BFA 12, 81). This is not necessarily a new observation about how Brecht views and uses language, but with the emphasis we have been placing here on language not just as a tool for description and communication, but a tool for action and intervention, we discover Brecht’s pragmatic engagement with language as all the more crucial, and as practically useful to us as readers. In whichever mode Brecht writes, from the elegiac observation of nature to the satirical texts of the *Hauspostille*, from oddly stilted four-liners tacked onto photographs to gaudy ballads, Brecht’s poetry does not just describe, argue, or teach; it leaves its mark on the world, it scaffolds the ways in which we come in contact with it. When we use language, as readers, or as speakers ourselves, we employ a ‘trick’, to borrow an expression from the philosopher Daniel Dennett, because

besides its prominent role in communication, it in fact performs a whole range of functions that allow us the more efficiently to engage with the world, to access and to navigate, to interact with it:²⁴⁸ like ‘sextants, compasses, maps, slide rules and all the other paraphernalia which have accreted around the basic biological brains of Homo sapiens’ (telescopes and radios included), language, too is a tool which can ‘carry out or [...] facilitate computational operations important to various human projects.’²⁴⁹ Perhaps not all of its supra-communicative functions are relevant in a literary context: for instance, the scaffolding effect of self-directed or “private” speech on task solving which was first posited by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky and has since been supported by the findings of more recent research, namely that, often, ‘children’s private speech (speech not addressed to some other listener) seemed keyed to the direction and control of the child’s own actions’, that ‘the incidence of such speech increased when the child was alone and engaged in trying to perform some difficult task’, and that ‘the children who made the most self-directed comments were the ones who subsequently mastered the tasks best.’²⁵⁰ The philosopher of mind Peter Carruthers, in turn, conceives of language as a medium of thought, suggesting that ‘one does not *first* entertain a private thought and *then* write it down: rather, the writing *is* the thinking’.²⁵¹ But no matter the specific range of functions that can be ascribed to language, in writing (and in publishing) the poems he did, Brecht adds to the chorus of utterances, to the totality of ways in which language is being and has been used, to each reader’s own sense of the relationship between words and world.

This, finally, allows us to make recourse to what the previous chapter has already begun to stake out. With a view to literature and to its effect on readers, language fulfils one function among others in particular, and Brecht’s poems make no exception: literary texts prompt and scaffold the capacity of readers to imagine, to self-generate the textual worlds that provide artificial contexts for critical reflection and scrutiny towards the status quo. That is to say, a function of Brecht’s poems as texts and as utterances is that they showcase the realities in which the utterances are embedded,

²⁴⁸ See Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (London, 1991), pp. 193–97.

²⁴⁹ Clark, ‘Magic Words’, p. 162.

²⁵⁰ Clark, ‘Magic Words’, p. 164. 4

²⁵¹ Peter Carruthers, *Language, Thought and Consciousness: An Essay in Philosophical Psychology* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 52.

furnishing the “real world” of the text with props, and giving evidence of its state and its conditions. Even where the utterances made by the speakers of Brecht’s poems, or quoted by them, are fabricated and altered by the poet that relays them to us, the reality they pertain to seeps through the different things said, for example, by Brecht’s various city-dwellers as they speak to others, or to themselves. It need not matter to us as readers, in other words, whether the instances of speech that make up the bodies of these poems correspond faithfully to some assumed reality, whether they are true or false, misleading, tendentious, or simply naïve. It does not even particularly matter that Brecht regularly departs from genuinely prosaic, ordinary speech. It is, for example, an unusual piece of advice: ‘Verwisch die Spuren’ (BFA 11, 157), yet we implicitly understand Brecht’s socially cold and alienating city to be a city where it is given. Or take *Fragen eines lesenden Arbeiters*, in which Knopf detects another case of language criticism in the scrutiny of historical narratives centred around the names of individual figures:

Der junge Alexander eroberte Indien.
Er allein?
Cäsar schlug die Gallier.
Hatte er nicht wenigstens einen Koch bei sich?
Philipp von Spanien weinte, als seine Flotte
Untergegangen war. Weinte sonst niemand?
Friedrich der Zweite siegte im Siebenjährigen Krieg. Wer
Siegte außer ihm?

(BFA 12, 29)

If one implication of the poem is ‘daß sprachliche Abkürzungen – in diesem Fall Metonymien – nicht mit den sie bezeichnenden Realitäten zu verwechseln sind, daß das Markenzeichen nicht mit dem Produkt und schon gar nicht mit dessen Produktion identisch ist’,²⁵² these questions also function *as* questions, asked by a particular speaker from a particular point of view. They are not only (fictional) quotations, but the poem enacts them. In some sense, they function as questions function in ordinary

²⁵² Knopf, *Gelegentlich: Poesie*, p. 41.

contexts as well. They demand an answer and readers respond to them as they might to questions elsewhere; they (at least attempt to) come up with, or imagine, an answer:²⁵³

Wer baute das siebentorige Theben?
In den Büchern stehen die Namen von Königen.
Haben die Könige die Felsbrocken herbeigeschleppt?
Und das mehrmals zerstörte Babylon
Wer baute es so viele Male auf? In welchen Häusern
Des goldstrahlenden Lima wohnten die Bauleute?
Wohin gingen an dem Abend, wo die chinesische Mauer fertig war
Die Maurer? Das große Rom
Ist voll von Triumphbögen. Wer errichtete sie? Über wen
Triumphierten die Cäsaren? Hatte das vielbesungene Byzanz
Nur Paläste für seine Bewohner? [...]

(BFA 12, 29)

But precisely in imagining answers, we also, inevitably, imagine the asker of the questions, too, and *his* answers, or what they might be. At one point, in fact, the poem itself supplies a stark and vivid image instead of a question:

Selbst in dem sagenhaften Atlantis
Brüllten in der Nacht, wo das Meer es verschlang
Die Ersaufenden nach ihren Sklaven.

²⁵³ See also Silvia Schlenstedt's treatment of the question in Brecht: while at least fairly clear answers suggests themselves (or are even suggested in the title) in the case of *Fragen eines lesenden Arbeiters*, she suggests that questions need precisely not be answerable to still demand engagement of this kind, see Silvia Schlenstedt, 'Ermutigungen auf vielerlei Art. Wirkungsstrategien im Aufbau von Gedichtbüchern 1933-1935', in *Wer Schreibt, Handelt. Strategien und Verfahren Literarischer Arbeit vor und nach 1933*, ed. by Silvia Schlenstedt (Berlin, Weimar, 1983), pp. 311–68 (p. 343).

(BFA 12, 29)

The poem reveals (or more pertinently, enables readers to bring to mind) the reading worker, his sense of labour and of craft, his power of the imagination, and his world, which has been built not by metonymies but by the people that populate it.

Reading Brecht's poems in this way means to intuitively approach meaning from an altogether different viewpoint, not sceptically or even particularly rigorously, not concerned with the faithfulness or accuracy of signs (asking, for instance, "Does this poem do the landscape justice?"), but much more pragmatically: what kind of person sees the landscape in military-strategic terms, what kind evokes literary metaphors to describe its beauty? Who needs to cover their tracks? This constitutes a Realism about the worlds in which people speak (the nature of that world being a root cause for speaking a certain way): the Realism of such poems does not, in other words, simply mirror the representational function of language, on the (if anything, fragile) congruence between words and world. Reality is not teased out from it by simply understanding what the words 'Landschaft', or 'Haus', or 'Himmel', for instance, signify and then piecing them together, but by discerning a sense of the world in and about which these speakers have made their utterances. Brecht's poems, that is to say, tell a story about language, and specifically about speech, that undoes the common notion that to speak is simply to name objects in the world, and that this relationship between world and words is fixed. Moving away from a narrow idea of representation also draws attention to how much language in fact achieves, and how intricately it is linked with what we do in the world: in the elliptic statement that there was '[k]eine Bank' we discern not just some objective reality in which there is no bench, but the particular world of experience of the tired traveller that is, in that particular moment, characterized by this lack.

The reality that emerges from behind each utterance is a reality that is populated by speakers and contexts, projects and intentions, material objects and circumstances. Their lives and their circumstances are evident in what they say and how they say it. Not because we have learned what all the words mean, but because we know what language usually is and does, do we get a sense of the four speakers in *Vier Aufforderungen an einen Mann von verschiedener Seite zu verschiedenen Zeiten* (BFA 11, 164). There is something useful and constructive in the practice of exhibiting utterances, words, statements, because it explores their relation to the world, their status not just as (possibly fundamentally flawed) descriptions of reality but as the

expressions, even the actions, of somebody, uttered at a particular time, for a particular reason or with particular intent. Here we reconceive the relationship between language and the world as the later Wittgenstein does for the failed Augustinian picture: the world does not, as he presents Augustine as claiming, stand in an isomorphic relation to an abstract multiplicity of possible utterances, so that to find the right thing to say would be at once to assure a dependable and uniquely correct relationship between a speaker and what she is speaking about. Instead, language is human-made and historical; one inhabits language so that ‘to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life’.²⁵⁴ Seemingly alive to this, Brecht likewise disrupts the mythology of language as naming, while providing, at the same time, a critique of ordinary language – not trying to supersede it through theory or scepticism, but taking a keen interest in the contexts (material, mundane, and ideological) of the utterances he reproduces or invents. He imagines a form of language, and thus, a form of life, and a world, through imagining the utterances of various speakers.

²⁵⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 11.

4 PERCEPTION, IMAGINATION, SPEECH, AND *VERFREMUNG*

4.1 Beyond the ‘Problem of Visibility’

In the previous three chapters we began to reassess the distinction between ‘Erlebnisse’ on the one hand, and ‘Kenntnisse’ on the other. Though Brecht appears to make this distinction when pitting his epic theatre against more conventional dramatic forms (BFA 22, 109-10), some of his poems demonstrate powerfully that abstract truths about “how things really are” are somewhat toothless if they are not conveyed to, understood by, and acted upon, ultimately, by perceivers. We have also seen that framing Brecht’s realist concerns purely in terms of the alleged passivity and impotence of perception, the inherent privacy and remove of the imagination, and the limitations of language and other representational artefacts, may be missing the mark. The perceivers whose voices are heard in the exile poetry are not confined to their immediately perceptible environments. They are able, in principle, to move their bodies around to get a better view, to use tools (such as the radio) to extend their sensory vantage point, scrutinise and reflect on what they are seeing, and experience the presence of a spatially and temporally extended world beyond the scope of what the unaugmented senses might at any given moment provide. By extension, perceivers are also imaginers: recollections of past events and simulations of alternative scenarios and possible futures calibrate and enrich experiences of the present, inform their ability to situate and contextualise what presents itself, make room for critique and scrutiny of the apparent status quo. And as much as Brecht’s Realism goes beyond spectating, it also makes clear that speech, too, does more than describe or represent the world: language is a crucial scaffolding for the sort of actions we undertake daily. That is to say, perception, imagination, and language serve and *are* forms of action; each of them crucially underpins the act of *begreifen*, of scrutinising and learning about the world, and of effecting change.

This does not mean, however, that we should simply close Brecht’s case. This final chapter considers what is perhaps the most substantial concern evident in Brecht’s writing that arises from the demands of Brechtian Realism: if the problem is not, as we have seen, that we can never know reality truly or sufficiently, or that the subjective viewpoint of humans is fundamentally limited, there is a sense in which we often know the world we inhabit too well, and that this intimate knowledge of, or familiarity with, the world not only aids, but guides and biases the way we interact with it. *Verfremdung*

(or, in English, defamiliarization) is the Brechtian catchword here.²⁵⁵ On one hand, Brecht's miscellaneous writings on *Verfremdung* provide an after-the-fact gloss on the kinds of practices, principles and devices that had already been evident in various forms on Brecht's pre-exile stage.²⁵⁶ On the other, it is in these various essays, notes, and snippets on *Verfremdung* that he sets out a, or perhaps *the*, key epistemological concern: that *erkennen*, or *begreifen*, is fundamentally hindered by perceptual (and other kinds of) habit. Scholarship has traced the idea behind Brecht's use of the terms *Entfremdung*, and later *Verfremdung*, back to Hegel's formulation in the preamble to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*: '[d]as Bekannte überhaupt ist darum, weil es *bekannt* ist, nicht erkannt',²⁵⁷ which, in 1940, resurfaces in Brecht's writing as the remark: 'Damit aus dem Bekannten etwas Erkanntes werden kann, muß es aus seiner Unauffälligkeit herauskommen [...]' (BFA 22, 655).

Crucially, as this chapter will emphasise, this is a problem very different from the 'problem of visibility'²⁵⁸ invoked by Barnett as the worry that the scope of human

²⁵⁵ While "alienation" and "estrangement" have both been used in English-language texts on *Verfremdung* (see John Willett in Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. by John Willett (New York, London, 1964) and Mumford respectively), "defamiliarization" is rightly a popular translation of the term, and, as we are about to see, the most apt in the present context.

²⁵⁶ The term is first mentioned in the essay *Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst* in 1936, where Brecht connects said effect with recent German 'Versuchen, zu einem *epischen Theater* zu kommen, für Stücke *nichtaristotelischer* (nicht auf Einfühlung beruhender) *Dramatik*' (BFA 22, 200). The aim is to prevent spectators from 'sich in die Figuren des Stücks lediglich einzufühlen', and making the portrayed reality, its objects, events and actions, seem '*außerordentlich* [...]' (BFA 22, 200) rather than familiar, ordinary, or as default. In an earlier short piece on the epic theatre Brecht already deploys the term *Entfremdung* to describe the effect he is after (BFA 22, 109), which may be, as Meg Mumford suggests, more immediately related to Marxist terminology (see Mumford, p. 176) than the later, broader term *Verfremdung*.

²⁵⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. by Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg, 1952), p. 28. See Jan Knopf, 'Verfremdung', in *Brechts Theorie Des Theaters*, ed. by Werner Hecht (Frankfurt a.M., 1986), pp. 93–141 (p. 95).

²⁵⁸ Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, p. 56.

perceptual experience is inherently limited, and, thus, epistemically impoverished. In perception (and its attendant capacities) we face not limitations, in fact, but complexity, and not impotence, but a remarkable efficiency with which human minds and brains manage that complexity. The world shows up as a single “way things are”, as something to be taken as given, and fixed, and inevitable, rather than complex, dynamic, and subject to human intervention, precisely *not* because perceiving is impotent, but because perceivers are, for the most part, highly attuned to their environment and skilled at interacting with it. They are able to draw on prior knowledge about “what the world is like”, gleaned from past experiences, and they can rely on learned skills and habits when sampling and processing incoming information. Or to put it the other way around, if it is a good thing, in principle, to be able to encounter and reach out to a rich, complex, and indeterminate world, it is also a taxing task for such perceivers who are also to act successfully in and on this world. Such active perceivers, who constantly reach out to their environment, who move their bodies across time and space, encounter a vast stream of constantly evolving information: in order to interact efficiently with the world they must compress this information into a manageable load, must constantly identify what is signal and what is noise in a “[...] blur” of possibilities’,²⁵⁹ must extract the former and filter out all the rest: it is precisely ‘the need for perception constantly to mandate action and choice that requires the system to opt for a single ‘overall take’ on how the world is now most likely to be.’²⁶⁰

That is to say, such action-oriented perceivers must take a certain number of short-cuts, and they do. They must rely precisely on those capacities, mechanisms, and tools, that Brecht elsewhere identifies as a cause for concern: linguistic or pictorial representations of reality, for instance, function to structure complex experiences into bite-sized objects and episodes, to unify and disambiguate indeterminate sensory input. Yet, in doing this job well, there is the worry that we might naively confuse the

²⁵⁹ Andy Clark, ‘Beyond the “Bayesian Blur”’: Predictive Processing and the Nature of Subjective Experience’, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 25.3–4 (2018), 71–87 (p. 74). For Clark’s source of the term “blur” and its original context in cognitive science, see Yuhao Lu, Tom Stafford, and Charles Fox, ‘Maximum Saliency Bias in Binocular Fusion’, *Connection Science*, 2016.

²⁶⁰ Clark, ‘Beyond the “Bayesian Blur”’, p. 77.

momentary and contingent percepts that emerge from this process for complete and veridical pictures of everything that is the case, of “how things really are”. The capacities to recollect and to imagine crucially inform and calibrate our grasp on the present. Yet, we may well be concerned about the expectations and biases introduced in what the world ends up looking like to the backdrop of these pre-formed and self-generated contexts. Familiarity with, or, more generally speaking, a skilled attunement to the environment, is essential; handing perceivers invaluable tools for navigating the constantly flowing stream of information from their environments, for making choices, and for interacting with the world, impacting upon and changing it. And yet, even though Brechtian Realism is angled towards exactly those forms of world-engagement, familiarity is troubling at the same time: the more we are able to rely on skill and prior knowledge, the more automated and habitual our engagement of the world is likely to be. With strong expectations in place, and a confident grasp on what is happening around us, we are less likely to experience surprise or uncertainty, less likely to inhabit the critical stance that Brecht sets out as the ideal response: in place of ‘Es ist so’, an astonished ‘Es ist also nicht anders’ (BFA 21, 410).

A reframing of the problem of familiarity as primarily a problem arising from the efficiency of active, world-engaging perceivers does more, however, than just shed light on the precise nature of Brecht’s concern, for in the wider context of Brecht’s hands-on realist project, this still ultimately spells good news: while the ‘problem of visibility’ represents a potentially insoluble limitation to subjective human experience, this different way of framing Brecht’s concerns opens the door to a whole range of productive responses that go beyond side-stepping perception and perceptual experience altogether. As has been established in the previous chapters already, Brecht is not so much worried about whether we can be in touch with the world and act in it in the first place, but invested in *that* we do it. And if we situate the root of these worries in efficiency rather than impotence, we see the more plainly that Brecht’s interventions do not constitute a mere dismissal of experience. For perceptual habits can be broken or disrupted. But not broken down entirely. Instead they can be guided, or manipulated, given that perceivers can and must, over rough and unknown perceptual terrain, tread carefully and attentively. They can suddenly notice the richness and strangeness of experience, they can feel surprise or shock at things that come unexpected, and adjust their expectations in future. In other words, the perceptual apparatus that brings the world into view is not just efficient, but flexible and adaptable, too.

Acknowledging this, we complement but expand on existing accounts of *Verfremdung*. It is already common, of course, to think of Brecht's key principle as a case of 'making the familiar strange',²⁶¹ of "making visible", or "making noticeable" contrasts and contradictions, circumstances and causes that escape the naked eye or the allegedly naïve one. The notion of shock is also frequently mentioned, in service of a sudden kind of critical insight.²⁶² To Brecht, the *Verfremdungseffekt* (i.e. the effect produced by an act or a process of *Verfremdung*²⁶³) manifests in a renewed or refreshed attention to the kind of behaviours, meanings, and values we may ordinarily take as given. At one point he defines *Verfremdung* broadly as

[...] eine Art der Darstellung, durch die das Geläufige auffällig, das Gewohnte erstaunlich wurde. Das allgemein Anzutreffende sollte eigentümlich wirken können, und vieles, was natürlich erschien, sollte als künstlich erkannt werden. (BFA 22, 211)

What matters to Brecht here, before anything else, is this kind of attention, or taking-notice of what seems simply and ordinarily to be the case, a 'jolting of the reader out of familiarity, prompting thought and the seeing of things in a new light'.²⁶⁴ And across the range of genres and forms, previous readers of Brecht have given many useful accounts of and examples for how this is achieved in practice, a common denominator between many of them being the idea that defamiliarizing works of art have the advantage of not, treacherously, posing as an organic unity:²⁶⁵ unlike supposedly naïve,

²⁶¹ Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, p. 76.

²⁶² See, for instance, Mara Polgovsky Ezcurra, 'On "Shock": The Artistic Imagination of Benjamin and Brecht', *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 10 (2012), Article 4.

²⁶³ Barnett helpfully distinguishes between *Verfremdung* as a principle, a process, or an act on the part of an artist, and *Verfremdungseffekt* as the effect that results from this process, the experience viewers, readers or audiences have as a result of it, see David Barnett, 'Verfremdung or Verfremdungseffekt? - Brecht In Practice - Free Online Resource Access' <<http://brechtinpractice.org/theory/verfremdung-or-verfremdungseffekt/>> [accessed 17 March 2019].

²⁶⁴ Ockenden, p. 183.

²⁶⁵ See Müller, p. 473.

and, indeed, habitualized, everyday experience, Brecht's poetic or theatrical montages present readers and audiences with a complex and difficult to navigate array of different contrasting elements. Specific stage devices and techniques are usually read in these terms: historicization, and *not-but* acting, as we have already briefly seen, each draw attention to certain conditions or behaviours by supplying to the audience some kind of "other", or alternative; material, in other words, that is food for critical reflection on the events portrayed. In the poetry, too, commentators have detected *Verfremdung* at play: in the *Hauspostille* we find shock-effects arising from the sharp contrast between brutal themes and an almost whimsical poetic diction and metre; in the exile poetry sudden changes of mood between idyllic landscapes and the war are similarly thought to sharpen the reader's attention to either. Much has also been said about the potential impact of such V-effects on viewing or reading behaviour; about how unfamiliar contexts, unexpected patterns, and unsettling juxtapositions force readers and audiences to abandon habit, how, with attention re-directed comes critique and scrutiny. Brecht's defamiliarization devices, so much seems to be agreed, require the audience or the reader to put in hard work across the whole range of poetic and stage devices that fall under the nexus of *Verfremdung*. Just as he suggested that 'plays should be so acted as to yield up their true message only after repeated viewings', Ockenden suggests that his poems, too demand repeated and dedicated reading.²⁶⁶ Hutchinson, too, emphasises that Brecht reckons with attentive and critical readers; readers who ask questions, reflect on what there are being presented with, embrace contradictions, rather than pass over them, and bring their own ideas to the table.²⁶⁷

On one hand, what we have seen in the previous chapters largely affirms, and sharpens, this idea of *Verfremdung* as a utilisation of contrast, as well as a calling readers and audiences to the task. To imaginative readers, Brecht's poems supply a complex and not always clearly defined array of past, present, and future, of immediacy and distance, apt for critical scrutiny and comparison: not *this*, but *that*. To readers who are also skilled language users in their own right, the poems supply utterances of various styles and registers, spoken from different perspectives and for different purposes, which reflect complex and sometimes contradictory realities, and which reveal to us the intricate relationship between utterances and the world by holding one

²⁶⁶ Ockenden, p. 182.

²⁶⁷ See Hutchinson, p. 36.

up against another. But having so far sought to anchor the source of such contrasts more firmly within the nexus of these day-to-day perceptual, imaginative, and linguistic capacities, and, crucially, in their world-involving character, we have been clearing a path to thinking about *Verfremdung* more explicitly along these lines as well. Contrasts, which often serve Brecht as the motor and the wellspring of critical reflection may be deliberately created on stage, for example, or brought about by imaginative readers. But, more fundamentally, they arise as the inevitable by-product of the fact that that world-engagement is a complex process which is not at all limited to the immediate environment, and that even within a given environment, we encounter all manner of contradictory information, ambiguities, and poverties in the stream of sensory signals. In other words, even as active and highly skilled perceivers, we are nonetheless constantly beset by surprises or shocks, by inconsistencies and momentary perceptual errors. Consider, for instance, the odd sensation of a sudden change in a repetitive pattern (an added, or an omitted note, in a musical or metrical sequence), or the perceptual uncertainty that comes with an unfamiliar, and thus, unpredictable, environment. Think of surprise, too, which is a distinct and recognizable sensation in itself: to be surprised is to experience a subtle contrast that does not need to be artificially supplied by an actor on stage, between what we expected and what has actually come to pass. That is to say, even day-to-day experience is rich and complex (and sometimes downright strange) in this way, and while perceivers possess highly efficient mechanisms to smooth things over, to fill in gaps, and to throw out all manner of perceptual noise, the perceptual apparatus is always already error-prone and open to all kinds of implicit and explicit manipulation. While Brecht actively creates contrasts on stage or on the page, the principle by which he does so, *Verfremdung*, relies on a mechanism that functions beyond either. Deploying devices of *Verfremdung*, Brecht taps into and harnesses the kinds of brief errors and perceptual mishaps that already at times characterise perceptual experience, recovering and drawing attention to the complexity inherent in the reality that presents itself.

And in the present context, but presumably more generally, poetry provides a rich source of all of these complex, strange and taxing experiences. Chapters One and Two have already offered a sense of this strangeness when it comes to the experiences evoked in Brecht's poetry on the level of episodic imagery: the contradictory emotions of horror and delight, the simultaneity of competing sensations, the subtle interplay between sensory experiences and, seeping into it, all manner of mental simulations and

recollections. But poetry also often affords more immediate experiential oddities: a jarring word choice, for example, which stands out sharply not just in contrast to the text but, more importantly, to the skilled and habitual reader and language user's own expectations: think of Brecht's *Großer Dankchoral* (BFA 11, 77), which, like many poems in the *Hauspostille*, draws some of its effect from an assumed familiarity with liturgical hymns or other source material (in this case, *Lobet den Herren, den mächtigen König der Erde*): on a content-level, Brecht brutally disrupts the notion of Christian thanksgiving by invoking natural processes of feeding and dying (stanzas 2 and 3), and replaces the idea of a caring deity with the sense of an anonymous and arbitrary existence under an indifferent sky (stanzas 4 and 5). In part this is achieved by the stark, and amusical line endings, for instance: 'Lobet das Aas / Lobet den Baum, der es fraß'. If *Verfremdung* is a name for the poetic principle employed by Brecht on one level of description, the *Verfremdungseffekt* manifests as a peculiar sensation on the part of the reader first, one that will be distinctly recognisable not just by readers of poetry but most day-to-day perceivers. One might think of it as a brief occasion of surprise, or perhaps of shock (though neither word quite does the peculiar sensation justice). Rather than throwing us off, or disrupting the reading process, they preserve, and make consciously available to us, that we had expected something else, however vague that expectation was (after all, at least a reader with even some remote knowledge of Brecht would hardly have expected to be presented with an actual hymn of thanksgiving). And so the sensation, which precedes any of the critical reflection that *Verfremdung* may ultimately be aimed towards, is a rich and complex one: made up from both our own world-engaging projection and what has actually transpired. Of course, there are other ways in which poetry affords such sensations: additions to or omissions from a metrical unit (for instance, in line 2 of *Großer Dankchoral*, where Brecht adds 'und sterben!' to the otherwise completed and metrically regular line), omissions of an obvious punchline or conclusion of a poem,²⁶⁸ sharp metrical changes from one line to another,²⁶⁹ and so on.

That is to say, while *Verfremdung* may be a name for an artistic principle, and for specific theatrical or poetic devices – interventions on the part of the playwright, the

²⁶⁸ See Hutchinson's discussion of the poem *Ulm 1592* (Hutchinson, pp. 33–34).

²⁶⁹ See *Zufluchtsstätte* or *Schlechte Zeit für Lyrik* for examples discussed in previous chapters.

stage director, or the poet - *Verfremdungseffekte* are the achievements (in one sense), or the mishaps (in another) of active perceivers, or more specifically, active readers, who bring not only their own critical reflections, questions and answers, but their own experiences, expectations, and perceptual skills to the task. V-effects occur not when perceivers are prevented from drawing on prior knowledge and their skilled attunement to a familiar world, but precisely when they do, and when, for whatever reason, this goes, however briefly, amiss. *Verfremdung* thus, is a strategy not always of side-stepping ordinary perceptual mechanisms and habits, but, at least sometimes, of utilising them. Surprises and shocks and strange sensations arise because they are in place and functioning, and they are not outside of the constant stream of perceptual experience, but characterise, shape, and guide it. To the backdrop of what cognitive science can tell us about what it means to be shocked or surprised, to pay attention, and about the ways in which perceivers routinely adjust and manipulate their perceptual processing, this chapter explores how such V-effects come about in the process of reading Brecht's poetry.

4.2 The Problem of Familiarity

Perception, as we have seen, can feel and be treacherous: the world tends to show up for us as a stable, determinate, and coherent "way things are", despite the fact that, as Brecht was keen to stress, it is not only complex and often contradictory, but also radically unfixed and subject to constant intervention and change. Even down to the most basic level at which we take in information about the world around us, we smooth over rough edges and fill in gaps: for instance, our eyes make several movements every second,²⁷⁰ darting across and scanning the visual field at high speed, yet, as we have seen already, what shows up for us in experience is a visual scene so stable that we are often tempted to describe it in pictorial terms. Another example is the complete lack of photoreceptor cells at the point where the optic nerve passes through the retina: we might expect this blind-spot to leave a "black" hole at the centre of the visual field, yet it does not.²⁷¹ It is worth emphasising here, in fact, just how fascinating everyday

²⁷⁰ These eye movements, also called saccades, occur at speeds of more than 500 degrees of visual angle per second, Troscianko, *Kafka's Cognitive Realism*, p. 50.

²⁷¹ See Troscianko, *Kafka's Cognitive Realism*, p. 50.

perceptual accomplishments can be when we pay close attention to them, and the more fascinating the more they highlight this actively constructed nature of the stable and coherent world we experience. Consider the ability to spot a set of car keys on a cluttered desk, a visual search task that is accomplished by actively scanning the visual environment for a target among a set of distractors.²⁷² Or the ability to extract a relatively “clear” signal from a heavily distorted radio transmission, which involves both “filtering out” the noise and “enhancing” the signal itself by filling in gaps or, in some other way, smoothing over various poverties and lacunae in the auditory stream. And not only can perceivers quickly locate their keys on a cluttered desk, but they can also see shapes among clouds or on a drywall, or hear, when falsely prompted, the onset of a popular song in a sound file of white noise.²⁷³

Mechanisms such as saccadic suppression, the filling-in of the blind-spot, or visual search, and, as we have seen, the capacity to mentally simulate, are unequivocally useful to everyday perceivers and agents, but they are also reminders, that there are, after all, major ‘discrepancies between input and experience’.²⁷⁴ These discrepancies arise not necessarily because perceivers are, indeed, passive spectators or picture-gazers. It appears to be the efficiency of these perceptual mechanisms, and the habitual skill with which perceivers actively harvest and process information that proves a potential worry here. In other words, precisely in the fact that perceivers are not passive picture-gazers, a different problem arises: while a photograph of the desk would capture a detailed and complete picture (at least from a single perspective) of not only the car keys, but also the stacks of books, coffee mug, post-it notes, headphones and so on, a perceiver searching for the keys in particular may not even, when asked, be able to account for the presence of any of these objects at all. With her attention trained

²⁷² See Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. 53.

²⁷³ See Harald Merckelbach and Vincent van de Ven, ‘Another White Christmas: Fantasy Proneness and Reports of “Hallucinatory Experiences” in Undergraduate Students’, *Journal of Behaviour Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 32 (2001), 137–44.

²⁷⁴ Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 50.

specifically towards the relevant target (or, in other words, her perceptual processing manipulated to accomplish a particular task), all else drops off the edge.²⁷⁵

And this is the crux of the matter: what is a useful set of abilities in most contexts, may not bring about the most desirable outcome even, or especially, from a pragmatic Brechtian perspective, and the idea that we always fall short of being able to truly grasp what is going on around us because we (our perceptual apparatus) are familiar with and become accustomed to the world as it shows up for us is central to Brecht's practical considerations. In the essay that sets out his reflections on *Reimlose Lyrik mit unregelmäßigen Rhythmen* (BFA 22, 357-65), he describes regular metre in verse as having

eine mir unangenehme einlullende, einschläfernde Wirkung, wie sehr regelmäßig wiederkehrende Geräusche (Tropfen aufs Dach, Surren von Motoren), man verfiel in eine Art Trance, von der man sich vorstellen konnte, daß sie einmal hatte erregend wirken können; jetzt tat sie das nicht mehr. (BFA 22, 364)

Brecht is alive in this example to the fact that what we have been calling familiarity so far has a particular role in the efficiency of perception. For better or for worse, prior knowledge of and attunement to the environment we encounter, has a significant impact on our interactions with the world, and on the efficiency with which we process information: for instance, we know how to tweak, to manipulate, to use objects that we are acquainted with. In dealing with a closely familiar person, we are able to gauge better how they will respond to different actions, how to interact and to cooperate with them. Familiarity is also, in the present context, one major factor that underpins the various perceptual mechanisms that enable us to constantly and on a rolling basis harvest and process information: a heavily distorted song playing on the radio will sound clearer the more familiar we are with it. We are able to drive along familiar roads

²⁷⁵ A rightly popular example is the following experiment (if you want to try it, do not read on just yet): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGQmdoK_ZfY (Daniel Simons, 'The Monkey Business Illusion', 2010). For the original paper, see Daniel J. Simons and Christopher F. Chabris, 'Gorillas in Our Midst: Sustained Inattentional Blindness for Dynamic Events', *Perception*, 28.9 (1999), 1059–74.

even in heavy fog, and, likewise, have to slow down on unfamiliar roads.²⁷⁶ Now take the example of reading poetry again: familiar metrical structures, or even some kind of regularity within one given text, make for much easier, and often quicker, reading, in the process of which we may well become inattentive or even, as Brecht puts it, “sleepy”.²⁷⁷

There is, naturally, no single, uncontested research paradigm in the study of perception that can account for the role of such prior familiarity. For instance, we may attribute the clarity with which a perceiver is able to hear the familiar but distorted song to a kind of “memory effect”: the filling-in of the various gaps happens retrospectively from memory, giving the listener the impression of having heard it more clearly. However, another research paradigm suggests itself in the present context, particularly as we are entertaining the idea of active perceivers, who bring their prior beliefs, their expectations, and their skilled habits to the task at every turn. Particularly according to Andy Clark’s take on the Predictive Processing research programme, perceivers are not just embodied (and so on) but also predictive, that is to say, ‘[t]o perceive the world is to meet the sensory signal with an apt stream of multilevel predictions’ and ‘[t]hose predictions aim to construct the incoming sensory signal “from the top down” using stored knowledge [...]’.²⁷⁸ If he is right, then that is to say, in the case of the radio example, that though the incoming information is fuzzy, the familiarised listener will be able to efficiently extract the signal (the song) from the noise (the static) because she is able to assign high reliability to the predictive top-down stream. In the same way, when driving along the familiar stretch of road in heavy fog, we are still able to cope with the task because we are able to ‘let detailed top-down knowledge play a substantial role’.²⁷⁹ It is our rolling predictions, based on previous familiarity with a scene or object, that do most of the work in such situations, enabling us (usually) to become, highly skilled at navigating, interpreting, and interacting with our familiar environments. The listener,

²⁷⁶ See Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. 57.

²⁷⁷ Whether Brecht’s observation – made in a *Nachtrag* to the essay itself – is made with a view to a particular example is not clear. It is, in any case, worth noting that very few examples of “good” poetry come to mind which really are so regular as to lull readers into inattentiveness.

²⁷⁸ Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. 6.

²⁷⁹ Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. 57.

according to this view, does not simply feel as if she has heard the song clearly in retrospect. Rather, she has simply heard it, because her perceptual experience is made up from both the “bottom-up” signal and the “top-down” priors that were already there.

If there is something to this strand of theorizing, it spells good and bad news for Brecht’s project. After all, it is a project that invests in hands-on, world-engaging perceivers, who bring themselves, their bodies, and the full range of cognitive and linguistic capacities to the task of taking reality in hand. And, as we have established, Brecht is hardly one to pass by such means and methods as are available to serve this purpose. But essentially, while familiarity allows the reader (and perceivers more generally) to deal confidently and efficiently with incoming information, it also may make her inattentive to what is actually occurring. She knows already what to expect, is certain of what it is she is reading, and can confidently make predictions about what will come next. ‘Das Bekannte überhaupt ist darum, weil es *bekannt* ist, nicht erkannt’,²⁸⁰ Brecht might well say with Hegel, whenever the predictive top-down stream does most of the work. Singling in on previously familiar aspects of a scene, or a line of poetry, or a musical sequence makes us miss, or “filter out”, or “throw away” as irrelevant, that which in fact might be crucial. For instance, perceptual (and, in the case of the radio, literal) noise is “thrown-out” from the main signal simply because, relying on the probabilistic model we have of the world, we, or rather, our predictive brain, judges them as not very probable: but what is the use of being able to hear the song more clearly, Brecht might ask in response to this particular example, when what really matters is attention to the fact that the radio is broken and in dire need of repair or replacement? Perceivers guided by strong prior knowledge become careless, their processing of information, their extraction of the signal becomes automated. There is little use, to Brecht, in perceptual experience when it acts only as a confirmation of what audiences already know or believe: “Aha, it’s that song again”, instead of “We must really do something about this radio!” Or indeed, as Brecht puts it when he describes the kind of response that theatre audiences ought to be discouraged from giving: ‘Ja, das habe ich auch schon gefühlt. – So bin ich. – Das ist natürlich.’ As alternatives, he offers, among others, expressions of surprise: ‘Das hätte ich nicht gedacht. – [...] – Das ist höchst auffällig, fast nicht zu glauben’ (BFA, 22, 110).

²⁸⁰ Hegel, p. 28.

4.3 Surprise and Attention

A common denominator between all the various accounts of what *Verfremdung* is and how it manifests in Brecht's practice is this kind of investment in critical reflection beyond the status quo. Another is the theme of contrast and juxtaposition as motors for such critique: instances of historicization, as we have seen, pit the alien or the different against the current and familiar, so that what seems mundanely true or even natural is revealed as merely a function of the society of a particular time and place. The 'not-but' acting method contrasts one possible behaviour with another, to highlight the causal impact on the world of human action or inaction. Contrasts may be deliberately retained between actor and figure, or between stage apparatus and set. In many poems, Brecht sets poetic traditions to work by contradicting them. In others, he contrasts the peaceful or idyllic with the horrible and violent, the determined with the melancholic, hope with dejection. Here Brady rightly identifies the purpose to be in engaging the reader's own critical thinking, in a kind of "Besonders-Machen" or even 'Schock', albeit in the greater service of producing 'Überlegung' or 'Einsicht'.²⁸¹ Chapters Two and Three of this study have also already explored contrast as a motor of the kind of critical attitude that Brecht demands, and preceding it, some kind of shock or surprise: in order for one thing to become salient, to stand out, to be noticed by us, to illicit a more pronounced response from readers or audiences, to shake us out of a lull, we need to be able to compare it to something else. In order to feel surprise, we must have had one expectation or another to the contrary of what turns out to be.

This emphasis across different accounts of *Verfremdung* on critical reflection and insight as a central purpose shows how essential this aspect is to our understanding of the principle, and it is partly for this reason also, that we tend to situate Brecht's approach to this matter quite apart from various other thinkers and artists (of whom there are hardly few) who also entertain a degree of worry about the great, and, indeed, overpowering influence of familiarity, and the highly efficient mechanisms on our encounter with the world. In fact, art and philosophy before and after Brecht (and both in- and outside Brecht's theoretical frame of reference) have often posited habitual day-to-day perception as standing in the way of truth, objectivity or authenticity, with the pervasive notion of poetic or critical insight as something that is achieved by a kind of

²⁸¹ Brady, p. 158.

side-tracking or leveraging out of such mechanisms. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially given the fresh interest at the time in subjectivity and phenomenological introspection, marks a phase particularly rife with such ideas: John Ruskin's notion of children's "innocence of the eye" idolizes a kind of attentive, painterly vision that is 'untainted by academic or romantic fancies',²⁸² and *Reformpädagogik* more widely looked to a kind of 'Eliminierung von angelernten Vorstellungen und in einer Wiedergewinnung der ursprünglichen, unmittelbaren Wirklichkeitsauffassung [...]'.²⁸³ Rilke's project in the *Neue Gedichte* might be thought of as wanting 'to see the world without preconceptions, to see it afresh and then to recreate it in poetry which would help us appreciate its elemental beauty [...]',²⁸⁴ in the same way that we might think of, for instance, Cézanne's painting of the *Five Apples* as showing us 'how to look at apples as if for the first time'.²⁸⁵ With Shklovsky's *ostranenie*, formulated as an artistic principle some two decades before Brecht's theorising took shape, art is marked with the purpose to obstruct, or dissect, everyday perceptual processes, by which, supposedly, we stop properly noticing or fully appreciating objects and states that are already familiar; making salient again what we take as given, what we are used to. But, while Stanley Mitchell at least posits a terminological and conceptual similarity between *ostranenie* and *Verfremdung*,²⁸⁶

²⁸² Anne Gully and Anthony Gully, 'John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye', *The Historian*, 55.2 (1992), 253–76 (p. 253).

²⁸³ Steffen Arndal, 'Sehenlernen und Pseudoskopie: Zur visuellen Verarbeitung des Pariserlebnisses in R. M. Rilkes Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge', *Orbis Litterarum*, 62 (2007), 210–29 (p. 213).

²⁸⁴ Roy Woods, 'Some Aspects of Seeing in Rilke's Poetry', *Trivium*, 8 (1983), 95–108 (p. 96).

²⁸⁵ *Moi*, p. 25.

²⁸⁶ Despite the fact that Brecht used *Ent- and Verfremdung* prior to his 1935 journey to Moscow that is thought to mark his encounter with Russian formalist thinking (see Knopf, 'Verfremdung', p. 97), both Shklovsky's *ostranenie* and Brecht's *Verfremdung* are often understood to essentially describe a kind of 'making the familiar strange', and Stanley Mitchell argues convincingly that this translational relationship 'cannot be *pure* accident, for the term has similarities of implication. In both theories the (proper) role of art is seen as one of de-routinisation, de-automatisation: art is the enemy of habit; it

Shklovsky's, too, was 'a purely aesthetic concept'²⁸⁷ and not aimed ultimately at critical reflection and insight as Brecht's was. Brecht, it seems clear, was not particularly concerned with pure and authentic aesthetic experience and would have positively objected to phenomenological introspection or an aloof painterly or lyrical gaze at the world in pursuit of a fresh naivety or innocence or a disengagement from the day-to-day. In place of gazing, he demands critical engagement and action; instead of a pursuit of some mythical truth or other, a pragmatic attitude towards a world that can be brought into view. Indeed, pointing out the difference between the two thinkers, Anya Feddersen writes in the *Brecht-Lexikon*'s entry on the *Verfremdungseffekt* that what sets Shklovsky apart from Brecht is his different set of priorities: 'die Kunst soll nicht zu distanzierterem Denken, sondern zu einem neuen Erleben der Dinge anregen'.²⁸⁸

But to the backdrop of what we have seen so far, there is also a note of caution to be sounded about this distinction between Shklovsky and Brecht as interested in a refreshed experience and in critical reflection respectively. We must consider carefully if we can also automatically assume of Brecht that his investment in critical reflection first and foremost also precludes a stake in experience; if not surprises, shocks, and sensations of sudden clarity or salience (or, indeed, V-effects) are also experiences in the first instance. In fact, Brecht's examples of what constitutes a V-effect are quite diverse, as becomes clearer if we take a broader view of how Brecht discusses the principle. While Brecht's key theorizing of *Verfremdung* and many of the devices most closely associated with it (such as breaking the fourth wall, not-but acting techniques, historicization) hail largely from Brecht's stage work and his written reflections on the theatre, the underlying principle need not be limited to that. In fact, all kinds of other artistic devices, in Brecht's oeuvre and elsewhere, can also be understood as instances of *Verfremdung*. Brecht himself applies it – somewhat anachronistically – to paintings by Bruegel the Elder. He famously draws examples of Chinese acting techniques (BFA 22, 201), of clowns and pantomimes during funfairs (BFA 22, 200), and even of

renews, refreshes our perceptions; by "making-strange", it defamiliarises', Stanley Mitchell, 'From Shklovsky to Brecht: Some Preliminary Remarks towards a History of the Politicisation of Russian Formalism', *Screen*, 15.2 (1974), 74–81 (p. 74).

²⁸⁷ Mitchell, p. 74.

²⁸⁸ Anya Feddersen, 'Verfremdungseffekt, V-Effekt', *Brecht Lexikon*, 2006, pp. 253–54 (p. 254).

accidental V-effects ‘auf dem alten Theater’ (BFA 22, 214-15) and ‘im älteren Theater’ (BFA 22, 215-16), such as when an attempted illusion goes wrong or its realisation is technically inadequate. *Verfremdungseffekte* seem to manifest in all of these cases as particularly salient experiences: the amused delight felt on discerning the Christian monks strolling in amongst the crowd witnessing Christ’s crucifixion in Bruegel the Elder’s *Procession to Calvary*, the baffled surprise at an actor tearing their costume or a piece of set falling apart mid-performance, or, expanding the examples to poetry, the contradictory feeling of peaceful surroundings with the world in chaos beyond them, and the jarring effect of stumbling over a crooked metre in a line of verse. While such experiences are usually remarkable, they are by no means out of the ordinary: Clark describes, for instance:

the perceptual strangeness of unexpected sensations (as when we take a sip of tea under the strong expectation of coffee) or the remarkable salience of omissions (as when the note that is suddenly absent from a well-predicted musical sequence seems almost present in experience, before being replaced by a strong sense of a very specific absence).²⁸⁹

Even beyond devices and acts of *Verfremdung* in art, experiences of sudden understanding, realization, or insight, of noticing something or, to use the common turn of phrase, of seeing something in a new light, can helpfully be described as approximating what Brecht calls V-effects. Among the many snippets and notes Brecht compiled on *Verfremdung* in 1936-37 (most dealing with examples from the theatre) we find a short piece titled *Verfremdung des Autos*, curiously echoing Clark’s examples from everyday life:

Eine Verfremdung des Autos tritt ein, wenn wir, nachdem wir einen modernen Wagen gefahren haben, eines der alten T-Modelle Fords fahren. Wir begreifen plötzlich, was ein Explosionsmotor ist, wenn wir die Explosionen hören. Wir beginnen uns zu wundern, daß solch ein Gefährt, daß überhaupt ein Gefährt fahren kann, ohne von tierischer Kraft gezogen zu sein, kurz, wir begreifen das

²⁸⁹ Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. 3.

Auto, indem wir es als etwas Fremdes, Neues, als einen Erfolg der Konstruktion, insofern etwas Unnatürliches begreifen. (BFA 22, 220)

Being used to the quieter modern cars (to Brecht, a known car-enthusiast, the example seems close to home), the experience of driving the older model manifests first as unexpected sound. It's not that the "modern" cars of Brecht's time were particularly noiseless, of course. They too would emit enough sound to indicate the workings of their motor, to flag up the technological feat of the internal combustion engine. But being used to, being familiar with those sounds, perceivers tend to cease to notice them. In cognitive-psychological terms, we suppress them as a repeated stimulus, as "noise", not signal, also in that sense. But a change in stimulus directs our attention to it: 'wir begreifen plötzlich, was ein Explosionsmotor *ist*'. The example may seem trivial, but it brilliantly illustrates a key Brechtian principle: that sometimes, what it takes to focus attention, to spark a thought, to make us switch off our perceptual autopilot, is a bang; a change in the incoming flow of information that shows up in conscious perceptual experience as a surprise, a shock, or another kind of unexpected sensation. Such sensations of surprise or shock which draw the reader's attention sharply to both what she had been expecting and that it has not transpired, and to whatever has; making her cautious and more attentive along the way.

It is not without good reason that we should be sensible to this idea that, on some level, V-effects manifest as perceptual and near-perceptual experiences, for such experiences, brought about by the mechanisms that serve active and habitual perceivers in day-to-day life as well, are not somehow impoverished per se. In this way, framing Brecht's concern about perception as too efficient, rather than impotent, puts us at an advantage for thinking about the artistic innovations and strategies that emerge from it. Unlike the "problem of visibility" that seems ultimately insoluble, that always seems to call for a kind of side-stepping or moving beyond ordinary perceptual experience, familiarity is a symptom of a perceptual apparatus that is not just highly efficient, but flexible and adaptable, too. Think about it: I can look at my cluttered desk with the explicit goal of spotting my keys, but I have indeterminately many other options. I can take stock of my various possessions, or rearrange them. I can suddenly notice a handwritten note that I wrote months ago. I can reflect on the design of a particular book-cover or pay attention to the feel of its paper. If I train my attention towards it, I am very much able to hear the static noise emitting from the broken radio. While, in

particular contexts, all kinds of things drop off the edge of perceptual awareness, they can become salient in others. What gets “thrown out” in one instance, can be recovered elsewhere. *Within* the scope of human experience, all this is perfectly possible. While attention is limited and directed, we can shift it and train it. Perceivers are able, in many different ways, to manipulate their perceptual processing, to switch off the auto-pilot, to tread carefully and attentively. Just as we are not confined to the world that is currently in view, we are not slaves to the mechanisms that constantly construct this perspective. In other words, contrasts need not be served up to readers and audiences on a silver platter; though this certainly works, too, they do not need to be spelt out visibly in an actor’s performance, or by means of set design or costume, or any range of other stage devices. When we pay attention to them, instances of perceptual strangeness, of sudden surprise, of one thing but not another, of unexpected occurrences or omissions, already characterise everyday experience, and they can productively be tapped to put perceivers on their guard. Or to put it the other way round: experiences of contrast (the sensation of a defied expectation, dealing with an unfamiliar scenario, the uncertainty in a non-predictable situation, as when the actor briefly gestures towards what the figure on stage is *not* doing) are the products of the same, ordinary mechanisms that also produce the seemingly crystal clear, stable “images” of the world that we sometimes experience.

So, while Brecht supplies contrasts and contradictions on his stage and in his poetry, we ought also to consider what precedes the instances of critical reflection they are intended to prompt: at their source, underlying the conscious recognition of two contrasting alternatives, of two sets of possible realities beyond the familiar one we already inhabit, perception is hard at work. Being confronted with ‘das Fremde und das Andere’,²⁹⁰ the alien, unfamiliar, or the other which Brecht deploys in his work, perceivers do not suspend any of the usual mechanisms that put them in touch with the world, but they tread more carefully: where “attention” is already a term we might use to describe what Brecht is after, it is also, in the context of the Predictive Processing framework, particularly apt: by attention, proponents of this view mean the subtle (sub-personal or sub-conscious) adjustment of the precision (or reliability) assigned to the “top-down” stream of predications and the “bottom”-up incoming signal, described by

²⁹⁰ Florian Vaßen, “‘Jeder sollte sich von sich selbst entfernen’: Fremdheit und Verfremdung bei Bertolt Brecht’, in *The B-Effect : Influences of/on Brecht*, ed. by Friedemann J. Weidauer (Madison, 2012), pp. 188–213 (p. 190).

Clark as the ‘Delicate Dance between Top-Down and Bottom-Up’.²⁹¹ We pay attention, in simpler terms again, to the incoming sensory information in an unfamiliar environment or before an unfamiliar sequence of events, because the “top-down” stream is judged not precise or reliable enough to do much of the work already. By setting events in another era, or in the artificial movement of the performer, which clearly mark the events portrayed as something outside of or beyond the reality that normally shows up in experience, or confronted with the (at least partially) unfamiliar setting of different times and places, audiences, we might say, do not fall into their usual perceptual habits. Like driving on an unknown stretch of road, they are not guided by much in terms of prior knowledge or expectation: what is said and done on stage becomes especially salient, because the viewers’ attention is firmly trained towards it. Likewise, in the case of not-but acting, it is worth noticing the moment that precedes the instance of critical reflection on what the figure has and has not done: it is a sense of uncertainty about what it is we are being shown, the expectation built up by the brief suggestion in the actor’s movement of existing to the right, the salience, then, of her not doing so, but existing in the other direction. This is crucial. While instances of *Verfremdung* correlate in many cases with works that do not resemble the world that shows up for ordinary perceivers in experience, and while it can manifest as a disruption of perceptual habit, it sets into motion what can be described as an adjustment, or a manipulation of the precision the perceiver assigns to her own prior expectations, conscious or otherwise. In the brief surprise over, or the sudden salience of, the actor’s behaviour on stage is preserved what would otherwise have been “thrown out”: rather than it simply being the case that she has exited to the left, we now have conscious access to the fact that we briefly entertained that possibility, perhaps even that we expected it or thought it was likely for it to be the case that she would do otherwise. This is the source and the beginning of critical reflection. On one hand, then, it makes sense to think of *Verfremdung* as a kind of “making difficult” of perception, but precisely in this way it engages perception, prompts it, trains it.

²⁹¹ Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. 57.

4.4 (T)reading Carefully

Finally, if we think of V-effects as shocks and surprises on one level, and as brief errors on another, we are well-placed to understand them as effects that do not simply “happen to us”; that they are not only instigated by the devices of a Brechtian theatre maker or poet, but that, we, readers, audiences, day-to-day perceivers, have a hand in the processes by which they arise. That is to say, while the shocks and surprises in Brecht’s work are meant, perhaps, to momentarily thwart habitual perceivers, it is their habit and skill that brings about shock and surprise in the first place. Only because we have been expecting something, only because we are active (and possibly predictive) perceivers do these errors occur in the first place. Again, this point has been somewhat anticipated in the context of Brecht’s poetry, where David Constantine makes the case that familiarity (and, we might add, the resulting perceptual habit) are not necessarily something that Brecht seeks to overcome, but to harness. Writing about Brecht’s various sonnets, he reminds us that the poet

needed things to contradict. Dozens of poetic forms and traditions served him in that way. But contradiction does not necessarily annihilate the thing it contradicts. The contradiction I have in mind (Brecht's sort, I think) draws its lifeblood out of the continuing life of what it contradicts.²⁹²

Clark’s example from music, in particular, resonates strongly with effects sometimes described in poetry: a musical sequence might be well-predicted due to certain familiar patterns, rhythms and motifs in the same way that rhyme, metre, or even tones or registers might give the reader certain expectations about a line in a poem. An omission (of a note from a familiar melody) is not just salient in the sense data that spells out its absence but it becomes present to us in the experience of “almost hearing” the omitted note before sensory feedback from the world contradicts that. Speaking about Brecht’s work, but also poetry more generally, Hutchinson points out that ‘[i]n much verse, what is suggested, or half-said, or obviously omitted, may be just as significant as what is actually stated’,²⁹³ and what he means is especially clear to the backdrop of the

²⁹² Constantine, p. 157.

²⁹³ Hutchinson, p. 33.

phenomena Clark describes. The experience of reading poetry is not (or not only) facilitated by ‘perception, processing, and comprehension of words on the page’,²⁹⁴ but somehow involves something that is supplied by the reader herself, drawn from her knowledge about the world, and about, if you will, “what poems of this kind are usually like”, “how sentences like that usually run” and so on. It is in the interplay between this and the real perceptual feedback from the text that productive responses arise: an extra foot or two, a missing or jarred rhyme, or a sudden tonal or thematic shift might draw our attention to the fact that we have been expecting something else precisely because of a familiarity with the tradition of a particular poetic form. The contrast between the poem and what we might have been led to expect, further, brings out and underpins what is new, or different, in the poem, prompting the reader to reflect on why this particular violation of the familiar format, of the regularity within one poem, or of a particular poetic tradition, has taken place: Why this?

And preceding this question is always a concrete experience, something that is in fact difficult to put precisely into words: the sensation of tasting tea under the strong expectation of coffee is a ‘peculiar’ one that might only clumsily be expressed in the exclamation: “Gee, I sure thought this was coffee, but it actually is tea.” We do not simply taste tea – as it usually tastes – but the sensation, if only for a moment, is something else. The contrast is salient not propositionally, not in terms of explicit “expectation” and “reality”, but manifests very concretely in perceptual experience itself. Brecht’s car example is like this, too. While we might well go on to harness the initial sensation of driving the old model into some more explicit critique about how a modern technological society begins to take such things increasingly for granted (and so on), the crucial underpinning of this critical stance, in this case, is a very ordinary perceptual experience that is rather harder to put into explicit terms. This is crucial, because it demonstrates that V-devices do not necessarily achieve a disruption of the perceptual mechanisms that are usually at play; that its purpose is not to set “gawpers” to work, to shake naïve everyday perceivers out of their familiar lull. To understand how we come to be surprised, or shocked, and, thus, attentive and careful, we must recognize that perceivers – everyday perceivers, that is – are already hard at work, and that day-to-day experiences, as well as all manner of errors, oddities, and shocks are achieved by them.

²⁹⁴ Troscianko, *Kafka’s Cognitive Realism*, p. 39.

Consider this example, where Brecht opens a relatively short poem with a metrical and syntactical imitation of the very familiar (in a German context) lullaby *Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf*:

Flieg, Bomber, flieg!
General Göring rüstet zum Krieg.
Im Schrank ist kein Brot. Mutter
Schau hinauf, dort fliegt unsere Butter!

(BFA 14, 311)

It is not, perhaps, Brecht's wittiest work, with the punchline relying entirely on the "Butter oder Kanonen" question asked by Goebbels in his famous speech at the *Sportpalast*. But there is something arresting to these lines, as the well-known metre deteriorates over their course. This is, first of all, because the effect is very gradual: the first line, fitting exactly with the children's song, is followed by a departure from the original meter in the second (the original line is "Der Vater hüt't die Schaf"). But the infraction may still be familiar to some readers or listeners: the beginning of the second line is often sung to German children with some other name or title inserted in place of "Der Vater", or some other activity besides the tending of sheep, which, similarly to 'General Göring' and his war machinery, may need to be forced into the line with too many syllables. The poem is, on one hand, an occasion to reflect critically not just about the war, but also the travesty of the kind of peaceful innocence evoked by the original song, as well as the song format itself. But once again, such reflection is underpinned by the strong pull of familiarity: a curious sensation that even by the second line (with all the force of its semantic import) a reader might not quite be able to shake. The departure from the established metre, and the odd punctuation in line 3 are the more jerky because we may still be trying to fit them into the song (a song, Clark might say, that we can "almost hear", and a metre that can be felt and asserts itself as we read on).

In the *Hauspostille* (the collection already being a textbook example of the younger poet's taste for scorn in its mock-religious titles, its *Lektionen*, *Bittgänge* and so forth) Brecht also takes on the well-known German classic, Goethe's *Wanderers Nachtlied II*:

Über allen Gipfeln
Ist Ruh,
In allen Wipfeln
Spürest du
Kaum einen Hauch;
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.
Warte nur, balde
Ruhest du auch.²⁹⁵

What could be thought of as a canonical celebration of ‘peace, smoothness and harmony’²⁹⁶ in its original form reads rather differently in Brecht’s *Liturgie vom Hauch*. The majority of its seven stanzas tell in harsh, even crude language – pressed as though clumsily into sickeningly whimsical verse – of starvation, police violence, and cold social indifference. After all but the final stanza, the imagined liturgical choir intones slightly different variations of Goethe’s poem, the first one reading:

*Darauf schwiegen die Vögelein im Walde
Über allen Wipfeln ist Ruh
In allen Gipfeln spürest du
Kaum einen Hauch.*

(BFA 11, 50)

Hutchinson describes ‘the antithesis of stanza and refrain, Brecht and Goethe, reality and false idyll, but also horror and complicity, politics and “poetry”’,²⁹⁷ and this fits in, in principle, with our previous observations: once again, it is stark contrasts that make for a rather drastic effect here. The quiet harmony in the composition of the original, but certainly everything we associate with Goethe’s poem and its cultural context, is almost unsettling in the company of Brecht’s jerky handling of metre and rhythm, which, in

²⁹⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke, Vol. 1*, ed. by Erich Trunz (München, 1998), p. 142.

²⁹⁶ Hutchinson, p. 38.

²⁹⁷ Hutchinson, p. 38.

turn, clashes with the brutal themes of each stanza.²⁹⁸ For instance, look at how the particularly rugged fourth line first stands out, metrically, and in its line ending, from the rest, only for it to be picked up, via slant rhyme, by the first line of the refrain:

1
Einst kam ein altes Weib einher

2
Die hatte kein Brot zum Essen mehr

3
Das Brot, das fraß das Militär

4
Da fiel sie in die Goss, die war kalte

5
Da hatte sie keinen Hunger mehr.

6
Darauf schwiegen die Vöglein im Walde

[...]

(BFA 11, 49-50)

But as Constantine points out, though the original and all we associate with it is being scorned and unsettled, it also makes its own contribution to the effectiveness of Brecht's poem. We may go further than that, too, and say that it is the reader's familiarity with Goethe's text that profoundly influences how we read and experience it. Where the first line of Brecht's refrain about 'die Vöglein im Walde' may already ring a bell for most readers, the second (even though Brecht has exchanged 'Gipfeln' for 'Wipfeln') immediately puts Goethe's poem into our heads and with it, a clear sense of where the rest of the refrain is going to take us. This is new: previously in the poem, readers are almost kept on their tiptoes about what new crudities of both language and theme are in

²⁹⁸ This is not to say, incidentally, that Goethe's poem is not also itself unsettling in certain ways: 'there is potentially a presentiment of death in these lines, and the rhyme falls briefly out of its scheme as we are made to wait – literally with baited breath (Hauch!) – for it to resolve.' I am grateful to Charlotte Lee for her observation and for supplying this formulation.

store in the next of each of the individually numbered lines. The refrain not only contrasts with the stanza in its formal harmony and evocation of peacefulness, but also in the fact that suddenly, we know (or think we know) what to expect next. Pressing Goethe's five lines into three, Brecht not only 'forces the pace [...], suggesting the impatience of the poet with the silence there',²⁹⁹ but also brings to mind the image of a rather sullen, impatient, and fast-paced recital of just another old classic text, as though this really *is* Goethe's poem called upon for just another occasion it cannot do justice to. Feeling that we know these lines, we may be tempted at first to also read them faster or less attentively, as though we are ourselves just reciting some altogether meaningless and well-memorised liturgical response.

Not that Brecht is letting us get away with it. Hutchinson points out the switching of 'Wipfeln' and 'Gipfeln' as 'another indication of Brecht's scorn for the original'³⁰⁰ (which is easy to imagine as true), but, more importantly, the small, barely noticeable detail also introduces renewed doubt into our expectations. We hesitate, perhaps become slower readers again, swaying between certainty and uncertainty about our expectations, between the familiar and the unfamiliar, each as unsettling as the other. The poem, in other words, forces us to change and reassess how we read it. It makes use of and plays with our expectations, but it also prompts us to constantly scrutinise them, to tread carefully. The refrain not only differs in some significant details from Goethe's original but keeps subtly changing throughout. Sometimes the first line changes to fit in with the narrative of the previous stanza ('So sagte das alte Weib nichts mehr / [...] / *Auch die Vöglein schwiegen im Walde*', BFA 11, 50). In its fourth iteration, it is even rendered as the policeman's exclamation after beating a man to death ('*So! jetzt schweigen die Vögelein im Walde*', BFA 11, 51), defying the established rhythm not only by adding a colloquial "So!" but also in the bizarre return, in the context of this quoted bit of speech from the policeman, from 'Vöglein' in the previous refrains to Goethe's more poetic 'Vögelein'.

The fact that Brecht's refrain approximates a text many readers will be familiar with, and the way this influences how we read and what we come to expect, is a key tool of *Verfremdung* in this poem, and evidence of use of that tool is found all across Brecht's poetic oeuvre. The examples from the *Hauspostille* (and certainly other poems

²⁹⁹ Hutchinson, p. 39.

³⁰⁰ Hutchinson, p. 39.

elsewhere in the oeuvre, too) perhaps stand out somewhat from the family of poems that we have so far been considering: poems affectionate towards and attentive to nature and ordinary life, to relatable, or at least recognizable sensations, experiences, and to the kinds of world-engaging activities we all get up to. But their effect is, partly, an effect resulting from those perceptual mechanisms that serve us in day-to-day circumstances as well. Just as *Verfremdung* is not, according to Brecht's own cautioning, geared towards the entirely alien or strange (BFA 22, 121), its English translation to "defamiliarization" does not need to imply an outright rejection of the familiar. Rather there is a delicate back and forth (or to borrow Clark's expression, a "delicate dance") between elements we (think we) recognize and ones that come unexpected, expectations that are doubly defied (just when we had adjusted them), then suddenly met. An uncertainty about our own expectations, or perhaps our reading strategy, is always at hand to throw us off, make us pause, prompt us to think. And we are also right on the track of *Verfremdung* at work in the poems discussed elsewhere in this study if we ask when and how it occurs that, reading them, we change tack, switch of the perceptual auto-pilot, and tread, or indeed, read carefully.

Widening the perspective again onto some of the poems we have already discussed, and recalling traces of *Verfremdung* in them that have already been teased out in earlier commentaries, we discover shock and surprise at work there, too: not just at the level of metre, rhythm, or rhyme or in contrast to poetic tradition do these poems raise and disappoint expectations and generate a kind of uncertainty that can phase into keen attention: consider syntactical inversions, or unusual word choices, in poems that purport to be quoted ordinary speech. Think of the sudden hypothetical negation, a single dactylic foot, in the middle line of *Der Rauch*, which not only disrupts the idyllic scenery evoked previously on a semantic level but which marks a sharp metrical change almost like a record scratch. Think of the change of mood *and* of mode from spectating to listening hard into the silent evening in *Frühling 1938*, which radically interferes with the successive visual detail supplied by each of the previous seven lines. Even though it is one of the oldest tricks in the book, it must suffice here, by way of closing the chapter, to say that the list of examples could go endlessly on, partly because there are likely to be as many conceivable expectations to a vast range of backdrops, as many momentary errors and oddities and surprises, as there are minds of readers. Not every mind seems to work the same, for one. Not every reader, for another, reads Brecht with an extensive knowledge of the poetic traditions he emerged from and responded to, but,

on the other hand, the vast backdrop of all kinds of other cultural artefacts, experiences, and material circumstances that informs the way we read and the expectations and past experiences we bring to the task would be impossible to track and record. But, crucially, each error or oddity that any one of Brecht's readers might report, each moment of shock or surprise, each salient omission, or sudden bang, arises to the backdrop of what we know and to our perceptual (and more broadly cognitive) skillset: jarring word choices stand out to us because we are skilled users of language; metrical turns are felt because we have a bodily sense of rhythm, but also stand out because, as perceivers, we are adept at seeking and finding regular patterns. The more is understood about how readers (who are embodied, enactive perceivers as well) interact with a text and with the world more widely, the more such errors and oddities become apparent. Thus, in many ways, Brecht's poems (here underpinned by various insights from recent theorizing and research) hand us a key to reading them productively: in depicting acts of world-engagement in all their complexity, they direct our attention to such phenomena and by reminding us how error-prone, but also how flexible and adaptable perceiving is, they set us on a course to engage with the texts and with reality in an attentive, and hands-on, fashion.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Hands-On Realism

To talk about a hands-on Realism is to talk about a Realism that is pragmatic in attitude, that takes neither a cynical nor an overly optimistic attitude to the possibility of attaining and expressing truths. As a hands-on Realist, Brecht is not worried that we can never get at reality and truthfully represent it, but is acutely conscious of the work that must be put into this task. The world must laboriously be brought into view and we must rely on whatever is at our disposal to do so: our bodily and mental capacities, our language and all kinds of other tools. We have to eat the pudding, to look through the telescope, to turn on the radio and to listen out into the quiet spring morning over the Sound. We have to imagine the future and recall the past to really grasp the present as it continues to be constructed by us and those around us in a shared, knowable world. Speaking or writing, too, are realist actions which are not a matter for poets alone. It is attention to these acts of world-engagement that affords to many of Brecht's poems their forceful claim on Realism: Brecht shows us perceivers, imaginers, speakers in action and he shows what their labour achieves: not head-internal mirror images of the outside world, nor images painted in language, but rich and world-involving experiences for the speakers of the poems and the reader alike. On one hand, this warrants the label "realist" in almost a conventional sense, in that these poems constitute affecting and relatable portrayals of the experience of being in a complicated, many-layered, and extensive world: they draw attention to the fact that real-life experience is precisely not the stable, coherent, and determinate image given to us in the fiction of pictorialism, but characterized by all manner of oddities, surprises, poverties and inconsistencies. What's more, they harness experiences of this kind, prying open cracks and rough spots to prompt critical reflection on the world that shows up. And this goes for both the fictional experiences evoked in the poems (those that are afforded to readers in their own acts of "imagining spectating", "imagining imagining" and so on) and readers' own, real-life experiences in their encounter with the texts: here, too, surprises (or, indeed, V-effects) await as the expectations of skilled but error-prone perceivers are primed and defied in a complex interplay of familiarity, regularity, divergence, and variance. That is to say, the critical potential of these poems does not unfold if, as readers, we assume some kind of special Brechtian mode of reading that

leaves ordinary perceptual processes behind. Indeed, *because* we (at least implicitly) read them much like other literary texts, because we rely on much the same skills with and attunement to language reading poetry as we do in other contexts, and because we bring our bodies and minds, our prior knowledge and expectations, to the task, these poems work in the way they do: they make us stumble, or pause, or tread carefully in a more targeted and deliberate fashion, but to the backdrop of the same mechanisms that put us in touch with the world at every other moment. Or in other words: Brecht's Realism is less a matter of creating hands-on readers from passive "gawpers", but in making use of the hands-on nature of perception that is already in place.

2. Poetry in the World

Having established by what might be meant by the term hands-on Realism, let us also briefly return to the formulation from which its tangibility metaphor is borrowed, in with which Brecht once set out his realist project: 'den Menschen die Realität meisterbar in die Hand zu geben' (BFA 22, 408). As we have seen throughout, the remark implies that Brecht's purpose is not exhausted *only* in fostering critical reflection, but ultimately also aims toward tangible action in and impact on the world beyond the stage or page. The question of this impact remains very much open and there are, undoubtedly, rather sombre answers that suggest themselves. Are we perhaps ultimately forced to conclude, in the words of American poet Jane Hirshfield, that '[a] lyric poem does not solve any outward dilemma; few answer any practical question, none refastens a single shingle to a house. As Auden wrote in his elegy for Yeats, "poetry makes nothing happen"?'³⁰¹ But here let us recall Kuhn's assessment of Brecht's poetry, which he writes 'can be treated as a very tangible, earthly, concrete legacy. It is now up to us to work out what we want to do with them.'³⁰² The question "What can we do with a poem?" in place of the question "What does it do?" is rather more productive, and there are also some very obvious answers of course: we might read them, teach them in schools, or turn them into songs or murals. We might tease out from them poetological or theoretical imports, or, as this study has done, discern from

³⁰¹ Jane Hirshfield, 'Poetry and Uncertainty', *The American Poetry Review*, 34.6 (2005), 63–72 (p. 64).

³⁰² Kuhn, 'Introduction', p. 11.

them a particular pragmatic attitude. They can be translated, and might, in translation or their original, and in one way or another, inform the work of successive generations of poets.³⁰³ Brecht was very alive to this latter “use” in particular, on numerous occasions reflecting on his own continued relevance, the endurance of his name and his legacy, and leading Werner Frick to situate Brecht and his poetry firmly in a Dead Poets Society of sorts:

Autoren der Überlieferung sprechen bzw. schreiben aus ihren vergangenen Gegenwart in den Zukunftshorizont einer Nachwelt hinein, von der sie für ihre Werke Dauer, Erinnerung, bleibende Geltung einfordern [...]. Umgekehrt finden Autoren späterer Generationen, ‘Nachgeborene’ im Brechtschen Sinn, immer schon ein Inventar von Werken und Gattungen, Formen und Stilen vor, ein traditionelles Repertorium, zu dem sie sich verhalten und gegen das sie sich behaupten müssen [...].³⁰⁴

In addition, the variety of potential real-world uses of Brecht’s work also goes beyond the nexus of scholarship and art: around the time of Germany’s reunification various writers and artists, politicians and trade unionists spoke in favour of adopting the *Kinderhymne* as Germany’s new national anthem, a proposal that has since been emphatically reiterated by Erdmut Wizisla,³⁰⁵ and brought once more onto the political stage when *Berliner Ensemble* and *Tatort* actor Peter Sodann stood as the Die Linke’s presidential nominee in 2009.³⁰⁶ Brecht himself of course conceived of another practical use of his work, when, in exile, he wrote poems conceived specifically for radio

³⁰³ See Kuhn, ‘Introduction’, p. 12.

³⁰⁴ Werner Frick, “...er hörte von dort Streit und Gelächter”: Der Lyriker Bertolt Brecht im “Club Der Toten Dichter”, in *Brechts Lyrik. Neue Deutungen*, ed. by Helmut Koopmann (Würzburg, 1999), pp. 75–100 (p. 79).

³⁰⁵ See Erdmut Wizisla, “‘May It Seem to Us Our Dearest...’: Brecht’s “Children’s Anthem””, in *Empedocles’ Shoe: Essays on Brecht’s Poetry*, ed. by Tom Kuhn and Karen J. Leeder (London, 2002), pp. 207–20 (pp. 218–20).

³⁰⁶ ‘Brecht als Hymne’, *TAZ*, 16 October 2008.

broadcast into Germany,³⁰⁷ or contributed to various pamphlets that were equally to make their way into the hands of Germans living under the Nazi Regime.³⁰⁸

With this study, a further answer to the question of use (of tangible, earthly, concrete use) has been given: poems, particularly by themselves, do not fasten any shingles to any houses, nor do they teach, build community gardens, staff soup kitchens, organise in unions, or protest social injustice. Humans do these things. And in all of these activities humans are served not just by their bodies and, as part of that, their remarkable brains, but also, among other tools and artefacts, by language. In language we communicate and organise, teach and generate new knowledge. Beyond that, in its various supra-communicative functions, language is not, for instance, an optional add-on to perceptual processes, but crucially scaffolds them: like so many other tools and capacities that are, according to the enactivist and extended view, deeply involved in and co-constitutive of perceptual experience, language shapes and calibrates it. Where the world shows up first as an indeterminate “‘blur” of possibilities’,³⁰⁹ our actions towards it, including acts of speech, serve to disambiguate distinct objects. If language aids us in accessing and in successfully navigating the world, helps us grasp, understand, pick apart, analyse, and effect change in the world in which we find ourselves, and if poems, too, are linguistic artefacts and even, on one level of description, utterances made by someone at some point, then poems can assume such a role as well. When the philosopher of language J.L. Austin says of ordinary language, of what he calls ‘our common stock of words’, that it ‘embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connexions they have found worth making, in the lifetimes of many generations’ (implying in his context that these distinctions and connections are likely to be ‘more numerous, more sound, [...] and more subtle’ than what philosophers could ‘think up in our armchairs of an afternoon’³¹⁰), then we might say the same of “‘our stock of poems” which, in the lifetimes of many generations of poets and readers, have forged new distinctions and connections of their own. Writing

³⁰⁷ See also *Über Reimlose Lyrik mit unregelmäßigen Rhythmen* (BFA 22, 357-65), where Brecht reflects on formal considerations involved in writing for a radio format.

³⁰⁸ Kuhn, ‘Brecht als Lyriker. Einführung’, p. 10.

³⁰⁹ Clark, ‘Beyond the “Bayesian Blur”’, p. 74.

³¹⁰ John L. Austin, ‘A Plea for Excuses. The Presidential Address’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 57 (1957), 1–30 (p. 8).

and reading them, we create new objects and new knowledge. They have ripple effects in our minds and make changes to our cognitive array, and, by that route, they have ripple effects and make changes to the world in which we are agents.

3. Beyond Poetry

A question that has been left largely unaddressed in the main body of this study, meanwhile, is what we might do with the pragmatic (and more specifically with the 4E Cognition lens) with regard to Brecht's theatre. The stage work, and its various techniques and innovations have been mentioned, here and there, of course; particularly in context with the principle of *Verfremdung*, they have served as classic (that is, much-discussed and generally well-understood) examples. They have also, occasionally, served the present argument as handy *counter*-examples of sorts: in Brecht's theatre, and even more in his theorizing of it, which may not always fully square with its practical implementations, it is much easier to see why we might think of Brecht's strategy as going beyond the everyday and its appearance in ordinary perceptual experience. On the stage, contrasts, contradictions, and juxtapositions, which sit at the root of critical reflection, are supplied to the audience more readily (indeed, visibly) than the subtle, but powerful contrast outlined in Chapter Four between an engaged reader's own expectation and the real feedback from the text, which similarly opens up the space for asking: Why this? But there are promising lines of inquiry here: after all, theatre audiences are embodied and enactive (and possibly predictive) perceivers just as much as readers are, and beyond or prior to specific stage devices and acting techniques, a performance is likely to yield the same sorts of surprises and defied expectations, uncertainties, and perceptual oddities as a poem.

An interesting example for essentially a deliberate play with expectations is the technique of displaying a banner of sorts at the beginning of an act or a scene, which announces the course of events. Take the beginning of *Mutter Courage*, for instance, where the audience is informed of the following:

FRÜHJAHR 1624. DER FELDHAUPTMANN OXENSTJERNA WIRBT IN
DALARNE TRUPPEN FÜR DEN FELDZUG IN POLEN. DER
MARKETENDERIN ANNA FIERLING, BEKANNT UNTER DEM NAMEN
MUTTER COURAGE, KOMMT EIN SOHN ABHANDEN. (BFA 6, 9)

Barnett explains the effect of this kind of epic device beyond its very prominent function (to draw attention to the fact that one is viewing a performance, rather than real-life events): ‘if an epic banner tells us that Mother Courage is going to lose a child, we will not focus on the outcome of that scene (will she? won’t she?) but on the *way* she loses the child to the war.’³¹¹ With this he is right on track: if careful attention (and, by extension, critical reflection) can come about in situations that are judged unpredictable, it can also be guided in particular directions by introducing prior knowledge about other aspects of a scene. And there is also a large body of literature not covered here, which applies theories of embodiment and 4E Cognition more broadly to the question of how audiences of film or live performance perceive and understand the actions and intentions of performed characters.³¹² This, again, might make for some interesting discussions of Brecht’s stage, particularly with a view to the theory and the practice of gestic acting, of the incomplete transformation and the separation of elements and what those sorts of devices might concretely do, to whatever result, to the viewer’s ability to simulate and to process the actions and events thus shown.³¹³

4. Beyond Brecht

Two remaining questions take us beyond Brecht. For one, we might consider the viability of the concept of hands-on Realism in the context of other, more conventional realist practices, which is partly a question of whether we should blindly go along with

³¹¹ Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, pp. 72–73.

³¹² See, for instance, Maarten Coëgnarts, ‘Cinema and the Embodied Mind: Metaphor and Simulation in Understanding Meaning in Films’, *Palgrave Communications*, 3 (2017), for an account of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Embodied Simulation Theory.

³¹³ Roy Connolly and Richard Ralley, for instance, take a critical view of Brechtian theorizing of *Gestus* as ‘an over-conceptualisation of the human being’ which privileges representation over action, while contending that the practice is another matter entirely, and that ‘the pragmatic Brecht’ of the rehearsal room might very well, and indeed, much better, be viewed through an embodied and enactive lens, see Roy Connolly and Richard Ralley, ‘Brecht and the Disembodied Actor’, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 28.2 (2008), 91–110.

Brecht's (or even Brechtian in a more abstract sense) rather broad-sweeping critique of them. On the whole, we probably ought not to. As we have seen, for all he had to say about the potential pitfalls of photography, for example, Brecht also acknowledged various uses of the medium, and of course, did make use of it himself. When he rejected Mann or Balzac as possible examples for *the* defining realist method, he also pointed out that a fixed definitive definition of Realism is not to be found elsewhere. If we look specifically at what this study proposes – that Brecht's poetry challenges the fiction of pictorialism and shows us embodied and enactive perceivers, imaginers, and speakers in action, being thus attentive to and evocative of rich and complex experiences – this may very well be true of other literary texts, if to a broader range of different and often less explicitly political purposes. It is difficult, for instance, to come up with any, say, nineteenth-century German realist novel which appears fully and in an unreflected manner to operate within the framework of pictorialism, that is to say, which at no point yields more attentive and insightful descriptions of its characters' inner life or perceptual experience in relation to their bodies and the world as well. On a formal level, too, much can be learned about a realist novel's mode of operation by invoking the technique of raising and defying expectations, of surprising the reader, and making salient omissions, which call the imaginative reader herself to the (critical) task of supplying her own material.³¹⁴ In addition, we might well read other literary texts through a pragmatic lens: to be sure, Brecht's project and his concerns give us a particular reason to do so, given the stake he has in reaching out to the world, learning about and acting in it. But at the very least, this does not automatically preclude other productive readings in these terms: we can always think of fictions as utterances and as actions which leave their mark on the reader and her world, and add to the common stock of language and experience.

Finally, having explored what we can learn about Brecht's poetry as well as his critical and interventionist project more widely if we draw on cognitive-scientific insights about perception and action, we might now want to turn this question around. Still very much speaking to the theme of the use-value of Brecht's work, we might ask what psychologists or philosophers of mind, and what cognitive literary scholars in particular, might take away from *it*. As examples throughout were intended to show, the

³¹⁴ See Vera Tobin, 'Cognitive Bias and the Poetics of Surprise', *Language and Literature*, 18.2 (2009), 155–72.

study of perception, and more widely the study of mind and brain, offers fascinating (sometimes eye-opening, sometimes remarkably intuitive) insights about the mechanisms involved in, and the phenomena resulting from, being in the world. Highlighting, for instance, the indeterminacy of perceptual experience, and the tools and capacities by which we disambiguate it, break it down, and make it manageable, such research makes us alive to the kinds of perceptual tricks and errors that we have constantly to contend with. Especially if we look beyond the most prominent(-seeming) of senses, vision, and particularly beyond the pictorialist story of what “seeing” the world is like, we can uncover

a vast terrain thick with perceptual oddities and achievements, puzzles and insights ripe for harvest. Exploring it enriches how we understand what it is to be a perceiver, what it is to be perceived, and why perceiving matters.³¹⁵

This characterisation by Casey O’Callaghan ends this study on an important note – why perceiving matters – and it is this that Brecht, or his readers, might feed back into the conversation about minds and bodies, perceivers and agents. Perceiving matters, looking-not-gawping matters, paying attention and treading carefully matter, because the world is an intractably complicated place which, at every turn, depends on what we do in it. Brecht reminds us, in other words, that the question of ‘how creatures like us get to know the world and to act in it’,³¹⁶ is a political question not least, and while this need not come in the form of concrete political demands of researchers and theorists of perception and action, it is a reminder of what is at stake: to study the mind and the brain, perception and action is to provide answers (or at least clues) to how human beings work, how they relate to their environments and their fellow creatures, what we can, realistically, pragmatically expect from ourselves and others, as we work together, organize, and act in a shared world.

³¹⁵ Casey O’Callaghan, *Beyond Vision. Philosophical Essays* (Oxford, 2017), p. vii.

³¹⁶ Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty*, p. 1.

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