CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

For the last two generations the world drama has been passing through a period of experimentation. This has not led to any definite or clearly established result. In the field of theatre we are far behind our recent advances in other spheres. Introspective investigation of psyche is no longer the only subject to arouse the interest of the theatre-goers. Atom, inflation, war, social struggles, family, religion, share market — all have become subjects for theatrical representation. People have acquired new motives for their actions; science has found new dimensions by which to measure them. It is, therefore, time for the dramatic art to find new expressions. The need of the present time is that our theatres should work out a style of presentation keeping in view the temperament and requirements of the modern scientific age. But it won't be an adequate solution if the theatres invent some kind of special style in the same way as the Munich Shakespearean stage was invented, which could only be used for Shakespeare. It has to be a style that can lend new force to a whole section of the theatrical repertoire which is still capable of life today.
Concern with subject and concern with form are complementary. Seen from inside the theatre it appears that the progress in theatrical technique is progress only when it helps to realize the material and the same is true of the progress in play-writing. For the twentieth-century audiences the theatre had one serious flaw. Neither its so-called developed stage technique nor its dramaturgy helped to present on the stage the great themes of our time as, for example, the building up of mammoth industry, the conflict of classes, war, the fight against disease, and so on. Even when the stock exchange, clinic or any other modern paraphernalia is shown on the stage, they form nothing but effective background for a sort of sentimental story that could have taken place at any other time. The traditional dramatic form, because of its dependence on the spectator's ability to be carried along, to identify himself, feel empathy and understand, is not suitable for the presentation of modern events and themes.

In the 20th-century the desire to present contemporary environment and changing relationships took many forms in art. The profusion of 'isms' — expressionism,
impressionism, symbolism, theatricalism, naturalism, mechanism, futurism, dadaism, formalism, constructivism, functionalism — reflects the attempts aimed at the radical transformation of society. It is not surprising that amongst so much activity theatre also passed through a period of experiment. This is the age of experiment, the true hey-day of avant-garde. The bounds of the theatre have been stretched to their utmost limits and sometimes beyond. However ridiculous the result, theory has been carried to the extreme in every direction. The microscopic was reached in a play of Austin Strong's, _Play Without a Name_, in which the stage represented the inside of a man's skull; and the macroscopic, in the dramas of social revolution, such as Gerhart Hauptmann's _The Weavers_ (1892) in which the crowd is the protagonist. Karel Capek's _Adam the Creator_ and Bernard Shaw's _Back to Methuselah_ (1918-20) both spanned the whole of mankind's development; the action of Armand Salacrou's _The Unknown Girl of Arles_ (1935) covered one hundredth of a second, the time it takes a bullet to travel from a suicide's pistol to his brain. August Strindberg and Jean Cocteau wrote plays with only one speaking character;
the Russians and the Germans put on mass dramas with casts of anything up to eight thousand. W.B. Yeats wanted his verse plays to be performed on a rug at one end of an ordinary room. Max Reinhardt produced a modern version of *Everyman* on the steps of Salzburg Cathedral and on such a colossal scale that he had actors placed on all the surrounding churches, one of them so far away that his cry arrived five seconds after the others. During World War I, the expressionists were using fantastic means to portray the logic of men's souls. It vastly enriched the theatre's means of expression and brought aesthetic gains that still have to be fully exploited, but it proved quite incapable of shedding light on the world as an object of human activity. The diverse kinds of documentary drama in its varying degrees such as that fostered by the American federal theatre fall outside the periphery of theatre proper. Jean Jacques Bernard's much discussed "theatre of silence" which was based on the dramatic possibilities inherent in the gaps between bits of dialogue has been almost entirely forgotten. Other stage forms conceived along the principle of audience activation, such as the theatre with tripartite stage,
a more recent development of fourth "lobby stage" where the seats become the revolving ones to enable the audience to face either stage; Norman Bel Geddes' "space theatre"; Werner Frey's and Jacque Schrader's Mehrzweck theatre for Basel; and, finally, the recent project of an "all round" theatre with a panorama stage of Andre Perrottet von Leben and Eya and Martin Burckhardt, all proved mere technical solutions of fencing in the audience like a herd of intellectual sheep. In short, almost every new experiment strove towards an entirely new social function for the theatre, but perhaps the most significant and fruitful from an aesthetic viewpoint is the dramatist's use of alienation techniques.

The word "alienation" is a translation of the term Entfremdung as used by Hegel and Marx and it refers to the need for any situation to be alienated if it is to be seen socially. It means the disharmony which always reappears between the world as it has come to be and the pressing forces of historical progress. The Russian term considered to be the origin of the word "alienation" is estrangement. The aesthetician Victor Sheklovsky, one of the leading representatives of Russian formalism, used it to denote the transformation of an ordinary or automatic perception into a poetically felt or visionary perception. "Alienation", as used by Sheklovsky, denotes a purely aesthetic process, an act
of imagination. It has been described by numerous writers and theoreticians. Shelley, for example, describes alienation as a technique with which poetry makes familiar objects look unfamiliar. Schopenhauer, Hofmannsthal, T.S. Eliot and many others have used the term in this sense. According to John Willett and Hans Egon Holtthusen, Brecht derived his famous term Verfremdung from the terminology of Russian formalists, while some others think that the term has definite German antecedents. The word "alienation" (Verfremdung) appears in 1936 in a Brechtian text. Not until his notes to the play The Roundheads and the Peakheads is it used. The notes give the following explanation under the key word "Alienation": "Certain events of the play — by means of inscriptions, interpolations of music and noise, and the technique of the actor — should be elevated (alienated) out of the realm of the ordinary, natural or expected and function as scenes complete in themselves."

Modern playwrights' use of alienation techniques is not something altogether new. It is only a restatement of the techniques of our rich cultural past. The oriental theatre existed even before the western histrionic tradition originated in Greece some 2,500 years ago with Thespis. Since then the playwrights have
been using one or the other set of conventions to penetrate the human situations. From the very beginning the main subject of drama has remained the relationship between one man and another as it existed at a particular time. That is what the dramatists are primarily concerned with. To achieve this end, modern alienation techniques owe a considerable debt to the Indian Sanskrit dramatic tradition and folk forms that did not depend on modern lighting techniques and stage machinery, historically accurate costumes and three-dimensional properties.

Alienation techniques help in the production of total theatre, a theatre in which dance, music and other related arts are given their due place. First of all it was Bharat Muni’s Natya Shastra that gave importance to the creation of Rasa in a drama and to achieve this end we find an abundance of dance and music in the Sanskrit dramas and in folk forms like Tamasha, Jatra, Yakshagan, Ram Lila, Ras Lila, Nautanki, Bhabhai, Khayal and many others. The Greek theatre which belongs to a different age and region and represents significant achievement in widely different forms also validates the concept of alienation. Oedipus, the most outstanding example of the distinctive modes of classical Greek drama, makes use of many Aeffects as, for example, the use of chorus. Every detail of the Oedipus myth
was known to the first spectators of *Oedipus* and therefore for them this play had little interest in terms of a suspense story which is one of the major demands of the realistic theatre. So much so that even "ritual expectancy" cannot account for the significance of the play, for then Sophocles's particular treatment of the Oedipus myth would have little to distinguish itself from any ordinary narration of the myth. The alienating nature of the theatre was also the established convention of Classic, Oriental, Renaissance, Neoclassic and Romantic theatre. There is alienation in medieval mystery plays, in the Japanese *Noh* plays and in Jacobean drama. Stylistically speaking also there is nothing all that new about the A-effects. Their expository character and their emphasis on virtuosity bring them close to the old Asiatic theatre. Didactic tendencies are to be found in the medieval mystery plays and in the classical Spanish theatre and also in the theatre of the Jesuits.

In the recent past the attempts of breaking the dramatic illusion with alienation effects have their antecedents in the theatre of G. Apollinaire, Marinetti and the stage techniques of German expressionists. Luigi Pirandello propagated in the twenties a new
critical and analytical method of acting; in France it was Paul Claudel who, influenced by the Japanese Noh play, developed together with Darius Milhaud a new operatic style, a combination of reportage and discussion in place of the old form of pathos and illusion. In Russia we have Tretiakov, whose play Red China shows him to have found quite new means of expression. Bruckner among others has made interesting experiments in the application of psychoanalytic theory to the stage. In America writers like George Kaiser, O'Neill and Thornton Wilder have done pioneering work for the new technique even if their ideas and aims don't coincide. The poetic dramas of T.S.Eliot, the satires of Mayakovsky, the Russian theatre of Meyerhold and Tairov, the monster pantomimes of Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator's political theatre are all part of the same striving to overcome the limitations of the "theatre of illusion". Many people tried to strike out in new directions, but the real front-line battles were fought out mainly by Piscator whose "Theatre am Hollandisches" was based on Marxist principles and by Brecht at Theatre am Schiffbauerdamm. They introduced many new things and turned every thing top to bottom, made comedy out of what had originally been tragic and vice versa. Their techniques added substantially to the spectator's illusion of not being in a theatre.
Theatres have fallen on them avidly; so much so that every play using alienation techniques seems to be indebted to them in one way or another.

Alienation techniques, such as inscriptions projected upon the stage, presence of modern equivalent of Sutradhar of ancient Indian Sanskrit drama, Greek chorus, mythical characters, a particular use of songs, music, choreography, masks and scenic design, expressionistic use of films, records and slides to show events, deliberate addressing of the real audience by the actors not meant as mere aside, switching from the world of appearance to the world of reality during performance, use of commentator or narrator who sometimes participates in the action also, performance of two or more roles by a single actor, actors speaking stage directions or commentaries, use of invocatory verse at the beginning and benedictory verse at the end — all these elements alienate events of the play from the realm of the ordinary, natural and expected and makes them surprisingly new and strange. Erwin Piscator, the German director known for his expressionist productions of the 1920s, introduced a number of far-reaching innovations which have become favourite alienation techniques with the modern playwrights. His
use of the film and the film projections as an integral part of the settings began to transform the scenic potentialities. Setting is awakened to life and begins to play on its own; the film is a new, gigantic actor, that helps to narrate the events. By means of it, documents, figures and statistics can be shown as part of the scenic background. In one of his productions, Piscator transmitted by wireless the sound of a sick man's heart. A film simultaneously showed the heart contracting. This shows how greatly human communications have been simplified by science and social conditions at present act as an obstacle to the full exploitation of the fact. Another innovation is the introduction of moving platforms on the stage. New facilities for staging allowed the use of musical and graphic elements which the theatre up to this time had not been able to employ. Piscator made use of records, as shown by his production of the play Resurrection in which he interrupted the performance by playing a record of Lenin's voice.

The background adopted an attitude to the events on the stage – by big screens recalling other simultaneous events elsewhere, by projecting documents which confirmed or contradicted what the characters said, by concrete and intelligible figures to accompany abstract
conversations, by figures and sentences to support mime transactions whose sense was unclear. The actors, too, refrained from going over wholly into their role by remaining detached from the characters they were playing and clearly inviting criticism of them. It is a matter of establishing quite new rules for the art of acting — playing against the flow, letting one's characteristics be defined by one's fellow actors, etc.

In Brecht's production of the revised *A Man's A Man* (1931) to the actor Peter Lorre whitens his face instead of allowing his acting to become more and more influenced by fear of death from within himself. The character's development has been very carefully divided into four phases — the Facker's face in the beginning, the natural face up to his awakening after being shot, the "blank page" up to his reassembly after the funeral speech, and, finally, the soldier's face. The use of alienation techniques necessitates and facilitates a new style of acting. The actors are expected to demonstrate their knowledge of human relations and behaviour in a conscious, suggestive and descriptive manner. In the realistic theatre they act by means of hypnosis. They go into a trance and take the audience with them. The play's meaning is usually blurred by the fact that the actor plays to the audience's hearts. The figures portrayed are foisted on the audience and are falsified
in the process, whereas the theatre that depends on A-effect wants its actors to be witty, ceremonious and ritualistic. When the actor approaches the image that Shakespeare, for example, has left us of his times, he ought to do it as a historian. He is to keep his distance from the past and oppose it to the present in such a way that the present will appear suddenly relative and strange. Walter Weideli's observations about this type of acting are worth quoting:

The actor becomes a contradictory personage, at once Hamlet and a critical witness of Hamlet, the present quoting and the past unquoted, simultaneously expressing the sentiments of his role and his own; he is not the sacred monster, but a man among others, suggesting to his fellowmen a judgement, inviting them into a discussion and then encouraging their retorts...."

Spectators and actors ought not to approach one another but to move apart. Each ought to move away from himself, otherwise the element necessary to glimpse the phenomenon in all its strangeness and incomprehensibility is lacking. The epic actor's efforts to make particular incidents between human beings seem striking may also cause him to be misrepresented as a short range episodist by anybody who fails to allow for his way of knitting all the separate incidents together and absorbing them in the
broad flow of his performance. In fact the actor in
the alienating theatre may possibly need an even greater
range than the actors in the realistic theatre, for he
has to be able to show his character's coherence
despite, or rather by means of, interruptions and
jumps. The actors have to use a special method of
representation. They need to get right away from the
old naturalistic school of acting followed by Jennings,
Paul Reumert and others. That kind of representation
cannot express our times; it is not going to sway a
purely modern audience. For that one has to use a
different form of acting — story-telling kind. It is
the kind of acting that the Chinese and Indians have
been using for thousands of years. Among modern actors
Chaplin is one of its masters. As Brecht observes:

The actor doesn't have to be the man he
portrays. He has to describe his character
just as it would be described in a book.
If Chaplin were to play Napoleon he wouldn't
even look like him; he would show objectively
and critically how Napoleon would behave
in the various situations the author might
put him in. In my view the great comedians
have always been the best character actors.

A-effects bring back to the stage the sister
arts of music, scenic design and choreography, long
devalued or excluded by naturalist dramaturgy because
these elements were mostly absent from the daily life. Instead of serving as mere auxiliaries of the text, these elements retain their independence in the plays making use of A-effects. They are raised to the level of autonomous elements. The musical numbers and songs are used to interrupt the action and to give the audience an opportunity to reflect and to arrive at a decision. Instead of pulling in the same direction as the situation, the music enters into a dialectical, contrapuntal relationship with it. It helps in the creation of A-effect if the musicians are visible during the performance and also if the actor is allowed to make visible preparation for it by straightening a chair perhaps or making himself up. To achieve the A-effect the actor must ensure that the level of plain speech and singing always remains distinct and in no case, therefore, should singing take place where words are prevented by excess of feeling. As for the melody, he must not follow it blindly; there is a kind of speaking against the music which can have strong effects, the results of stubborn, incorruptible sobriety which is independent of music and rhythm. Musical numbers are not smuggled in at the point when the emotional charge of the scene rises to a climax and speech merges
into a song — but are introduced as distinct ingredients of the play, which interrupt its flow, break the illusion and thereby render the action strange.

Flexibility in the construction of scenic design, which is an important requirement of our traditional moving theatres, such as Ram Lila, Bhavai, Kathkali etc., has found favour with the modern playwrights using A-effects. Sets suggest the locale of the action rather than depicting it. In Brecht’s Puntile, a mountain is made out of chairs. In the Horatii the sun is represented by a spotlight carried across the rear of the stage by a technician. Brecht used half curtain masking only half the height of stage, behind which stage hands and stage apparatus could easily be seen: "... don’t seal off the stage! Leaning back in his chair, let the spectator be aware of the busy preparations made for him cunningly; he sees a tinfoil moon float down, or a tiled roof being carried in; do not show him too much, but show him something! And let him notice that you are not wizards, friends, but workers!"  

More interesting than the technical aspects of the alienation, such as leaving the stage machinery visible, is its effect on the story. There is no linear
progress of the plot as is found in the dramatic form of theatre. Here we find sudden leaps and each scene exists for itself, a separate entity. Realistic theatre depends on the strong centralization of the story; a momentum that draws the separate parts into a common relationship. A particular passion of utterance, a certain emphasis on the clash of forces, are the hallmarks of the dramatic. The tautly logical construction of realistic plays indicates the relentless course of fate and makes it unfathomable and incapable of being influenced by human initiative. Alienation techniques are used to keep the construction loose so that passive submission on the part of audience may be discouraged. Doblin provides an excellent criterion by saying that with an epic work, as opposed to the dramatic, one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life. We can identify the techniques to some extent as used by modern playwrights, but to expound them in a few catch phrases is not possible. They still mostly need to be worked out in detail as the alienation effect depends a great deal on the methods of production, Director's approach to the subject and the technique of acting. And because of the highly subjective nature of these things, there is very little that a playwright can do about them, except for giving stage directions.
which may or may not be honoured.

The writers seek to achieve certain aims by using alienation effects. After all, the destruction of stage illusion is not an end in itself. Undoubtedly the alienation has its positive side. By inhibiting the process of identification between the spectators and the characters, by creating a distance between them and enabling the audience to look at the action in a detached and critical spirit, familiar things, attitudes and situations appear in a new and strange light and create through astonishment and wonder a new understanding of the human situation. Alienation techniques delight in dislocating our stock associations. It is a common fact that we have a horrible way of taking all the characteristics of a particular type and lumping them under a single head. We picture a usurer as cowardly, furtive and brutal. Not for a moment do we think of allowing him to be in any way courageous or wistful or tender-hearted. These effects prove that continuity of ego is a myth. A man is an atom that perpetually breaks up and forms anew. The essential point of this theatre is that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead
of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grips with things. Just as one has sporting arena full of experts, similarly alienating theatre is a place of experts. As the spectator reads the projections on the screen, he adopts an attitude of smoking and watching and, therefore, remains pretty well occupied with himself. There is no chance of the actors having the effrontery to offer much people those few miserable scraps of imitation which they at present cook up in few rehearsals without the least thought. In a way the alienation techniques underline the modes of behaviour most useful to the human race and show them in different ways. If one acts this way the following will happen, but if one acts like that then the opposite will take place. The spectator is no longer allowed in any way to submit to an experience uncritically by means of simple empathy with the characters in the play. The production takes the subject matter and the incidents shown and puts them through a process of alienation which is necessary to all understanding. Choruses enlighten the spectator about facts unknown to him; films show a montage of events all over the world; projections add statistical material. And as the background comes to the front of the stage, so people's activity is subjected to
criticism. Right and wrong courses of action are shown. People are shown what they are doing. The theatre becomes thought-provoking for people who wish not just to explain the world, but also to change it.
Notes and References


2. The terrible oracle was fulfilled the day Oedipus killed Laius and solved the riddle of the Sphinx, consequently becoming the king of Thebes and marrying Jocasta.


5. Director produced Rasputin in the Theatre an Hollandplatz on Nov. 17, 1927. Brecht helped with the adaptation.

6. Reference is to Brecht's own production of the revised Mann ist Mann, with Peter Lorre as the Tacker Galy Gay, at Staats Theatre Berlin in 1931. The play had a short and highly controversial run and Peter Lorre's performance in it was adversely criticised.
