

Two Concepts of Society in Drama: Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* and Edward Bond's *Lear*

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Bertolt Brecht and Edward Bond, though of different generations, are two major representatives of a theater noted for its close relationship to modern society. Both playwrights are self-professed socialists and regard drama as a medium for expressing and communicating their political views. Brecht's Epic theatre is a rational form of theatre, aiming not at the emotional identification of a passive audience but at their critical awareness of what is happening on the stage and at their ability to transfer the fictitious reality of the play to the social reality of their everyday lives. Bond, too, conceives of his works as manifestations of a "rational theatre," confronting the spectators with analytical insights into modern society, and making them aware in which way they themselves are oppressed by and at the same time part of the alienating mechanisms of this society.¹ For both playwrights, then, the theatre is closely linked with a *pragmatic* intention: it becomes a means critically to investigate and, it is hoped, to change the dehumanizing structures of modern society.

There are also similarities between the two authors in the thematic and formal conception of their plays. For one thing, the plays of both Brecht and Bond are situated in a public or semi-public sphere, thus relating the private lives of individuals to the general life of society. Their concern is not primarily, as is the case with so much of modern drama, with problems of personal identity, of communication, of intimate human relationships but with socially and politically significant actions. Accordingly, there is a certain degree of impersonality to the characters, who frequently serve to illustrate various social roles and public interests, conveying, often in their sheer numbers, the impression of a mass society. Moreover, Brecht's and Bond's plays are similar in their loose, episodic structure, in the montage-like succession of short, often contrasting scenes, in the free use and juxtaposition of symbolic and naturalist elements – all of which reflect a conscious deviation on the part of both authors from the Aristotelian model of causality, coherence, and organic wholeness.

There is also a tendency in both playwrights to take up classical, historical, or mythological subjects and use them as ironic dramatic models for their anti-classical and demythologizing interpretation of the modern world (see, for example, Brecht's *St. Joan of the Stockyards*, *The Life of Galileo*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, or Bond's *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, *The Sea*, *Bingo*, *The Woman*, etc.). Equally, both authors show a preference for the political parable, with affinities to social allegory and to the didactic reduction and moral evaluation of their dramatic subject matter. And in some of his plays, Bond even explicitly employs techniques of Brecht's Epic theatre, such as in the figure of the Narrator in *The Passion*, or in the Japanese poet Basho in *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, who similarly acts as an epic narrator and opens the play by directly addressing the audience. Martin Esslin calls this work "a beautiful parable, very Brechtian in its exotic setting (as an *alienation effect*, to show familiar problems in an unexpected light) and in its moral didacticism."²

All of these parallels in dramatic intention and technique leave no doubt that Edward Bond, like many of his colleagues in Britain today, has in an important way been influenced by Brecht's modern theatre, which from the late 1950s, has significantly contributed to the renewal of the English stage. In recent years, Bond has defined his dramatic position in the tradition of Brecht's Epic theatre: "The forms of the new drama will be epic," he said in 1982, and emphasized that what he meant by that was not merely a "style" but a "philosophical undertaking."³ Epic drama to Bond, as to Brecht, is a philosophical form of drama, an artistic instrument for analyzing, from the viewpoint of a radical humanism, the objective state of a society, and it becomes a medium of historical truth by "deconstructing" the dominating myths and ideologies of that society.

Although the parallels are quite defined, however, it would be a gross misunderstanding to regard Bond as a mere imitator of Brecht on the British stage, and to reduce his work to not much more than a contemporary adaptation and actualization of Brecht's ideas. Bond himself has pointed out a significant difference: "Brecht wrote in the time of the 'masses.' I write in the time of the 'individuals.'"⁴ To Brecht, man is *homo sociologicus* who is entirely defined by his social conditions, and consequently, his characters are social types without a private, psychological side. To Bond, man is *homo duplex*, a being defined by both its social environment and its individual existence. Whereas Brecht rejected psychology and psychoanalysis as a form of individualistic escapism and as a mystification of the objective problems of capitalist society, Bond, like many of his contemporaries among British playwrights, examines the social phenomena and the conflicts dramatized in his plays in the light of their psychological consequences, and thus explores their implications for the life and consciousness of the individual.

This difference in dramatic focus is reflected in a different mode of

communication between stage and audience. Brecht's Epic Theatre is a form of meta-theatre, which always keeps the spectator aware of the fictitious character of the dramatic performance. His alienation-effect implies a certain relief, a sort of aesthetic distance for the spectator, suspending his psychological involvement in the action and placing him, as reflective-critical-observer, above the fictional world. Bond's theatre, on the other hand, though informed with the philosophy of epic drama, still relies on the immediate force of dramatic presentation. The most prominent feature of Bond's plays which sharply distinguishes him from Brecht is the conscious, even excessive use of violence as a kind of shock-therapy on the audience. In this, he is clearly indebted to Artaud's "theatre of cruelty" and, thus, to a theatre heavily drawing on psychological, emotional, and sensual effects, even if, unlike Artaud, Bond claims to employ these effects for his rational-political purposes. Bond's analysis of society, the ideological content of his plays, may be rational but his way of communicating this analysis to the audience is built on emotional shock, on unrelieved tension, on the nightmarish intensity of human suffering and aggression; i.e., on confronting the spectator with the full impact of the dramatic experience. Bond has called this the "aggro-effect" instead of Brecht's "alienation-effect."

It is a fundamental break with the Brechtian tradition of epic theatre, with which Bond's dramatic method has sometimes been compared. Like Brecht, Bond wants the audience to react analytically to the incidents he shows, but instead of seeking to distance the audience from the events by interrupting the action, Bond talks of the need to involve the audience by surprising and shocking them with images which are part of the continuing action: 'Alienation is vulnerable to the audience's decision about it. Sometimes it is necessary to emotionally commit the audience – which is why I have aggro-effects.'⁵

The comparative neatness and consistency of this statement tend to conceal somewhat the extreme underlying tension or even contradiction between the rational-ideological and the emotional-psychological levels of dramatic communication in Bond's plays. In modern drama Brecht and Artaud represent two opposing answers to the problem of alienation, the first stressing the need for rational explanation and political action, the second stressing the need to shock the audience out of the paralyzing rationalizations of a false, abstract consciousness. The first answer is of a social, the second of a psychological nature; the one aims at the conscious, the other at the subconscious reaction of the spectator; the one focusses on man as a political, the other as an individual being. In trying to combine these extreme positions of the modern theatre, Bond stands to gain dramatic power, but he also runs the risk of the two intentions undermining each other: that his emotional shocks are not political enough to have a rational effect, and that his political analysis is not rational enough to be really shocking. At any rate, the balance is a difficult one to

maintain, and what may first appear to be merely a means of increasing the emotional involvement of the audience has far-reaching consequences for the underlying philosophy of the modern theatre. For it seems that Bond shows a curious and paradoxical distrust of the very rationality on which his political analysis is built. I believe that this distrust, this paradoxical tension within Bond's dramatic method indicates not only superficial differences in form or temperament from the theatre of Brecht, but reflects a deeper, more fundamental sense of alienation and, indeed, a different concept of modern society. It also implies, as will be shown, a different structure of dramatic (inter-)action.

Brecht is without doubt a severe and often polemical critic of society, revealing in his plays the mechanisms of repression and exploitation, the injustices of class, the dehumanizing consequences of capitalism. His criticism, however, is accompanied by an underlying belief in the forces of historical progress and of modern, scientific rationality, which will eventually lead to the overthrow of the capitalist system and, thus, put an end to the self-alienation of man.⁶ Brecht sees the concrete possibility of changing the inhuman character of society by changing the unequal distribution of power and property. Society can be comprehensively described from the standpoint of dialectic materialism, and from such a description we can derive the means to overcome its inherent contradictions. Brecht shares the Hegelian and Marxist view of the rational character of human history and of the eventual control of man over a civilization which, after all, he himself has created. Society, then, is closely linked with the actions and interactions of concrete human beings. "The historical circumstances must not be thought of ... as dark forces ... but they are made and maintained by people (and will be changed by them): Whatever is acted there and then, constitutes them."⁷

I call this concept of society *concrete and anthropocentric*. It places the decisive problems and contradictions of society – and, thus, of dramatic action – on the material level of economic interests (e.g., *St. Joan of the Stockyards*), on the fight of individuals for their survival (e.g., *Mother Courage*), on the struggle for political power (e.g., *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*). The central conflict in Brecht's works is between this material level of the necessity for survival in a competitive world and the moral level of an original, altruistic humanity that Brecht considers a fundamental instinct of human nature. True, as Walter H. Sokel has shown, this conflict can turn into a tragic paradox, since the human impulse of altruism and compassion is often destroyed by the very means it must use to realize itself (as in *The Measures Taken* or in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*).⁸ But what matters to us here is that the conflict is clearly defined in an anthropocentric framework of potentially meaningful, that is to say self-determined and socially relevant human action. Society, in spite of alienation and moral deformation, is closely interrelated and, as it were, "grown together" with the lives and actions of real people – much in the

original, Hegelian sense of “concrete” (from the Latin *concrecere* = “to grow together”). “Truth is concrete,” Brecht maintained throughout his life; and truth, to him, was above all social truth.

As has been said, there are many similarities with this dialectic-materialist concept of society in Edward Bond’s works. Yet a closer look at his plays reveals that there is an additional and, I believe, decisively “new” dimension to his social philosophy which goes beyond the inherited Marxist version of capitalist-bourgeois alienation. To be sure, there are sharp class differences, there is exploitation and moral corruption, there is grotesque deformation and dehumanization in Bond’s works. And there also can be no doubt about the author’s conviction that these deformations are caused by the structure of society, by the injustice and depravity of its political, moral, religious, and other institutions. But to Bond, the dehumanization of modern man is no longer merely the result of material inequality and economic injustice, of the specific structures of capitalism. It is, rather, tied up with the more general historical transformation which Max Weber called the “rationalization” of Western society, and which involves the increasing anonymity and impersonality of social institutions, the development of half-autonomous bureaucracies, the substitution of science and technology for myth and religion.⁹ As a consequence of this continuing and ever-accelerating transformation, the structures of modern society have grown so gigantic and overpowering that they tend to become independent of their human creators. They begin to lead an abstract life of their own, dictating their anonymous, impersonal laws to the lives of the individuals, and threatening to turn them from subjects into mere objects of the historical process. As these structures determine more and more what constitutes the “reality” of modern society, they tend to deprive the individuals of their own personal and communicative sphere, of their right to feel, to think, to act, or to live in a self-determined way. Having developed into a complex apparatus far beyond the experience, the control and, often, the understanding of its individual members, society has turned into a strangely half-real superreality which, like an invisible prison, threatens to alienate man from his most fundamental needs. *This*, I believe, is the reason for the often diffuse and apparently unmotivated acts of aggression which are such a striking feature of Bond’s works.

We evolved in a biosphere but we live in what is more and more becoming a technosphere. We do not fit into it very well and so it activates our biological defences, one of which is aggression ...

What ought we to do? Live justly. But what is justice? Justice is allowing people to live in the way for which they evolved. Human beings have an emotional and physical need to do so, it is their biological expectation. They *can* only live in this way, or all the time struggle consciously or unconsciously to do so. That is the essential thing I want to say because it means that in fact our society and its morality, which deny this, and its

technology which more and more prevents it, all the time whisper into people's ear 'You have no right to live'. That is what lies under the splendour of the modern world.¹⁰

It is "our society," "its morality," "its technology" which, like personified abstractions, "whisper" into people's ear their own unreality, their virtual non-existence. Bond's use of language here suggests the danger that the active force, the "subject" of the historical process may not be humanity any more but the social constructions themselves which it has created; that it is no longer real people but these abstract constructions which determine the course of human history.

In this sense, then, I call Bond's concept of modern society *abstract and anthropofugal*. The term of an "abstract society," which has been developed in recent cultural philosophy, was given systematic shape by Anton C. Zijderveld in his book *The Abstract Society*.¹¹ In this view, modern society is abstract in that it is removed from the concrete, everyday life of real persons, and that the "decisions" about the solution of problems and about the future course of that society are no longer the result of concrete actions and interactions of people but of quasi-autonomous processes generated and regulated by the inherent mechanisms of increasingly self-sufficient social structures. This has far-reaching consequences for human relationships, because the specific *indifference* of these abstract, impersonal, essentially inorganic structures towards concrete, personal, organic life-worlds enters more and more into the sphere of communication between people and, indeed, into their own self-concept.¹² Abstract society becomes like an invisible wall of indifference between concrete human beings, alienating them from each other and from their own anthropological reality – and in that sense it is "anthropofugal" in character. And it is exactly this historically "new" form of social indifference which I believe to be at the heart of Bond's view of the modern world. No longer do we have in his works, as in Brecht's, people acting and interacting according to their real, if morally questionable, life-interests, but isolated and finally powerless individuals reacting to an abstract world which in effect negates and annihilates their concrete existence.

I would like to illustrate this difference here through a comparison of Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1938–40) and Bond's *Lear* (1971). Both plays are among the best-known and highest-rated works of their respective authors. Brecht's play belongs to the group of his so-called "mature plays" which mark the peak of his dramatic achievement. And Bond's *Lear*, which was called a "masterpiece" by Martin Esslin,¹³ must equally be regarded as a major contribution by its author to the modern theatre. The two plays can therefore be seen in a way as representative examples for an investigation of their authors' social philosophy. Moreover, there are a number of remarkable parallels in theme and dramatic conception which make a comparison appear particularly illuminating.

First of all, in both plays “goodness” is represented through symbolic personification in the dramatic action and is, as it were, put to the test in the context of social reality. In Brecht’s play, the search of the three gods for at least one good human being in Setzuan leads them to the prostitute Shen Te, who is the only one in town to offer them a room for the night. In Bond’s play, Lear’s flight from the regime of terror which his daughters have established leads him to the Gravedigger’s Boy, who is equally the only unconditionally good human being whom Lear meets, and who offers him hospitality in a similarly unquestioning and spontaneous way. In both works, good is defined as concrete communicative action, as “altruism and generosity.”¹⁴ And in both works, too, this principle of communicative action is destroyed in its clash with social circumstances. In Bond’s, as in Brecht’s play, this communicative principle is regarded as an expression of a natural human instinct not yet corrupted by society. Shen Te and the Boy are both personifications of their authors’ Rousseauesque-Marxist belief in an original goodness of human nature, which is distorted in the hostile environment of an aggressive society. In a way, moreover, the protagonists in both plays, being exposed to the schizophrenic pressures of such distortion, are split personalities in whom natural, human self clashes with pragmatic, realistic self. In Brecht, the split is objectified in Shen Te’s *alter ego* Shui Ta, whose mask she assumes in order to survive in a world of ruthless economic competition. In Bond, Lear suffers to an almost schizophrenic degree from the split between his humane intentions and the destructive power politics which he has institutionalized in his wall. And the ghost of the Gravedigger’s Boy who, after he has been killed by the very functionaries of this wall, accompanies Lear everywhere, could be seen as his younger *alter ego* personifying his original humanity yet uncorrupted by power.¹⁵

In both plays, too, the characters are faced in their actions with a double contradiction. On the one hand, the “naive” actions of the natural self involuntarily lead to destructive results since they lack the necessary connection with the existing social circumstances: Shen Te’s unlimited generosity threatens to ruin her economic existence; the Boy’s unconditional hospitality indirectly causes the destruction of his family. On the other hand, the attempt to integrate the human impulse into social reality entails a self-defeating contradiction between means and ends: Shui Ta, to be able to realize his human ends, must use the inhuman means of economic competition and exploitation. Lear, to secure peace and freedom for his people, uses the means of political terror and repression. Both erect a power-structure to enforce the realization of their aims – Shui Ta his tobacco factory, Lear his wall. And in both cases, the very nature of this power-structure implies the negation of the human aims for which it was originally created.

If, then, there are some interesting parallels in the dramatic and philosophical conception of the two plays, these parallels make the differences stand out in

even sharper light. In *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, the social circumstances which lead to the failure of human intentions are clearly defined on a *material* level, they are connected with the concrete living conditions of the people and with the pressures of sheer physical survival in a world of Darwinian capitalism. The general situation in Setzuan, stated at the beginning of the play, is one of destitution and extreme material need. "But there is generally great poverty in our province. They say only the gods can help us now."¹⁶ The people act in a cold and egocentric way, but their behavior appears understandable in the face of the harsh economic realities they are up against.

They are bad.
 They are the friends of no one.
 They don't allow anyone a pot of rice.
 They need all for themselves.
 Who could blame them?¹⁷

Shen Te's attempt at moral integrity fails because the more she has power to act, the more she gets entangled in that corrupt, capitalistic struggle for survival. The conflict between her human and her pragmatic self, however, is kept up throughout the play and provides, in her double role as Shen Te and Shui Ta, the basic formula of the action and the central source of dramatic tension and interest. Both sides of this formula are still defined within the anthropocentric context of the concrete actions and interactions of people which determine the character of "society." In Bond's *Lear*, on the other hand, the social circumstances have become an amorphous superstructure which, visualized in the central image of the wall, appears strangely *removed* from and virtually independent of the concrete life of the people and their interests of survival and self-preservation. Representing not only the omnipresent background but the institutionalized public "motive" of the characters' actions, the wall becomes a symbol of the all-pervading petrification of human relations in the play. Society has become a self-perpetuating power system above the heads of the people, forcing them into those irritatingly arbitrary and yet compulsive acts of aggression which characterize the general atmosphere of the play. The Gravedigger's Boy as the representative of natural humanity is killed early in the play and reappears only as the ghost of his former self which, quite different from Shen Te in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, has lost all real influence on the course of events. True, in a sense this human side lives on in the blinded Lear and in the community of deserters from the wall that gathers around him towards the end of the drama. But the conflict with political power which results from this Utopian attempt at pacifism is no longer a conflict between concrete persons but between Lear and the Wall, between humanity itself and the abstract, essentially non-human socio-political system it has created. Cordelia, the former revolutionary who is now in power, has lost all personal

qualities and has turned into as fierce and indifferent an executor of the destructive law of the Wall as her predecessors.

In *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, the dangers and enemies against which Shen Te assumes the role of Shui Ta and sets up the tobacco factory are *real*. Her use of the mask of Shui Ta is an act of self-protection which appears as a pragmatic necessity in the face of the chaos that her spontaneous impulse of compassion threatens to bring about, and of the many grudgers she has because of her unexpected possession of the small capital which the gods, in reward for her "goodness," have left her. Therefore Shui Ta's first act in reducing the price for the joiner's shelves, though hard on the joiner who has to earn a living for a wife and four children, seems quite understandable to the spectator. And the scene involves real interaction between the two characters; both act from their own vital interests, and react upon each other in an exchange of arguments and mutually consequential behavior (Scene 2). Furthermore, the measures that Shui Ta takes are, at least on an economic level, successful; they are rationally related to his aims (although these aims may contradict those of Shen Te): he manages to get rich and powerful by expanding his shop into the tobacco factory, thus demonstrating the possibility in the world of the play of "successful," if morally questionable, individual action. Shen Te's failure is not an economic but a moral failure, and is due to her irrepressible human motives which constantly interfere with the imperatives of the business world around her.

In Bond's play, the dangers and enemies against which Lear builds his wall are, ultimately, *unreal*. They may originally have had a basis in reality – "I stopped my enemies in the field," says Lear, "but there were always more of them. How could we ever be free? So I built this wall to keep our enemies out"¹⁸ – but they have long since lost any *fundamentum in re*; instead, the relationship of cause and effect meanwhile seems reversed, and it is rather Lear's wall itself which, in the manner of a self-fulfilling prophecy, produces ever new dangers and enemies which appear to prove its necessity. The real enemies are, significantly, not outside but inside his system (his daughters, and later *their* new enemy, Cordelia). And, unlike Shui Ta's factory, Lear's wall is not even a success as a power-structure – it is never finished, and it destroys not only its opponents but those who try to use it for their political purposes.

Lear's first action in the play, the shooting of a worker at the wall for an accident which has killed a fellow-worker, already shows the difference. Unlike the actions of Shui Ta, it is not understandable from any concrete human point of view but appears thoroughly senseless and irrational to the spectator. Lear reacts not to the reality of the situation but to his own life-long obsession with an abstraction, his political *idée fixe* of the wall. This abstraction – "All these things are in your head," says Bodice (p. 19) – makes him blind and indifferent not only to the other person, to the innocence of his victim, but towards himself. As he orders the firing-squad to shoot, he stands exactly in

their line of fire, ironically illustrating the implicit confusion and the self-destructive consequences of his ideology, and foreshadowing his own fate as a victim of the wall at the end of the play. Lear lives in an illusion of personal action and personal power, while in fact he has become an instrument of the wall, which will eventually destroy its human creator. His daughters, too, have this illusion of personal power when they replace Lear as rulers. But they are soon faced with the trans-personal force of the quasi-autonomous power system which, instead of their own intentions, dictates their moves. In Act II, Scene 4 Bodice, at the center of this system, sits at a desk before a strategic map that has become the real decision-making authority.

I'm forced to sit at this desk, work with my sister, walk beside my husband. They say decide this and that, but I don't decide anything. My decisions are forced on me. I change people's lives and things get done – it's like a mountain moving forward, but not because I tell it to. I started to pull the wall down, and I had to stop that – the men are needed here. (*She taps the map with the finger tips of one hand.*) And now I must move them here and here – (*She moves her index finger on the map.*) – because the map's my straitjacket and that's all I can do. I'm trapped. (p. 62)

It is the same map which, in the ensuing scene, leads the soldiers – and Lear's daughters themselves – into prison and death (Act II, Scenes 5ff.).¹⁹ The map thus signifies the abstract social constructions in which the concrete persons of the play, even those “in power,” are imprisoned, and of which Lear's wall is the comprehensive symbol. The simile in the above passage of a “mountain moving forward” is clearly an allusion to the wall and to its role as an impersonal, non-human “meta-subject” of the dramatic action.

The difference between Brecht's and Bond's plays described here in terms of a concrete and an abstract society, can also be recognized in the forms of the dehumanization of modern man. The acts of dehumanization in *The Good Woman of Setzuan* culminate in Shui Ta's and, even more, in his protégé Sun's ruthless exploitation of the workers in the tobacco factory (Scene 8). In Sun's behavior there is cruelty and sadism, there is fascist egomania, there is all the arrogance of power. He oppresses the workers, including the children and old people, with dictatorial force. But yet he acts upon the criterion of economic efficiency, of the working ability and the working performance of the people, and in that sense his behavior is again related to his own interests and to the functioning of the factory. It is an example of the master-slave relationship which recurs in Brecht's works, and which, going back to Hegel and Marx, is his central formula for expressing the alienation and human deformation of capitalism. But it is a formula which is still defined in the context of concrete (inter-)action, of personal power, of rational, if brutal and ruthless, human behavior. *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is based on an anthropocentric model of

social deformation, as Brecht's own preliminary note on the play makes clear, where he states that Setzuan stands for all places where "people are exploited by people."²⁰

If we compare this with the forms and acts of dehumanization in Bond's *Lear*, we once more realize a significant difference. There is a strange sense of confusion about these acts in *Lear*, which indicates that they have got out of control, and that they have lost all rational, anthropocentric foundation. Thus, Warrington's torture by Lear's daughters in Act I, Scene 4 shows an inhuman sadism disconnected from any personal or communicative reality – in the preceding scene, they both want to marry him. Warrington's horrible deformation – he is made deaf and dumb – becomes a symbolic image for this loss of anthropocentric substance; he is deprived of the ability which most of all constitutes the humanity of man: to communicate. In Act II, Scene 6, the madness of a political system in which the concrete individuals are exchangeable and dispensable elements becomes a method: whole groups of prisoners in Cordelia's newly erected regime are shot on the basis of abstract lists, including those who have fought *for* the new government (p. 70). The many acts of violence in the play, however, are epitomized in the operation in which the prison doctor blinds Lear by removing his eyes with a new "scientific device" (p. 77). In this scene, the abstract nature of the dehumanizing forces in *Lear* becomes sharply apparent. The doctor, himself a former prisoner, has qualified for this human experiment – and for others (e.g., the autopsy of Fontanelle) – on the basis of "papers" which confirmed his "good standing with the government" (p. 72). He has no personal relationship to Lear whatsoever, and there is an utter indifference in the cool scientific performance of his task which strikes us as much more shocking and inhuman than anything that happens in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. In fact, the doctor's behavior does not seem to be human at all, but the execution of an impersonal force of dehumanization which transfers the concrete organic basis of human life and knowledge – Lear's eyes – into the inorganic context of a scientific meta-world: "With this device you extract the eye undamaged and then it can be put to good use ... Note how the eye passes into the lower chamber and is received into a soothing solution of formaldehyde crystals" (p. 77). Concrete man is deformed and dismembered, while society becomes an autonomous force the "anthropofugal" nature of which is highlighted in this scene, certainly one of the most terrible in contemporary drama.

I believe that it is this new dimension of a society without human beings, of a history without a basis in real life which creates that specific sense of terror, that fundamental sense of modern alienation which Bond's works communicate to the spectator. And I think that this implicit concept of an abstract society is largely responsible for the extreme incoherence and fragmentation of human life, and for the senseless and self-destructive acts of aggression that pervade his plays. In Brecht, modern alienation is still defined in the anthropocentric

framework of the conflict between exploiter and exploited, between master and slave, and of the more general conflict between moral and material values. In Bond, the decisive conflict is no longer between human beings but between the anthropocentric idea of humanity (Lear) and the anthropofugal tendencies of an abstract society that threatens to destroy the very foundations of human values and rationality from which it has developed.²¹

In recent years, Bond seems to have turned back to a more concrete view of society, with which he comes closer to that of Brecht than in *Lear*. After the "problem plays" of his earlier and middle career, he calls these "answer plays"²² where, as in *The Bundle* or *The Worlds*, he tries to explore practical political alternatives to the alienating mechanisms of abstract society. As has been indicated, there is already the prefiguration of such an alternative in *Lear* in the pacifist land-community, in which the broken bond between humanity and nature is restored and the principle of concrete, self-determined life is re-established on the new basis of a communicative, non-repressive society. Whether these alternatives must, as in *Lear*, remain Utopian, or whether they can become the potential of real social change, however, is a question which only the historical process itself can answer.

NOTES

- 1 Edward Bond, "The Rational Theatre," Introduction to *Plays: Two* (London, 1978), pp. 161–82.
- 2 Martin Esslin, *Jenseits des Absurden. Aufsätze zum modernen Drama* (Wien, 1972), p. 116.
- 3 Patricia Hern, "Epic/Rational Theatre," in Edward Bond, *Lear*, with Commentary and Notes by Patricia Hern (London, 1983), p. xi.
- 4 P. Hern, p. xvii.
- 5 Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, *Bond: A Study of His Plays* (London, 1980), p. 280.
- 6 See Hans Egon Holthusen: "artistic achievement is here set upon an equal footing with scientific achievement and connected with the Hegelian-Marxist idea of progress." "Brecht's Dramatic Theory," in *Brecht. A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Demetz (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1962), pp. 106–16, p. 110.
- 7 Bertolt Brecht, *Kleines Organon für das Theater, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XVI (Frankfurt, 1967), pp. 678–85, § 38.
- 8 Walter H. Sokel, "Brecht's Split Characters and His Sense of the Tragic," in *Brecht. A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp. 127–37.
- 9 See, for example, Max Weber, *Staatssoziologie* (Berlin, 1966), especially 3, "Der staatliche Herrschaftsbetrieb als Verwaltung."
- 10 E. Bond, "Author's Preface" to *Lear, Plays: Two*, pp. 4–12, p. 10.
- 11 Anton C. Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society. A Cultural Theory of Our Time* (New

- York, 1970). The term was first introduced by Karl R. Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies. Vol. I. Plato* (London, 1966), pp. 174f.
- 12 See Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, vol. II (Frankfurt, 1981), pp. 454ff. (*The Theory of Communicative Action*, Beacon Press, 1985).
 - 13 M. Esslin, *Jenseits des Absurden*, p. 119.
 - 14 W.H. Sokel, "Brecht's Split Characters," p. 128.
 - 15 For a similar view see Joseph E. Duncan, "The Child and the Old Man in the Plays of Edward Bond," *Modern Drama*, 19 (1976), 1-10.
 - 16 Bertolt Brecht, *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (Frankfurt, 1955), p. 7. (My trans.)
 - 17 *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, p. 21.
 - 18 E. Bond, *Lear. Plays: Two*, p. 17. (Subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically within the text and indicated by the page number).
 - 19 The map is of course a motif taken from Shakespeare's *King Lear* (Act I, Scene 1). For a detailed comparison of Shakespeare's with Bond's drama see Horst Oppel and Sandra Christenson, *Edward Bond's Lear and Shakespeare's King Lear* (Mainz, 1974).
 - 20 *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, p. 6.
 - 21 It seems to me that this new concept of an "abstract society," with all its implications for dramatic structure and interaction, not only applies to Bond but can be seen as a more general paradigm for the social criticism and the implicit cultural philosophy of modern British drama. The work of other major contemporary British dramatists can be analyzed in a similar way from this paradigm – thus, for example, the dissolution of concrete life-worlds in John Osborne; the loss of concrete identities in Harold Pinter; the imprisonment of characters in the empty play of textual meta-worlds in Tom Stoppard; or the transformation of personal experiences into the artificial sphere of cultural substitutes in Peter Shaffer. I try to develop this idea in my forthcoming book *Das Drama in der abstrakten Gesellschaft. Zur Theorie und Struktur des modernen englischen Dramas (Drama in an Abstract Society. On the Theory and Structure of Modern English Drama)*.
 - 22 Letter to Tony Coult of July 28, 1977, quoted in Malcolm Hay and Philip Roberts, *Edward Bond. A Companion to the Plays* (London, 1978), p. 74.