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THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF BERTOLT BRECHT

by

Anthony Squiers

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
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THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF BERTOLT BRECHT

Anthony Squiers, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2012

Bertolt Brecht is widely considered to be one of the most important figures in Twentieth Century literature. An acclaimed poet, he is best known as a playwright and director. His 'epic theatre' revolutionized the theatre by creating radical breaks from traditional literary and theatrical form. These radical breaks were done in an effort to facilitate radical social change. Specifically, Brecht designed his epic theatre as a revolutionary aesthetic which would help bring about the advent of a Marxist revolution. There is a broad corpus of academic work which analyzes the formalistic elements of his work. However, this body of work has been severely limited by a formalistic understanding of Brecht's thought and work and neglects his unique philosophical contributions to Marxism. This dissertation serves to remedy this by reconstructing Brecht's social and political philosophy into a single theoretical framework. In doing this, the dissertation presents Brecht's thought in context of a revolutionary Marxist aesthetic and explores his vision of historical materialism, dialectic of enlightenment, social ontology, epistemological foundations and ethics, in an effort to reveal his relevance today. This is accomplished by meticulous readings of his theoretical writings and deep analysis of three of his plays, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, *Life of Galileo*, and his adaption of *Coriolanus*.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Brecht is a difficult phenomenon...”¹

On February 27, 1933 the Reichstag building, the seat of the German parliament in Berlin, was set ablaze in what was alleged to be a Communistic plot to unsettle the German government. Marxist playwright and poet, Bertolt Brecht, a shrewd political observer, accurately anticipated the violent and repressive response by the Nazis and the following day fled Germany with his wife, Jewish actor Helen Weigel and their two children. Brecht was only thirty-five at the time but had already established himself as an important literary figure gaining notoriety for widely acclaimed and commercially successful productions like *Baal* which premiered in 1923 and *The Threepenny Opera* which premiered in 1928.

Brecht's introduction to Marxism came in the middle part of the 1920's. In 1926, Brecht wrote, “it was only when I read Lenin's *State and Revolution* (!) and then Marx's *Kapital* that I understood, philosophically, where I stood” (Brecht, et. al., 2003, p. 35). By the early 1930's Brecht had established what would become long lasting and intimate friendships with prominent German Marxists. These friendships

¹ Benjamin, 1973, p. 27.

composers, Kurt Weill (who he collaborated with on *The Threepenny Opera*, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* and other projects) and Hanns Eisler (who he collaborated with on *The Measures Taken*, *The Mother*, *Kuhle Wampe* and other projects) and the influential philosopher Karl Korsch whose discussion groups and classes Brecht attended.

These associations, along with his theatrical successes and his reputation for keen intellect made Brecht an important and influential left intellectual in Germany at the time and thus a potential target for the Nazi aggression that followed the Reichstag fire. In fear of the Nazis and their designs to eradicate Marxism, Brecht spent fifteen years in exile. He first went to Denmark, then to Sweden, Finland and the US in an attempt to stay ahead of the progressing German military. He spent 1941-47 in Santa Monica where he often associated with other exiled German intellectuals like Thomas Mann, Fritz Lang, Lion Feuchtwanger, Hanns Eisler, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse. He awaited the conclusion of the war in California and in 1947, returned to Europe, living in Switzerland, in preparation for a return to Germany. In late 1948, Brecht arrived in Berlin and the following year established the Berliner Ensemble with state aid from the newly founded German Democratic Republic.

Brecht died in 1956, in the GDR leaving behind a formidable artistic legacy. He is perhaps best known for creating major theatrical works such as: *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *The Good Woman of Szechwan*, *Life of Galileo*, *The Threepenny Opera* and his theoretical writings which attempted to create a

revolutionary theatre. Brecht began theorizing about theatre and politics in his late teens and early twenties. However, his efforts intensified later in his exile years where he continued to clarify and refine important concepts to his theory of 'epic theatre'.

During his short lifetime, Brecht produced copious writings which included more than fifty plays, adaptations, operas and screenplays, several collections of poetry, various works of literary prose and volumes of theoretical writings and musings on the theatre, art, politics, society, history, culture and other topics.²

The large majority of Brecht's works have been translated into English through a series published by Methuen as well as various other sources. English speakers are greatly indebted to the translation efforts of National Book Award winner for translation Ralph Manheim as well as those provided by John Willett. Together they are responsible for editing and translating many of Brecht's works into English. In English translation, Brecht's writings consist of nine volumes of plays containing translations of Brecht's own notes on the plays, a volume of collected works of poetry which also includes notes from Brecht, three volumes of letters, diary and journal entries, a collection of short stories, a book of parables, a novel, three edited collections of essays and dozens of other miscellaneous essays, fragments and theatrical and literary works. In an effort to faithfully reconstruct Brecht's social and political philosophy all of these works have been analyzed by this author.

² Willett's editorial contributions found in Brecht & Willett (1990) are a useful resource for biographical information on Brecht as well as contextualizing his works to particular periods of his life.

However, in order to build the theoretical framework needed to conduct the present scholarship, several sources were of special importance. The first and perhaps foremost is Willett's edited collection of Brecht's essays, *Brecht on Theatre* (Brecht & Willett, 1992)³. This collection was in Willett's words, "meant to give English-language readers the main texts [of Brecht's theoretical writing on the theatre] and set these in chronological order" (BT, 1992, p. 1). It contains essays spanning most of Brecht's adult life beginning in 1918 when Brecht was twenty to 1956, the year of his death. Many of the essays were published during Brecht's lifetime and include some of Brecht's most original and influential theoretical discussions like how his theatre differs in form and content from bourgeois theatre, his theories on acting and his theory of 'estrangement effects' which is considered at length in this dissertation.

Another important source is Kuhn's and Giles's edited collection of Brecht's writings, *Brecht on Art and Politics* (Brecht, et. al., 2003).⁴ This volume contains a selection of expositions that are in Kuhn's and Giles's words, "engaged with social, political and cultural processes" (BAP, p. 1). Some of the writings are complete and polished essays that were published during Brecht's lifetime and others are incomplete sketches and fragments. In this volume we see Brecht theorizing on pedagogies, ideology and truth, Fascism, historical materialism and other cultural and social themes. Like *Brecht on Theatre* this collection is also arranged chronologically, covering the years 1914-56.

³ Because of the frequency this volume is cited and its importance, it will hereafter be cited as (BT) in order to allow ease of referencing.

⁴ Hereafter (BAP).

The third and final edited collection of Brecht's theoretical writings, available in English, is *Brecht on Film and Radio* (Brecht & Silberman, 2000).⁵ This text is arranged in five parts. The first part is a selection of mostly fragmentary theoretical texts on the cinema which were written over the span of Brecht's life. The second section consists mostly of fragmentary texts theorizing the role, potential and importance of the radio in society. These texts come from the years 1926-32. The following three sections contain Brecht's early screenplays, material regarding the Threepenny film and his film *Kuhle Wampe*, respectively. The section on the Threepenny film includes an important theoretical essay Brecht wrote about his lawsuit against Nero Film Company over the 1931 film version of *The Threepenny Opera*, directed by Georg Pabst.⁶ Using the lawsuit as the entry point for a sociological study, this essay examines art as a commodity in the capitalistic mode of production. In it, Brecht discusses the limitation of art given the predominance and social/culturally entranced nature of bourgeois ideology, the necessity of overcoming that ideology for world historical development to occur and the relation of theory to praxis.

Brecht also left behind two collections of his private writing, both of which are available in English. The first is a diary (Brecht, Ramthun & Willett, 1979) written just after Brecht's experience as a medic in World War I which covers the years 1920-22. It contains only a handful of theoretical musings interspersed among accounts of Brecht's daily life, many love affairs and the beginnings of his literary

⁵ Hereafter (BFR).

⁶ For a succinct account of this lawsuit see (BFR, p. 147-8n).

and theatrical career. While this diary provides little in terms of theoretical value it does reveal, at times, Brecht's early concern for social justice and the humanistic tendencies which persisted throughout his life.

The second collection of Brecht's private writings is what has come to be known as his work journal (*Arbeitsjournal*) (Brecht, Rorrison & Willett, 1993)⁷ written between 1934 and 1955. This volume contains hundreds of pages of mostly fragmentary sketches that include conceptual musing and notes about particular projects and works, commentary on historical and political events, remarks on social theory and articulations of the role of art in creating a Marxist revolution. Although this journal does not contain thoroughly worked out expositions it is an indispensable resource that documents Brecht's theoretical concerns and positions and reveals the large extent to which Brecht was engaged in philosophical and social theoretical thought as well as how this thought was a constant concern for him while producing his art.

The collected volume of Brecht's letters (Brecht & Willett, 1990)⁸ also exposes Brecht's attention to philosophy and social theory and the way that these concerns were at the center of his artistic endeavors. This is revealed in his disclosures to such collaborators as: Lion Feuchtwanger, Elisabeth Hauptmann, composers Hanns Eisler, Kurt Weill and Paul Dessau, director Erwin Piscator, renowned set designer and Brecht's long time friend Casper Neher and in his

⁷ Hereafter (Journals).

⁸ Hereafter (Letters).

correspondence to thinkers such as Benjamin, Korsch, Georg Lukács, Ernst Bloch and theologian Paul Tillich.

Finally, Brecht left behind a large collection of preliminary and production notes for his plays. A large number of these notes can be found at the end of the various volumes of his plays and reveal the very conscious way Brecht's social and political philosophical positions informed his art. In total many of Brecht's theoretical writings do this. For example they often directly relate particular artistic techniques to his larger goal of creating a revolutionary aesthetic, they discuss the goal of presenting particular ontological claims within works, and they reveal the philosophical assumptions on which Brecht based his art.⁹

Brecht was quite forward that the basis of his plays was Marxist (Journals, p. 372; BT, p. 24n). It is also clear that he meant for this philosophy to be thoroughly enmeshed with the form of the art he produced (Martin & Bial, p. 26; Brecht, 1965b; BT, p. 24, 25, 72, 80). In this way, then, his artistic works can also be seen as philosophical sources. The positions and thoughts he embedded in them are available for unraveling—an endeavor undertaken in the case studies of his plays provided below in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

As we can see from this discussion on Brecht's writings and will see throughout this dissertation, Brecht theorized about many important social and political issues—sometimes expressly in this notes, journals, essays and letters and

⁹ When quoting from these sources, I have provided the year it was written or first published in brackets immediately following the citation, in order to give the reader a sense of when these things were said.

other times he embedded those thoughts in his artistic works. At times his theorization is incredibly unique; for example, his concept of ‘estrangement effects’, theorized the role art could play in undermining dominant worldviews and its potential role in creating social revolution. However, in the dissertation we will also see that many ideas of Brecht’s have commonality with other thinkers, particularly those of other Marxist thinkers. Brecht was a voracious reader and seemed to draw from many different sources. The attention Brecht gives these ideas in his journals and the essays and fragments found in the aforementioned edited volumes and the central role his studies played in his life clearly demonstrate that Brecht did not simply adopt the positions of others. He pondered them, considered them and discussed them with some of the most brilliant minds of the twentieth century. Like all good theorists, Brecht was not afraid to borrow useful concepts from others, to follow others’ lines of thought, to find value in others’ ideas. In his writings especially his journal and letters we often see references to particular thinkers he no doubt drew upon (e.g. Marx, Engels, Lenin, etc.). Moreover, it is a fair assumption that his friends, particularly the very close ones like Benjamin and Korsch, influenced him as much as he influenced them. However, because of the nature of much of Brecht’s theoretical writings (i.e., existing often in underdeveloped and fragmentary form) direct genealogies are often difficult to establish. In several cases, however, this is possible, as in Chapter 7 where it is argued that Brecht appropriated a particular idea from Mao as well as in Chapter 6 to a lesser degree where it is shown that Brecht draws from Descartes.

Together the aforementioned works provide a large collection of material. The task of reconstructing Brecht's social and political philosophy without the sorting and compilation undertaking by these translators and editors would have been herculean if not impossible. Those interested in understanding Brecht as a theorist would certainly do well to begin in these places. They contain expositions which offer clues to Brecht's thought, including remarks on Marxism, historical development and most importantly the role art can play in creating revolutionary social change. Furthermore, they also provide Brecht's explanation on his own efforts to create a Marxist revolutionary aesthetic. While Brecht's writings are copious, there is also an abundance of scholarly work produced on Brecht and his work.

The State of Brechtian Scholarship

The state of Brechtian scholarship today is robust; but, at the same time, it suffers from some paucity. Since Brecht's death a whole academic industry has emerged on both sides of the Atlantic which continues to grow steadily. Today Brechtian scholarship is being produced not only in Europe and the States but also in all parts of the Americas, Asia and Africa. One need only search for Brecht in their library catalogue or thumb through the various publications of the International Brecht Society to see that serious minds have chosen Brecht (both as man and phenomenon) as the subject of their inquiries and have produced an array of diverse scholarship. To date, much of this scholarship has fallen into two broad categories.

The first is largely biographical in nature. In truth, most of this literature tends to be hagiographic, though notable exceptions exist (e.g. Fuegi, 1994). The second deals with the enormous corpus of Brecht's work, including plays, poetry, essays, musings, and other prose. However, this work has by and large been limited to formalistic approaches (Squiers & Roessler, 2011). These formalistic approaches have missed important aspects of Brecht's work. Particularly, it is the contention of this author that the extant literature has not done a good job investigating Brecht as a social and political philosopher. This work seeks to redress this shortcoming.

Brecht's contributions to theatre and the arts have been well documented in the literature (e.g. Bartram, and Waine, 1982; Benjamin, 1973; Demetz, 1962; Esslin, 1961; Willett, 1977; etc.). Bentley, for example refers to him as the "fountainhead of so much in the theater" (Bentley, 1955; 210). Indeed, within drama studies, he is widely considered to be one of the most important figures of the twentieth century. While his impact in this area is undeniable, what is often overlooked (because of the aforementioned emphasis on form) is that Brecht was an equally serious philosophical scholar. As Wolfgang Haug states, "behind Brecht's world fame as a playwright and poet it is still a widely kept secret that he was one of the most outstanding Marxist philosophers" (Haug, 1999, p. 113).

"As a dramatist/philosopher of historical consciousness, Brecht somehow always falls between the cracks of theatre and philosophy, of Marx and the Frankfurt School..." (Roessler, 2006). A thorough review of Brecht's work and the literature on it attests to the truth of this statement. For too long, Brecht has been understood only

as an artist and not as a philosopher. While pieces of his philosophy have been unearthed as is evidenced by the literature review that follows, no large scale analysis of his philosophy has been undertaken to date (Squiers & Roessler, 2011). This work serves as the first attempt to outline Brecht's thought into a single philosophical framework. My purpose for this dissertation is to present Brecht primarily as a philosopher who, in the Marxian praxis tradition, uses art as a particular form of praxis. Specifically, this dissertation will place Brecht in the disciplines of political theory and social philosophy. In this dissertation, I explain, clarify, reconstruct and at times augment Brecht's social and political philosophy. In this regard, it is hoped that this work will serve both as a model for the study of Brecht as a philosopher and as a starting point for the discourse. It is my hope that this work will provide an impetus for its own critique, further critiques of existing research and new philosophical approaches to Brechtian scholarship.

In order to undertake this project, I begin by asking a very simple research question which will provide more than enough material for the task at hand. Specifically, I ask, "What is Brecht's social and political philosophy?" For the current purposes, social philosophy should be understood as the philosophical study of social behavior, while political philosophy can be defined as the philosophical consideration of social or collective (i.e. political) organization and the consequences of various political arrangements. These, of course, are not mutually exclusive endeavors. Each informs and shapes the other in complex ways. Nor do they stand in isolation from other branches of philosophy as classically understood. This project will primarily

focus on Brecht's position on questions of social behavior and social arrangements. However, given the complex relationship these questions have with other philosophical pursuits, it will be necessary to explore questions of ontology, epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics.

Formalism

One can trace the advent of Brechtian scholarship as a conscious, self-reflexive academic discipline to a seminar held at the 1968 meeting of the Modern Language Association. That year the world's leading Brecht scholars met to discuss the current state of Brecht research. The main focus of that meeting was on the published works of Brecht. The primary concern was to raise the issue of which versions of Brecht's work were considered standard. During this meeting, however, other questions were raised and a consensus soon emerged that these questions warranted the establishment of a society dedicated to the promotion of Brecht research. The result was the formation of the International Brecht Society which encourages, facilitates and provides fora for the dissemination and discussion of ideas relating to the study of Brecht (Fuegi, 1969).

Most of the early Brecht scholars came from literary and theatrical backgrounds or language studies. Their research, therefore, reflected the interests of these disciplines and primarily sought to speak to the literatures in their respective

fields. As a consequence, much of the scholarship on Brecht has taken a formalistic approach (Squiers & Roessler, 2011).

Over the last few decades in literary circles the terms ‘formalism’ and ‘formalistic’ have been thrown around so freely and used to describe such diverse methods as to render them virtually meaningless. Therefore clarification of their application here is warranted. By calling a study ‘formalistic’, I mean that it focuses primarily on the structure or form of the text. In this approach, the analysis rests upon the description and interpretation of the text or, more broadly, in the description or interpretation of the formal elements of a work of art. In other words, formalistic approaches in Brechtian scholarship take the form of Brecht’s work as the principal object of inquiry.

Though this dissertation seeks to move beyond formalism and highlights the limitation of formalistic approaches, it is not my intention to imply exclusively pejorative connotations with my use of the word. What I am referring to as the formalism of Brechtian scholarship has provided us with immense insight into Brecht and his work. Indeed, the present work is heavily indebted to this scholarship. As will be shown in this work, Brecht’s innovations in form are important aspects of his philosophy. In order to understand what Brecht was attempting to do as a philosopher, one must understand that Brecht’s form is qualitatively different from traditional form. Formalistic approaches show us these differences.

Perhaps the three most notable scholars to provide formalistic approaches to the study of Brecht were John Willett (1977), Eric Bentley (1955, 1999) and Martin

Esslin (1961, 1969). Willett, for example, provides a comprehensive examination of many formal elements of Brecht's work. In this, he looks at Brecht's subject matter, language, theatrical influences and music. Like Willett, Bentley and Esslin also provided analysis of Brecht's form, examining, for example, the sources of Brecht's language, the lack of empathy in his work, Brechtian acting techniques and characterization. In their treatments of Brecht's work, all three of these scholars are quick to recognize, for example, the importance of Brecht's innovations in narrative form and acting techniques, his innovative use of lighting effects, his anti-Wagnerian use of music, his application of written text in performance and his other innovations and experimentations. These works are important because they delineate the characteristics of Brecht's form and place those characteristics in the general context of aesthetic form. Since so much of Brecht's form is a reaction against traditional form it is important to both understand what traditional form is and how Brecht deviates from it.

Though these scholars provide insight into Brecht's form, they offer little analysis of Brecht's philosophy. Willett, for example, only devotes a small section to Brecht's theory. This serves only as a rudimentary outline of Marxism and contains no meaningful analysis of Brecht's particular notions of Marxism. Instead, Willett makes a general critique of Marxism saying, "Marxism often degenerates into a means of stylizing the actual course of events, facing the reader with gross oversimplifications, and leading to awkward intellectual shuffles" (Willett, 1977, p. 194). However, in this he overlooks the fact that Marxist aesthetics by nature seek to

expose contradiction where the bourgeois mindset sees none. This is especially true of Brecht who was a great master of exposing and showing the contradictions of bourgeois society (Squiers and Roessler, 2011). Similar to Willett, Bentley and Esslin also seek to stifle a discourse on Brechtian Marxism. Esslin says for example that Brecht “loyally supported the Communist cause and did all he could to put himself and his great talents at its service. There can be no doubt that he was ready, for its sake, to sink into the mire and to embrace more than one butcher” (Esslin, 1961, p. 150).

In the end, what we get from the works of Willett, Bentley and Esslin is that Brecht was a great thinker and great innovator of form; but, his worldview was Marxist and therefore mistaken, wrong, incorrect, flawed, etc. This is taken as an *a priori* assumption in their analyses. In essence, they attempt to claim that Brecht’s innovations are important despite his being a Marxist—as if these things can be dissociated from his Marxism! Willett, Bentley and Esslin treat Brecht’s formal elements as important because they clearly changed the face of theatre and have been extremely influential—a point they would not deny. However, they want to do this by separating Brecht from his Marxism; despite the fact that Brecht states in a letter written to composer Paul Hindemith, that his talent was “absolutely inseparable from [his] socialist ideas” (Letters, p. 191) [1934 or 1935]. For these commentators and many of those who followed in their footsteps there was no need to consider Brecht’s philosophy because it was Marxist and there was nothing of value one could learn from it. So they focused their efforts on the study of the formal elements of Brecht’s

work which they felt had some application. In doing this huge gaps were left in the literature on Brecht.

While Willett, Bentley and Esslin constitute a major part of the formalistic canon on Brecht, other general works on the formal elements of Brecht's work can be found (e.g. Fuegi, 1972 and 1987; Ley, 1979; Demetz, 1962; Mews, 1997) as well as research on various specific elements like: character and characterization (Farrell, 1959; Weideli, 1963; Scofield, 2006; Boal, 1985); dialogue (Russo, 2003); music (Calico, 2008; Fowler, 1991; Gerdeman-Klein, 2000); the lyric style of his poetry (Brooker, 1988; Thomson, 1989; Speirs, 2000; Whitaker, 1985; Tatlow, 1977; Kuhn & Leeder, 2002; Grimm, 1982); plot and narrative form (Spalter, 1967; White, 1981, Curran, 2001); formal elements of performance (Wulbern, 1971; Fuegi, 1987; Mews & Knust, 1974; Eddershaw, 1996; Jones, 1986); scene design (Collins & Nisbet, 2010; Fletcher, 2003); rhetoric (Eagleton, 1985); etc. However, these works do little to fill in the philosophical gap in Brechtian literature left by Willett, Bentley and Esslin. They do not, for example, explore Brecht as a praxis theorist which, as this dissertation will demonstrate, is so central to his thought. Furthermore, they provide no commentary on his social ontology, nor do they attempt to unravel his epistemological assumptions, or his views on ideology or capitalism—all of which were instrumental considerations for Brecht as he developed the formal elements which these works discuss.

Though I may not agree with some of the conclusions from this formalistic branch of research and feel it has limitations, this work remains fundamental to

Brechtian scholarship. The fact that my present endeavor attempts to fill some of the gaps left by that literature should testify to its importance. As was mentioned above, formalistic approaches have outlined the qualitative differences between traditional and Brechtian form, which is crucial in understanding Brecht's thought. However, it is worth emphasizing that because of this focus on form, much of Brechtian scholarship does not critically engage with Marxism and political thought. Not surprisingly, much of this can be attributed to open hostility to Marxism as is the case with Willett, Bentley and Esslin. But, certainly many scholars who have undertaken research on Brecht have done so from a formalistic perspective because they are either uninterested in the philosophical implications of his work, feel it is not significant or are unequipped to deal with it because they were trained in other areas. The result is that Brechtian scholarship has relied almost exclusively on literary theory and literary concepts to understand Brecht's thought. This has come at the expense of a deeper, broader understanding of Brecht's work and thought. While most scholars acknowledge Brecht's Marxism, there is little analysis of what that Marxism actually looks like and what his major contributions to Marxism are (Squiers & Roessler, 2011). In short, Brechtian studies have failed to move beyond formalism and this has rendered the study of Brecht lacking to those who may be interested in pursuing Brecht from other academic traditions, especially the social sciences and social and political philosophy.

Although the dominance of formalistic approaches to Brechtian scholarship can be attributed to hostility to Marxism and the interests and expertise of those

conducting the research, within the literature one can also detect a resistance to studying Brecht from other perspectives. Formalism has become an entrenched value and attempts to move beyond it have been attacked as if the Brechtian were the exclusive property of formalistic studies. Shookman (1989) provides a particularly good example of this.

In her work, Shookman criticizes Barthes for what the author considers Barthes' misreading of Brecht. Particularly, Shookman criticizes Barthes for ignoring the form of epic theatre and advocates for a formalistic approach to study Brecht and his work. Shookman states for example, that Barthes, "quickly succumbed to the ever less political lure of semiology, structuralism, psychoanalysis, and textual *plaisir*, regarding epic theater as a concept more and more remote from Brecht's concrete concerns and...theatrical practice" (p. 472). Shookman is correct in saying this about Barthes; however, Shookman completely misses that ignoring the form was exactly the point for Barthes. Shookman, unlike Barthes, is limited by a formalistic approach. Because of this, Shookman essentially criticizes Barthes for seeing the forest beyond the trees.

Although, as was stated above, understanding Brecht's form is important, the discipline should not be restricted only to it as Shookman called for. In fact, Brecht himself made several calls against taking a purely formalistic approach to understanding his work. For Brecht, proper understanding of his work requires a sociological approach that is able to examine "'human beings' relationships to one another" (BAP, p. 68) [1929]. This is what Barthes (1972, 1974) tries to do. The

object of inquiry for Barthes was not meant to be the form *per se* but the signification of the form. Barthes was not interested in determining what could be described about Brecht's forms or what Brecht's forms could tell us about other forms or form in general. He was interested in what Brecht's forms reveal as signs of life in bourgeois society. To criticize Barthes for reading Brecht in this way can be seen as antithetical to Brecht's own intentions. For example, Brecht hoped to produce a scientific audience or in his words "an audience of the scientific age" (BT, p. 26) [1929]. By this, he meant an audience that could "explore humanity's new mutual relationships...(Marriage, disease, money, war, etc.)" via his theatre (BT, p. 29) [1929]. What Brecht desired was an audience of sociologists—"a theatre full of experts [on society], just as one has sporting arenas full of experts [on sports]" (BT, p. 44) [1931]. For Brecht, "theatre, art and literature" were more than just formal constructions and ends in themselves, they had "to form the 'ideological superstructure' for a solid, practical rearrangement of our age's way of life" (BT, p. 23) [1927]. If one wishes to take seriously assertions of Brecht's like "[t]he theatre's future is philosophical" (BT, p. 24) [1929] one cannot simply refer to the formal elements of his work as Shookman would have us do. This formalism prevents the depth of Brecht's work from emerging. To criticize Barthes for critically engaging Brecht's work in a way that goes deeper than formalism and attempts the sort of philosophical examination that Brecht himself would have wanted represents a perversion in Brechtian scholarship.

Not only can one see that the entrenched nature of formalism limits our understanding of Brecht, it has also led to poorly theorized works. Calico (2008), is perhaps the example *par excellence* of this. In her work, she argues that Brecht's experimentations with musical theatre, particularly his *Lehrstücke* or didactic, learning plays, were an attempt to establish a new contract between the theatre and its audience. Here she misrepresents Brecht's philosophy by suggesting he can be understood in terms of contractual relations. Framing what Brecht, the great Marxist playwright, was trying to do in such bourgeois concepts is misguided. Nowhere in his writings does Brecht discuss the theatre as a contractual relationship. Furthermore, only a cursory examination of his theoretical writings reveals that his work was produced with the express intention of destroying the hegemony of bourgeois ideology¹⁰ (BT). This would include the bourgeois notion that social relations can be reduced to contractual relations, as classical liberals like Smith or Locke would have it. Furthermore, Brecht attacks this notion repeatedly in his plays and poems. For

¹⁰ Kuhn and Giles (BAP) correctly assert that, "Brecht argues that ideologies are a product of specific social relationships, where particular classes adopt sets of ideas on a pragmatic basis according to the principle of utility...he addresses the specific role of bourgeois ideology [saying it] mystifies the nature of social relationships in general [and] must therefore be countered..." (p. 60-61). In this way, they argue that Brecht is adopting Marx's notions found in the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*. Therefore, references to ideology in this dissertation should be understood in this light i.e. as a state of illusion which is to be overcome. However, it should be noted that Marxists have applied this term in different ways. Eagleton (1991) provides a good discussion of the various ways Marxists have used the term and ultimately takes a position which has some similarity to the one outlined above in that he sees a connection of ideology to particular interests in society. He states that the function of ideology is the "promotion and legitimation of the interests of social groups in the face of opposing interests" (p. 29). However, he is reluctant to reduce ideology to falsehood and provides a critique of those who do. He argues that within all ideologies there is a "basic realism and reliability of cognition" (p. 14).

example, the Philosopher in the *Messingkauf Dialogs*¹¹ (a quasi-autobiographical character) finds his motivation in “destroying men’s preconceptions about their life together in society” (Brecht, 1965b, p. 97).¹²

This misrepresentation emerged because Calico’s attention is myopically focused only on the musical form of Brecht’s theatre. She limits herself to the type of language and methodology of musicology yet attempts to say something larger about social relations, an endeavor for which she appears to lack the vocabulary, understanding, classifications and methodology needed to adequately do so. She approached and executed the project like a musicologist would (Adorno of course excluded) and does actually say some insightful things about the music. However, while doing so, she ignores what Brecht was actually trying to accomplish. Instead, she attempts to fit Brecht within her own (or actually Carolyn Abbate’s¹³) framework instead of taking the time to reconstruct the framework Brecht developed and articulated. This framework was philosophical in nature (Benjamin, 1973, Haug, 1999; Squiers, 2011, 2012; Squiers & Roessler, 2011) but none of it was considered in Calico’s work. Consequently, the reader is left with a superficial and misleading analysis of Brecht’s work.

Two general problems emerge from this discussion on formalism. First, formalistic approaches have overlooked or left out important aspects of Brecht’s

¹¹ The *Messingkauf Dialogs* are an unfinished stage play that Brecht worked on primarily during the late 1930s and early 1940s. In Brecht’s words it contains, “a lot of theory in dialog form” (Journals, p. 20) [1939].

¹² Hereafter (MD).

¹³ See Calico (2008) p. 8 and 70-73.

thought. Second, formalism can lead to poor theorization. For these reasons, the present work attempts to move beyond this tradition.

Non-formalistic Approaches

Although a lot of the scholarship on Brecht has been restricted to the study of form, not all the literature on Brecht's aesthetics has. Some have taken Brecht's Marxism as a serious object of analysis. Adorno, for example, criticizes Brecht's aesthetics for being committed to the Marxist worldview. According to Adorno, Brecht's aesthetics, like all committed art, fail to be revolutionary because they are not designed to fully participate in a dialectical discourse. They are presented in such a way as to abstractly negate alternative views. In other words, Adorno accuses Brecht of being too sure that his worldview produced the Truth. Adorno is in large part correct to highlight this. Brecht did view Marx's material dialectical epistemology as a sort of Archimedean point for the leverage of truth (Bloch, 2007). However, Brecht denies that his work failed to fulfill a role in dialectical discourse or that Leftist committed art in general failed to do so. In fact, Brecht makes a contrary argument, arguing that his work and committed art in general (i.e., truth) formed a dialectical antagonism with ideology (i.e. illusion) (Bloch, 2007).

Like Adorno, Lukács is also critical of Brecht's aesthetics. According to Lukács, Brecht's revolutionary aesthetics is mistaken in its call for the destruction of existing artistic forms. For Lukács, established artistic forms can be employed in the

service of revolutionary action (Bloch, 2007). This difference stands at the core of the now famous aesthetic debate between Brecht and Lukács and is explored more deeply in Chapter 3.

Benjamin (1973) also weighed in on the debate around Brecht's aesthetics, attempting to articulate it in Marxian praxis-philosophy terms. Benjamin, a close friend of Brecht's, quite accurately argues that epic theatre is designed to represent the empirical conditions of bourgeois society and instruct audiences on these realities. In Benjamin's words, "[e]pic theatre...incessantly derives a lively and productive consciousness...This consciousness enables it to treat elements of reality as though it were setting up an experiment with the 'conditions' at the end of the experiment, not at the beginning" (Benjamin, 1973, p. 4). Benjamin saw the connection between Brecht's theory of theatre and Brecht's Marxian praxis-theory. This connection is explored in depth in Chapter 2.

Suvin (1984) also views Brecht's work as a praxis oriented philosophy. Particularly, Suvin discusses the Marxist emancipatory project undertaken by Brecht, accurately suggesting that Brecht's work reflected a dialectical materialistic worldview which emphasized that the world exists as a process and that the human condition is determined by that process which can be developed, manipulated, controlled, formed, etc. by human action. Furthermore, Suvin identifies Brecht's aesthetic standpoint, particularly his emphasis on estrangement, as seeking to undermine bourgeois values by forcing the audience to objectively and rationally see the realities of the world.

Another important non-formalistic contribution can be found in the work of Arendt (1968 and in Demetz, 1962). In these writings, Arendt both praises Brecht for his skill, compassion and selfless commitment to change, while at the same time condemning him for what she sees in him as a totalitarian impulse. Specifically, she argues that Brecht was particularly dangerous because of his great artistic ability and support for Stalin, whom she attempts to reduce to totalitarian methods and rule. Arendt does a nice job defining some of the essential import of Brecht, including his didactic potential and his production of committed art.

Arendt also uses Brecht as a starting point to address the role of the poet in the political realm, revealing something with which this dissertation agrees—mainly that Brecht serves as a good entry point to many discourses. However, her assertion that Brecht had totalitarian sympathies is entirely overstated. Primary sources demonstrate Brecht's rejection of totalitarian politics (BAP; Letters; Journals). Furthermore, Brecht's anti-totalitarian sentiments have been highlighted by the preeminent Brecht Scholars, Kuhn and Giles (BAP). Arendt, however, is not the only thinker to criticize Brecht on this account (Rainer, 1999; Heller, 1953; Boeninger, 1955; Bentley in Brecht, 1965). For example, like Arendt, Szczesny (1969) also argues that Brecht had authoritarian tendencies which made him and his art dangerous. Szczesny begins with a liberal definition of freedom and individuality and uncritically engages Brecht from this standpoint. Specifically, he gives a very selective, reading of Brecht's *Galileo*

which was under-theorized and under-researched¹⁴. It seems clear that Szczesny did not intend to critically engage Brecht's thought. In the book, there is, for example, no attempt to explain Brecht's reading of Marx, his praxis-philosophy, his actual position on totalitarianism, etc. Instead, Szczesny simply uses Brecht as the sacrificial whipping boy of a conservative and bourgeois ideological flagellation. This particular type of attack is common amongst liberal thinkers and others (e.g. Arendt 1958 and in Demetz, 1962; Heller, 1953; Boeninger, 1955; Bentley in Brecht, 1965). This is unfortunate because the basic thesis that Brecht poses a threat to the bourgeois order is an important one. But at least Szczesny and the others put enough thought into the matter to target Brecht, who as this work will indicate, posed (and perhaps still poses) a great challenge to the bourgeois mindset and liberal order.

Like Arendt, Giles (1995, 1997) attempts to place Brecht in a larger social discourse. Specifically, Giles (1997) examines Brecht's essay on and the historical events surrounding the Threepenny lawsuit. In his study, Giles places Brecht's ideas from the essay in the context of the then emerging critical theory of the German left-intellectuals. Giles pays particular attention to how Brecht's pragmatic critique of logical empiricism (1995) and the notion of technological change, as well as the influences of social behaviorist Otto Neurath and Marxist philosopher Karl Korsch (1997) played in developing Brecht's thought. While this work conspicuously lacks an account of the role the Marxist sociologist Fritz Sternberg had in Brecht's thought,

¹⁴ Szczesny, for example, takes a small and narrow reading of Brecht's theoretical writings and augments this with an equally small and narrow reading of commentary on Brecht. Specifically, Szczesny uncritically accepts the already uncritical analysis provided by Esslin which, as was mentioned above, rejects Brechtian Marxism as an *a priori* condition of his analysis.

it still does a fair job contextualizing Brecht into the wider discourse of critical theory and pre-World War Two left-intellectualism in Germany.

Post-formalistic Approaches

While Adorno, Arendt, Benjamin and others are not concerned with the form of Brecht's work *per se* but in its revolutionary potential and its wider social implications, others have both addressed formal issues more directly and attempted to engage Brecht's thought in a wider philosophical discourse. We can refer to these approaches as post-formalistic. These approaches have largely developed out of the Marxist literary criticism championed by Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and others. This tradition of literary criticism has as its objective, according to Eagleton (1976), "to explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings [and] grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the products of a particular history" (p. 3).

Jameson (1999), for example, provides an analysis of the relation between Brecht's form and his politics, synthesizing Brecht's ideas in Marxist terms. Specifically, Jameson argues that the goal of Brecht's form is to produce a critically self-reflective process where the audience is able to place itself historically and detach themselves from the customary way of understanding the world around them. In doing this, Jameson argues that Brecht's work cannot be properly addressed by employing the standard categories, differentiations and language of literary criticism.

Instead, Jameson frames Brecht in relation to what he sees as Brecht's indebtedness to logical empiricism, pragmatism and the thought of Karl Korsch.

Although Jameson's work critically engages Brecht with Marxism and wider aesthetic philosophy, his work lacks detailed analysis of Brecht as a philosopher. Instead he opts to use Brecht as a means of producing a critical framework for literary or, perhaps more broadly, cultural interpretation. His object is not so much to analyze Brecht as to be able to apply Brecht. Jameson uses Brecht as a vehicle of approaching not only literature and other forms of art but the life-world in general. In *Brecht and Method* (2000), for example, he stresses the usefulness of Brecht and provides a rather compelling argument that Brecht's stand-alone, episodic scenes provide the reader with a new way of seeing. This is something that Barthes (1972) also addresses. Barthes argued for a historicized reading of events and texts in order to place them within the larger social context. This is done, according to Barthes, not by examining the form, but by interpretation of what the form signifies. Both Jameson and Barthes emphasize the importance of Brecht's notion of *gestus*. As will be described in more detail in Chapter 4, *gestus* is the signification of particular gestures. It is the gist a motion or action signifies. For Jameson and Barthes, *gestus* reveals for the audience that which is present but overlooked. It makes the obscure obvious.

Like Jameson, Oesmann (1997, 2005) goes deeper than formalism in her analysis of Brecht. In her work, she engages Brecht's aesthetic philosophy with that of Adorno, Lukács, and Benjamin. This adds freshness to the aesthetic debate

mentioned above. The most interesting of her arguments is perhaps her assertion that Brecht looked at the progression toward communism as uncertain and not inevitable. While this position is provocative, it is unfortunately predicated on very fragmentary, un-contextualized evidence and a narrow reading of Brecht's dramatic work. The preponderance of evidence shows that Brecht maintained a teleological view of human history and used his art not to ensure the progression toward a communistic society but to facilitate and expedite its inevitable advent (Squiers, 2011). As Chapter 2 will show Brecht believed that a final determined end was present in embryo form in the present. Like Aristotle's acorn current society would develop into the oak of communism. Oesmann also engages Brecht's thought with work in anthropology and with Foucault's work. However, here she forgoes any deep, philosophical relevant reading and critique of the theorists explored. In other words, she applies the theorists in her analysis but provides no justification for their application.

Although Oesmann may have weakness in the aforementioned points in her work, she along with Jameson and Barthes represent an important step forward in the exposition of Brecht's thought. Because these scholars have looked at things besides the formal elements of Brecht's work, they have managed to say new and important things about it—things that could not have been said if formalism had been adhered to. The present undertaking seeks to build on these examples.

Methodology

Unlike the formalistic and some of the non-formalistic contributions mentioned above, this dissertation attempts to engage Brecht with other Marxist and Marxian thinking. By engage, I mean to critically involve in a discourse, in order to make connections, associations, evaluations, comparisons and contrasts, as well as to highlight similarities and dissimilarities, look for unique contributions, etc. However, unlike the aforementioned non-formalistic and post-formalistic works, this dissertation will focus on areas of Brecht's thought which have largely been ignored, including his epistemological assumptions, conceptualization of historical materialism, praxis philosophy, and social ontology. Additionally, like Oesmann's, this work will engage Brecht's thought with non-Marxist thought as well, including work in social psychology, sociology, political science, the sociology of knowledge, the natural sciences and political philosophy.

Furthermore, unlike Jameson and Oesmann, whose literary studies on Brecht manifest more as philosophical musings than philosophical analysis, this work will constitute a philosophical analysis of the work and thought of Brecht. In the work of Jameson and Oesmann, literary theory is informed by philosophy. That is, their readings of Brecht have been informed by various philosophical traditions and works, e.g. Marx, Adorno, Benjamin, etc. This maneuver allows them to make comparisons between Brecht and others, a goal both fully realize (Squiers & Roessler, 2011). But making comparisons of this sort is not the goal of this dissertation.

Instead, the goal of my research is to reconstruct Brecht's social and political philosophy. In order to do this, my approach rejects the traditional formalistic approaches undertaken in traditional literary studies, where the form is the object of investigation. I am not interested in explaining, examining, comparing, etc., Brecht's artistic forms. Instead, I analyze the constitutive parts of the form with the intention of highlighting what they signify about the philosophical content embedded in it. As was mentioned above, this is the general approach of Barthes and the way Brecht hoped his form would be applied. I consider Brecht's form as a constituent part of his social and political philosophy. Because of this, Brecht's form is not my primary object of inquiry. I analyze it solely for the purposes of revealing something about Brecht's philosophy. This is a key point and constitutes what I see as one of my work's key contribution to Brechtian studies.

In this endeavor, I am trying to walk a fine line. Specifically, it is not my intention to claim that the present work constitutes a perfect hermeneutical reconstruction of Brecht's thought, since I do not feel such an errand would be possible. I reject the idea that there can be an authoritatively correct reading. To make such a claim would require an absolute, authoritative stance about that theorist's work. Given the nature of hermeneutical reconstruction, I think such a claim is impossible. Furthermore, Brechtian scholarship has been limited by this type of axiomatic readings. Instead of looking for new ways to understand and apply Brecht, so much of the literature has taken the canonical works about him (e.g., Esslin (1961, 1969), Sokel (1963 and in Demetz, 1962), Bentley (1955, 1999), Willett (1977), etc)

at face value (Squiers & Roessler, 2011). Taking Jameson and Oesmann's work as my example, I hope to challenge some of the axioms of Brechtian research, just as, for example, Oesmann does by rejecting the traditional manner of classifying Brecht's works into three distinct categories. Some of the axioms that I will challenge are the reasons for Brecht's use of his epic narrative form, the purpose of his use of split characters, his understanding of the role and purpose of *gestus* in his work, etc.

Instead of feigning an authoritative reading of Brecht, I take ownership of the reconstruction. It is Brecht vis-à-vis Squiers. But, more than that, it is Brecht vis-à-vis Squiers vis-à-vis Barthes, Gramsci, Burger and Luckmann, Lukács, Aristotle, Sartre, Marx and Engels, etc. It is my hope that this reading will be not only revealing but also a starting point for a new kind of discourse on Brecht and also a model to be both used and critiqued for social and political philosophical readings of literary figures and other artists.

Specifically, this project does several things which may be of use to others. First, it illustrates the advantages of an interdisciplinary analysis of Brecht and artists in general. The application of research from several disciplines should provoke the reader to make connections with the literatures (s)he is familiar with and allow them to produce further interdisciplinary studies. Second, it provides a more totalizing account of the thought of Brecht. The philosophical reconstruction presented here may be used as the basis for future studies in two ways—as the general framework to understanding the rationale for various formal elements of Brecht's work and as a skeletal outline of a philosophy which can be filled in with the particulars of its

corpus. Finally, this work can be of use to the political philosopher interested in the arts in two ways. In general, it provides examples of the type of questions that can be raised and answered when examining an artist. More specifically, the approach used in the textual readings demonstrates a method of extracting data from art which may be useful to others.

For example, I see potential uses for this approach in the examination of such figures as: Duchamp, Shaw, Beckett, Dali, Dr. Seuss, etc. who may also have philosophical importance and may be espousing unique philosophical positions.

In order to do this reconstruction, I shall draw on all types of Brecht's writings including essays, reviews, short-stories, novels, poetry, letters, plays, movie scripts, journal entries and musings. Specifically, I will use his theoretical writings, found primarily in his essays, reviews, journal entries, letters, and musings as my guide in reconstructing this philosophy. True to the approach outlined above, his artistic works will be used to reveal the philosophical tenets of his theoretical works in order to clarify them, demonstrate their material applicability and to make general claims regarding his praxis philosophy. All types of work will be considered with equal weight because, as is argued in Chapter 2 and Squiers (2011), they all are constituent parts of his praxis philosophy.

However, it should be noted that Brecht's praxis philosophy developed over time and stressed the necessity of constant development through process of experimentation. For Brecht, theory and praxis existed in a constant dialectical struggle. That is, theory needed to be reconciled by the empirics experienced in praxis

and empirics of praxis needed to be reconciled by theory (BFR; Letters; Squiers, 2011). This process of mutual reconciliation would continue until theory and praxis were completely reconciled (Squiers, 2011). Therefore, the essential character of Brecht's philosophy is one of experiment and change and there is, then, no definitive articulation of the theory.

This is not to suggest, however, that nothing can be said about his theory. Contrary to the formalistic literature which attempts to divide Brecht's work into three categories—early expressionist work, didactic theatre and epic theatre—a classification based on three different forms, Oesmann stresses a specific continuity can be found in Brecht's theory and entire repertoire. Oesmann articulates this continuity in Marxist terms. While perhaps, to some degree, Oesmann overstates the idea that Brecht's early work can be understood in Marxist terms, she is entirely correct to discuss Brecht's work as a process of continuity and development. Oesmann's work may downplay the significant change in Brecht's work which occurred by the late 1920s, and this comes at the expense of a more nuanced reading; but Brecht himself hints at the continuity when he says, "When I read Marx's *Capital* I understood my plays...It wasn't of course that I found I had unconsciously written a whole pile of Marxist plays; but this man Marx was the only spectator for my plays..." (BT, p. 23-4n) [1928]. For certain, as Oesmann and Squiers (2011b) highlight, Brecht's early works, for example, *Baal*, *The Wedding*, *Drums in the Night*, and *The Threepenny Opera*, were critiques of bourgeois society. Marxism simply provided Brecht with a language and rationalistic epistemic center to clarify his

critique in a scientific way. In other words, Marxism provided Brecht with a coherent philosophical framework for his critique of bourgeois society.

Advancing, then, from Oesmann's contribution, this work will assume continuity in Brecht's work. However, unlike Oesmann, this continuity will be defined as a discontentment with bourgeois society and a desire to change that society through the praxis of artistic endeavors. This recognizes the continuity that Oesmann accurately highlights but also admits that Brecht himself was unable to articulate this discontentment in Marxist terms earlier in his career.

Given that it wasn't until Brecht's introduction to Marxism that a coherent philosophical agenda is articulated, textual references in support of this dissertation's arguments will largely be taken from texts written by Brecht after his introduction to Marxism.

Objectives

I have two main objectives for undertaking this type of research. First, it is my hope that by examining Brecht through this underrepresented perspective I will help expand the purview of Brechtian scholarship. That is, I hope to encourage the field to begin thoroughly and systematically exploring Brecht's influence and importance beyond his roles as a dramatist and literary figure. His role as a social philosopher is particularly germane in this regard because, as I will argue in Chapter 2, the theoretical underpinnings and normative basis of his epic theatre are largely political

and represent a well worked out and comprehensive philosophical worldview and agenda. As the great critical theorist Walter Benjamin said, “[o]ne may regard epic theatre as more dramatic than the dialogue [e.g. Plato]...but epic theatre need not, for that reason, be any the less philosophical” (Benjamin, 1973, p. 6).

My second main objective for this research is to provide an example of how philosophical meaning can be expressed and extracted from literary and dramatic works. Despite the efforts of thinkers like Brecht, Camus and Sartre, this is a fact often overlooked by those studying social philosophy and political theory. No doubt this is due, at least in part, to the formal demarcations established between disciplines in present day academia. While I make no normative claims regarding the ways disciplines have been divided, one of the results of these divisions is that many social philosophers do not consider narrative works to be appropriate objects of study for their discipline. This perspective overlooks that many of the ancient roots of the field (at least in the Western academy) were presented in narrative form. Aristophanes, Homer, Sophocles, and the Bible stand as ready examples. Furthermore, this mindset has created a situation where thinkers with significant philosophical importance are not properly being analyzed from a philosophical framework. Mandeville, Ibsen, Chekhov and of course Brecht can surely be included in this group.

I am not alone in the call to reassert the important of literature in political studies. Zuckert has been a long-time proponent of including literature in the scope of political philosophy (Zuckert, 1981; 2007). Over the last several decades, the study of literature and politics has increasingly become an important part of political

philosophy and political science. This fact is made evident by the formation of the Politics and Literature (now the Politics, Literature and Film) organized section of the American Political Science Association in 1993 and the publication of an entire special issue on politics and literature in *The Review of Politics* in 2007. Furthermore, there have been calls from other disciplines for the critical engagement of literature and politics and good work has been done in these areas. Tassi (1998), for example, argues that essentially theatre is a form of philosophy and political theatre by extension is political philosophy. Conolly and Haydar (2008) argue that literature provides us with certain information and understanding we do not get from the traditional type of scholarly books and articles. This sentiment is also found in Zuckert (1981; 2007), Dannhauser (1995), Bloom (1960) Foley (1986), Euben (1986; 1990; 2007) and Saxonhouse (1992).

I see several advantages to conducting philosophical research on literary figures. Since literature is generally less esoteric than scholarly writings, it allows for a wider discourse to develop. For example, psychological, economic, social, political, moralistic, ethical, epistemological and ontological themes are often expressed in a single work or are dealt with during the course of a literary career. This is unlikely to be the case in more esoteric works. Furthermore, Brecht seems an especially likely candidate to elicit a wide discourse. Not only do his literary works explore the aforementioned themes and more; Brecht was also many things besides a playwright and poet. He was one of the premier Marxist aesthetic thinkers of the twentieth century, an accomplished director and songwriter, as well as a writer on sociology

and social psychology, politics, art and economics, media and communication, history, etc. Since Brecht was all of these things and stands at the cross section of so many disciplines, through him we are able to bring together diverse discourses in ways we otherwise would not be able to. The present work, for example, brings together work in social psychology, the sociology of knowledge, sociology and political science, aesthetic theory, political and social philosophy, epistemology, etc.

Furthermore, it is fair to ask what we get as scholars and philosophers from Brecht that we do not get from others like Benjamin or Adorno or anyone else. While certainly Brecht was close in many aspects of his thinking to the Frankfurt school, especially Benjamin, I offer two answers.

First, Brecht presented a complex and thoroughly developed Marxian philosophy of praxis. His theatre was a large-scale social experiment which sought to facilitate the advent of radical political and social change. It was also an experiment that was constantly adapting for the sake of greater effectiveness and one which extended throughout society—reaching the workers themselves. In Brecht's praxis, sets were built, lights shone, instruments were played, songs were sung, dances were danced, *gestus* shown, material conditions were exposed in recognizable ways, theatres were filled and minds were engaged in material ways (Squiers & Roessler, 2011). Furthermore, it is a praxis philosophy deeply rooted in notions of human psychology (Squiers & Roessler, 2011).

Second, I believe Brecht was unrivaled in his ability to portray social contradiction in a realistic and accessible way. Brecht was so deft at this that his plays

in particular serve as a sort of source of empirical data for his audience. While of course, other critical theorists expose social contradictions, they are able to do this only by abstracting them. That is, they are able to do so only by means of rationalization, in that they interpret from a rational standpoint and present the abstracted interpretation. Brecht, on the other hand, does not abstract. Quite simply he exposes, demonstrates, shows, etc., social contradiction in a manner that is obvious to the audience. This allows the audience to then interpret from a rational standpoint for themselves (Squiers & Roessler, 2011). For Brecht the idea is to bring about a new way of thinking, understanding and interpreting the world. In a word, the goal is to alter consciousness. What Brecht attempted was to provide a new way of thinking so that people would come to new conclusions.

This was done in two ways: through cognitive disruption, as will be explored in Chapters 2 and 3, and through the assessable portrayal of social contradiction which sought to undermine the logic of bourgeois ideology, which will be explored in Chapters 4 through 7.

Overview

This work will be organized around the central thesis that a coherent social and political philosophy can be reconstructed from Brecht's thought and works. While the dissertation maintains this overarching thesis, each chapter will contain its own thesis and support for these individual theses. In essence, each chapter serves to

show an individual element of Brecht's social and political philosophy. Furthermore, efforts will be taken to demonstrate the way these elements connect to each other, which will in turn serve as evidence in support of the master thesis.

The next chapter will contain a discussion of Brecht's ethics. Specifically, it will be argued that Brecht had a fundamental ethical concern for the suffering and injustice found in bourgeois society. This concern formed the ethical imperative for his epic theatre. Furthermore, it will be argued that Brecht designed epic theatre to alter the *weltanschauung* or worldview of the audience and that Brecht's ethical imperative was then to alter the worldview of the audience. This was done in an effort to create the necessary conditions for human emancipation. In this, praxis is an essential element of Brecht's philosophy. Therefore, Chapter 2 will also argue that Brecht's thought constitutes a Marxian philosophy of praxis and the specifics of his praxis-theory will be outlined in order to demonstrate that the entire project of epic theatre was deeply rooted in Brecht's ethical concern for human emancipation.

In Chapter 2, it will be asserted that Brecht sought to alter the *weltanschauung* of his audience through two distinct but inter-related ways—cognitive disruption and the demonstration of social contradiction. Chapter 3 will discuss the notion of cognitive disruption in Brecht's work. Specifically, it will be argued that in an effort to alter the *weltanschauung* of the audience Brecht developed various 'estrangement effects' (*Verfremdungseffekte*) which were designed to make the familiar world seem unfamiliar. One 'estrangement effect' that Brecht employed was to alter the structure of narration away from the traditional plot structure articulated by Aristotle in his

Poetics. This, in effect, constitutes an alteration of a particular type of time that Zerubavel (1985) refers to as ‘socio-temporal order’. Chapter 3 will demonstrate that Brecht’s manipulation of socio-temporal order is likely to serve the purpose of cognitive disruption.

Chapter 4 will explore the second way Brecht attempted to alter worldview—his demonstration of social contradictions. Particularly, the chapter will investigate the role Brecht’s notion of *gestus* played in demonstrating social contradictions and the role Brecht thought the signification of these social contradictions played in changing consciousness. In order to do this, we will first reconstruct Brecht’s notions of the nature of ideology and its relation to language. Since Brecht’s ideas in this area are contained primarily in a fragmentary form, this will be accomplished by demonstrating the similarities between Brecht’s ideas and those of Gramsci and Barthes who developed more thoroughly articulated theoretical frameworks. It will be shown that, like Gramsci and Barthes, Brecht conceived of a dominant ideology which: 1) serves particular interests not universal ones, 2) is historically/socially conditioned and thus not an innocent reflection of objective phenomenon, 3) obscures contradiction and attempts to project a unified totality and 4) is, in part, a product of language. It will also be shown how Brecht attempts to overcome this type of ideology through his portrayal of social antagonism.

Both Sartre and Barthes stress the importance of Brecht’s disrupting the myth of unity through the demonstration of contradictions. Both point out that in this Brecht attempts to distance the audience’s manner of perception from the dominant

ideology. This, it will be argued, is similar to a process of what we can define as phenomenological reduction. This phenomenological reduction serves two functions according to Brecht's philosophy. The first is to strip away the dominant ideology and the second is to begin to replace that ideology with the material dialectical weltanschauung of Marx.

Chapter 5 will illustrate Brecht's challenge to the totalized, unified reality presented by bourgeois ideology. In this chapter, we will examine a specific example of Brecht's depictions of contradiction present in bourgeois society. Particularly we will look at a pathology Brecht saw in bourgeois society—the dialectical antagonism of the self. This antagonism will be defined as the antagonism between the individual-being and the species-being and will be revealed by an analysis of Brecht's use of the literary/theatrical technique of the 'split character' in his play *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

In Chapter 6, an analysis of *Life of Galileo* will be presented. Through this analysis we will see that Brecht's attempts to disrupt one's worldview were founded on the idea of creating what he considered to be a Cartesian form of doubt in his audience which would call into question the validity of the inherited, uncritically accepted worldview. Brecht saw this as the impulse at the heart of the bourgeoisie's emancipation and believed this would serve as the basis for the emancipation of the working class. However, we will also find that doubt in one's weltanschauung is not enough to move one from the realm of ideology and confusion. For Brecht, one also needs to have and employ the proper tools of perception, i.e. dialectics.

Furthermore in this analysis of *Life of Galileo*, we will see that Brecht displays a model of the bourgeois revolution and outlines a dialectic of enlightenment which was founded on a particular version of historical materialism. From this analysis, it will be demonstrated that Brecht envisions the state apparatus as a repressive force protecting the hegemony of the dominant class ideology. However, it will also be shown that maintaining the dominant weltanschauung is not solely a function of the state apparatus, for Brecht. Individuals may align themselves with the interests of the state and ruling classes believing they are acting toward the interests of the subaltern classes. This will be seen in Brecht's depiction of a pragmatic call to suppress truth in order to prevent existential anxiety in the masses.

In our analysis of *Galileo*, we also see that Brecht believed Galileo's recantation was emblematic of a larger failing of the bourgeois mindset. Specifically it will be argued that Brecht believed Galileo's recantation prevented truth and science from aspiring toward universal interests. Because Galileo refused to demand that science be used toward universal emancipation, its use toward particular ends (and the continued suffering of the masses which that entailed) could continue with impunity.

Finally, our study of *Galileo* will reveal several important characteristics of Brecht's historical materialism. For example it will be shown that Brecht saw the emerging bourgeoisie as possessing the notion that science and truth could be used toward their ends and that the hegemonic class employs violence, administered through the state apparatus, in defense of the existing order.

In Chapter 7, Brecht's historical materialism will be examined still further. An analysis of his adaptation of *Coriolanus* will demonstrate his belief in 'dominant' and 'secondary' contradictions within a process of historical development—an idea Brecht appropriated from Mao. This chapter will augment what the previous chapters reveal about Brecht's historical materialism. For example, in Chapter 5, we will see that Brecht demonstrates the manifestation of a particular contradiction (that of the self), within a particular historical period, in *The Good Woman*. Similarly, in Chapter 6, our analysis of *Galileo* will reveal Brecht's depiction of the playing out of the class antagonism between the princely and clerical classes and the emerging bourgeois. In Chapter 7, we will see how two particular contradictions in historical development can relate to each other. Specifically, we will see that for Brecht within the process of historical progression different contradictions can take precedence over others at different moments. As with the analysis of *The Good Woman* and *Galileo* this chapter will expose Brecht's belief in a particular philosophical position. Moreover, perhaps more importantly, it will demonstrate Brecht's ability to portray social contradictions and the playing out of historical materialism in his work. In the conclusion, Chapter 8, the main arguments of this dissertation will be summarized and the single theoretical framework this work attempts to create will be reiterated in concise form. Furthermore, a preliminary critique of Brecht's social and political philosophy will be offered along with ideas for future research. Finally the concluding discussion will attempt to address the relevancy of Brecht's thought today by answering the question: "What does Brecht lend to a revolutionary aesthetic today?"

CHAPTER II

BRECHT'S ETHICS OF PRAXIS

I came to the cities in a time of disorder
 When hunger reigned there.
 I came among men in a time of revolt
 And I rebelled with them.¹⁵

Introduction

Brecht was many things—playwright, poet, lyricist, director, philosopher, etc. However, for Brecht these roles were not disparate. While doing them, he was directing the world toward a new social order and attempting to facilitate the advent of universal human emancipation¹⁶. Brecht's whole professional life and much of his private life as well was devoted to ending social antagonism and the emancipation of humanity from material suffering. What made him the 'difficult phenomenon' that

¹⁵ Brecht, Willett, Manheim, & Fried, 1978, p. 319.

¹⁶ Brecht is vague about what emancipation would mean in practice. However, in his plays, especially *The Good Woman*, *Puntila* and *Saint Joan* he seems to envision it as both freedom from material suffering and exploitation. Brecht is less vague on his definition of exploitation. We can see from discussions like those in *Puntila* and *The Threepenny Novel* that he sees this as the expropriation of surplus value from the worker. For example, in *Puntila*, Brecht has one of the characters say, "schoolbooks...naturally...don't say who does the tilling and who gets the rewards" (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1976, p. 159) and in *The Threepenny Novel* we see "When anyone expends some of his working-power on a thing, that thing becomes more valuable...But the thing on which we expend it does not belong to us" (Brecht, 1961, p. 362). In essence, Brecht believes that the proletariat is not allowed to enjoy all the fruits of their labor. Instead they are forced to surrender portions of the value of their production to the bourgeoisie.

Benjamin called him was that nearly his whole life and everything he did constituted either a praxis element or theory element of his complex social philosophy.

One difficulty of Brecht's work is locating an ethics in it. His epic theatre was not interested in moralizing. True, Brecht himself referred many times to the instructive nature of epic theatre; but, Brecht never intended epic theatre to instruct its audience in moral behavior. As Brecht himself says, "[m]any people...attacked the epic theatre, claiming it was too moralistic. Yet moral utterances were secondary in epic theatre. Its intention was less to moralize than to study [society]" (quoted in Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 29) [c. 1936]. This is not to suggest that there was no ethical imperative to the epic theatre, though. Instead of presenting moralistic arguments, Brecht designed epic theatre to alter the *weltanschauung* of the audience. This constituted the ethical imperative of his theatre. This was critical for Brecht because by altering the audiences' *weltanschauung* he was trying to create the necessary conditions for human emancipation. Epic theatre, then, was ethical not in its text but in its agenda (i.e. creating the necessary conditions for human emancipation). In this way, we can say that Brecht's ethic was an ethic of praxis in the Marxian sense.

This chapter seeks to draw Brecht's aesthetic theory into the larger discourse of Marxian praxis philosophy and social and political philosophy more broadly. In it, I will argue that Brecht's thought constitutes a Marxian philosophy of praxis and outline the specifics of his praxis-theory in order to demonstrate that the entire project of epic theatre was deeply rooted in Brecht's ethical concern for human emancipation.

Marxian Praxis-Theory

Marxian praxis-theories (or philosophies of praxis) are philosophies where Marxian theory is practically applied to one's actions. They are philosophies where Marxian theory directs one's actions. That is, Marxian philosophies of praxis are philosophies where progressive (i.e. materially emancipatory) action (understood in Marxist terms) forms a central tenet of the theory. Specifically, Marxian philosophies of praxis posit some form of action as being necessary for the fulfillment of the theory. They stress the necessity for some action to occur in order to ensure that the predictions of the theory come to fruition.

As Haug (2001) points out, the concept of Marxian praxis-theory can be traced back to Marx himself. In its simplest form it is found in the often quoted "Theses on Feuerbach" where Marx states that "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways, the point, however, is to change it" (Marx and Engels, 1972, p. 109). Although this work was not published during Marx's lifetime it nevertheless became an influential aspect of Marx's thought for twentieth century Marxists. This influence was evident in Italian Marxism. Antonio Labriola, for example, was the first to use the term "philosophy of praxis" calling it the "nucleus of Historical Materialism" (Haug, 2001, p. 69). It was elaborated by Antonio Gramsci who advocated for counter-hegemonic action intended to destroy the so called 'common sense' understanding of subaltern social groups. This 'common sense' understanding is quite similar to Brecht's notion of the working class

weltanschauung. Both are meant to imply an uncritical acceptance of mechanisms of truth production which are dominated by the bourgeoisie. That is, both thinkers see reality being constructed in bourgeois society with particular biases that reinforce the domination of the bourgeoisie.¹⁷

Although largely developed independently of the Italian versions, Marxian praxis-theory was also influential in Germany, most notably in the work that came out of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, to which Brecht's friend and intellectual companion Walter Benjamin was associated. While there are differences between the Italian and German formulations of Marxian praxis-theory as well as differences within the two schools, all formulations maintain some common elements. For example, they all adopt, in some form, Marx's dialectical epistemology and theory of historical progression (i.e. historical materialism). In short, Marx's theory of historical progression posits that history advances when the contradictions inherent within a particular mode of production are reconciled. These contradictions manifest, materially, in the form of antagonistic social forces between the producers of wealth (the exploited) and those who get to enjoy it (the exploiter). However, according to Brecht's interpretation of Marx (see *The Threepenny Lawsuit* in BFR)¹⁸, the reconciliation of these antagonisms cannot happen until certain conditions are met. Particularly, this reconciliation cannot occur until the exploited class becomes conscious of their social position and the exploitation that it entails. For reasons

¹⁷ Wolfgang Fritz Haug illustrates this point as well as other similarities between Brecht's Marxian praxis-theory and that of Gramsci. See Haug (1999 and 2001).

¹⁸ This is a point that seems to be supported by Cohen's (1979) reading of Marx's historical materialism.

explored later, only then can the exploited class act as a social force for change. The development of this so-called ‘class consciousness’ is the first and an essential condition that needs to be met before world historical progress can happen. So, for example, in bourgeois society, historical progress can only be achieved when the proletariat realizes it is an exploited social class. Only then can they act as a unified progressive force. Helping the proletariat achieve their class consciousness and thus become a progressive social force is the first task of the Marxian praxis-theorist. This task also forms the basic driving principle behind Brecht’s epic theatre and his ethical imperative.

The Theory of Epic Theatre as a Praxis Philosophy

According to Brecht, the difficulties of social change “are not mastered by keeping silent about them” (BT, p. 29) [1929]. They are mastered by exposing them. To Brecht, in order to expose these difficulties one must first be able to depict the empirical realities of the present day. Once these realities are understood, once one understands the social environment, one can begin to alter social relations or the relations of social forces. Brecht argues that as history progresses, new social relationships are created and it is the job of the artist to depict these new relationships. This understanding is what he had in mind when he says, for example, that “art follows reality” (BT, p. 29) [1929]. Reality springs from the social superstructure which is in turn determined by the mode of production. This is a point Brecht posits

for example in his writing on *The Threepenny lawsuit* (BFR). In essence, the mode of production creates the conditions of what we can refer to as the material life-world, i.e. the given, concrete, and intersubjectively available world humans physically inhabit and share. Changes in the mode of production create new material conditions. Art, then, depicts these new conditions and relationships.

However, according to Brecht the depiction of the new relationships that were created by the advent of the capitalistic mode of production is not possible in bourgeois forms of art. He offers two interrelated reasons for this. First, bourgeois art is unscientific. That is, it does not incorporate what Brecht believed to be the major advancement in the science of human relations, dialectical materialism. He says, for example, that representations in theatre, “cannot work out satisfactorily without knowledge of dialectics—and without making dialectics known” (BT, p. 279) [1956]. Bourgeois theatre is conspicuously lacking this, according to Brecht. Furthermore, he argues that the reason science is lacking in bourgeois art is that “[t]he bourgeois class...knows very well that its rule would come to an end if the scientific eye were turned on its own understanding” (BT, p. 185) [1949]. According to Brecht,

[t]he reason why the new way of thinking and feeling [i.e. dialectical materialism] has not yet penetrated the great mass of men is that the sciences, for all their success in exploiting and dominating nature, have been stopped by the class which they brought to power—the bourgeoisie—from operating in another field where darkness still reigns, namely that of the relations which

people have to one another during the exploiting and dominating process (BT, p. 184) [1949].

In Brecht's mind, the bourgeoisie have a vested interest in keeping this type of science out of the theatre. Dialectical materialism will demonstrate to the workers the realities of their social position, particularly their exploitation. It will show them that their labor is producing wealth that they are unable to enjoy.

While he is not direct about the actual mechanisms the bourgeoisie are using, Brecht argues that the bourgeoisie have suppressed dialectical materialism in art to protect their own interests. In Brecht's understanding, then, they have also suppressed the social truth which can only be divined through that particular *weltanschauung*. Brecht's understanding of dialectical materialism is that of a specific epistemology that is both essentialist and rationalistic. By essentialist I mean that it seeks a unified, objective truth. That is, it seeks to divine the essential, necessary and undeniable characteristics of the object being investigated. As a rationalistic epistemology, truth is to be found by understanding the essence of philosophical or scientific inquiry. In Resnick's and Wolff's words, a rationalistic epistemology tries to express "the conceptual essence of reality" (Resnick & Wolff, 1987, p. 9). In other words, rationalists believe that they have the correct, essential way of viewing the world. This then allows them to see the world in its essential nature i.e. as unified, objective truth. If one is unable to see the world through the material dialectical *weltanschauung*, they are unable to see true reality according to Brecht. He states for example that "[t]he intensified class struggle, the legality of competition, unrestrained

exploitation, the accumulation of misery via the accumulation of capital—it all means that dialectics more and more becomes the only possible aid to orientation” (Journals, p. 47) [1940].

It is for these reasons Brecht argues for the abandonment of bourgeois forms of art. According to Brecht, they are unable to depict truth (because of its lack of proper science) and therefore depict untruths. These unrealistic depictions presented in bourgeois art have negative effects on the proletariat. For example, Brecht refers to bourgeois theatre as producing “hypnosis [and] sordid intoxication” (BT, p. 38) [1930]. He also states that bourgeois or what he also defines as ‘dramatic theatre’ has turned people “into a cowed, credulous, hypnotized mass” (BT, p. 188) [1949].

Though not articulated in these words, Brecht is saying that bourgeois theatre creates and reinforces an uncritical *weltanschauung*, a worldview which is not self-critical and unable to provide a meta-critique of itself. Since the *weltanschauung* cannot critique itself, empirical illusions have no way of being exposed as such. They are uncritically accepted as reality and thus the possibility of their change is eliminated. This phenomenon makes Brecht very critical of bourgeois art. He believes it discourages the material conditions necessary for class conflict to be reconciled and thus retards the progress towards his social ideal of human emancipation.

Brecht discusses this uncritical worldview in his “A Short Organum for the Theatre.” Here, he argues that for the worker:

[I]t seems impossible to alter what has long not been altered. [They] are always coming on things that are too obvious for [them] to bother to

understand them...A child, living in a world of old men, learns how things work there. He knows the run of things before he can walk. If anyone is bold enough to want something further, he only wants to have it as an exception. (BT, p. 192) [1949].

This theme is also found in Brecht's unfinished *Messingkauf Dialogues*:

Many of us...find the exploitation that takes place between men just as natural as that by which we master nature: men being treated like soil or like cattle. Countless people approach great wars like earthquakes, as if instead of human beings natural forces lay behind them against with the human race is powerless. Perhaps what seems most natural of all to us is the way we earn a living. (MD, p. 42)

What Brecht is saying is that people develop an uncritical and unconscious way of perceiving, interpreting and understanding their environment. They internalize the common, accepted manner of truth production and the truths produced through that manner without considering the possibility an alternate manner of truth production could exist. In other words, they uncritically accept the dominant *weltanschauung* and all their understandings of their environment (i.e. all the truths they perceive) are created within the limits of that *weltanschauung*. Bourgeois theatre then reinforces this uncritical *weltanschauung*.

Since bourgeois theatre is presented in the bourgeois *weltanschauung*, it depicts life in a way which prevents the working class from seeing that the conditions they live under are mutable. For example, bourgeois theatre presents human nature as

a limit to social progression. In the bourgeois weltanschauung, human nature is seen as something that prevents the possibility of change. It intones Hobbes' essentialistic (i.e. permanent, unalterable) *bellum omnium contra omnes* view of human nature—a human nature which is believed to be relentlessly and perpetually competitive and hostile toward others. If one accepts the bourgeois weltanschauung's view of human nature then they will also see social antagonism as being immutable and reconciliation of social antagonism as being impossible.

Moreover, bourgeois theatre also obstructs the proletariat's ability to see the position of their class in historical terms. That is, they are unable to see that their class is a progressive force. In short, what Brecht sees as the bourgeoisie's perverse portrayal of reality stands as an obstacle to proletarian class consciousness.

Since bourgeois art is coupled with so many impediments to proletariat class consciousness, innovations in art are necessary if art is to help advance the progressive cause of human emancipation. The existing forms could not be used, according to Brecht. He states, for example, "[I]t is not at all our job to renovate ideological institutions on the basis of the existing social order by means of innovations. Instead our innovations must force them to surrender that basis. So: For innovations, against renovations" [sic] (BT, p. 53) [1932]. As was highlighted earlier, Brecht clearly saw bourgeois art as being too entrenched in the reproduction of bourgeois hegemony. Therefore, if he was going to use art for the progressive social cause of proletarian and human emancipation, he needed to be innovative. The result was his epic theatre which, he asserted, makes the "progress towards conscious

experience...possible” for the working class (BT, p. 276) [date uncertain, early 1950s].

Brecht developed epic theatre to change the consciousness of the proletariat. This required changing the epistemic center or the particular epistemological orientation one uses to validate their claims of truth.

Dialectical materialism is a unique epistemology¹⁹. That is, the dialectician has a fundamentally unique way of understanding, interpreting and validating the conceptions of the world around them. For example, the material dialectical epistemology assumes everything as interrelated and interacting with everything else. To the dialectician, nothing exists in isolation. There is a definite and specific interconnection between all things and processes according to dialectical materialism.

Furthermore, dialecticians assume contradictions to be universally present or existent in all things. That is, contradictions exist in every process and object. The struggle between contradictory aspects of a thing determines the essence²⁰ and development of that thing. Although contradictory aspects are in conflict, they are also interdependent. To illustrate, one could look at the example of a war which is comprised of the conflicting forces of offence and defense. Offence and defense are the two contradictory elements by which a war is comprised. They form its essence

¹⁹ This discussion of material dialectics is especially indebted to Mao (1967) who provides a clear and concise explanation.

²⁰ The use of the word essence in the following discussion should be understood as the defining characteristics of something and is not intended to imply permanent or immutable characteristics. As we will see below and in Chapter 4, Brecht conceives of objects and processes as having a historically determined but alterable, and changing essence. The immutable essence would be that it is constantly developing and in flux.

and define it. Moreover, it is impossible to have one without the other. There is a unity of opposites. Without offense, there can be no defense and while an offensive action may occur without a responding defensive action, it is simply an aggressive action not a war. These two contradicting forces in war—offense and defense—drive the development forward toward a conclusion or in dialectical terms a ‘reconciliation.’ Furthermore, they persist in the process of a war until the contradictory forces have been fully reconciled. That is, they persist until the old unity (offense and defense) yields to a new unity (e.g. domination, destruction, peace) meaning that new contradictions are formed and a new process emerges.

Just as war contains a specific contradiction so too does every other process or object. The particular contradiction of a process or a thing constitutes the essence which distinguishes one thing from another. In order to reveal the essence of a process or a thing, one must understand the particularities of the contradiction. One needs to know the essence of both sides of the contradiction and the stage of development of that contradiction. This is the only way to understand the totality of what one is studying and thus the only way to understand reality.

Dialectical materialism is a different way of viewing the world than most people, at least in bourgeois society, view it. For example, most in bourgeois society do not hold the assumption of a unity of opposites as does the dialectician. However, according to Brecht, it is the only *weltanschauung* by which one can divine reality or truth. Brecht’s quote above about dialectical materialism being the only possible aid to orientation illustrates this point as do other statements like:

[I]t will probably be well nigh impossible to demand that reality be presented in such a way that it can be mastered, without pointing to the contradictory, ongoing character of conditions, events, figures, for unless you recognise the dialectical nature of reality it cannot be mastered. (Journals, p. 120) [1941]

In short, according to Brecht, if one does not view the world with the material dialectical *weltanschauung*, they are living in illusion.

The question then becomes for Brecht “How does one move someone out of this sort of Platonic cave of illusion into the world of reality?” That is, how does one get someone else to think dialectically? Epic theatre was an experiment in this. It attempted to convert people to the material dialectical *weltanschauung* and guide them out of their world of illusion, their false consciousness.

In Brecht’s theory of epic theatre, this process entails two things. First, the viewer is given clear presentations of the contradictions of bourgeois society. This will be considered in-depth in Chapter 4. The second part in this process of conversion, for Brecht was to show the present reality in ways which make it seem unnatural and impermanent. This was crucial according to Brecht’s thought and is explored more deeply in Chapter 3. His epic theatre needed to demonstrate that the present reality was not immutable. He wanted epic theatre to demonstrate to the audience that things can change, that conditions are not unalterable by nature. To Brecht, the present reality is historically determined. The social relations that exist in a particular period are determined by the particular mode of production found in that particular period. As history progresses through the changes in the mode of

production, so too do social relations (see *The Threepenny Lawsuit* in BFR). Brecht states, “social existence is continually developing” (MD, p. 35) and discusses humans as “shifting raw material, unformed and undefined” (MD, p. 54). Thus, Brecht’s social ontology is one of constant flux. He did not believe social relations can be permanently defined by any fixed traits. They are dependent on the mode of production in society and thus impermanent and transforming. Brecht states, for example, “we must leave [different historical social structures] their distinguishing marks and keep their impermanence always before our eyes, so that our own period can be seen to be impermanent too” (BT, p. 190) [1949].

The reason that demonstrating the impermanence of present conditions is so critical, for Brecht, is that if the workers thought that their efforts to alter their conditions were Sisyphean, they would not bother trying to change them. “Who wants to prevent the fishes in the sea from getting wet?” (Brecht, et. al., 1979, p. 328). For Brecht, “[l]earning means something very different to people in different strata of society [i.e. the proletariat]. There are people who cannot conceive of any improvement in conditions” (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 27) [c. 1936].

Brecht stresses the impermanence of social conditions. However, not only does he stress that social conditions can change; he also tries to demonstrate the human role in creating those conditions. He states, “[man] does not have to stay the way he is now, nor does he have to be seen only as he is now, but also as he might become” (BT, p. 193) [1949]. But he further states that historical conditions “are created and maintained by men (and will in due course be altered by them)” (BT, p.

190) [1949] and “[t]he smallest social unit is not the single person but two people. In life too we develop one another” (BT, p. 197) [1949].

Once conditions are no longer seen as natural, permanent, unalterable realities and are seen instead as relative, mutable and temporary, the audiences’ reaction to seeing them portrayed changes, according to Brecht. Instead of uncritically accepting their life conditions, they will say, in Brecht’s words, “[t]his person’s suffering shocks me, because there might be a way out for him” (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 26) [c. 1936]. The way people view suffering will change. No longer will they view suffering as a regrettable but fixed fact of life. They will see it as something which can and should be done away with.

The goal of epic theatre for Brecht was to make theatre where:

Nothing permitted the audience any more to lose itself through simple empathy, uncritically...in the experiences of the characters...The presentation exposed the subject matter and the happenings to a process of de-familiarization. De-familiarization was required to make things understood. When things are ‘self-evident,’ understanding is simply dispensed with. The ‘natural’ had to be given an element of the conspicuous. Only in this way could the laws of cause and effect become plain. (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 25) [c. 1936]

What Brecht means by the ‘laws of cause and effect’ is the laws of dialectics. De-familiarization then meant the de-familiarization of the bourgeois weltanschauung. This de-familiarization would make the bourgeois weltanschauung

seem unnatural and allow for the material dialectical *weltanschauung* to seem natural, which to Brecht it was.

Brecht tries to achieve this ‘de-familiarization’ through his much discussed ‘estrangement effects’ (*Verfremdungseffekte*) which we will consider in-depth in Chapters 3 and 8. According to Brecht, “[a] representation that [estranges] is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” (BT, p. 192) [1949]. That is, estrangement effects are designed to knock the spectator off balance cognitively and thus alter their perception of what they are seeing. They are attempts at creating a cognitive change where the granted is no longer taken for granted. Brecht’s estrangement effects are meant to estrange the spectator from their present reality. With them Brecht tries to cause unease or questionability in the validity of that reality. Common examples of ‘estrangement’ effects used by Brecht are the use of projections and recordings, various lighting effects, loudspeaker commentary, the use of written text and special acting techniques.²¹ But epic performance needed to contribute as well. Brecht experimented by altering the relation of music to dance, to dialogue, to *gestus*, etc. and all the relations each held to each other. By doing so he tried to deconstruct the relationship between them. He takes apart the pieces (the music, *gestus*, dialogue, etc),

²¹Brecht provides a good illustration of what these effects would look like in practice when he discusses lighting, for example. He states, “brilliant illumination of the stage...plus a completely darkened auditorium makes the spectator less level-head” and “If we light the actors and their performance in such a way that the lights themselves are within the spectator’s field of vision we destroy part of his illusion” (BT, p. 141) [1940]. For more on Brecht’s estrangement effects see: Brecht & Willett (1992) and Willett (1977). Furthermore, Brecht sometimes provides accounts of the various estrangement effects attempted in his productions. These can be found in Brecht’s notes to some plays (e.g. *Life of Galileo*, *Mother Courage*, his adaptation of *The Tutor*, etc.) and can be found in the notes sections of the collected volumes of his plays.

manipulates them, alters them and puts them back in new, unexpected ways. Thus, the expected can no longer be expected.

Epic theatre also estranges the spectators by altering their relation to time. As will be explored in the next chapter, Brecht's epic theatre breaks the continuity of time. Whereas, in Brecht's words, "[t]he dramatic is characterized by a certain passion in the tone of the exposition and a working out of the collision of forces" that relies on continuity, epic theatre is different (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 24) [c. 1936]. According to Brecht, "[t]he epic writer, Döblin, gave an excellent description when he said that the epic in contrast to the dramatic, could practically be cut up with a scissors into single pieces, each of which could stand alone" (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 24) [c. 1936]. In Brecht's epic theatre he deconstructs time. That is, he breaks it apart to analyze it part by part, period by period, contradiction by contradiction. He shows the viewer the forces at play in each fragment. What he attempts to show is that these forces are both material (i.e. they are found in the life-world as opposed to the mind) and that they work dialectically. This can only happen when time is broken into its component parts, according to Brecht. Just as a physicist studies the component parts of an atom (e.g. protons, neutrons, etc.) in order to provide a complete picture of the atom, Brecht wanted to study the component pieces of time in order to provide a complete picture of history. In epic theatre, Brecht breaks history down into its component parts to demonstrate that there is a logic to how it progresses. Epic theatre in this regard is supposed to be a scientific lesson in history. It is supposed to give the viewer an understanding of how social relations work throughout history and at any

given time in history. It is supposed to demonstrate how social relations are determined by the particular mode of production in society. If people understood this, according to Brecht's thought, they would also see that a change in the mode of production will cause a change in social relations. Those desiring change were working with, not against the laws of nature, according to Brecht. That is, the proletarian revolution was the next step in world historical progression. Brecht and epic theatre were just trying to help that process along to end the current suffering. Brecht states that "all history is a mere construction" (Journals, p. 132) [1941]. Epic theatre deconstructs that 'mere construction'. It demonstrates its relativity and thus opens the doors to creating a better construction, a better social alternative—one with more favorable social relations.

According to Brecht, estrangement effects also need to have an experimental quality. He states, "[t]he new school of play-writing must systematically see to it that its form includes 'experiment'" (BT, p. 46) [1931]. If effects did not work, they needed to be changed or altered. In Brecht's mind, praxis modifies theory and theory modifies praxis (BFR, p. 148, 189, 193). Theory and praxis were intertwined. Theory and praxis exist together as a dialectical unity. They are the dialectical elements of historical progress. They are the antagonistic elements that comprise historical progress. But, according to Brecht's thought history is still progressing and this contradiction has not been reconciled. Theory does not square with the empirics of praxis and the empirics of praxis do not square with the expectations of the theory. What Brecht wanted to do, then, was alter the relation theory had to praxis. By

altering this relation, Brecht hoped to come across the proper relation between the two which he felt was necessary for their reconciliation. For Brecht, theory needed to be constantly reconciling praxis and, simultaneously, praxis had to be continually reconciling theory. They would interact in a *pas de deux* of mutual reconciliation of each other. Eventually, he believed this would lead to a complete reconciling of the two to each other—a perfect action dictated by a perfect theory, a perfect theory altered to perfection by the empirical data collected in praxis. Praxis would constantly reaffirm theory and theory would constantly reaffirm praxis and the process of historical progression could finally move to its teleological end—a classless society.

For Brecht there was no doubt that this classless society would emerge and that it was the final and determined end to the historical development of class antagonism. He states, for example, that “the classless society is real...it is itself an anticipation” (BAP, p. 108) [c.1932]. Furthermore he asserts that “class struggle...has to be fought out to the end” (Journals, p. 46) [1940]. For Brecht this ‘end’ would bring about the classless society and would emerge with the proletariat’s triumph over the bourgeoisie—what he refers to as the “final victory” (Journals, p. 6) [1938].

Brecht’s Ethics of Praxis

Epic theatre was especially catered to the proletariat. This was to make the altering of their *weltanschauung* possible. Brecht states, for example:

Our representations of human social life are designed for river-dwellers, fruit farmers, builders of vehicles and upturners of society, whom we invite into our theatres and beg not to forget their cheerful occupations while we hand the world over to their minds and hearts for them to change as they think fit. (BT, p. 185) [1949]

Clearly, Brecht saw this group as the historically progressive force and the key to actual progression. Brecht believed that worker involvement in a social movement was essential for progressive change because only they were able to generate enough force to counterbalance the bourgeoisie and shift the dialectical union toward reconciliation. The reconciliation, of course would mean the communistic period of history where the means for production would be owned collectively, eliminating the source of social antagonism.

While Brecht's epic theatre was in many ways designed for the proletariat, its purpose of shifting the viewers' epistemic center to the material dialectical *weltanschauung* was by no means limited to workers. Brecht also saw a role for the bourgeois intellectual in the human emancipation he worked for. In his essay, "Intellectuals and Class Struggle," for example, he says that "the proletariat can use all kinds of intellectuals" and recognizes the role of the bourgeois intellectual as one of leadership (Brecht, 1973, p. 19-21) [c. 1927]. Brecht was of course a bourgeois intellectual. However, he, like Benjamin, Adorno, Lukács, and Korsch was an intellectual who was critical of the bourgeois order and, thus philosophically allied to the progressive force of the proletariat.

Brecht was interested in “the conversion of the maximum number of readers or spectators into experts [on society]” (BT, p. 43) [1931]. What he hoped for was “a theatre full of experts, just as one has sporting arenas full of experts” (BT, p. 44) [1931]. That is, he hoped to have experts on society and history and thus turn his audience into “statesmen, thinkers and engineers [of society]” (MD, p. 100). This, of course, meant individuals who viewed the world through what Brecht saw as the only possible way to get at true reality—the material dialectical *weltanschauung* (BAP, p. 103, 144; Journals, p. 46, 120; BT, p. 276, 279). Once an individual had this particular *weltanschauung*, that is, once they had the ability to conceive truth they could become teachers to those without the means of accessing truth. In his discussion on radio as an apparatus of communication, for example, this idea comes out when he talks of “the prime objective of turning the audience not only into pupils but into teachers” (BT, p. 52) [1932]. Seemingly, Brecht envisioned an exponential growth in the number of *weltanschauung* conversions based on the premise that the converted would themselves become converters.

As was illustrated above, Brecht’s theory of epic theatre constituted a specific philosophy of praxis which was intent on converting the epistemic center of the working class to the material dialectical *weltanschauung*. This, Brecht believed would set the progressive force of the proletariat loose which would in turn alter the dialectical relations between the bourgeoisie and proletariat and create the conditions necessary for the reconciliation of that antagonism. The reconciliation of the bourgeois-proletarian antagonism meant the collective ownership of the means of

production and, thus, the end of social antagonism for Brecht. This was the normative goal for Brecht. It was his ethical concern and the goal he directed his actions toward achieving.

While largely devoid of moralistic utterances, epic theatre forms a well worked out ethics, based on the praxis element of Brecht's praxis-theory. The praxis in Brecht's theory was the energies he employed in trying to alter the *weltanschauung* of the working class and bourgeois intellectuals. Changing the *weltanschauung* of the proletariat in particular was a necessary precondition for social change to happen, according to Brecht. The proletariat needed to become aware of itself as a capable, coherent historically progressive force.

Undoubtedly, Brecht was troubled by the conditions found in bourgeois society. For example he states, "there [are] painful discrepancies in the world around us, conditions that [are] hard to bear...[h]unger, cold and hardship..." (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 29) [c. 1936]. Brecht believed that these conditions were by no means a permanent reality and that under the right conditions things could be changed. Epic theatre was an attempt to create the necessary conditions for such change to happen. As Brecht states, "the purpose of our investigation was not merely to arouse moral misgivings about certain conditions...The purpose of our investigation was to make visible the means by which those onerous conditions could be done away with" (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 29) [c. 1936]. Brecht was not content to simply complain about the conditions of economic exploitation. His ethical imperative lay in trying to create the necessary groundwork for them to change. Theory was not enough for

Brecht. He needed praxis. As Brecht put it, “ideas are extremely useful when they form the basis for action” (Brecht, 1973, p. 19) [c. 1927].

In this way, then, we can say that Brecht’s ethical position was found in his philosophy of praxis. This position was to change the worldview of the proletariat and help set the conditions necessary for the end of social antagonisms and universal human emancipation. In Brecht’s words, this “road leads over capitalism’s dead body, but...the road is a good one” (BT, p. 50) [1931].

Conclusion

According to Brecht, echoing Marx before him, with the advent of epic theatre, “[t]he theatre entered the province of the philosophers—at any rate, the sort of philosophers who wanted not only to explain the world but also to change it” (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 26) [c. 1936]. Epic theatre was Brecht’s attempt to change the world. It was a thorough articulation of Marxian theory-praxis and highlights Brecht’s deep-seated ethical concerns.

This chapter has shown how epic theatre is a particular form of Marxian praxis theory and forms the basis of Brecht’s ethics. I have made the argument that Brecht was normatively discontented with bourgeois society and had an imperative to create the conditions for the development of what he saw as a better world. For Brecht this necessarily entailed altering *weltanschauung*. Ethically, this was what needed to be done.

In this chapter, it was claimed that Brecht sought to alter the *weltanschauung* of his audience through two distinct but inter-related ways—cognitive disruption and the demonstration of social contradiction. In the next chapter, we will discuss the notion of cognitive disruption in Brecht's work.

CHAPTER III

CONSCIOUSNESS, COGNITION AND THE ALTERING OF SOCIO-TEMPORAL ORDER

“The time is out of joint—O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!”²²

Introduction

As we saw in the last chapter, according to Brecht the major obstacle to the emancipation of the working class is their inability to see the true realities of the world and their exploited position within it. Brecht believed that they are unable to see these realities because they have been socialized to understand the world through the dominant, (i.e. bourgeois) *weltanschauung* or worldview (BT). This worldview presents current social and economic structures as rational, natural and inevitable. These assumptions of the rationality, naturalness and inevitability of the systems form the core elements of the dominant worldview and are reinforced by bourgeois forms of art (BT).

In response to the bourgeoisie's domination of worldview and in an effort to shatter the mythos created by the worldview, Brecht formed his aesthetic theory of epic theatre which included his estrangement effects which as we saw in the last chapter were designed to make the familiar world seem unfamiliar. The theory

²² Shakespeare, W. *Hamlet*. Act 1, scene 5, 188–189.

chapter were designed to make the familiar world seem unfamiliar. The theory posited that if one presented empirical representations to an audience in odd, unusual ways it would allow them to begin seeing the world differently. In essence it would demonstrate the possibility of alternative worldviews. This, in turn, would challenge much of what is held as commonsense or taken-for-granted knowledge. It will be argued, in this chapter, that Brecht's estrangement effects are likely to serve this purpose, a position that stands at odds with previous research (Silcox, 2010). This is demonstrated by close examination of one estrangement effect employed by Brecht which still works as an estrangement effect—the altering of the structure of narration away from the traditional plot structure articulated by Aristotle in his *Poetics*.²³ By drawing on sociology of time literature, I argue that this alteration of plot structure is, in effect, an alteration of a particular type of time that Zerubavel (1985) refers to as 'socio-temporal order' and that Brecht's manipulation of socio-temporal order was a technique used to expose the human origins of reified social constructions and likely to alter the consciousness of his audience.

After first providing a critique of the existing researching on the viability of Brecht's estrangement effects, I will begin by giving an overview of Brecht's aesthetics. In the first two sections, three differences between Brecht's epic narrative and Aristotle's dramatic narrative will be demonstrated. The next section will show how these differences in narrative structure have been previously understood and

²³ Due to the confines of this chapter, the larger debates about the characteristic of Aristotelian plot will be ignored. When references are made to Aristotelian narrative structure, they are a reconstruction of Brecht's understanding of them as found in: Martin and Bial (2000); Brecht and Willett (1992); Brecht, Rorrison, and Willett (1993); etc. For a defense of Brecht's reading see: Curran (2001).

work of Jameson and Benjamin provides a more complete and nuanced account of Brecht's work.

The discussion will then turn to establishing that narrative structure is a form of socio-temporal order and that temporal referencing has important implications for human cognition and subsequent conceptualizations of the world. It will then be established that socio-temporal order can become reified. Next it will be established that dramatic plot is both a form of socio-temporal order and reified and that there are two effects of changing socio-temporal order—anxiety and cognitive disturbance. In the concluding section it will be argued that Brecht's altering of narrative form has the function of producing anxiety, cognitive disturbance and subsequently the disruption of one's belief in their 'reality'.

Previous Research on Estrangement Effects

Drawing an analogy between Brecht's estrangement effects and the phenomenon of imaginative resistance Silcox (2010) attempts to debunk Brecht's theory of estrangement effects. Specifically, she argues that Brecht's rejection of empathy completely detaches the audience from the performance, leaving them unengaged and thus unable to form meaningful responses. According to Silcox, emotional engagement with artistic communications is necessary for lasting impressions to form and didactic intention to be successful. She finds emotional

engagement lacking in Brecht's work and then presents empirical evidence which purports to substantiate her claim.

However, several fatal pathologies in her theoretical conceptualization and empirical data leave this work invalid. For example, Silcox makes several false assumptions about Brecht's theory of estrangement. First, she assumes that Brecht's work is meant to completely negate emotional response (p. 131-133, 137). This is not the case. As Brecht himself says in a 1939 letter to an unknown recipient, his epic theatre was not meant to completely eliminate emotional response. "Some people have read into [my theory] the notion that I come out 'against emotion and in favour of the intellect'. This of course is not the case. I don't see how thought and feeling can be kept apart" (Letters, p. 316). Brecht recognizes the importance of emotional response saying that "the epic principles guarantee a critical attitude on the part of the audience, but that attitude is highly emotional" (Journals, p. 135) [1941].

Furthermore, this notion is found elsewhere in Brecht's writings (BT, 1992, p. 23, 88; MD, p. 15, 57, 102) and is also recognized by preeminent Brecht scholar Reinhold Grimm (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 37), Sartre (1976), Boal (1985), etc. What epic theatre attempted to do was to eliminate one particular emotional response, full empathy with the protagonist. This, Brecht believed, would allow the audience to then have an emotional response based on a critical and rational assessment of what they have seen (Althusser, 1990; Benjamin, 1973; BT; Journals; Sartre, 1976; Squiers, 2011).

Secondly, Silcox incorrectly assumes that Brecht's estrangement effects were designed to alienate the audience from the performance (p. 132, 135). In fact, Brecht wanted the audience to be engaged with the performance. He required attentiveness and personal, intellectual commitment to it. The estrangement Brecht desired was an internal estrangement from one's current *weltanschauung* or worldview (BT; Munk, 1972, p. 4; Squiers, 2011; Squiers, 2009). This misconception is likely a result of Silcox's failure to make a distinction between alienation (*Entfremdung*) and estrangement (*Verfremdung*). Brecht, of course, uses the term *Verfremdungseffekt* (estrangement effect). Bloch (in Munk, 1972) draws a precise and accurate definition of *Verfremdung*. According to Bloch, while *Verfremdung* and *Entfremdung* "are bound together by the alien" (Munk, 1972, p. 4), the former is the idea of making the familiar strange—as Brecht does with his *Verfremdungseffekt*. *Verfremdung* connotes a de-familiarized conceptualization where as *Entfremdung* only implies a distancing as Feuerbach (1998) uses it to indicate a moving away of one from one's true self and Marx (Marx, Engels & Tucker, 1972, p. 56-67) uses it to indicate the moving away of one's labor product from one's self. Brecht's use of the word *Verfremdung* and not *Entfremdung* indicates that the moving away or distancing he sought through these effects was a distancing of familiar conceptualization not as Silcox implies a distancing of the audience from the play's performance and its content.

Finally, Silcox erroneously assumes that the primary idea of Brecht's text in his epic theatre was to bombard the audience with moralistic messages (p. 135). This too is a false assumption. Instead, Brecht attempted to portray realistic events and

wanted the audience to come to their own conclusions about the moral implications of the events portrayed (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 29; Schwarz, 2007; Squiers, 2011, Sartre, 1976; Barthes, 1972).

There is also a pathology with the empirical evidence Silcox uses to support her thesis. Silcox uses survey data taken of audience members after what she deemed to be a performance of epic theatre in 1969 (p. 138-139). The survey attempted to gauge what types of effects the play had on the audience. As Silcox states, the director employed the same techniques as Brecht himself used. However, she fails to realize that the particular estrangement effects employed in this performance (e.g. speaking directly to the audience, sudden shifts in action, etc.) would have no longer worked as estrangement effects because the audience would have become too accustomed to them. Instead of standing outside the expectations of that audience's worldview these effects would have been immersed in it. While once at the vanguard of dramaturgy, many of Brecht's estrangement effects have been so widely adopted not only in theatre but in cinema and television they are now (as they would have been at the time of the survey) rather commonplace. As noted Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz (2007) states, "It is easy to note the use advertising has made of the most sensational discoveries of avant-garde art, among them the resources of the Brechtian actor" (p. 42). In order, then, to produce the desired effect one would need to create new estrangement effects and cannot recycle the old. This is something that is readily recognizable to those with dramaturgy backgrounds (Squiers, 2009). Since Brecht's original estrangement effects, which no longer work as estrangement effects were

employed one would not expect that the audiences would be affected in the way Brecht theorized. Moreover, when effective estrangement effects are employed there is preliminary empirical evidence that they work as theorized (Squiers & Roessler, 2011).

Brecht's Narrative Aesthetics

In his accounts of epic theatre²⁴, Brecht contrasts it with what he refers to as 'dramatic theatre,' or the theatrical style described by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. Three oppositions between 'dramatic theatre' and epic theatre are relevant to the current discussion on narrative structure.

First, as opposed to 'dramatic theatre', the narrative arrangement of epic theatre does not move linearly. Instead, the course of events moves as Brecht says, in "'irregular' curves" (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 25) [c. 1936]. In 'dramatic theatre' the narrative has a certain trajectory. Early in the narrative, conflict is introduced. All scenes maintain a certain trajectory headed toward the eventual resolution of that conflict. Each progressive scene, then, is intrinsically linked to and builds upon the previous scene "by causal necessity" (Aristotle & Butcher, 1997, p. 14). The resolution of the conflict and a subsequent *dénouement* constitute the teleological

²⁴ Brecht's use of the term 'epic' is meant to imply similarity to classical epic form (e.g. Homer and Virgil). The extent to which Brecht's classification of these forms is accurate can, of course, be debated. However, the characteristics of 'epic' form he highlights can without doubt be applied to his 'epic theatre'. According to Willett, "Brecht himself seems first to have used the phrase in print in an article in *Der neue Weg* (Berlin) of 16 May [1927] where he referred to 'the creation of a great epic and documentary theatre which will be suited to our period'" (BT, p. 22n).

end-point of the story. Epic narrative form, on the other hand, does not move toward a resolution of conflict. Instead, it deliberately rejects such resolution in order to highlight, for the audience, the unresolved social antagonisms which exist in the material life world. Since epic theatre does not move toward the resolution of a conflict, it can dispense with trajectory of this kind and is thus allowed to move in an irregular, nonlinear, even erratic fashion.

The second difference between the narrative structure of 'dramatic theatre' and epic theatre is closely related to the first. Since epic theatre rejects the trajectory based narrative structure which progresses toward the resolution of a conflict, a scene need no longer be dependent on the previous scene. Scenes are allowed a certain degree of detachment from each other. Unlike in 'dramatic theatre' where one scene exists for the next and only as part of the unified whole of a plot, in epic theatre each scene stands as a self-contained entity. Although each scene still maintains a thematic continuity with the others and can be linked by characters and setting, each scene is meant to stand alone, in epic theatre. Jameson (2000) refers to this self-contained nature of each scene, in epic theatre as 'autonomization' and states, "the episodes of a narrative thus cut up into smaller segments tend to take on an independence and an autonomy of their own...Scenes are episodes, and the episodes are temporally separated from each other (p. 43-4).

Brecht's classic play, *Mother Courage and her Children*²⁵ provides a good illustration of these two points. The title character, Mother Courage, is a vendor of war goods. She along with her three children (Eilif, Katrin and Swiss Cheese) move through the front during the Thirty Years War selling their wares from a cart. The play is divided into twelve scenes arranged chronologically with the first scene set in 1624 and the last in 1635.

In the first scene, Mother Courage is visited by two army recruiters who attempt to recruit her son Eilif into the war. Mother Courage forcefully resists this proposition but later in the scene Eilif is led off to enlist by one of the recruiters while the other one distracts Mother Courage by engaging her in a business transaction. The second scene jumps forward to the following year and depicts a chance encounter between Mother Courage and Eilif where Mother Courage castigates her son for risking his life by being brave in his new role as a soldier. The third scene again jumps forward another three years and depicts among other things Mother Courage's failed attempt to ransom her son, Swiss Cheese, who has been taken prison and subsequently executed. The play continues in this manner of jumping forward with individual scenes depicting the fortunes and misfortunes of Mother Courage and the eventual death of all three of her children.

Although the events portrayed are presented chronologically, these scenes are not moving linearly in the sense scenes do in 'dramatic' form. Each subsequent scene

²⁵ Brecht wrote *Mother Courage* in 1939. It premiered in Zurich in 1941 at the Zurich Schauspielhaus. Brecht's acclaimed production co-directed with Erich Engel and starring Weigel as Mother Courage opened in 1949 in Berlin (Unwin, 2005, p. 214).

does not build upon the previous scene. Each subsequent scene does not rely on the previous scene in order to make sense. They can exist independently of each other and in fact could be staged in a variety of orders without distracting in any significant way from the play's impact. What is important for Brecht, in this play and in his epic theatre, is not the progression of the scenes or a building up of the scenes to some end point. What is important are the depictions contained in the individual scenes. In *Mother Courage*, as with Brecht's other epic plays, the scenes are 'atomized' vignettes, each designed to reveal some truth about social relations. Essentially, each scene in *Mother Courage* is a snapshot, a glimpse of events that transpired over a nine year period during the Thirty Years War. The scenes are not bound together by the necessity of a progressive moment toward the resolution of a conflict. In *Mother Courage* there is no resolution to be found. In scene eleven Mother Courage's sole remaining child, Katrin, is shot and killed trying to prevent a surprise attack on a sleeping village by beating a drum while on a rooftop. In this scene, Mother Courage has now lost all of her children to the war that had been sustaining them. Although all three of Mother Courage's children become casualties of the war, and although the war has taken away her entire family, in the final scene, Mother Courage once again straps herself to the cart and follows the troops who are again on the march. As the war continues so does Mother Courage's business.

Instead of existing to propel the story along the plot's trajectory to the resolution, the purpose of each scene in epic theatre is to stand as an illustration of

actual social contradictions. For Brecht each scene “[c]ommunicates insights” (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 25) [c. 1936] about the material life world and social conditions.

In the chapters that follow we will see specific examples of Brecht’s portrayal of social contradiction by analysis of particular scenes. The discussion in Chapter 5, for instance, will reveal Brecht’s portrayal of an antagonism within the self, in bourgeois society. Likewise, the discussions in Chapter 6 and 7 will show Brecht’s demonstration of historical class antagonisms. Chapter 6 shows the antagonism between the feudal and princely classes and the emerging bourgeoisie in late Renaissance Italy and Chapter 7 shows the class antagonism between Plebeians and Patricians in ancient Rome.

Brecht provides a clear illustration of the aforementioned differences between ‘dramatic theatre’ and epic theatre when discussing the bourgeois novel which he argues shares a narrative form with ‘dramatic theatre’. He states:

The bourgeois novel in the last century considerably developed “the dramatic,” which meant the strong centralization of plot and an organic interdependence of the separate parts. The dramatic is characterized by a certain passion in the tone of the exposition and a working out of the collision of forces. The epic writer, Döblin, gave an excellent description when he said that the epic, in contrast to the dramatic, could practically be cut up with a scissors into single pieces, each of which could stand alone... (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 24) [c. 1936]

The final difference pertaining to narrative form between ‘dramatic theatre’ and epic theatre is Brecht’s rejection of the principle of *natura non facit saltus* (nature does not make jumps) (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 25) [c. 1936]. This rejection stems from Brecht’s natural ontology and can be seen as a major theoretical basis for his deviations from the dramatic form.

Natura Non Facit Saltus

The principle of *natura non facit saltus* was a methodological assumption of Swedish naturalist Carl Linnæus used in his categorization of plants and animals. Linnæus based his system of categorization on the variations of what otherwise are species which have many common characteristics. Different species, for Linnæus, were variations on a common theme. The way the species varied from the common theme formed the basis of Linnæus’ nomenclature scheme. Linnæus’ methodology was appropriated by Charles Darwin in crafting his theory of biological evolution. In his theory, Darwin stressed the gradualness of change in nature. Biological evolution, according to Darwin was a process of slight, accidental alteration which took ages to unfold into its present state. Darwin argued that this gradual process of change was ordained in the natural order of life processes. He states:

As natural selection acts only by accumulating slight, successive, favourable variations, it can produce no great or sudden modification; it can act only by very short and slow steps. Hence the canon of ‘*Natura non facit saltum*,’

which every fresh addition to our knowledge tends to make more strictly correct, is on this theory simply intelligible. We can plainly see why nature is prodigal in variety, but niggard in innovation. But why this should be a law of nature if each species has been independently created, no man can explain.

(quoted from Fishburnn, 2004, p. 65)

Aristotle describes narrative structure in a way which is very similar to the way Darwin described the process of biological evolution. According to Aristotle, narrative arts have their foundations in two causes “lying deep in our nature” (Aristotle & Butcher, 1997, p. 5)—the natural human inclination to imitate from which humans derive a form of pleasure and the “the instinct for ‘harmony’ and rhythm” (Aristotle & Butcher, 1997, p. 5). This instinct for harmony and rhythm, for Aristotle meant the desire to synchronize with the pulses and rules dictated by nature. According to Aristotle, narrative form had its own natural harmony and rhythm which is reflected in what Brecht refers to as the dramatic form (Aristotle & Butcher, 1997). This natural form, for Aristotle was *natura non facit saltus* which he believed to be the natural form of all change. He states for example, “[n]ature proceeds little by little” (Franklin, 1986, p. 247) and “nature passes...in...unbroken sequence [*metabainei sunechōs*]” (Franklin, 1986, p. 248). Thus, narrative form too should fit this model because “the objects of imitation are men in action” (Aristotle & Butcher, 1997, p. 3). In other words, a narrative depicts men in action who are living under the conditions of nature and hence are propelled through time according to the natural dictate of *natura non facit saltus*.

The continuity assumption of *natura non facit saltus* can also be seen in Aristotle's analysis of narrative structure. He states, for example, "plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed" (Aristotle & Butcher, 1997, p. 16). Aristotle's assumptions of natural causal sequencing were applied to narrative form, which he viewed as ontologically indistinct from nature. This understanding is exemplified in Aristotle's assertion that proper narrative structure should "resemble a living organism in all its unity" (Aristotle & Butcher, 1997, p. 47). In short, Aristotle puts forth the claim that the pattern of *natura non facit saltus* is the pattern of natural progression and thus is the natural pattern of dramatic narrative which is a reflection of nature. This concept can also be seen in the aforementioned discussion of the linear, interdependent nature of dramatic plot where each scene evolves from its predecessor.

In general terms, *natura non facit saltus* stresses the continuity within the process of change. Deviations are slight. Sequential manifestations retain many of the qualities of the previous manifestation. Subsequent manifestations are simply alterations of their predecessors.

Brecht rejects this conceptualization of natural and social change and instead argues that nature does make leaps. This methodological assumption about the nature of change is according to my analysis at the core of the now famous aesthetic debate between Lukács and Brecht. According to Lukács, the form of the traditional novel (e.g. Tolstoy, Balzac) has developed in much the same way Aristotle describes the

discovery of the natural form of a narration that is according to the natural law of *natura non facit saltus* (Bloch, 2007). While Lukács is not as essentialistic as Aristotle, he does claim that the dramatic narrative form is an accumulation of the historical totality of mankind. Davies for example states, “[w]ith Lukács...the reading of history in relation to art and social change requires searching for those totalizing forms which reflect the wholeness of experience” (O'Neill, 1976, p. 65). In Lukács' thought, this narrative structure represents the history of previously reconciled contradictions and as such serves as the proper form for the advancement of world history (Bloch, 2007). It is an accumulation of established truth. Brecht, on the other hand argues that this is not the case.

Brecht believes that the dramatic form is not the accumulation of historically established and persistent truth but only the expression of bourgeois truth, which is mere ideology according to Brecht and something which needs to be overcome in order for the proletariat to see the truth of their exploited position and the means of emancipating themselves (Bloch, 2007; Solomon, 1979; BT; Journals). For Brecht, then, one cannot base a revolutionary aesthetic in the aesthetic forms of the past. A revolutionary aesthetic must break (i.e. leap) from the past. This leap is not only necessary it is possible and natural for Brecht. He states, “revolutions are derived from metaphysics, they happen because the old yields to the new and because the only thing ‘that is irresistible is what comes into existence and develops’. everything is dependent on everything else, and developments happen with miraculous leaps” [sic] (Journals, p. 46) [1940].

In short, Lukács sees the traditional narrative structure in terms of a dialectical progression which has emancipatory properties built into it. But, Brecht sees it as a reflection of bourgeois ideology which must be overcome by a breaking away or a progressive leap—“the leap from quantity into quality” (Journals, p. 342) [1945]. *Facit saltus*, not *natura non facit saltus* is the natural pattern of social change for Brecht. Therefore, the use of *natura non facit saltus* in narrative structure is a replication of a false idea and serves to reify the false belief in this conception of change.

The Bad New Things

One of the most widely commented on aspect of Brecht’s work is its innovative character. This is not surprising given Brecht’s entreaty in a conversation with Benjamin, “[d]on’t start from the good old thing but the bad new ones” (Benjamin, 1973, p. 121) [1934]. In regards to narrative structure the function of Brecht’s innovations have been understood in two ways.

First, as Jameson (2000) highlights, Brecht’s divergence from dramatic narrative form (what he calls Brecht’s ‘autonomization’) draws particular attention to the events and actions portrayed on the stage. Benjamin also recognizes this function when he says that “[t]he job of epic theatre...is not so much to develop actions as to represent conditions” (Benjamin, 1973, p. 4). Brecht himself draws attention to what Jameson calls his ‘autonomization’ when he states, “the individual episodes have to

be knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed. The episodes must not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give us a chance to interpose our judgment” (BT, p. 201) [1949]. Instead of allowing the audience to get caught up in the emotions evoked by dramatic plot (e.g. what will happen next? How will the hero cope? etc.), Brecht’s ‘autonomization’ allows the viewer an opportunity to absorb the gest—“[t]he realm of attitudes adopted by the characters toward one another” (BT, p. 198) [1949]. According to Brecht, expressions of gest are “usually highly complicated and contradictory” (BT, p. 198) [1949]. Thus, a higher degree of attention to them is needed in order to understand them. In epic theatre, the gest does not serve to propel the story but has another function—to help reproduce “real-life incidents on the stage in such a way as...bring it to the spectator’s attention” (Journals, p. 81) [1940]. The importance of gestus cannot be overlooked. As Brecht says, “[t]he ‘story’ is...the complete fitting together of all the gestic incidents” (BT, p. 200) [1949]. Brecht’s ‘autonomization’ allows for the gest to have its intended effect on the audience by drawing particular and directed attention to it. Gest will be explored more thoroughly, in the next chapter, where it will essentially be argued that they are the pieces of social ‘truth’ to be extracted from Brecht’s theatrical works. Furthermore, the discussions in Chapters 5 through 7 will illustrate particular gests Brecht portrayed, for example class antagonisms as well as other ‘truths’ about social relations.

The second way Brecht’s innovations in narrative structure have been understood is having the function of eliminating empathy and catharsis. This aspect

has been explored most famously by Benjamin (1973) and is perhaps the most conventional explanation of epic narrative form. According to Benjamin:

What Brecht refuses is Aristotelian catharsis, the purging of the emotions through identification with the destiny which rules the hero's life... The art of epic theatre consists in arousing astonishment rather than empathy... instead of identifying itself with the hero the audience is called upon to learn to be astonished at the circumstances within which he has his being. (Benjamin, 1973, p. 18)

In other words, in epic theatre the hero is not attempting to resolve a conflict, nor is the narrative structure a mere unfolding of events toward the resolution of the protagonist's conflict. As we saw in the above discussion of *Mother Courage*, the point of Brecht's narrative form is to depict events, not to depict the resolution of the protagonist's conflict. Though certainly conflict exists in *Mother Courage*, that conflict is not resolved. Mother Courage, herself does not even recognize the source of that conflict, let alone actively seek its resolution. Thus, the audience cannot adopt her struggle as their own (i.e. cannot empathize) and then relax from the sense of catharsis found in the resolution, as is the case in 'dramatic theatre'. Instead their uneasiness remains and Brecht leaves them to resolve that conflict for themselves. This is a conflict which is as much their own as it is Mother Courage's; but, it is a conflict which like Mother Courage's remains unresolved in their experience.

That Brecht desired to purge his theatre of catharsis and the empathy which was intrinsically linked to it is unquestionable. He states, for example, "I'm not

writing for the scum who want to have the cockles of their hearts warmed” (BT, p. 14) [1926]. The reliance on empathy in ‘dramatic theatre’ to express meaning is too low of a standard for art according to Brecht. He states, “the catharsis of which Aristotle writes—cleansing by fear and pity, or from fear and pity—is a purification which is performed not only in a pleasurable way, but precisely for the purpose of pleasure” (BT, p. 181) [1949]. For Brecht, emotional pleasure is shallow and its use is based on an assumption of the audience’s incapability to derive meaning from reason.²⁶ Brecht rejects this, saying, “[t]he one tribute we can pay the audience is to treat it as thoroughly intelligent. It is utterly wrong to treat people as simpletons when they are grown up at seventeen...I appeal to reason” (BT, p. 14) [1926].

Furthermore, Brecht argues that empathy acts as an imposition on the audience which disallows them the opportunity to obtain the full potential of the art. In his words:

[G]reat theoretical obstacles prevent us from recognising that the concreteness with which life is depicted in aristotelian drama (drama which aims to produce catharsis) is limited by its function (to conjure up certain emotions) and by the technique this requires (suggestion), and that the viewer thus has a stance imposed on him (that of empathy) which prevents him readily adopting a critical attitude to the things depicted[.] [sic] (Journals, p. 109) [1940]

While the two functions of Brecht’s divergence from ‘dramatic’ narrative form highlighted above—1) drawing particular attention to the events and actions

²⁶ This is not to suggest that Brecht completely rejects emotions. As was stated in the introduction, it is only a particular type of emotion that Brecht rejects.

portrayed on the stage and 2) dispensing with empathy and catharsis—are important elements of Brecht’s theory, they are not an exhaustive explanation of the functions of Brecht’s divergence from ‘dramatic narrative form’. I argue, an examination of the literatures of the sociology of knowledge, social psychology and the sociology of time shows that Brecht’s deviance in narrative form also distorts the audience’s sense of time and thus draws attention to the fact that time or more specifically the forms of time that Zerubavel (1985) refers to as ‘socio-temporal order’ are nothing more than reified social conventions. By dispelling the myth of the organic nature of temporal order Brecht is also attempting to dispel the myth of the organic nature of other social conventions which are understood as commonsense matters and taken-for-granted truisms of bourgeois society.

Cognition, Patterns of Data Delivery and Socio-temporal Order

One can think of forms of temporal reference as falling into two groups. The first group is comprised of temporal references which emanate from the observation of the rhythms of the natural world. The day would fall into this category because it is based on the duration of the earth’s rotation around its axis. Temporal references which are based on the rhythms of nature can be contrasted with those forms of temporal references in our second group—those which have no foundation in the rhythms of nature. Temporal references in this group are creations of humankind. The week serves as an example of this. As Zerubavel (1985), the foremost sociologist of

time, points out there is no rhythm in nature that corresponds to the seven day cycle. Thus, this sense of time is “a socially constructed artifact which rests upon rather arbitrary social conventions” (Zerubavel, 1985, p. xii). That the duration of the week was altered after the French Revolution and in the Soviet Union attests to the conventionality of this type of temporal reference—what Zerubavel refers to ‘socio-temporal order’.

Socio-temporal orders have two relevancies to the current discussion. First, as will be argued below, ‘dramatic’ narrative structure is a form of socio-temporal order which situates events in a prescribed but arbitrary sequence that has no corresponding rhythm in nature. Secondly, temporal referencing has important implications for human cognition and subsequent conceptualizations of the world (i.e., important implications in the creation and maintenance of a *weltanschauung*).

As Zerubavel points out, “[o]ne of the major contentions of cognitive psychology is that man essentially perceives objects as some sort of ‘figures’ against some ‘ground’” (Zerubavel, 1985, p. 19). In other words, objects or data in general are made sense of by contextualizing them, that is, by applying them to some frame(s) of reference. According to Zerubavel (1985), “[a]ny interpretive process of ‘defining a situation’ essentially presupposes a solid, reliable ground, against which the situation can be perceived and assigned some meaning” (p. 19).

One of the ways humans contextualize data is through temporal references. As Zerubavel (1985) states, “time functions as a context for anchoring...meaning” (p. xiv). Although seemingly one could create any type of meaning for one’s self by

‘anchoring’ data in whatever context their fancy can create, meaning can only have intersubjective validity (i.e. be understood by others) if one ‘anchors’ their meaning in socially shared contexts. Garfinkel (1984), whose work has been widely influential in the social sciences, makes exactly this point when he states:

With respect to the problematic character of practical actions and to the practical adequacy of their inquiries, members take for granted that a member must at the outset ‘know’ the settings in which he is to operate if his practices are to serve as measures to bring particular, located features of these settings to recognizable account. They treat as the most passing matter of fact that members’ accounts, of every sort, in all their logical modes, with all of their uses, and for every method for their assembly are constituent features of the settings they make observable. (p. 8)

Here Garfinkel is using “settings in which he is to operate” to mean what we have referred to as the context in which meaning is anchored. “Recognizable account” means simply being understood by others or what we have referred to as intersubjective validity. Simply put, Garfinkel is stating that humans must share some context by which to produce meaning if they hope to communicate with others. It is also important to note that Garfinkel points out that individuals assume those they are communicating with share a similar cognitive context. In his words, they treat it as “the most passing matter of fact” (Garfinkel, 1984, p. 8). We shall return to this point shortly. These assumptions stand at the heart of Garfinkel’s theory and have informed much of current cultural anthropological thought.

According to Garfinkel (1984), “Sociologists distinguish the ‘product’ from the ‘process’ meanings of a common understanding. As ‘product,’ a common understanding is thought to consist of a shared agreement on substantive matters; as ‘process,’ it consists of various methods whereby something that a person says or does is recognized to accord with a rule” (p. 24-5). In other words, the products of meaning are the pieces of data (words, vocalics, actions, expressions, communications, etc.) which are accessible to others and have intersubjective validity. The process is the way in which those data are presented. Common understanding (i.e. intersubjective validity) is predicated on rule-like processes.

Part of that process is to found or ‘anchor’ one’s inner-subjective cognition in a common context with those one wishes to communicate with as was mentioned above. This involves a common system of characterization, differentiation, classification, symbolic representation, system of logic, and epistemological and ontological assumptions. However, this common system is only one of the rule-like features of the process of intersubjective understanding. There are also rule-like features in the manner of communication. That is, there are certain expected features, and patterns of communications. If communications are presented without expected features, they can become convoluted, misinterpreted, incomprehensible, ambiguous—in short, lacking intersubjective validity.

Often temporal sequencing is one of these rule-like features in the process of creating intersubjectively valid pieces of communication. For example, in the English language there is the expectation of a specific temporal sequencing in sentence

structure. Take, for example, the following fragment: “the red shirt”. This fragment follows the expected temporal sequencing in English. First, comes an article, then the adjective and finally the noun. Using this expected, rule-like sequencing, a sentence like, “She wore the red shirt.” has a high degree of intersubjective validity.²⁷

However, by altering the temporal sequence of the sentence we can see that the statement loses a degree of intersubjective validity. If, for example, one said “She wore the shirt red” confusion emerges. The reason confusion emerges is because the receiver is accustomed to receiving data in a particular sequence. It is, of course, not impossible to make sense of this sentence. However, the way we can make sense of it is by deconstructing the pieces and reconstructing them back into the temporal sequence we are accustomed to. Only then does the sentence achieve the level of intersubjective validity of our original sentence.

The two aspects of the process of common understanding that I have highlighted are of course culturally and linguistically specific. One social group can, for example, ‘anchor’ meaning in a different context than another social group. Different social groups can and often do have differing systems of characterization, differentiation, classification, symbolic representation, systems of logic, and epistemological and ontological assumptions. One social group can also apply different prescriptions for delivery of data than another social group. For example, the

²⁷Although as Garfinkel (1984) points out there is always some degree of uncertainty in language. For example, the reader does not know which red shirt, who, etc.

temporal sequencing of the Spanish sentence differs from English in that the article is followed directly by the noun which is then followed the adjective.²⁸

As Garfinkel (1984) points out, common understanding then is possible by the application of these rule-like structures in both cognitive processing and data delivery. These rule-like structures sit then as “background expectancies as a scheme of interpretation” (Garfinkel, 1984, p. 36) for members of the social group. That is, individuals expect that others in their social group will abide by the rules and therefore apply those rules in their interpretations of data. As Garfinkel (1984) states, common understanding is possible because those in a social group act “in accordance with methods” (p. 30). However, these methods do not necessarily need to be articulated or even understood by the members of the social group. Often members do not even realize their existence because they are so basic to the operation of one’s daily life. As Garfinkel (1984) says, these rule-like structures are “‘seen but unnoticed,’ expected, background features of everyday scenes” (p. 36) which are “‘treated by members as the ‘natural facts of life’” (p. 35). That is, they are so commonplace, so fundamental that they are taken-for-granted and obtain an unquestioned status of commonsense facticity for the members of social group. For example, for a child learning English will internalize the temporal sequence of article,

²⁸ This is not to imply that inter-cultural commonality and intra-cultural un-commonality cannot exist. Certainly there must be some level of inter-cultural commonality if translation of language is at all possible, for example. Furthermore, certain social groups can experience greater or lesser degrees of common understanding than others. A cult or religious group which lives in isolation will most likely have a higher degree of common understand than a large diverse polity like the United States. Likewise, a family is likely to have greater levels of common understanding than, for example, the city or church community at large that the family belongs to. Still, by and large, we can expect that particular social groups will maintain a degree of common understanding which makes communication, mutual understanding and social coordination possible.

adjective, noun in much the same way they will internalize other facts of existence like the necessity of urination or the force of gravity. These things are simply seen as the way things are and achieve a level of accepted facticity that serves as a foundation of practical action. People urinate, I urinate. Things fall, I can fall. People speak this way, I speak this way.

Zerubavel (1985) recognizes socio-temporal order as obtaining this type of facticity. He states, for example, “[t]he temporal regularity of our everyday life world is definitely among the major background expectancies which are at the basis of the ‘normalcy’ of our social environment” (Zerubavel, 1985, p. 21). Berger and Luckmann’s work is also in accord with this proposition. They state, “[t]he world of everyday life is structured both spatially and temporally” and “temporality is an intrinsic property of consciousness” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 26). Flaherty (2003) also recognizes the importance of temporality in consciousness arguing that self-conceptualization is influenced by temporal factors.

As is evidenced by the preceding paragraph, though urination and gravity are facts of life which are independent of human creation and language structure is a social construction, they attain the same level of facticity—commonsense, taken-for-granted, uncritically accepted reality. In a word, these social constructions become reified. In the next sections we will discuss this process whereby social constructions, particularly socio-temporal order attain the level of facticity of a natural process or phenomenon as well as the implications of this process.

Reification of Socio-temporal Order

Garfinkel (1984) states that “[c]ommon sense knowledge of the facts of social life for the members of the society is institutionalized knowledge of the real world” (p. 53). Here he means that this commonsense knowledge is established as customary or normal but also that it becomes routinized or more accurately serves as the basis of routinized social existence. However, this commonsense, taken-for-granted knowledge rarely reaches the level of critical reflection by individuals within a social group. As Berger and Luckmann (1967) point out, “[c]ommonsense contains innumerable pre- and quasi-scientific interpretations about everyday reality, which it takes for granted” (p. 20).

Both Berger and Luckmann (1967) and Zerubavel (1977, 1985) highlight that sociotemporal structures often exhibit this taken-for-granted, commonsense quality. Berger and Luckmann state for example, “[t]he temporal structure of everyday life confronts me as a facticity with which I must reckon, that is, with which I must try to synchronize my own projects... All my existence in this world is continuously ordered by its time” (p. 27). Zerubavel says, “even though the sociotemporal order is based, to a large extent, on purely arbitrary social convention, it is nevertheless usually perceived by people as given, inevitable, and unalterable” (p. 42).

Furthermore, Berger and Luckmann (1967) and Zerubavel (1985) also place emphasis on the role temporal structure has in determining actions. Berger and Luckmann say, “temporal structure...is coercive” (p. 27) while Zerubavel states that

socio-temporal orders “often constitute binding normative prescriptions” (p. xiii). This notion has become a common theme in sociology. For example, Diehl and McFarland (2010) state, “collective behavior requires a shared grounding to make interaction meaningful, and so we see the relationship between the structure of situations and the socio-temporal structure of the rituals that happen in them as having an orthogonal relationship” (p. 1747). Moreover, Foster (1996) discusses the menstrual cycle as a form of socio-temporality concluding that the mental mapping out of rhythmic elements of the menstrual cycle is a highly social act that has real implications for social organization which affects women's lives.

The reason temporal structure is so coercive is because it is a social expectation. As was illustrated above, temporal structures are maintained as commonsense, taken-for-granted facticities which also shape social expectations. Others within one's social group expect, for example, that temporal sequencing accord to particular rules and would have difficulty understanding utterances that do not accord with the rules.

Furthermore, much of social coordination, especially in complex modern societies would be impossible without standardized socio-temporal structures (Sorokin & Merton, 1937; Zerubavel, 1985; Foucault, 1995). Schedules, calendars, the rhythm of the clock, “[r]igid sequential structures,” “[f]ixed durations,” “the standardization of temporal location” (e.g. the bus arrives every hour on the hour, the stakeholder's meeting is the third Tuesday of every month, etc.) and “[u]niform rates of recurrence” all help a society coordinate actions and are predicated on the

expectation that members of the society intuit them in a matter-of-fact, taken-for-granted, commonsense way (Zerubavel, 1985, p. 2-9).

All of these temporal structures are absorbed subconsciously and transmitted to younger generations by processes of socialization and can be learned early in childhood (Friedman, 1986). Each succeeding generation is socialized into the society's socio-temporal structures until eventually these structures appear as natural, inevitable and immutable as any temporal order based on the rhythms of nature. The further removed one is, in time, from the origin of a social convention the less likely (s)he is to come to understand that convention as such. In Berger and Luckmann's (1967) words, "[t]he 'There we go again' now becomes 'This is how these things are done.' A world so regarded attains a firmness in consciousness; it becomes real in an ever more massive way and it can no longer be changed so readily" (p. 59).

The social demands of a complex modern society, the requirements of intersubjective validity, the process of socialization and subsequent institutionalization all lead to the reification of socio-temporal order.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), "[r]eification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things...reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products—such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws or manifestations of divine will" (p. 89). Similarly, Lukács (1971) describes the phenomenon of reification as happening when "a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all embracing

as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people” (p. 83). For both Berger and Luckmann and Lukács, the essential character of reification is evident. Reification is the objectification and naturalization of social, subjective phenomenon. It is when social constructions are not or are no longer seen as social constructions but taken as something fixed by the dictates of nature. The taken-for-granted, commonsense, matter-of-fact quality of socio-temporal orders attests to their reification. To the [wo]man on the street, the seven day week, for example, is treated as natural, immutable and inevitable as the force of gravity which keeps her/him from floating skyward.

In the next sections we will see that ‘dramatic’ narrative structure, like the seven day week, is a particular socio-temporal order which has a similar taken-for-granted, commonsense, matter-of-fact, reified quality.

‘Dramatic’ Plot as Socio-temporal Order

According to Dipple (1970), “Plot is the arrangement of action; action progresses through the indispensable medium of time from which it derives all of its modifying vocabularies. Beginning, middle, and end constitute a march through temporal history...” (p. 43). Here Dipple quite clearly articulates the temporal quality of plot.

As was discussed in the section on *natura non facit saltus*, Aristotle puts forth a theory of the organic nature of narrative structure. Specifically, the reader will recall

that Aristotle argues that the pattern of *natura non facit saltus* is the pattern of natural progression and thus is the natural pattern of dramatic narrative which is a reflection of nature. As Belfiore (1992) states, “In Aristotle’s view, plot is a sustasis [i.e. bringing together] of events that is very strongly analogous to a biological sustasis.” (p. 176). Furthermore, as was stated before, for Aristotle, the ‘dramatic’ narrative has a certain trajectory. Early in the narrative, conflict is introduced. All scenes maintain a certain trajectory headed toward the eventual resolution of that conflict. Each progressive scene, then, is intrinsically linked to and builds upon the previous scene. This means that actions are placed in linear sequence where the beginning must come before the middle which in turn must come before the end (Aristotle & Butcher, 1997, p. 14). According to Aristotle, this trajectory can only move either from good fortune to bad fortune, or bad to good (Aristotle & Butcher, 1997, p. 15). ‘Dramatic’ plot then represents a rigid sequential structure, according to Aristotle’s formulation. In short, this rigid sequential structure constitutes the “principles” by which a plot must “conform” (Aristotle & Butcher, 1997, p. 14).

According to Zerubavel (1985), rigid sequential structures “are the most obvious and conspicuous form of temporal regularity” (p. 2). Furthermore, he points out that “sequential rigidity is, to a large extent, conventional and by no means inevitable” (Zerubavel, 1985, p. 5). Far from being the reflection of nature as Aristotle claims, ‘dramatic’ plot is simply a social convention and is as Zerubavel’s claim suggests not inevitable and is mutable. This point is made clear by Gibson (1996) in his critique of Genette and others who assume a naturalized narrative

structure. Furthermore, Brecht's epic theatre demonstrates this, as well as the work of Joyce and Beckett. Though they maintain narratives they forgo the so called natural principles outlined by Aristotle.

'Dramatic' Plot as Reified Structure

While it is evident that Aristotelian narrative structure is not ordained by natural forces and is instead a social convention (Gibson, 1996) which can be altered, it is still employed nearly exclusively. Benjamin (2003), for example, asserts that Aristotelian dramatic structure had a hegemonic influence on German drama. This point is also made by Unwin (2005), who argues that the hegemony of Aristotelian dramatic structure was especially pronounced in the European classical theatre of Germany and France. Furthermore, Dipple (1970) discusses the difficulties of moving past Aristotle's 'dramatic' narrative structure saying, "[t]he place of time in the narrative and its potential control over the structure of fictions has a lengthy background" (p. 48). These statements attest to the widespread acceptance of Aristotelian dramatic structure. While widespread acceptance could be indicative of reification it is not, in itself, enough to demonstrate the reification of Aristotelian dramatic structure. In order to claim it has been reified, one must demonstrate that it is seen as natural not just by Aristotle but to contemporary society in general.

Some readily available empirical evidence suggests that Aristotelian plot has been reified. For example, an examination of my nine year old daughter's report card

lends support for this thesis. This should be no surprise given Barthes' (1970) quip, that the "conventional mode of writing has always been a happy hunting ground for study in schools" (p. 69). On this report card, there is a section called "Proficiency in Writing Narratives". Under that section there is a subsection entitled, "Writes narratives showing how characters, setting and events evolve." Several things can be gleaned from this.

To begin with, the reader will notice the word 'evolve'. This implies two things. First, that events need to develop and second that the development of narratives should mimic the process of evolution. In other words, there is an underlying assumption that narrative structure should have a continual evolutionary process. Here we see the application of *natura non facit saltus* suggesting an Aristotelian notion of plot.

Second, notice that the report card says 'showing how' events evolve. It does not say that events *can* evolve but *how* they do. This suggests that events must move in some prescribed way. An examination of my daughter's work and a quick inquiry into the matter confirms that indeed this prescribed way is Aristotelian in form.

Finally, notice the phrasing, "showing how characters, setting and events evolve". In this, 'events' are not being used as direct objects. 'Events' *are evolving*. Nothing is happening to 'events'. They are not, for example, being: contrived, observed, composed, arranged, experienced, thought up, written, etc. They are not being made to evolve. Instead, 'events' have become anthropomorphized. They have the human quality of spirit, ego, autonomy, agency, self-animation. 'Events' are said

to be doing the actions, all by themselves. ‘Events’ appears as an undifferentiated totality. They do not appear as the sum of purposeful, intentional, human actions, which they are. Human action is forgotten about, overlooked, ignored, perhaps suppressed (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971; Journals) and the human roots of ‘events’ become invisible, hidden, overlooked, etc. The puppeteer’s hands are hidden; the marionette appears string-less behind the black background of reification. We no longer connect with ‘events’ in our true relation to ‘events’. We no longer see these ‘events’ as the product of our labor. We connect with this object in a different way. We see it as an external object with agency which we observe, classify, describe, study, catalog, analyze, discover the properties of, etc. In short, we experience it only in its alienation from us.

My daughter’s report card suggests that there is an expectation to conform to the principles of Aristotelian narrative. For her, this is simply how plot is. She takes Aristotelian narrative structure for granted and moreover, understands it as if there are certain, set principles which can be mastered just as she understood that there are certain, set principles to the lunar cycle which can be mastered.

Furthermore, the fact that we found this on a child’s report card (from a public school no less) is evidence of a profound level of institutionalization of Aristotelian narrative structure. Aristotelian narrative is the rule by which narrative structure abides. There is an assumption that Aristotelian narrative structure is *how* narrative structure *is* and younger generations are socialized to understand plot in this way.

The Effects of Altering Socio-temporal Order

So far, we have seen that in Brecht's aesthetics, there is a rejection of Aristotelian dramatic form. We have also seen that Aristotelian dramatic narrative is a reified socio-temporal order. We shall now explore the consequences of deviating from expected socio-temporal order in order to gauge the potential effects of Brecht's epic theatre may have on its audience. From the literature on social psychology and the sociology of time, we see that there are two, interrelated, potential effects of deviating from expected socio-temporal order.

First, deviation from the expected socio-temporal order can cause a general sense of anxiety in individuals. As Zerubavel (1985) states, "temporal irregularity...contributes considerably to the development of a strong sense of uncertainty" (p. 12) and there is an "overwhelming feeling of 'bad taste' which often accompanies the act of deviating from that norm" (Zerubavel, 1985, p. 5). Garfinkel's experimental work also points to the potential for mental distress from deviating from expected socio-temporal order. He states:

The members' real or perceived environment on losing its known-in-common background should become 'specifically senseless'...behaviors directed to such a senseless environment should be those of bewilderment, uncertainty, internal conflict, psycho-social isolation, acute, and nameless anxiety along with various symptoms of acute depersonalization. (Garfinkel, 1984, p. 55)

A variety of experiments done by Garfinkel lends empirical validity to both his and Zerubavel's claims (Garfinkel, 1984).²⁹

Second, there are "disturbing cognitive implications of temporal irregularity" (Zerubavel, 1985, p. 22). As was stated above, temporal references serve as grounds against which data can be perceived and assigned meaning. Zerubavel (1985) discusses the cognitive implications of altering these grounds saying, "any incongruity between figures and grounds is cognitively disturbing" (p. 21). Most likely anxiety results from an inability to make sense of data because the grounds we use to do so are not as we are accustomed to seeing them.

Collectively this feeling of anxiety and cognitive disruption can serve to undermine one's faith in one's sense of reality. According to Berger and Luckmann (1964) "the unproblematic sector of everyday reality is so only until further notice, that is, until its continuity is interrupted by the appearance of a problem" (p. 24). Anxiety and cognitive disruption are of course problematic and thus able to disrupt one's belief in one's 'reality'.

²⁹ In these experiments, Garfinkel had his experimenters defy the socially constituted and shared expectations of the subjects. In one experiment he had students treat their parents like strangers instead of acting according to the dictates of the socially expected child-parent relation. In another, he had experimenters go into stores and attempt to barter even though the entrenched social expectation was that one pays the marked price for an item. In all cases, the defying of social expectations produced emotional turmoil in the subjects.

Penetrating the Veil of Reification

In the first two sections, of this chapter we found that there were three differences between epic and dramatic theatre. Section one showed that epic theatre does not move linearly and scenes are not dependent on the previous scene. The next section showed that epic theatre rejects the principle of *natura non facit saltus*. After that, we found that Brecht's innovations had two functions—to draw particular attention to the events and actions portrayed on the stage and the eliminating of empathy and catharsis. While accepting the validity of these claims, it was suggested that there is another function to Brecht's innovations. The discussion then turned to establishing that narrative structure is a form of socio-temporal order and that temporal referencing has important implications for human cognition and subsequent conceptualizations of the world. In the sections that followed it was established that socio-temporal order can become reified and that dramatic plot is both a form of socio-temporal order and reified. Finally, the previous section argued that there are two effects of altering expected socio-temporal order—anxiety and cognitive disturbance.

If dramatic plot is a socio-temporal order which is reified and Brecht alters this socio-temporal order, then the result would be the production of anxiety, cognitive disturbance and disruption of one's belief in their 'reality'. This then, is the other function of Brecht's divergence from Aristotelian narrative structure—the

production of anxiety, cognitive disturbance and the disruption of one's belief in their 'reality'.

Brecht is very specific that the disruption of the audiences' sense of reality is a goal of his epic theatre. He wants to estrange one from their sense of reality—hence his estrangement effects. He states: the estrangement effect is “a representation that...recognize[s] its subject, but at the same time makes [the subject] seem unfamiliar” (BT, p. 192) [1949]; “the ‘natural’ had to be given an element of the conspicuous” (Martin & Bial, 2000, p. 25) [c. 1936] and “the normal must assume the character of the never-before-known” (Journals, p. 328) [1944].

He attempts to achieve this estrangement of one from their sense of reality by method of deconstruction in its most basic sense. He states, “the self-evident...is resolved into its components when counteracted by the a-effect...an imposed schema is being broken up here” (Journals, p. 82) [1940]. In the example posed in this chapter, Brecht breaks apart socio-temporal order. He breaks apart the imposed schema of Aristotelian ‘dramatic’ structure. By doing this he demonstrates that it is possible “to alter what has long not been altered” (BT p. 192) [1949] and opens the possibility that other reifications such as the mode of production, the private ownership of the means of production, social relations, etc., can also be undone (Journals, p. 192; BT, p. 184).

In this way, Brecht was attempting to “penetrat[e] the veil of reification” (Lukács, 1971, p. 86). Whether or not Brecht's techniques actually function in the manner theorized is, of course, an empirical question. However, Brecht seemed to be

character of everyday scenes, or become estranged from them” (Garfinkel, 1984, p. 37). Brecht’s epic theatre uses the latter as its general approach. Furthermore, as was stated above, preliminary empirical evidence suggests that when properly understood and applied, estrangement effects can have an impact in altering individual’s conceptions of the world (Squiers & Roessler, 2011)³⁰.

Therefore, contrary to existing research this chapter has demonstrated that Brechtian estrangement effects have the potential to alter consciousness and thus can be used as a weapon against the hegemony of bourgeois ideology.

In the next chapter, we will shift our focus from Brecht’s cognitive disruption to the other method Brecht employed in the destruction of the bourgeois weltanschauung—his portrayal of social contradictions.

³⁰ Students were provided with a discussion board prompt on an online learning format. The prompt contained an account of a well known biblical scene. It was produced using various Brechtian estrangement effects which sought to obfuscate its origin. These effects were specifically designed to be effective for that particular audience by taking into account the commonsense, taken-for-granted, everyday weltanschauung of it. Empirical evidence provided by the written responses of the students demonstrated that the effects were successful in compelling students to consider familiar events from a completely different context. Specifically they produced a situation where the standard deference and uncritical acceptance of the bible account was missing, in all the students and critical, new ways of understanding it emerged. A full account of the estrangement effects employed and responses by the students will be provided in the conclusion.

CHAPTER IV

EIDETIC REDUCTION AND CONTRADICTION

“A mere echo of the world is not enough...”³¹

Introduction

In the second chapter we discussed class consciousness as a necessary step in the emancipation of the working class. In essence it was argued that, for Brecht, emancipation cannot happen until the reality of exploitation is realized by the working class. According to Brecht, people develop an uncritical and unconscious way of perceiving, interpreting and understanding their environment. They internalize the common, accepted manner of truth production and the truths produced through that manner without considering the possibility that an alternate manner of truth production could exist. In other words, they uncritically accept the dominant *weltanschauung*. In the previous chapter we saw how this dominant *weltanschauung* takes on an organic, naturalized appearance and that Brecht attempted to destroy this appearance of naturalness by demonstrating its socially constituted nature. This it was argued would cause a cognitive disruption in the audience which could serve to undermine their belief in their own reality.

³¹ Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1976, p. 417 [1950].

In this chapter, we will see that not only does the bourgeois worldview appear as organic for Brecht; it also presents itself as a unified, all-encompassing totality—a totality which attempts to omit contradictions and obfuscate social antagonism. This notion of the totalizing aspiration of the bourgeois worldview is captured well in two different Marxian concepts: the Gramscian and Neo-Gramscian notion of hegemony and Barthes' notion of myth.

This chapter will reconstruct Brecht's notions of the totalizing nature of ideology and its relation to language. While Brecht's ideas in this area are expressed primarily in fragmentary form and lack an overarching structure, an analysis is possible by demonstrating the similarities between Brecht's ideas and those of Gramsci, other political theorists and Barthes who developed more thoroughly articulated theoretical frameworks. It will be shown that like Gramsci and Barthes, Brecht conceived of a dominant ideology³² which: 1) serves particular interests, not universal ones, 2) is historically/socially conditioned and thus not an innocent reflection of objective phenomena, 3) obscures contradiction and attempts to project a unified totality and 4) is in part a product of language.

While this reconstruction of Brecht's notions of the totalizing nature of ideology and its relation to language provides a new and important exposition relating Brecht's thought to other notable Marxist thinkers, its primary purpose is to serve as a

³² Like Brecht, Barthes and Gramsci both speak of ideology, at least in part, as a condition of falseness which benefits the ruling classes and needs to be overcome. For Gramsci this notion can be found for example, in his critique of Croce (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 270-2), his discussion on Machiavelli (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 125-36) and when directly commenting on the concept of ideology (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 376-7). This notion is also found throughout Barthes' discussion of mythologies, especially (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 112, 137-142).

foundation to highlight Brecht's more original philosophical contributions. This reconstruction serves two purposes. First, it helps describe Brecht's position on the nature of ideology and secondly it serves as a basis for understanding Brecht's attempt to shatter ideology. Specifically, after establishing Brecht's position on the nature of ideology we will see that in an effort to shatter the illusion of unity found in the dominant ideology, Brechtian dramaturgy attempts what we might refer to as a type of phenomenological reduction which seeks to remove objects from the commonsense, default position of the inherited language and expose contradictions. Like Brecht's defiance of socio-temporal order explored in the last chapter this move also attempts to disrupt the audience's *weltanschauung*.

Hegemony

Gramsci as well as other political theorists conceptualize hegemony as a sort of ideological hegemony. For Gramsci, the hegemonic ideology in any given period reflects the dictates of the mode of production (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 294). In other words, Gramsci envisions hegemony as the ideology required by a particular mode of production. It is the ideology which maintains that mode of production and legitimizes it. Hegemony is maintained by two highly complex and interrelated components, commonsense and domination. Commonsense for Gramsci means the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 322). This notion is very

similar to what was discussed in the last chapter—i.e. the everyday, taken-for-granted, commonsense way of viewing the world which Brecht sought to undermine.

Domination, on the other hand, is the forceful assurance of commonsense and is a particular function of political society or the state apparatus (i.e. government as opposed to civil society), for Gramsci. He says, for example that “[t]he State is the instrument for conforming civil society to the economic structure” (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 208). This attempt at conformation involves “the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 244). For Gramsci, the state apparatus exercises dominance by “render[ing] the ruling group ‘homogeneous’, and [creating] a social conformism which is useful to the ruling group’s line of development” (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 195).

This conformism is made practical by using the state apparatus as a coercive power which can both actively and passively enforce the ‘commonsense’. In other words, the state apparatus is a means of defending, propagating, reassuring, legitimizing, acting as an alibi for, etc., the commonsense way of seeing things. In essence, the commonsense is legitimated by the fact that it is widely held but also by the fact that the state apparatus is employed in its support and defense. The state apparatus, for Gramsci, is a vehicle of domination ensuring a dominant ideology.

As was just mentioned, Gramsci links dominance with social conformism. Conformity is achieved, according to Gramsci, when the ruling group is able to

disguise its particular interests and present itself as representatives, defenders, protectors, etc., of the universal social group. In essence, conformity is achieved by convincing the people that the interests the state (in this case both political and civil society) works toward are not the interests of the ruling class but the interests of everyone (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971). In other words, it projects itself as the embodiment of the common good. The state is seen as the embodiment of the social totality. In bourgeois democracy the state presents itself as the representative, defender, protector, etc. of freedom and equality which are held as universal interests. The state is seen as the means of ensuring the interests of liberty and equality. Thus it is seen as the means of ensuring the common interest. Critiques of this conception of the state have been provided by several political theorists.

Wolin, for example, sees the emergence of this totalizing conception of the state stemming from the Hobbesian formulation of the state, which Hobbes envisions as a homogeneous undivided totality held together by the strong-arm of the sovereign to the universal benefit (i.e. security) of all (Benhabib, 1996, p. 32). Like Hobbes, Locke also has this notion of the state being the protector of the universal interest. For Locke this means the protection of private property (Locke, 1980).

It is these types of mythic assumptions of unity that Young (in Benhabib, 1996) argues bourgeois democracy is predicated on. According to Young, bourgeois democracy mandates that discussion needs to proceed from a common position of established social principles. These established principles clearly fall into the category of commonsense as they are the taken-for-granted, everyday way of viewing

things. However, in a repressive capacity, the state also restricts discourse, permitting only discourse which begins at that common point, i.e. commonsense. Anything outside the bounds of this commonsense, that is any discourse which has different epistemic center, employs a different set of methodological assumptions, uses another system of logic, nomenclature scheme, manner of differentiation, etc, is excluded from public discussion and social consideration. As a result, various perspectives held by underprivileged groups in society are abstractly negated. They are condemned, suppressed, nullified, ignored, etc., because they contradict hegemony. They contradicted the totalizing claims of commonsense.

Mouffe also sees a connection between the totalizing aspiration of commonsense and exclusion. For Mouffe, meaning is constructed through a series of mutually exclusive comparisons. That is, meaning can only be held in its exclusion from what it is not. Social truth then, or what Mouffe refers to as ‘social objectivity’, is by necessity held in opposition to something we may think of as untruth. The totalizing of ‘social objectivity’ is constituted by the opposition of ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ thought, according to Mouffe. ‘Social objectivity’ results from what has been ordained as the rational conclusion. Conclusions which contradict this conclusion are labeled ‘irrational’ and thus abstractly negated. However, Mouffe is also quick to highlight that social objectivity is “constructed through acts of power” and states that the “confluence between objectivity and power is... ‘hegemony’” (Benhabib, 1996, p. 247). For Mouffe hegemony is the exclusion of alternative ways of understanding—ways which run contrary to the totalized social truth or ‘social

objectivity'. Hegemony is the negation of antagonism and the attempt to build "universal rational consensus", according to Mouffe (Benhabib, 1996, p. 248).

As Mouffe highlights, hegemony is the attempted exclusion of alternative ways of thinking. It is the abstract negation of contradictions. However, the abstract negation of contradictions does not eliminate those contradictions. They remain, largely unnoticed, beneath the surface of social perception, un-reconciled, waiting to be reconciled, regardless of the cunning or violence the ruling class may employ, regardless of the potential repression of any state apparatus. In Gramsci's words, "however much the ruling class may affirm to the contrary, the State, as such, does not have a unitary, coherent and homogenous conception" (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 342). Moreover, "common sense cannot...be reduced to unity and coherence even within an individual consciousness, let alone collective consciousness. Or rather they cannot be so reduced "freely"—for this may be done by 'authoritarian' means' (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 326). However, even when means for repression are employed the contradictions remain.

Myth

Barthes, like other post-structuralist thinkers (e.g. Derrida and Foucault), deemphasizes the importance of the state apparatus in maintaining the dominant worldview. Like Derrida and Wittgenstein, Barthes sees any given dominant

worldview, to a large extent, as a product of language.³³ Barthes refers to this dominant worldview as myth and argues that it is a type of speech, “a system of communication...it is a message” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 109).

Although Gramsci does not elaborate deeply, he too sees commonsense as a product of language. For Gramsci, language is the “totality of determined notions and concepts” (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 323) and “contains the elements of a conception of the world” (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 325). Language, in essence, is the vehicle for the dissemination of particular worldviews. Language is the outward articulation of the worldview. It accords with and reflects the rule-like structures of the worldview; it reflects the system of classification used, meets the expectations of logic, reveals ontology, etc.³⁴ Truth then, “owes its effectiveness to its being expressed in the language appropriate to specific concrete situations” (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 201). In other words, truth is measured by its level of concordance with the language of the historically determined material conditions of the world. As was mentioned above, these conceptions of the world are not objectively determined but are thoroughly penetrated by the state which “presents itself in the language and culture of specific epochs” (Gramsci, Hoare & Nowell-Smith, 1971, p. 268).

³³ It is important to note that unlike Derrida who does not believe in an essence independent of form, Barthes does. For Barthes the form i.e. signifieds are approximations of the essences. In myth, the form is mistaken for the essence.

³⁴ Wittgenstein would argue that language is more than a mere reflection of *weltanschauung* but that it acts as the boundary or limits of the *weltanschauung*. In essence he argues that one is only able to comprehend what is available through language (Wittgenstein, 1953). Whether language is a reflection of the worldview or *vice versa*, they mirror each other.

Like Gramsci, Barthes conceives myth as a mode of signification or a form of communication that is historically determined. Myth is the language of the time which serves as the foundations for intersubjectively valid meaning. So for both Gramsci and Barthes, myth or commonsense are rule-like structures of language and serve as the grounds by which one measures truth. Myth then is not only commonly held notions, commonsense, quasi-scientific facticities; it is a set of rules of language. In other words, claims of truth are only valid in so far as they correspond to the dictates of the language commonsense/myth. If something does not correspond, for example, with the common ontology, epistemological assumptions, scheme of nomenclature, system of logic, manner of differentiation, etc. of commonsense/myth, it is held as invalid (i.e. untrue, false, etc.). Commonsense/myth then shapes knowledge. It is a sort of schema for truth production and validation. It serves as the confines, borders, limits, etc. for intersubjective validity and as a conceptual frame by which data is intersubjectively made sense of.

Since myth is a type of language, it “belongs to the province of a general science, coextensive with linguistics, which is semiology” according to Barthes (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 111). In other words, myth is a semiological system; it is the entire system of significations that comprise a language and thus requires semiological analysis to properly understand it. According to Barthes, “[s]emiology is a science of forms [which] studies significations apart from their content” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 111). For Barthes, significations, i.e. signs, are the product of “a relation between two terms, a signifier and a signified” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p.

112). Signifiers are material substances which potentially have meaning (e.g. objects, sounds, images) but have no meaning independently of corresponding signifieds.

Signifieds are not the thing in itself but are mental representations of the thing (Barthes, 1970, p. 42). Together, the signified and the signifier form the components of the sign (Barthes, 1970, p. 35). For Barthes, signifiers are objective, they have essence and are the raw material, the object of perception; however, in order for them to be understood requires interaction with the mental representation of the object, the signified.

Signs are historically and culturally determined according to Barthes. Within temporal and cultural textuality, signs stand as the representation of the object. In other words, signs ‘stand in’ for the signifiers. But what ‘stands in’ is not the same everywhere, at all times: There is an interaction between the objective data (i.e. signifier) and a historically determined mental representation of the objective data (i.e. signified). In any given period and culture, then, these interactions produce particular, historically and/or locally determined signs with historically/locally determined meanings.

Furthermore, within given periods/cultures “signs are repeated in successive discourses and within one and the same discourse” (Barthes, 1970, p. 15). The repetition of signs lends them and their historically determined meaning a taken-for-granted quality which serves to naturalize them, according to Barthes. In his words, they become “standardized, normalized objects” (Barthes, 1970, p. 41). That is, the form (i.e. the sign) becomes (mis)taken for the essence and a “universal

semantization” (Barthes, 1970, p. 42) occurs within the sign system where the form becomes completely (mis)taken for the essence. Barthes states, for example, myth “transform[s] a meaning into form” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 131). This process is predicated on a historically determined sign which only stands in for the signifier but is (mis)taken for the signifier in its self and results in the historically determined nature of meaning being lost. Barthes states:

[M]yth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made. The world enters language as a dialectical relation between activities, between human actions; it comes out of myth as a harmonious display of essences. A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature, it has removed from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance. (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 142-3)

According to Barthes, there is a “constant game of hide-and-seek between the meaning and the form” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 118). Yet the results of this game are historically determined. In his words, “there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 120). But as was stated above, myth hides historical determination, “it stiffens, it makes itself look neutral and innocent” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 125). While Barthes believes that signs are always “motivated by the concept which they represent” they do not cover “the sum of its possibilities for representation” (Barthes

& Lavers, 1972, p. 127). Possibilities are chosen. This choice is where politics and class interest come in to play for Barthes. He states:

[E]verything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie has and makes us have of the relations between man and the world. These ‘normalized’ forms attract little attention, by the very fact of their extension, in which their origin is easily lost. They enjoy an intermediate position: being neither directly political nor directly ideological, they live peacefully between the action of the militants and the quarrels of the intellectuals; more or less abandoned by the former and the latter, they gravitate towards the enormous mass of the undifferentiated, the insignificant, in short, of nature. (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 140)

According to Barthes, it is “[t]he first bourgeois philosophers” who have made the choice of how signs are represented (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 142). In his words, they have “pervaded the world with significations, subjected all things to an idea of the rational” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 142). Like Mouffe after him, Barthes sees the bourgeois conception of rationality having a hand in the determination of truth. It is rationality that determines the sign in bourgeois philosophy for Barthes, as if rationality stood outside the semiological system—as if rationality were a device one could employ to gauge how well the sign approximates the signifier. That is to say, it is as if rationality clarified the sign and brought it into accordance with the signifier. But rationality does not stand outside of a given semiological system for Barthes. It is a usage, a value which guides the transformation of meaning into form.

Once meaning is transferred into form it becomes (to borrow a term from Husserl) 'sedimented' or fixed in the commonsense, typical, everyday, taken-for-granted way of understanding the world. However, no meaning is outside of human construction for Barthes since it requires choices; even "the most natural object contains a political trace, however faint and diluted, the more or less memorable presence of the human act which has produced, fitted up, used, subjected or rejected it" (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 143-4).

Even though meaning is created by human action, the human origins of meaning are hidden, according to Barthes. We experience reality as something completely alien to ourselves, independent of our own actions, natural, wholly objective, as if our representations of real objects were the things in themselves.

But in what manner do things become objective? According to what principle? Barthes addresses this saying, "[m]en do not have with myth a relationship based on truth but on use: they depoliticize according to their needs" (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 144). Here we see Barthes in accord with Gramsci. For Barthes this naturalization occurs in a way which is beneficial to the ruling class. He states, "myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal...this process is exactly that of bourgeois ideology" (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 142). In other words, it is the bourgeoisie who are creating meaning in the current myth system. The bourgeoisie is making the choices of how meaning is constituted. However, according to Barthes, "[a]s a political fact, the bourgeoisie has some difficulty in acknowledging itself...As an ideological fact, it

completely disappears” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 138). Like a clever criminal, it attempts to destroy the evidence of the crime. It wipes off the finger prints from the murder weapon; it establishes an alibi, it makes it look like an accident, etc. In the process of hiding itself, the bourgeoisie must suppress contradictions because it is only in contradiction that the bourgeoisie is revealed. It is only in contradiction that we see that it is not the universal class, for example, and that its position is not a product of nature as they would like everyone to believe. Contradictions contradict the bourgeoisie and its claims to unity, totality and nature.

In summary, both Gramsci and Barthes, conceive of a dominant ideology which: 1) serves particular interests, not universal ones, 2) is historically/socially conditioned and thus not an innocent reflection of objective phenomenon, 3) obscures contradiction and attempts to project a unified totality and 4) is in part a product of language.

Bourgeois Weltanschauung

Although Brecht’s thoughts on this subject are admittedly more disjointed and less thoroughly articulated than either Gramsci or Barthes’s, he is far from silent on the matter. These themes are to be found for example in his journal entries, the essays collected in *Brecht on Theatre*, embedded in *The Messingkauf Dialogues* and in various fragments found in *Brecht on Art and Politics*. Using the framework developed above we can reconstruct Brecht’s thought. Specifically, Brecht is in

accord with all four of the points highlighted above. Like Gramsci and Barthes, Brecht sees the dominant ideology serving the interests of the ruling class. He states, for example, “the question ‘what is true’ can no longer be resolved without the question ‘whom does this truth benefit’” (BAP, p. 111) [c. 1932]. Brecht also sees the dominant worldview as historically/locally determined. Specifically, for Brecht this determination results from the particular social relations of an epoch. He states, “people’s consciousness depends on their social existence” (MD, p. 35) and “social being determines consciousness” (Journals, p. 231) [1942].

Furthermore, Brecht also believed that the bourgeois *weltanschauung* obscures contradiction and seeks to present a unified totality. When discussing the bourgeois theatre, which as Chapter 2 showed Brecht believed simply reflected bourgeois ideology, he states, “[t]he bourgeois theatre’s performances always aim at smoothing over contradictions, at creating false harmony, at idealization...None of this is like reality” (BT, p. 277) [1949]. Brecht also sees this obscuring of contradiction as a means toward bourgeois totalizing. He states, “the society in which we live is such that we are dependent on assimilating things, and thus on methods that specifically turn all things into objects of assimilation” (BAP, p. 104) [c. 1931]. Brecht envisions a bourgeoisie that seeks to hide itself within the totality, to hide its particular interests. For example, he says that “our bourgeoisie thinks it is mankind” (Journals, p. 12) [1938] and the bourgeoisie is “eagerly and desperately occupied with achieving a new totality” (BAP, p. 97) [c. 1930]. The reason the bourgeoisie attempts to create a totality is obvious for Brecht; he believes that it is done as an “attempt to

give lasting shape to specific proposals of an ethical and aesthetic nature, and to confer on them a final, definitive character, in other words, the attempt of a class to give permanence to itself and to give its proposals the appearance of finality” (BAP, p. 98) [c. 1930].

And how does the appearance of finality come about for Brecht? Like Gramsci and Barthes, Brecht too sees the sedimentation of bourgeois ideology in the language it uses. Art for example is, according to Brecht, “a skill in preparing reproductions of human beings’ life together such as lead people to a particular kind of feeling, thought and action” (MD, p. 95). Bourgeois art and more generally bourgeois language lead people to certain feelings, thoughts and actions. These feelings, thoughts and actions are of course beneficial to the bourgeoisie and help maintain the bourgeois order. Because of this Brecht believes that “[s]ociety cannot share a common communication system so long as it is split into warring classes” (BT, p. 196) [1949]. In other words, for revolutionary social change to happen the subaltern classes cannot rely on the language of the exploiter. Brecht states, “[w]e know that the barbarians have their art. Let us create another” (BT, p. 189) [1949]. A new language must be developed—one that is free from the classifications, differentiations, methodological assumptions, assertions, logic, conclusions, etc. of the bourgeoisie’s language. It is only by removing the bourgeoisie from language that one will be able to achieve the non-historically determined, i.e. real ‘Truth’ according to Brecht. It is because of this belief he states, “[e]pistemology must be, above all, critique of language” (BAP, p. 94) [c. 1930].

Epic Theatre and Language

As we saw in Chapter 3, in epic theatre scenes are detached from each other. As Jameson (2000) highlights, scenes are not the only element of Brecht's form to undergo 'atomization'. Atomization is required for all the constituent parts of the performance. Brecht states, for example that "[w]ords, music and setting must become more independent of one another" (BT, p. 38) [1930] and that epic theatre required "the separation of the different elements" (BT, p. 85) [1935]. So for Brecht, epic theatre consisted of many independent parts or pieces. These pieces include, for example, musical elements, lighting effects, written texts, projections, scenes, words, sounds, etc.

In epic theatre, each of these pieces stands apart from each other. They are no longer meant to relate to each other as they do in the bourgeois language but to stand in isolation from each other, outside of the customary and expected, commonsense everyday organization of the dominant language. As was mentioned above, Brecht conceived of a totalizing bourgeois *weltanschauung*. For Brecht, objects of perception fit within default, commonsense, everyday, taken-for-granted places in conceptualization. Perceived objects are, in essence, fixed in the bourgeois *weltanschauung* to specific relations to other objects and to nature. In Brecht's words, "the 'idea' is no more than a reflex" (Journals, p. 119) [1940]. In other words, within the bourgeois *weltanschauung* there is a determined 'this goes with that' and thus objects are perceived with what is experienced as a fixed, *a priori* determination.

They are placed together in set ways, related in set ways; this limits the universe of possible meaning they may have. For Brecht (like Gramsci and Barthes), the meaning they do have is ordained by the bourgeoisie and seeks to serve bourgeois interests. But in epic theatre objects no longer stand in the place ordained for them in bourgeois language. Their relations to each other are changed. In this way, epic theatre defies the logic of bourgeois language and its rule-like expectations. Instead of standing in their relative place in the bourgeois schema, Brecht changes them around. He alters them and a disruption occurs. The objects are disrupted from their language. They are freed from, become pure of bourgeois language. Instead of being obfuscated, hidden, abstractly negated in bourgeois language they are revealed in their objectivity, they are revealed as things in themselves. In Brecht's words, once we "extricated ourselves from bourgeois thinking" (Journals, p. 448) [1952] we can begin to see "the basic meaning underlying every (silent) sentence" (BT, p. 55) [1931]. A "stripping bare of the middleclass corpus of ideas" would occur (BT, p. 86) [1935]. In the next three chapters we will see specific examples of objects Brecht attempts to extract. In the next chapter we will specifically examine the object of the ego while Chapters 6 and 7 show Brecht portraying social classes.

Brecht believed that a "[g]enuine understanding and criticism are only possible if the part and the whole and the varying relations between the part and the whole can all be understood and criticized" (MD, p. 91). In other words, one must understand how meaning is constituted, how the objects of perceptions are aligned, organized, fitted, arranged, determined, etc., in language. One must understand where

the representations of these objects fit within the historically determined way of understanding the world. When everything is broken up into pieces, removed from the totality of a worldview, removed from the commonsense, default meaning of language, one can begin to critically evaluate the representation of the object, according to Brecht. That is, one is able to perceive the object in a manner different than one perceives it through the bourgeois *weltanschauung*. Once perceived objects are separated from bourgeois language, they are perceived anew. They no longer default back to the place in the schema ordained by the bourgeoisie.

Brecht's attempt to extract social reality from bourgeois ideology seems to be the point of interest both Barthes and Sartre have in Brecht.

Barthes on Brecht

According to Barthes, minds are not blank screens onto which our senses project the objective world neutrally. Instead, our minds construct mental representations of the objective world, and these representations are conditioned by our environment. They are conditioned by the system of classification we use, the method of logic, our ontological assumptions, our epistemic center, etc. Therefore, these representations are both historical and localized. Although the objective world may exist independently and outside of a given language the mental representations we create to understand it, (i.e. to provide it with meaning) do not. The task of semiology is to regain a sense of how human action constitutes reality. It is to remind

us that our reality is not independent of ourselves but is a product of our historically determined mental representations of the world.

Barthes states that “any semiological system is a system of values; now the myth-consumer takes the signification for a system of facts: myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 131). In other words, the myth consumer (i.e. one who perceives within bourgeois ideology) holds myth as a natural fact when actually it is socially, historically determined. It is a product of our historically determined mental representations. Barthes also states, that a “voluntary acceptance of myth can in fact define the whole of our traditional Literature. According to our norms, this Literature is an undoubted mythical system” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 134).

This is not, however, the case for Brecht’s theatre, according to Barthes. Speaking about Brecht’s theatre in general terms, he states for example that “Brecht divined the variety and relativity of semantic systems” and was able “to show the world [as] an object to be deciphered” (Barthes & Lavers, 1972, p. 263). In other words, for Barthes, Brecht liberated the essence of social facticity from the fetters of bourgeois ideology. Brecht suspended meaning and held the sign out for the spectator allowing them to transform it back into meaning—not the meaning of the sign but the meaning of the thing in itself. Barthes refers to this displaying of the thing in itself as ‘demystification’ and lauds Brecht for his ability to achieve this with his dramaturgy.

Sartre on Brecht

Sartre's philosophy makes a distinction between objects and images. An image to Sartre (1976) is "a reality of the physical world" that is a historicized reality or the reality shaped by a current ideology (p. 87). Images are recognized. They are familiar. We are so accustomed to them that they are data which fall into a default position in the everyday, taken-for-granted, commonsense schema of understanding. Thus, they are internalized without critical reflection.

An object, on the other hand, is something which is not recognized. It is not familiar. It is perceived anew. Since it is unfamiliar, it has no default place to fall into in the everyday, taken-for-granted, commonsense schema of understanding. One must then analyze an object critically in order to fit it, place it in a relative position in a schema.

According to Sartre, bourgeois theatre presents images. It presents, in his words, "the image of man as eternally unchanging in a universe that never changes" (Sartre, 1976, p. 69). This image appears as organic and fixed and is thus unquestioned. It stands as a methodological assumption, an *a priori* facticity that shapes and limits the way one understands the world.

For Sartre, contrary to bourgeois theatre, Brecht's theatre presents objects. Speaking in general about Brecht's plays, Sartre believes that they present data which are removed, extracted, liberated from the trammel of bourgeois ideology. The objects that Brecht presents, according to Sartre, are none other than social man. He

states, “Brecht’s aim is to show modern man to us, his contemporaries, through gestures presenting action by him...making us discover ourselves as others, as if other people were looking at us; in other words, achieving an objectivity which I cannot get from my reflection” (Sartre, 1976, p. 62-63). For Sartre, Brecht forces us to become self-reflective anthropologists. That is, he forces us to study ourselves as if we were seeing ourselves for the first time and could not rely on preconceived notions, default understandings, etc., in order to provide an account or explanation. In this way, the audience “recognizes itself, but in a strange guise as if it were someone else; it brings itself into being as an object before its own eyes, and it sees itself, though without playing itself as a role, and thus comes to understand itself” (Sartre, 1976, p. 74).

Brecht and Phenomenological Reduction

According to Sartre, “What Brecht wanted and what our classical dramatists tried for was to cause what Plato called ‘the source of all philosophy’—surprise, making the familiar unfamiliar” (Sartre, 1976, p. 74). As we have seen from our discussion, Sartre, Barthes and Brecht see epic theatre as an attempt to project objects outside of bourgeois language and ideology. According to these theorists the audience is provided objects, free from the fetters of bourgeois ideology. Brecht seems to conceive the liberation of objects from bourgeois language as, what we can refer to, an eidetic reduction—a return to the essence, to the thing in itself.

Furthermore, for Brecht the possibility of what we are calling phenomenological reduction is predicated on doubt, i.e. the reluctance to accept the taken-for-granted. Barthes for example says, “[i]n the bourgeois order, the transmission always proceeds from elders to offspring...[i]n the Brechtian order there is no inheritance unless it is inverted” (Barthes, 1972 p. 141). Brecht rejects the uncritical acceptance of the way meaning is constituted. For Brecht the slate must be cleared. Brecht states:

So we basically agree with Descartes when he doubts whether he can know things, that is to say, things which are nominalised, fixed and unchanging.

However, we don’t assume that this depends on the nature of the human mind, but are of the opinion that this sort of thing does not exist in the way that, e.g.

Kant claims... (BAP, p. 93) [c. 1930].

In other words, Brecht believes that one cannot know the thing in itself if one relies on the normalized reproduction of the thing inherited from the past. This is not a problem of one’s ability to perceive. It is a problem of ideology. Since it is a problem of ideology it affects every object of perception. Thus, he states that “[d]oubt really ought to be applied to all things together” (BAP, p. 93) [c. 1930]. That is, one must doubt the given, the commonsense, the taken-for-granted if one wants to perceive reality and not the refracted (i.e. illusory) reality of the bourgeois *weltanschauung*. In Brecht’s words, “the normal must assume the character of the never-before-known” (Journals, p. 328) [1944]. Only then will “society [cease] to have the character of an infallible authority” (Journals, p. 192) [1942] and the “individual’s

position in society [will lose] its God-given quality and becomes the centre of attention” (MD, p. 104).

Phenomenological reduction implies the type of stripping away of language Brecht envisions. Only by removing the object from ideology can one encounter its eidetic substance, its essence. But if it is removed from bourgeois language what happens to the object? For Brecht it does not stand totally independent—with no relation to others or anything else. That is, objects do not stand independent of language. If they stood outside of language there would be no chance for objects to be intersubjectively shared and validated. One would be provided with no means of making sense of them. Instead, for Brecht they would have to stand in a language—a sort of pure language, the language of science, the language of truth. They are in the language of dialectics. For Brecht, as was shown in Chapter 2 and will be examined further in Chapter 6, dialectics serve as the only true means of seeing reality. It is not surprising then, that for Brecht what is left after eidetic reduction, after the stripping bare of the bourgeois ideology is not the totalized, unified reality presented by the bourgeois *weltanschauung* but contradictions.

Brecht presents contradictions and in doing so offers a new worldview, the Marxist worldview, to the audience. In essence, Brecht attempts to strip away bourgeois ideology and replace it with the material dialectical epistemology of Marx. In this way, Brecht believed he was presenting social truth. He was presenting objects removed from bourgeois ideology, but in order for these objects to be correctly observed (i.e. observed in the true essence) one must see them dialectically.

Gestus

According to Brecht, “[t]he bourgeois class...knows very well that its rule would come to an end if the scientific eye were turned on its own understanding” (BT, p. 185) [1949]. In other words, once the essences of social relations have been reduced, extracted, liberated, etc., from bourgeois ideology—removed from bourgeois language—one can begin to see social reality. But what is the eidetic substance of social relations for Brecht? What does he reveal?

Brecht refers to the eidetic substance of social relations as ‘social gest’. Brecht conceives of this as the attitudes which are produced as a result of the historically determined social relations, the “particular attitudes adopted by [one] toward other men” (Journals, p. 104) [1940].

According to Brecht, gest is “usually highly complicated and contradictory” (BT, p. 198) [1949]; however, one does not observe this in bourgeois theatre. Since bourgeois theatre is a reflection of bourgeois ideology, it does not show contradiction. Instead it projects unity.

In Brechtian dramaturgy, “[t]he ‘story’ is...the complete fitting together [i.e. arrangement] of all the gestic incidents” (BT, p. 200) [1949]. This means that in Brechtian dramaturgy the performance consists of a collection of these truths about social relations which have been segmented off, removed, freed, extracted from bourgeois ideology and are put forth in a way Brecht conceives as bare facts—open, pure, unadulterated realities that are ready to be observed by the audience. Since

Brecht rejects the bourgeois claims to totality and nature and espouses a dialectically epistemic center it is no surprise that Brecht sees these objects are contradictory. In the next chapter we will see the how, for example, Brecht conceives of the ‘self’ as a contradictory object.

Conclusion

Using the theoretical framework provided by Gramsci and Barthes, this chapter reconstructed the fragments of Brecht’s thought on ideology. We found that like Gramsci and Barthes, Brecht conceived of ideology as 1) serving particular interests not universal ones, 2) historically/socially conditioned and thus not an innocent reflection of objective phenomenon, 3) obscuring contradiction and attempting to project a unified totality and 4) in part a product of language.

We then saw that Brecht attempted to extract objects from the bourgeois language, in order to render them pure, essential, unadulterated, etc. In essence, Brecht, the revolutionary, is attempting to take objects outside of the language of the oppressors and put them into the language of revolution. These objects, these social truths become objects of emancipation for Brecht, or in his words ‘weapons’ (BAP). Brecht believes only through this cutting away of ideology, this eidetic reduction, can one see truth. As was stated in Chapter 2, only after the truth is perceived will the revolutionary class be able to move history forward. In the next chapter, as well as Chapters 6 and 7, we will see specific social truths Brecht attempted to reveal.

Specifically, we will examine particular contradictions that Brecht saw once bourgeois ideology was stripped away. In doing so, we will see Brecht's eidetic reduction in action. In the next chapter we will examine the contradiction of the ego revealed by Brecht, while Chapter 6 and 7 will examine Brecht's revealing of social classes and their antagonisms.

CHAPTER V

RETHINKING BRECHT'S SPLIT CHARACTER: DIALECTICS, SOCIAL ONTOLOGY AND LITERARY TECHNIQUE

“[T]he destruction, fragmentation, atomization of the individual psyche is a fact...”³⁵

Introduction

Brecht's use of two distinct personas in the same character—that is his use of the so called ‘split character’—is quite prevalent in his work. As Walter Sokel points out, the split personality is a major theme in *A Man's a Man*, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* and *Puntilla* (Sokel, 1964). It is the argument of this chapter that conventional interpretations of Brecht's use of this technique are inadequate because they fail to consider Brecht's social ontology. This inadequacy stems from the perspective taken by Walter Sokel (1964) and Martin Esslin (1961) who approached Brecht primarily as a dramatist and literary figure not as a social philosopher. In the following sections, I re-evaluate Brecht's use of the split character from the perspective of Brecht as a Marxist philosopher. Specifically, I will show that Brecht's use of the split character is a device employed to highlight a dialectical

³⁵ Journals, 1993, p. 143 [1941].

antagonism of bourgeois society³⁶, for example the antagonism between the individual-being (i.e. egoistic being) and the species-being (*Gattungswesen*). An in-depth analysis of Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*³⁷ will demonstrate how this antagonism plays out in Brecht's work.

The chapter begins with an overview of the traditional interpretations of Brecht's split character and then moves to a discussion of Brecht's social ontology in order to reveal his understanding and belief in the aforementioned antagonism. In the following section, an analysis of Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (Brecht & Bentley, 1986) will demonstrate that Brecht's use of the split character is a literary device used to highlight the antagonism between the individual-being and the species-being.

The Split Character

According to Martin Esslin, the presence of the split character in Brecht's work is the result of a split in Brecht's own character (Esslin, 1961). Specifically, Esslin argues that in Brecht we find ambivalence to the question of what has primacy, instinct or reason. Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles also find this tension between instinct

³⁶ Though his plays may not be set in bourgeois society Brecht attempted to represent particular aspects of bourgeois society. For example he discusses a theme of *The Good Woman* as, "the fatal effects of bourgeois ethics under bourgeois conditions" (Brecht & Willett, 1990, p. 409). As we saw previously Brecht wanted to show his audience the conditions of their own world in estranged ways. Setting a play about bourgeois society in ancient China or Rome as he does in *Coriolanus* contributes to what was termed 'de-familiarization.' It makes the familiar unfamiliar. In this way the setting can be seen as an estrangement effect.

³⁷ Brecht began working on this play in 1939 and the first complete draft dates from 1940. It premiered in Zurich in 1943 at the Zurich Schauspielhaus (Brecht, Manheim, & Willett, 1976). For a concise account of other productions see Unwin (2005).

and reason in Brecht. However, to them Brecht shows preference to the instinctive nature of creativity over reason, at least in his early writing (Kuhn & Giles, 2003). Nevertheless, this tension, according to Esslin, is the creative tension which nourishes Brecht's work (Esslin, 1961).

Sokel, on the other hand, argues that the split character represents the relationship between Brecht's "deep-seated though oft-denied sense of the tragic [and] his political utopianism" (in Demetz, 1962, p. 128). According to Sokel, Brecht's sense of the tragic is revealed in the split character when the true nature (benevolent nature) of the character is self-denied in order to achieve some kind of benevolent end. Sokel illustrates this point in the split between Shen Te and Shui Ta in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. In the play, Shen Te, the charitable and good natured protagonist is faced with external social pressures which make it very difficult for her to remain good and charitable. For example, the selfishness of a gang of freeloaders and her own pregnancy create demands on her limited resources that jeopardize her ability to continually be charitable. In an effort to prevent these external social pressures from inhibiting her altruistic goals, Shen Te invents an alter ego, Shui Ta. Under the guise of Shui Ta, Shen Te employs deceptive, hurtful, callous and selfish means to eliminate or circumvent the external social pressures that are threatening her altruistic goals. She does this in order to save her charitable goals and thus preserve her true nature. However, these means are at odds with the ends they are designed to achieve. As Sokel puts it, "[the] means defeat the end they are to serve" (in Demetz, 1962, p. 128). This use of selfish and hurtful means to achieve benevolent ends and

the apparent necessity of doing so in bourgeois society is, according to Sokel, Brecht's sense of the tragic.

What Sokel is carelessly and crudely referring to by Brecht's 'political utopianism' of course is Brecht's belief in Marxist philosophy and the emancipatory potential thereof. In short, Brecht's political utopianism is his vision of a communistic society.

While Sokel may be right Brecht's sense of the tragic is often overlooked, both his and Esslin's explanation of Brecht's use of the split character have missed the mark. This is, because they fail to consider Brecht's work as a representation and informative illustration of the nature of bourgeois society. In other words, they failed to recognize Brecht's work for the instructive vehicle it was intended to be. They are not viewing the work as the educative accounting of a particular social ontology—a social ontology derived from Brecht's use of a material dialectical epistemology.

This stems primarily from the perspective taken by Sokel and Esslin who approach Brecht as a dramatist and literary figure. This is a fairly logical approach to take, given that the split character is a literary device. However, approaching Brecht's use of the split character in this manner misses, in large part, the most important aspect of Brecht—Brecht as a social philosopher in the dialectical tradition.

Brecht's Social Ontology

As the following section will show, for Brecht bourgeois society causes estrangement. To be more specific, it is the way in which bourgeois society is structured that causes individual estrangement. Specifically, it is the mode of production in bourgeois society that causes estrangement. It is the capitalist mode of production that causes varying forms of alienation. Although Brecht doesn't articulate it in these terms, one form of estrangement that the capitalist mode of production causes is the estrangement of one from one's species-being. This is a notion that is found sporadically in Brecht's journal entries (Journals, p. 47, 59, 70, 93, 143) as well as his personal notes for *The Good Woman* (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1976, p. 365) and in his notes to *Puntilla* (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1976, p. 414). This chapter will reveal how this notion is also embedded in *The Good Woman*.

In Feuerbach's treatment of the nature of man, he claims that what distinguishes the human species from all other species is not consciousness *per se* but having a specific consciousness. That specific consciousness is a consciousness of oneself as both an individual and as a member of a species (Feuerbach, 1998). That means, like other animal species, humans have a consciousness of their selves. For example, just as a dog is aware of itself as a self in the fact that it recognizes and has the capacity to act on things like hunger and danger which are necessary for the existence and preservation of the self, humans are also aware of the individual self. Humans understand self-need. However, unlike other animal species, humans also

recognize that they are members of a species. Humans have in essence the capacity to cognize themselves in a larger context than just in the context of the self. So there are really two types of being for the human subject. There is the individual-being and there is the species-being. The individual-being is being for the self. It is egoistic being. The species-being is what connects the individual-being to the rest of humanity. It is being for the species. For Brecht (as will be illustrated below) there is being which is being, of the self, for the self (i.e. individual-being); and, there is being, of the species, for the species (i.e. species-being).

Individual-being and species-being are dialectically antagonistic. They are the two antagonistic elements that comprise the self. That is, the human self is both the individual-being and the species-being. However, in bourgeois society the individual-being and species-being are not permitted to reconcile. Instead in bourgeois civil society the species-being is abstractly negated. That means it is devoid of all relation to anything else. It is nothing. The species-being is not allowed in the material, life world. It is not allowed in the material life of the individual. Bourgeois society is a society of only individual-being, not a society where species-being is allowed to manifest. This is due to the mode of production of bourgeois society. It is due to capitalism. That is, there are winners and losers in the capitalism mode of production. Everyone must compete for scarce (often necessary) resources (BAP). People are also in competition for jobs which are necessary to procure the necessities of life, like food and shelter. Capitalism is a system of constant competition. It is the realization

of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* Hobbes envisioned. Because of the competition, bourgeois society is atomistic.

For Brecht, bourgeois society fractures things into separate and disparate parts (e.g. classes and individuals). In the discussion of *Coriolanus* and *Galileo* in the subsequent chapters we will see how Brecht illustrated his belief in disparate classes through his depiction of them in these works. In this chapter we will see Brecht showing that it also splits the individual-being from the species-being and then one individual from another; or in Brecht's words, it causes "the progressive isolation of individual social functions" (Journals, p. 47) [1940].

The Good Woman of Setzuan

The play begins with Wong, a water seller, encountering three gods in need of accommodations. Wong tries to help the gods find accommodations; but, the people of the village are unwilling to help. As a last resort, Wong asks Shen Te, a prostitute who agrees to take in the gods for the night. For her generosity, the gods reward Shen Te with a large sum of money and tell her to remain the good person she is. Shen Te purchases a tobacco shop with the money and intends to do good deeds with the profits from the store. However, as was mentioned above, an endless string of social pressures, starting with a family of freeloaders and a carpenter demanding pay for the shelves he made in Shen Te's shop quickly begin to dwindle her resources. As pressures on her resources mount, it becomes more difficult for Shen Te to do what

she believes is right. She is conflicted between her own needs and her own morality. In the first act, for example, Shen Te says, “I’d like to be good, it’s true, but there’s the rent to pay” (p. 11). Paying the rent is a personal necessity. One cannot live without shelter. Here we see an antagonism—the antagonism between being good and maintaining one’s own subsistence.

Being good, as defined by Shen Te, is living for others. She says, for example in act three:

Isn’t it funny how people who don’t have very much like to give some of it away? They must like to show what they can do, and how could they show it better than by being kind?...When we sing a song, or build a machine, or plant some rice, we’re being kind (p. 28-39).

Helping others directly (giving) and active, productive membership in society (singing, building a machine, planting rice,) are social acts, to Brecht. They are examples of living as a species-being. So, the antagonism between being good and maintaining one’s own subsistence, is an antagonism between living as a species-being and maintaining one’s own subsistence.

Maintaining one’s own subsistence is living for one’s self. It is egoistic living. It is individual-being. Therefore, the antagonism that Brecht is highlighting is the antagonism between the individual-being and the species-being.

In act four, we see this antagonism again. Wong, the water seller is assaulted by the barber Shu Fu. Wong’s hand is severely injured in the attack and he contemplates bringing legal action against the barber. However, none of the

witnesses to the assault agree to come forward and testify in court. They are reluctant because they are afraid the barber will use his influence with the police and other authorities to retaliate on them. Shen Te, then, castigates them for their inaction. She states, “Your brother is assaulted, and you shut your eyes? He is hit, cries out in pain, and you are silent?” (p. 49). This castigation is directed toward the witnesses’ unwillingness to act in their capacity as species-beings.

Brecht’s use of the word ‘brother’ is also a reference to the species-being. It is used to demonstrate that there is an organic connection between Wong and the witnesses to the assault. Brecht is indicating that there is a brotherhood of people. This brotherhood (the brotherhood of being human) exists despite the fact that there are compelling egoistic interests splitting them apart. The egoistic interests of the witnesses come into conflict with their ability to do what is right, to bear witness and help their fellow human.

In this example, we see Brecht’s analysis of how the dialectic is playing out. It appears Brecht believes that in Bourgeois society the individual-being takes precedence and the species-being is abstractly negated. The species-being is not allowed to manifest.

Another important handling of the antagonism between the individual-being and species-being is found in act 4a, the Song of the Defenseless. Shen Te enters the stage carrying the mask representing Shui Ta and sings:

In our country

A useful man needs luck

Only if he finds strong backers
 Can he prove himself useful.
 The good can't defend themselves and
 Even the gods are defenseless.

Oh, why don't the gods have their own ammunition
 And launch against badness their own expedition
 Enthroning the good and preventing sedition
 And bringing the world to a peaceful condition?

Oh, why don't the gods do the buying and selling
 Injustice forbidding, starvation dispelling
 Give bread to each city and joy to each dwelling?
 Oh, why don't the gods do the buying and selling? (p. 53)

In these stanzas, Shen Te laments the current human condition. We see that in this song Brecht reiterates the line 'why don't the gods do the buying and selling?' Brecht's repetition of this line is used to emphasize its importance. Brecht associates 'injustice' and 'starvation' with 'buying and selling'. By 'buying and selling', Brecht seems to be alluding to the market capitalism his audience is familiar with. In this song then, Shen Te makes an appeal against the injustice of market capitalism as a vehicle of economic distribution. Market capitalism hurts people. Market capitalism hurts people because of its competitive nature. This is evidenced in the line "The

good can't defend themselves." They cannot defend themselves against the bad. That is the good (those who live as species-beings) cannot defend themselves against the bad (those who live solely as individual-beings). Shen Te laments the inability for the species-being to manifest in a system of market capitalism. She is lamenting the abstract negation of the species-being in bourgeois society, capitalism being its defining characteristic.

After the previous lines, Shen Te puts the mask on and sings: "You can only help one of your luckless brothers/ By trampling down a dozen others..." (p. 53).

Shui Ta continues the theme of competition; however, unlike Shen Te, Shui Ta does not lament. Shui Ta accepts and embraces the idea of competition. Shui Ta is accepting of the idea that dozens can be trampled. Shui Ta accepts the egoism of bourgeois society. Furthermore, Shui Ta denies the ideas espoused by Shen Te. The mask is a representative covering of Shen Te, thus a covering of her ideas about the species-being. The mask is a representation for the abstract negation of the species-being.

The Song of the Defenseless is important in demonstrating the antagonism Brecht sees between the individual-being and the species-being in bourgeois society. In it, we see both Shen Te, who represents the species-being and Shui Ta, who represents the individual-being are actually one person. Both Shen Te (species-being) and Shui Ta (individual-being) exist in the same person. They are one person, however, as the putting on of the mask represents, the individual-being blocks out the species-being.

The co-existence of both contradictory elements within one thing is consistent with dialectical thinking. In *On Contradiction*, Mao states, for example that “no contradictory aspect can exist in isolation...[w]ithout its opposite aspect, each loses the condition for its existence” (Mao, 1964, p. 42). Existence, then, is dependent on the relation of two contradictory aspects. This relation forms the basis for the identity of a thing. In Mao’s words, “It is so with all opposites...on the one hand they are opposed to each other, and on the other they are interconnected, interpenetrating, interpermeating and interdependent, and this character is described as identity” (Mao, 1964, p. 42). Furthermore, Brecht’s use of the split character and as he says, “the continual fusion and dissolution of the two characters...” (Journals, p. 70) [1940] where one side of the antagonism is represented at a time and then becomes the other side of the antagonism is also consistent with dialectical thought. This idea is precisely what Mao had in mind when he asserted that “two opposite things can coexist in a single entity and...transform themselves into each other because there is identity between them” (Mao, 1964, p. 49).

While all the aforementioned examples present clear indications of the antagonism between the individual-being and the species-being, Brecht’s clearest demonstrations of this antagonism come near the end of the play. Shen Te discovers that she is pregnant by her lover, Yang Sun. Soon after realizing she is pregnant, Shen Te encounters an impoverished child who is living on the street. Shen Te is clearly moved by this sight and thinks of her unborn child. She sings:

As this is the world my son will enter

I will study to defend him.

To be good to you, my son,

I shall be a tigress to all others

If I have to.

And I shall have to. (p. 81)

Shen Te does not want the fate of the child she encountered to be the fate of her child.

Her motherly devotion cannot allow that to happen. This motherly devotion is an indication of her species-being. She is not self-concerned, she is concerned with the welfare of another (her child). But, she makes the determination to be a 'tigress' in order to protect the child. Brecht uses the image of a tigress to represent a predator which, in turn, is meant to represent the predatory nature of bourgeois society. In essence, by promising to become a tigress, Shen Te promises to act not in the cooperative nature of a species-being but in the competitive nature of an individual-being. Here we see Brecht's sense of the tragic, according to Sokel. Shen Te wants to protect her child from the horrors of bourgeois society but is willing to prey on others in order to do it. The means are at odds with the ends. In order to protect her child, Shen Te again takes on the identity of Shui Ta. Shen Te then disappears while Shui Ta takes over operations in the tobacco shop. After several months where Shen Te is absent, Yang Sun, her lover, becomes concerned that Shui Ta has done something bad to Shen Te. Yang Sun confronts Shui Ta and unknowingly reveals his love for Shen Te, to Shen Te. When Yang Sun leaves the shop, Shen Te weeps and is overheard by Yang Sun. Yang Sun quickly fetches the police and Shui Ta is arrested in connection

with Shen Te's disappearance. At the trial, the gods who Shen Te helped at the beginning of the play serve as the judges. As the trial wears on Shui Ta confesses that she is actually Shen Te. Shen Te takes off the mask and addresses the gods. She states: "Your injunction/To be good and yet to live/Was a thunderbolt" (p. 107).

Here Brecht illustrates the difficulty of being both good and living in Bourgeois society. He refers to the injunction to both be good and live as a thunderbolt and again illustrates the antagonism between the individual-being (living competitively in bourgeois society) and the species-being (being good). By using the metaphor of a thunderbolt, Brecht wants to show the intensity of the antagonism.

Shen Te continues with the line "It has torn me in two" (p. 107). This line is perhaps the most poignant in the entire play. The idea that Shen Te has been torn in two means that Shen Te's dialectical whole, that is her species-being and individual-being have not been permitted to reconcile. In other words, her true identity which is a condition of both antagonistic elements is not allowed to manifest. Moreover, it indicates that there is some force, 'it', which is responsible for the antagonism between the individual-being and the species-being not being reconciled. The 'it' which Brecht refers is undoubtedly the atomistic system of bourgeois capitalism and bourgeois society. With Shen Te's next lines, Brecht further explores the antagonism between the individual-being and species-being in context of bourgeois society. Shen Te says:

I can't tell how it was

But to be good to others

And myself at the same time

I could not do it

Your world is not an easy one, illustrious ones!

When we extend our hand to a beggar, he tears it off for us

When we help the lost, we are lost ourselves

And so

Since not to eat is to die

Who can long refuse to be bad?

As I lay prostrate beneath the weight of good intentions

Ruin stared me in the face... (p. 107-108)

Again, we see the idea that in bourgeois society the pressures of self-preservation, specifically economic self-preservation by necessity takes precedence. Shen Te cannot focus on helping others (i.e. acting as a species-being) because there is no one who will aid her reciprocally. In order to stay alive, Shen Te must abstractly negate the species-being. She must don the mask of Shui Ta and hide her benevolent nature. That is, she must hide her species-being or face 'ruin'. In a 1946 letter to Elisabeth Hauptmann Brecht states "[t]he rending in two of Shen-Teh [sic] is a monstrous crime of bourgeois society" (Letters, p. 413).

Brecht sees the abstract negation of the species-being as a result of Bourgeois society. Specifically, it is the competitive nature of bourgeois society that causes this abstract negation. While Shen Te is committed to act according to her sense of morality and allow her species-being to manifest, she is also forced to act

competitively in order to ensure her own survival. The competitive nature of bourgeois society in essence poses a dilemma for Shen Te—a dilemma between her sense of moral obligation and the necessity of her survival. It is in order to overcome this dilemma that Shen Te invents her alter ego, Shui Ta. Shui Ta handles situations in a manner which Shen Te's good nature doesn't permit her to. Shui Ta adopts traits which are necessary in successful competition in bourgeois society. Shui Ta is highly self-interested, egocentric, ruthless, manipulative and deceitful. Shui Ta adopts these characteristics in order to compete in the *bellum omnium contra omnes* which defines bourgeois society.

Summary

This chapter has argued that the conventional interpretations of Brecht's use of the split character are inadequate because they fail to consider Brecht's social ontology. This inadequacy stems from the perspective taken by Sokel and Martin Esslin who approached Brecht primarily as a dramatist and literary figure not as a social philosopher. In order to gain a fuller appreciation of Brecht and his work, this chapter has approached Brecht as a social philosopher in the dialectical tradition and re-evaluated Brecht's use of the split character from this perspective. By analyzing Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* the chapter has shown that Brecht's use of the split character is a device employed to highlight what he sees as an essential

dialectical antagonism of bourgeois society, the antagonism between the individual-being and the species-being.

In the previous chapter, we saw that Brecht's epic theatre attempts a certain eidetic reduction which seeks to remove the object outside of its place in the schema of bourgeois ideology. In this chapter we examined one object Brecht removed, the human object. By doing this, Brecht highlights the contradictory nature of this object, undermining the claims of totality of the bourgeois worldview.

The exposure of contradiction like this does two things in Brecht's philosophy. First, as was stated above it undermines the totalizing claims of bourgeois ideology and secondly, it allows the object to be placed in the truly rational (i.e. dialectical) context. By contradicting the claims of unity and nature found in the dominant worldview, Brecht is serving to undermine the faith one has in that worldview and at the same time offers a new one—what he sees as a pure, totally rational one, dialectics. This notion is explored, in more depth, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

BRECHT'S DIALECTICS OF ENLIGHTENMENT

“Eppur si muove”

Introduction

In Chapter 2, we saw that Brecht was attempting to set the necessary preconditions for revolution. Specifically he was attempting to foster the class consciousness of the proletariat which would allow them to overthrow their exploiters. However, in order to change the consciousness of the working class certain obstacles had to be overcome. The main obstacles, for Brecht, are the natural and totalizing appearance of the dominant worldview. In Chapter 3, we saw how Brecht sought to alter Aristotelian narrative structure in his epic plays. Brecht's alteration of Aristotelian narrative structure challenged the naturalness of this form and exposed it as reified. By extension this move opened the door to expose other reified social relations and introduced the argument that they too were alterable. In this, Brecht “show[s] us mankind's world/ as it really is: made by men and open to alteration” (Brecht, et. al., 1979, p. 234).

In Chapter 4, it was argued that Brecht's epic theatre attempts a certain eidetic reduction. This reduction was an effort to remove the object outside of its place in the

schema of bourgeois ideology. By removing the object from a schema which claims totality, Brecht's dramaturgy is meant to reveal contradictions like the one we saw in the last chapter. Theoretically the exposure of contradiction does two things in Brecht's philosophy. First, it undermines the totalizing claims of bourgeois ideology and secondly, it allows the object to be placed in the truly rational (i.e. dialectical) context. By contradicting the claims of unity and nature found in the dominant worldview, Brecht works to undermine the faith one has in that worldview and at the same time offers a new one—what he sees as a pure, totally rational one, dialectics.

As we have seen in Chapter 4 and will see from our discussion on *Galileo*, Brecht attempts to disrupt one's worldview by creating what he sees as a sort of Cartesian doubt.³⁸ That is, this disruption is predicated on the calling into question of the existing schema of understanding. Not only does Brecht see this as the foundation for the emancipation of the working class; he also sees this impulse at the heart of the bourgeoisie's historical emancipation from the feudal aristocracy and princely classes. However, doubt in one's *weltanschauung* is not enough to move one from the realm of ideology, according to Brecht. One must also have the proper tools of perception. For Brecht, this necessarily means the use of dialectics—the discovery of which Brecht likens to a sort of technological advancement that offers the possibility of complete reconciliation between truth and illusion. Just as the telescope allowed

³⁸ In Brecht's reading of Descartes, Brecht emphasizes what he sees as Descartes' epistemological appeal for one to doubt the given manner of seeing the world in order to gain clarity. How closely we can link this idea to Descartes or how important it was for him are of course debatable questions. However, for the present purposes our use of the concept is meant to show its importance to Brecht and not to make claims about how well or not Brecht's reading approximates Descartes.

Galileo to contradict the Ptolemaic worldview, dialectics allow one to contradict the bourgeois worldview. In Brecht's mind, history has progressed by means of this type of technological advancement. With technological advancements humankind has been able to further reconcile theory with praxis and as the movement toward clarity progresses, humanity has also been eliminating the chains of domination permitted by ideology. Each technological advance can be, in essence, a weapon which emerging classes may employ toward emancipation, in the war against ideology. Dialectics was such an important technological advancement for Brecht that he states "plays, especially with an historical content, cannot be written intelligently in any other framework" (Journals, p. 372) [1947].

In *Galileo*, Brecht displays a model of the bourgeois revolution or at least the beginnings of it. In doing so he outlines his own dialectic of enlightenment which is founded on his version of historical materialism. From this several things emerge. First, Brecht sees a Cartesian form of doubt as the impetus behind the Enlightenment and that this type of doubt is a necessary precondition to the altering of *weltanschauung* and thus to class consciousness and revolution. It will also be revealed that Brecht sees the state apparatus as a repressive force ensuring the hegemony of an ideology which serves the interests of the dominant classes. However, we will also see that, for Brecht, the maintenance of the dominant *weltanschauung* is not solely a function of the state. Situations may arise where individuals align themselves with interests of the state and ruling classes in the belief they are acting in the interests of the subaltern classes. Finally, it will be shown that

Brecht sees Galileo's recantation as emblematic of a larger failing of the bourgeois mindset—the use of truth and science toward particular interests.

Doubt

As should be evident from our previous discussion, above all else, Brecht's epic theatre sought to fracture the everyday, commonsense, taken-for-granting, matter of fact manner of viewing the world. For Brecht, the dominant *weltanschauung* has to be disrupted, ruptured before a new worldview can come into existence and emancipation becomes possible. In Chapter 3, we saw how Brecht's deviation from Aristotelian narrative form attempted to disrupt the dominant *weltanschauung* by disrupting its conventional temporal structures and thus its language. Similarly, in Chapter 4 we saw that Brecht attempts to rescue the object from the dominant worldview by taking the object outside of the bourgeois worldview, i.e. outside of its place in the bourgeois schema. Both these moves were meant to disrupt one's faith on their old worldview, thus allowing the new, pure, dialectical worldview to replace it. For Brecht, one must doubt the viability of a worldview in order for another to replace it. In order for the new way of seeing to emerge the old must be done away with. Brecht illustrates this point clearly in his play, *Life of Galileo*³⁹ (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1972).

³⁹ This play was written between 1937 and 1939. Brecht undertook minor revisions beginning in 1945 in collaboration with actor, Charles Laughton. It premiered at the Zurich Schauspielhaus, in 1943. The following analysis draws on the original version. For a discussion on the play's variations see Brecht, Manheim & Willett, (1972). For an account of other productions see Unwin (2005).

In the opening scene, Galileo is found in his study by his pupil, Andrea Sarti, the son of the housekeeper. Andrea sees a model of the solar system and shows an interest in it. The model is a Ptolemaic model which is according to Galileo “in the opinion of the ancients” (p. 3). Note that Galileo says that the model is in the opinion of the ancients. That is, it is according to the handed down way of seeing the world. However, this model is not in the opinion of Galileo. Though it is the commonsense, everyday, taken-for-granted way of understanding the solar system, Galileo doubts it. Already, in the first scene we see Galileo embodying the type of doubt that Brecht envisions—a doubting of the given. This is a theme which continues throughout the play. For example, Brecht returns to it, in a most poignant fashion, in the last scene when Galileo states, “[s]cience trades in knowledge distilled from doubt...science aims at making doubters of everybody” (p. 93).

However, this doubting of the given is not just presented in the person of Galileo. In the play, Brecht presents this as a *zeitgeist*—a general spirit, a mood or attitude—which is just beginning to emerge. For example, Brecht has Galileo remark, that society is “no longer satisfied with what it says in the ancient books...where faith had ruled for a thousand years, doubt has now set in” (p. 5). By having Galileo embody this Cartesian ideal and to express its general pervasiveness, Brecht appears to draw out an association between the principle of doubt and the Enlightenment more generally. For Brecht this ideal was at the core of the spirit of the Enlightenment. Here Brecht is not far from Foucault’s characterization of the Enlightenment as “a desperate eagerness to imagine it otherwise than it is” (Foucault

& Rabinow, 1984, p. 41) and “a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique” (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984, p. 42). For Brecht, the Enlightenment, is essentially a doubting of the given. This doubting of the given is expressed over and over in Galileo, as we will see. It was only by doubting the given that the technological innovations were possible that led to the rise of the bourgeoisie.

A New Way of Seeing

Taking Andrea’s interest in the model as an opportunity, Galileo goes on to explain why the Ptolemaic model is wrong and why he believes the Copernican model is correct. As he is doing this, Andrea’s mother comes in and inquires as to what Galileo is teaching her son. She is skeptical of Galileo’s teaching, remarking that her son “blabs it out in school and the priests come running to me because of all the sinful stuff he says” (p. 7). Galileo responds, “I’m teaching him how to see” (p. 7). From this brief exchange, Brecht reveals two things. First there is the looming conflict with the Church—a point we will consider in depth below. Second, Brecht has Galileo emphasize he is teaching Andrea a method, a way of ‘seeing’. Galileo does not stress, for example, that he is teaching Andrea about the stars, or the sun or the solar system, etc. He is not merely presenting the pupil with facts. He is teaching Andrea a way of seeing the truth for himself. Galileo is trying to develop a type of critical attitude in the boy. Galileo attempts to show the boy a way to see the world as he has never seen it. Brecht himself emphasizes this point in an article originally

published in the GDR, when he lauds Charles Laughton for his role as Galileo for “emphasiz[ing] what was novel in [Galileo] at that time by letting him look at the world around him as if he were a stranger and as if it needed explanation” (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1972, p. 240) [1956]. It is a new way of seeing—a new *weltanschauung*—that Galileo, like Brecht, is after. With new ways of seeing, according to Brecht’s preface to the play, “[o]ld beliefs are dismissed as superstitions, [and] what yesterday seemed a matter of course is today subject to fresh examination” (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1972, p. 213) [1939].

Galileo attempts to teach Andrea a new way of seeing by setting a washboard in the center of the room. He tells Andrea to imagine the washboard is the sun. Galileo then has Andrea sit in front of the washboard to one side and asks him which side the sun is on. Andrea replies that it is on the left. Galileo then lifts the chair along with the boy and repositions them so that the washboard is now to Andrea’s right. By this small experiment, Andrea realizes that the sun could appear to move without it actually having moved. Galileo explains to him that it is a matter of perspective. From Andrea’s previous perspective (i.e. the taken-for-granted, everyday, commonsense way of seeing and understanding the world) the sun moved while the earth stood still. However, with this new way of seeing, it is now possible that the sun stands still and the earth moves.

At its core, Galileo’s demonstration is akin to Brecht’s epic theatre. It is a demonstration in a new way of seeing which makes the “progress towards conscious experience...possible” (BT, p. 276) [date uncertain, early 1950s]. It challenges the

given way of seeing the world. It questions its naturalness and opens the door for an emancipatory worldview to emerge. Through praxis, that is, through the experience of the experiment, Galileo has contradicted Andrea's worldview. He has created doubt in it. Galileo does not alter the objective pieces of Andrea's experience. The washboard was still a washboard, the chair a chair, etc. Andrea was still a perceptive, perceiving being. The only thing that changes is the way Andrea views the object. That is, the only thing that changes is the object's place in his schema of understanding, i.e. its relation to other objects.

This new way of seeing has a use value for Brecht. That is, it is something to be employed and there is benefit to its application. Galileo is endowing Andrea with a tool (a new schema). This new schema (i.e. heliocentrism) is a tool that Andrea can use to see the world. It is a more advanced tool. It is a better tool—one with which a person can better ascertain truth. In this episode, we see Brecht treating Andrea's new schema in much the same way he later treats Galileo's telescope. Galileo takes this technological advancement and turns it to the night sky. He sees the heavens as no one has ever been able to before. And just as Andrea's tool presents an understanding that contradicts the old *weltanschauung*, Galileo's tool also presents an understanding that contradicts the then dominant worldview. Contrary to the geocentric worldview, Galileo's telescope shows him that bodies are moving around Jupiter and yet crystal spheres are not shattering. In a manner of speaking, Galileo is freed from his platonic cave of illusion; the key to his shackles was the telescope in his hand. However Galileo, like Brecht's audience, still only watches the sky by a reflection in the lake

of illusion. Galileo and Andrea (like the audiences Brecht attempts to affect with his art) have not fully reconciled truth. This is because they have not yet learned to use dialectics—something that would not have been possible for Galileo because as Brecht states, “dialectic is (has always been) a property of nature, a characteristic which, however, was only discovered by Hegel and Marx. Before this discovery, the world could not be explained” (BAP, p. 103) [c. 1931].⁴⁰ Although a total ascertaining of truth is not possible for Galileo because he does not have access to dialectics, Brecht presents him as willing and eager to use new tools in the pursuit of truth. In Galileo, through his use of the telescope and also in Andrea and his willingness to use a heliocentric worldview, Brecht demonstrates a sort of attitude for his audience to adopt.

This attitude stands in opposition to, for example, the court scholars of the young Grand Duke Medici. In order to fund his research, Galileo names the moons of Jupiter which he has discovered after the Grand Duke in hopes of gaining a patron. Galileo is invited to Florence where the Grand Duke’s scholars attempt to verify his findings. Galileo offers to show them the moons using his telescope. However, the philosopher asks, “Mr. Galilei, before we apply ourselves to your famous tube, we should like to request the pleasure of a disputation: Can such planets exist?” (p. 32). Galileo replies “I thought you’d just look through the telescope and see for yourselves” (p. 32). The Florentine scholars refuse. Galileo’s tool has no use value for

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that Brecht seems to overlook Eastern dialectics when he makes this point.

them. They already have a totalized manner of seeing the world. The philosopher states, for instance:

The cosmos of the divine Aristotle with its spheres and their mystical music, with its crystal vaults and the circular courses of its heavenly bodies, with the oblique angle of the sun's course and the mysteries of its tables of satellites and the wealth of stars in the catalog of the southern hemisphere and the inspired construction of the celestial globe is an edifice of such order and beauty that we shall be well advised not to disturb its harmony. (p. 33)

Galileo's truth is disrupting. It disrupts the dominant *weltanschauung's* claims to totality. For the philosopher all is accounted for. There is no contradiction to be seen, a point which is continued by the mathematician: "One might be tempted to reply that if your tube shows something that cannot exist it must be a rather unreliable tube" (p. 33).

It is important to note that Brecht represents the claims of totality coming from the court scholars. Here Brecht reminds the viewer of the connection between material interests and the dominant worldview. The Mathematician and the Philosopher have gained their positions because they lay claim to a mastery of truth. Galileo challenges their mastery of truth and thus to their claims to occupy the positions they are in. Such arguments, of course, are not new. In the Gospels, Jesus plays the same role Galileo does in Brecht's play. He challenged the notions of truth held by the Pharisees who, like the court scholars, had material interests threatened by this challenge.

In the end, the Florentine scholars refuse Galileo's plea to look through the telescope. And what is the nature of this plea? Like Brecht himself, Galileo's appeal is a phenomenological one. He wants the scholars to simply use their own eyes. It is an appeal to their senses, not to their sense of logic. However, the scholars' material interests and the worldview which protects them force a betrayal of their perceptive capacities. They must not see. No one must see.

Fear

In Chapter 4, we placed Brecht's thought in context with that of Gramsci and Barthes. It was shown that like these theorists Brecht conceived of a dominant ideology which: 1) serves particular interests, 2) is historically/socially conditioned, 3) attempts to project a unified totality and 4) is, in part, a product of language. While we found concord between all three theorists on these four points, we also saw that Gramsci and Barthes place different degrees of emphasis on the role the state apparatus plays in the maintenance of the dominant worldview. For Gramsci, the state apparatus clearly plays an important function. In fact, for Gramsci maintaining the dominant worldview through cohesion is a primary function of the state apparatus. Although Gramsci stresses that hegemonic ideology is not only maintained by the state apparatus, Barthes, like Foucault, Derrida and other post-structural thinkers, further de-emphasizes the role the state plays in maintaining the dominant worldview. While each would probably recognize that the state apparatus does have a hand in the

maintenance of the dominant worldview, these theorists focus nearly entirely on the way meaning is socially negotiated and re-created through the processes of social interaction.

In *Galileo*, Brecht adopts a more classical Marxist position with some similarity to Gramsci's. Like Gramsci, Brecht clearly sees the state apparatus as a material force maintaining the dominant worldview. However, like Gramsci, Brecht also believes that the forces maintaining the dominant worldview are not exclusive properties of the state. The maintaining of the dominant worldview is not a simple matter of power politics. While Brecht recognizes and seems to emphasize a top-down pressure exerted through the state apparatus which upholds, protects, provides an alibi for, etc. the dominant weltanschauung, he also sees pressures emerging from lower levels of society. While the top-down pressures and the bottom-up pressures have different motives, they both seem to operate using the same mechanism: fear.

Fear of the State

Throughout *Galileo*, Brecht portrays a menacing Church. We have already seen Andrea's mother's statement that 'the priests come running to her' over Andrea's ideas. However a more pointed illustration is provided at the end of this first scene. When Galileo and Andrea are alone, Galileo tells him not to "mention our ideas to other people [because] our rulers have forbidden it" (p. 14). Galileo knows

there are consequences to contradicting the dominant worldview, consequences which are handed down by the Church.

Similarly, this notion can be seen in Galileo's exchange with his friend, Sagredo. While making observations with the telescope Galileo proclaims, "This is the tenth of January, 1610. Humanity notes in its diary: Heaven abolished" (p. 19). Sagredo rejoins simply by saying, "It's terrifying" (p. 19) and later confesses to Galileo that he is "trembling for fear [Galileo's discoveries are] the truth" (p. 23).

This fear is of two types. First, it is fear of the uncertainty which we will explore in the next section. Sagredo's second fear is a more material one that directly relates to the violence of the state apparatus. In this scene, Galileo tell Sagredo that he intends to move to Florence so he can serve as a court astronomer for the Grand Duke Medici. Sagredo implores Galileo not to go because he is worried about Galileo's safety. He states:

Galileo, you're on a dangerous path. It's bad luck when a man sees the truth...How can the mighty leave a man at large who knows the truth, even if it's only about the remotest stars? Do you think the pope will hear your truth when you tell him he's wrong? No, he'll hear only one thing, that you've said he's wrong...A moment ago when I saw you at your tube looking at the new stars I thought I saw you on a flaming pyre and when you said you believed in proofs I smelled burnt flesh. (p. 27)

Here Brecht reminds us of the violent methods of the Inquisition. The Inquisition, for Brecht, is a militant functionary of the state apparatus. The state wields violence.

Violence is an ever ready tool of the state. The Inquisition represents this not abstractly but concretely. Brecht merely indexes the Inquisition as playing this role in a particular historical period. It is a form of evidence for Brecht—that is, the state exercises violence in the maintenance of the hegemonic weltanschauung and here is where we have seen it.

Of course one could argue that the Church is acting in a capacity which is distinct from its function as a state apparatus when the Pope vis-à-vis the Inquisitor poses such a threat. That is, one may want to make the argument that the Church represents a different type of apparatus, a religious apparatus for example. However, Brecht is clear that he is trying to present the Church in its role as a state. In his notes about the play he says, for example, “[i]n the present play [*Life of Galileo*] the church functions, even when it opposes free investigation, simply as authority...it is...the temporal authority, the ultimate political court of appeal” (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1972, p. 216) [1939] and “[t]he church...is mainly being treated here as a secular establishment. Its specific ideology is being looked at in the light of its function as a prop to practical rule” (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1972, p. 229) [1956].

Like Gramsci, Brecht sees violence as something which is exercised on behalf of the material interests that depend on the dominant weltanschauung. For Brecht, violence has a use value for those with material interests in maintaining the dominant worldview. It is something that can be employed in the defense of the dominant weltanschauung.

The above point is clearly illustrated in an exchange between the Chief Inquisitor and Pope Urban VIII. After the death of Gregory XV, Cardinal Barberini, a man of science is elected Pope. This gives Galileo a sense of enthusiasm because he believes that Urban VIII will be sympathetic to his work and findings. This is not, of course, the case. The Cardinal Inquisitor advises the Pope to suppress Galileo's work saying, "the spirit of rebellion and doubt...has come over the world" (p. 78) and "[i]t is the unrest of their own mind" (p. 78). Here again we see Brecht's representation of the zeitgeist of doubt and also its potential to disrupt the dominant worldview. The Cardinal Inquisitor continues:

[T]hanks to the bad example of that Florentine [Galileo], all Italy, down to the last stable boy, is prattling about the phases of Venus and thinking at the same time of many irksome things which are held in our schools and elsewhere to be immutable. (p. 79)

Here the idea of class struggle clearly emerges. Those of a potentially revolutionary class are starting to question nature itself. They are questioning the way things are. They are asking if things could be different. The Cardinal Inquisitor understands this doubting will lead to a questioning of the naturalness of social relations—social relations which have been taught (on the authority of Aristotle) to be organic, immutable products of nature.

This is not the only place Brecht highlights the class nature of the battle for truth. When the Florentine scholars are investigating Galileo's claims, Galileo's collaborator, a lens grinder named Federzoni, becomes the target of class antagonism.

In an effort to come to Galileo's defense (and in practice, the defense of truth) Federzoni attempts to get the Florentine philosopher to engage him in a reasoned debate. However, the philosopher refuses to even acknowledge him. Directing a reply to Galileo and not Federzoni, he states, "I wish your man there would keep out of a scientific debate" (p. 36).

Federzoni is a bourgeois, an artisan. In other words, he is a member of the emerging class. Therefore, the philosopher wants to prevent him from entering a debate. The man of the emerging class presents contradictions—contradictions that undermine the dominant group's claim to nature, unity and totality. Moreover, Federzoni does not speak Latin. Galileo insists that the conversation be held in the vernacular for Federzoni's sake against the protests of the Florentine scholars. Latin is the language of truth for the scholars but more importantly the usage of it is exclusive. One must belong to the hegemonic class to even acquire it and to know how to use it. Its possession implies a certain social standing. A bourgeois like Federzoni would have had neither the opportunity nor the means to learn it. By attempting to relegate all scientific conversations (i.e. all ascertaining of truth) to Latin, the philosopher is fundamentally attempting to secure esotericism—to keep knowledge within the bounds of the current elect, to withhold it from all others. Above all, for the philosopher, the truth must be kept from a class that can use it to their advantage like the one Federzoni, the bourgeois, represents. Especially this class must be rendered silent. They must be abstractly negated because they are the ones who have the potential to take everything away.

Brecht conveys this emergence of the bourgeoisie clearly when commenting on Scene 13, immediately after Galileo's recantation. Brecht states:

"Galileo's gaze is answered by Federzoni, the artisan-scholar, and for some time the two stare at each other... This is Galileo's punishment: it will be the Federzonis of the future centuries who will have to pay for his betrayal at the very inception of their great career. (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1972, p. 255) [1956]

Similarly, when Galileo is summoned before the Inquisition it is a merchant, a bourgeois named Vanni who offers to help Galileo to Venice and thus put him out of the reach of the state apparatus. Vanni tells Galileo, "I swim or sink with men like you, Mr. Galilei! If ever they try to harm you, please remember that you have friends in every branch of industry" (p. 75). The bourgeoisie are on the rise and can use Galileo. His truths further their interests.

However, whereas Galileo's truth has a use value for Federzoni and Vanni, it has none for the Florentine philosopher. Similarly, it has no use value for the Cardinal Inquisitor or the Pope. It threatens their current existence. In a scene between the Pope and the Cardinal Inquisitor, Brecht has the Pope being dressed in his Papal garb. This is princely garb. It is exalted garb which both represents the Pope in his role as Head of State and also the material interests that such a position affords. The Pope, the Inquisitor, the court scholars all enjoy privilege, and stand as representatives of their respective class(es). But in the Pope we see the connection between state and particular interests embodied in one person. During this scene, Brecht makes the pope

the physical embodiment of the state's cohesive power and particular interests. State interests and class interests unite in the representation of the Pope. The Pope initially resists the Inquisitor's request to suppress Galileo's findings in favor of letting the truth prevail. After all, the pope is a man of science. But in the end, the Inquisitor's argument is too strong. At the end of the scene, the Pope, now fully outfitted in the apparel of a king, realizes that Galileo's worldview will jeopardize everything. It undermines his authority; it undermines his claims to be the grand and final arbitrator of truth, not to mention all the material entitlements that accompany such a position. It threatens to destabilize the social relations from which he and those of the dominant classes gain such advantage. Therefore, the Pope consents to the Inquisitor's request to suppress Galileo. He is afraid of the consequences of Galileo's truth. As Brecht says elsewhere, "[f]ear rules not only those who are ruled, but/ The rulers too" (Brecht, et. al., 1979, p. 297). Thus, the Pope allows state violence to be employed in the protection of its worldview and all the particular interests propagated by it. The Pope concedes to the Inquisitor that "the instruments [of torture] may be shown to [Galileo]" (p. 81).

At the end of the play, it is precisely this threat of violence that Galileo names as the cause of his recantation. He states, "I recanted because I was afraid of physical pain...They showed me the instruments" (p. 92).

Given the above, Brecht's position is apparent. Like Gramsci, Brecht too sees the maintenance of the dominant *weltanschauung* partly as a state function. It is fear of the state, specifically it is the fear of the potential violence which the state can

wield and utilize in the defense of the dominant weltanschauung that holds the system together.

Existential Anxiety

This is not to say Brecht sees the state as entirely responsible for the maintenance of the dominant weltanschauung. As we have seen in the previous discussions, Brecht also attributes the maintenance of the dominant weltanschauung to uncritical attitudes in the masses—to their reluctance to doubt and unwillingness to see the world otherwise than it is currently seen. Furthermore, in the episode with Sagredo, Brecht makes an argument regarding the role the fear of uncertainty plays in maintaining the dominant worldview.

Sagredo, like the rest of Europe, is having his worldview disrupted. As was argued in Chapter 3 this creates anxiety. Brecht too sees this and in order to reveal Sagredo's anxiety Brecht has him ask Galileo, "Where is God in your world system?" (p. 23). Sagredo asks this because God had a fixed central position in his now disrupted worldview. God was a marker, something to which other objects could be related to. However, the relations of objects have changed for Sagredo. Now, relations between objects are uncertain. The objects themselves are estranged and he too has become estranged from this worldview. These objects, then, must fall into, be fitted, conformed, rationalized into a new schema.

One does not have to look at the empirical evidence mentioned in Chapter 3 to see how this might be frightening. It forces a confrontation with one's own ego. Like the stars, and all other objects, the ego is defined by its relation to all other things. That is, it is defined by its place in the schema. If these objects, 'stars' no longer make sense in my language, my schema for understanding, how can I be assured the object I call self or ego makes sense? How do I know or measure the validity of my self-perception? How do I determine the validity of the place I have fitted my ego in my grand schema, my *weltanschauung*? How do I know myself? I am no longer only subject to the misrecognition of others, I can no longer recognize myself. All rationalistic foundations are now subject to critique—to doubt. Sagredo asks where God is in this schema but by implication is asking where he himself is—the ego in no small way being defined by its relation to God in the Roman Catholic tradition.

Moreover, once the ego is lost, once it loses its relation to God, it loses its former relation to purpose. Thus, my purpose, the purpose which befits the ego, legitimizes, endows it with meaning is also subjected to doubt. In its essence then the fear of uncertainty which Sagredo expresses is a fear of being without purpose or, more precisely, it is the fear on having no purpose. It is the fear of absurdity. This we may refer to as existential anxiety. While the state could foster this anxiety, Brecht portrays this as something that can exist outside of the state apparatus. That is, while Brecht does not say that the state could not employ, utilize, implement, etc, this anxiety in the defense of the dominant worldview, he specifically portrays it as

emanating from non-state sources. Specifically, it is not direct dominance that produces this anxiety; it is something in the attitude of the people themselves.

Brecht further elaborates this point in an exchange between Galileo and a young monk scholar. The purpose of the monk's visit is to dissuade Galileo from his work. While the monk could be seen as a representative of the Church, he does not take the same attitude as the Pope or Inquisitor. He may in some purely symbolic way represent the Church; however, he does not represent the individual interests that the Church and its *weltanschauung* protect. He is a monk and therefore an ascetic. He has few if any material interests. For all practical purposes he has no material investment in the maintenance of the Church or its worldview. He is not, however, immune to the effects of anxiety that the disruption of a worldview could produce. But it is not the fear of losing his own place, his own purpose that motivates the monk to ask Galileo to censor his work. He appeals to Galileo on the strength of a paternalistic obligation to the Church's flock. In essence he is afraid of the consequences for the lower classes if they face the anxiety he believes Galileo's ideas would provoke. In taking this position he aligns with the state, with the interests of the hegemonic class, but does so in the name of the interests of the subaltern classes. He tells Galileo:

They're very poor, but even in their misery there is a certain order. There are cyclic rhythms... What gives them the strength to sweat their way up stony paths with heavy baskets to bear children, even to eat is the feeling of stability and necessity they get from the sight of the soil, of the trees turning green every year, of their little church standing there and from hearing Bible verses

read every Sunday...What would my people say if I were to tell them they were living on a small chunk of stone that moves around another star, turning incessantly in empty space, one among many and more or less significant? What would be the good or necessity of their patience, of their acquiescence in their misery? (p. 56)

In essence the monk is making a metaphysical appeal; but he is also making one based on the interests of the subaltern classes. The monk does not want the people to fall into existential anxiety, for their own sake. To him, the masses are better off with their delusions. They are happy with them. These delusions provide meaning to their lives. They supply them with purpose. It is, in effect, all that they have. Galileo's worldview may present truth; but, it is a callous truth—a truth which implies that the people suffer for no reason. It is better, the monk argues, that they believe their suffering matters. At least, this provides them with a means of coping. It provides them comfort. The monk is thus arguing that Galileo's teaching will deprive the subaltern classes of the small amount of material happiness they do have.

However, Galileo refuses to accept the monk's logic and retorts:

Your peasants in Campagna are paying for the wars which the vicar of gentle Jesus is waging...Why does he put the earth at the center of the universe?

Because he wants the See of St. Peter to be in the center of the world! (p. 57)

Galileo is quick to highlight that the existing worldview is not in the subaltern classes' interest. This worldview does not protect universal interests (a point that both the monk and the state occupy) but protects particular interests.

At the same time Galileo highlights the relationship between a hegemonic worldview and the state. It is the government of the state that Galileo points to. The center of temporal authority is predicated on epistemological authority. They are inseparable for Galileo. Thus, Galileo confronts the monk, posing the question of how that worldview could be in the interests of the subaltern classes. It is *these classes* which are suffering and are being slaughtered in the name of that worldview. For Galileo, as for Brecht, the subaltern classes must “rouse themselves and learn how to think...” (p. 58) if they are to realize their interests. That is, they need emancipation from this worldview. They cannot rely on the old *weltanschauung* to ensure their material interests. In sum, Galileo points out that this worldview violates the interests of the subaltern classes.

The Betrayal of Truth and Instrumental Reason

From our discussion of *Galileo* we see Brecht presenting both the fear of violence and existential anxiety working to uphold the dominant worldview. Furthermore, this worldview is intrinsically linked to particular interests which it protects. In his discussion with the monk, for example, Galileo talks about truth as a means of liberation for the peasants. Since Galileo sees the emancipatory potential of truth his recantation is all the more regrettable, according to Brecht (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1972). In the last scene of the play, Andrea visits Galileo years after his recantation. Galileo has been made a house prisoner by the Church and has been

abandoned by his former colleagues including Andrea for his betrayal of truth. Andrea informs Galileo that he is on his way to Holland to continue his scientific work. Before he leaves, Galileo gives Andrea a copy of his *Discursi* on which he has been secretly working. Seeing this, Andrea attempts to rationalize Galileo's recantation. He speculates that Galileo recanted because he was being strategic, that he knew if he were to die there would be no way for him to produce new works. Always the teacher, Galileo listens critically to Andrea's thoughts on his recantation. However, Galileo recognizes Andrea's ideas immediately as a crude *post hoc* rationalization and rebukes his pupil for his intellectual laxness. Galileo then informs Andrea that he recanted out of fear.

While Galileo could have accepted Andrea's *post hoc* rationalization and perhaps saved face, he did not. Galileo refuses to betray the truth again. In this gesture, Galileo attempts to elevate fidelity to truth to what Brecht sees as its proper height. After years of reflection, Galileo now sees that no reason is good enough to betray truth, not even those based on egoistic motives. To further this point, Galileo again speaks of the relation between hegemonic ideology and particular interests. He says for example, "princes, landlords and priests keep the majority of the people in a pearly haze of superstition and outworn words to cover up their own machinations" (p. 93), "[t]he misery of the many is as old as the hills and is proclaimed in church and lecture hall to be as indestructible as the hills" (p. 93) and "[t]hey grabbed the telescope out of our hands and focused it on their tormentors—princes, landlords, priests" (p. 93). Galileo has come to the conclusion that a betrayal of truth is also a

betrayal of those who suffer. It is a failure to use science toward its proper ends—human emancipation. This is Galileo's final lesson, one that Andrea takes with him as he smuggles Galileo's manuscript across the border.

However, for Brecht, this lesson comes too late. The damage has been done. In a commentary on the play, Brecht refers to the historical figure saying:

The fact is that Galileo enriched astronomy and physics by simultaneously robbing these sciences of a greater part of their social importance...Galileo's crime can be regarded as the 'original sin' of modern natural sciences...The atom bomb is, both as a technical and as a social phenomenon, the classical end-product of his contribution to science and his failure to contribute to society. (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1972, p. 225)

In other words, Galileo's betrayal of truth was a betrayal of the humanistic purposes of his disciplines and science more generally. If Galileo had not recanted, he would have been denying particular interests from using truth for their own ends. To die for truth would have meant dying for the liberating potentialities of science. By recanting to save himself, Galileo devalues truth and places himself above it and above the suffering of the masses. The truth and its ability to free are no longer of the utmost importance. Galileo cannot therefore stand as a counter-example to the emerging bourgeois mindset—a mindset which, like the princely, clerical and feudal classes, sees truth only as an instrument toward their own ends.

Throughout the play, Brecht portrays an emerging bourgeoisie hungering for Galileo's science because it has a use value for them. This is hinted at in Brecht's

statement about Galileo being forced to meet Federzoni's gaze and in Galileo's interaction with Vanni. But this theme also comes out elsewhere. For example, in the first scene, Galileo meets a new pupil, Ludovico. Ludovico tells Galileo about the invention of the telescope in Holland. Galileo is intrigued by the invention, asks Ludovico a few questions about it, then quickly sketches out his own blueprint.

Initially, Galileo has only an academic interest in the instrument; however, later in the scene this interest changes. Galileo is visited by the Procurator of the University who informs him that Galileo's request for an increase in his stipend has been denied. The reason, according to the Procurator, is that Galileo's research is not economically profitable. He states:

Only what brings in scudi is worth scudi. If you want money, you'll have to come up with something different. If you have knowledge to sell, you can ask only as much as it earns the purchaser. For instance, the philosophy Mr. Colombe is selling in Florence brings the prince at least ten thousand scudi a year... Your misfortune, Mr. Galilei is your field. (p. 12)

The Procurator then suggests that Galileo invest his time in developing commercially viable inventions. Galileo attempts to reason with the Procurator, making arguments for the validity of his own work. However, Galileo's rationality falls on deaf ears. For the Procurator, knowledge is not an end in itself, nor is it a means of achieving human emancipation. Knowledge is only valuable as a means to other ends—commercial ends.

After hearing the Procurator's stance, Galileo takes a new interest in the telescope. Galileo immediately sees its commercial and military value. Since it is commercial ends the Procurator seeks, it is commercial ends Galileo will provide. Thus, he creates his own model of the telescope and passes it off as his own invention to the Senate of the Republic. This temporarily ensures Galileo additional remuneration; however, the Senate soon learns that they do not have proprietary rights to the technology and thus receive no advantage over others from it. Outraged at Galileo's fraud, the Procurator returns to Galileo and castigates him. The gist of his argument is summed up by Galileo in a comment to Sagredo after the Procurator exits, "[d]id you hear what he said: A world where you can't do business makes him sick" (p. 21). The Procurator does not care that Galileo only presented the telescope as his own so that he could have the means he needed to further his research. This research is meaningless to the Procurator so long as it is not commercially profitable.

Similarly, in the aforementioned exchange between the Inquisitor and the Pope, the Pope informs the Inquisitor that the church must yield to the ship owners' request to use Galileo's star charts, "since material interests are involved" (p. 80). In this brief statement by the Pope, we again see that the bourgeoisie, this time represented by the ship owners, are on the rise. They are becoming powerful enough to place demands on the Church that the Church cannot deny. Furthermore, we see the bourgeoisie's relationship to instrumental rationality—they use according to their needs. They rationalize to serve their own ends. Like Horkheimer (1985), Brecht sees this type of rationality as a characteristic of the bourgeois *weltanschauung*. Moreover,

Brecht demonstrates this characteristic not abstractly but concretely. The Pope, Vanni, and the Procurator all exhibit practical action predicated on this type of rationality. For Brecht this is a “crippled rationality” (BAP, p. 177) [1937] and is “the quality of reason which the ruling classes would prefer” (BAP, p. 178) [1937]. With this mindset, “[t]he judgements ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are transposed into the judgements ‘useful’ and ‘not useful’” (Letters, p. 491) [letter to Ruth Berlau, 1950].

Perhaps it is too great of a load to place on Galileo’s shoulders alone, but by recanting, by not elevating truth above the interests of the few, Brecht sees Galileo as allowing the eventually victory of instrumental reason. While Galileo’s failure is likely more emblematic than a primary cause for Brecht, he suggests that since Galileo recanted, because he placed himself above the suffering masses, science and truth remain instruments of particular interests, not universal ones. Instead of standing up for truth and science and their universal emancipatory properties, Galileo allows them to be relegated to means of fulfilling particular interests, to being used as tools of domination.

Conclusion

By analysis of Brecht’s play *The Life of Galileo*, several important aspects of Brecht’s thought have been revealed. First, we have seen that Brecht sees doubt as the impetus behind the Enlightenment. Furthermore, we can gather from our discussion in this chapter and from those in Chapters 2 and 4 that Brecht sees doubt as a

necessary precondition to the altering of *weltanschauung* and thus to class consciousness and revolution.

We have also seen that Brecht envisions the state apparatus as a repressive force ensuring the hegemony of an ideology which serves the interests of the dominant classes. However, for Brecht the maintenance of the dominant *weltanschauung* is not merely a function of the state. Situations may arise where individuals will align themselves with interests of the state and ruling classes, believing they are actually protecting the interests of the subaltern classes. This was seen in Brecht's argument regarding the prevention of existential anxiety.

Finally, we have seen that Brecht sees Galileo's recantation as emblematic of a larger failing of the bourgeois mindset. Particularly we see Brecht putting forth the argument that Galileo's recantation prevented truth and science from aspiring toward universal interests. Instead, because Galileo refused to stand up for the liberating potential of science, he continued to let it be used toward particular ends. This came at the expense of the continued suffering of the masses.

In this chapter, we have also revealed several important characteristics of Brecht's historical materialism. We have seen, for example, that emerging classes are quick to use science and truth toward their own ends. We have also seen that the hegemonic order is also equally willing to employ the violence of the state apparatus in defense of that order. In the next chapter we will explore Brecht's historical materialism further.

In *Galileo*, we saw Brecht portraying the rise of the bourgeoisie. In portraying that rise, Brecht revealed various historical factors he identified as hindering their advent, for example the repression of the state apparatus which was controlled by the waning princely class and the call to prevent existential anxiety. Similarly, in Chapter 5, we saw that the historical conditions of bourgeois society could limit the development of the human individual by abstractly negating the species-being. Furthermore, in Chapter 2, we saw that for Brecht the failure of the proletariat to develop class consciousness was hindering their emergence. While historical progression enviably marches forward for Brecht the road is filled with impediments that slow it down.

Impediments can work two ways for Brecht—the particular can affect the general and general can affect the particular. For example, Brecht argues that the uncritical worldview of the masses stands in the way of world historical development. Since the proletariat does not develop a class consciousness they cannot rise up and propel history forward. Here we see the particular affecting the general. It is the particular, the proletariat which is inhibiting the general develop of history. Specifically it is the proletariat's failure to master the science of history, and to participate in the making of its own history that holds historical progression back. But, at the same time the general historical period gives rise to conditions that also hinder the proletariat's development and thus the development of history. Class antagonisms, material, economic interests, hegemonic discourses, commonsense,

violence, competition, repression and fear prevent the proletariat from developing.

They inhibit its ability to see the ‘truth’—to form class consciousness.

In chapter 5 we saw Brecht demonstrate the current working out of a particular contradiction, the self. In Chapter 6 we saw another particular contradiction playing out with Brecht’s depiction of the class antagonism between the princely and clerical classes and the emerging bourgeois. In the next chapter, we will see how two particular contradictions in historical development can relate to each other.

Specifically, we will see that for Brecht within the general historical progression different contradictions can take precedence over others at a particular moment. This is an idea that Brecht appropriated from Mao. As in the two previous chapters an analysis of one of Brecht’s plays will reveal not only Brecht’s belief in this notion but also demonstrate Brecht’s ability to portray social contradictions and the playing out of historical materialism in his work.

CHAPTER VII

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY CONTRADICTIONS

“[I] have always needed the spur of contradiction.”⁴¹

Introduction

When asked, in 1954 which book he read the previous year had the most impact on him, Brecht indicated it was Mao Tse Tung's *On Contradiction* (Brooker, 1988). My analysis of Brecht's philosophical thought suggests it is Mao's treatment of higher order antagonisms, that is, between 'dominant' and 'secondary' contradictions that appealed to Brecht. In fact, Brecht used Mao's treatise as a means of teaching others, particularly his cast about 'dominant' and 'secondary' contradictions. One primary source, in particular, a transcribed dialogue, "Study of the First Scene of Shakespeare's 'Coriolanus'" attests to Brecht using Mao's treatise in this manner (BT, p. 252-65). In this dialogue, Brecht makes reference to having asked his collaborators to read *On Contradiction* and their responses indicate that they did.

I begin with a discussion of Mao's concept of 'dominant' and 'secondary' antagonisms. Next, I will show how this concept influenced Brecht's adaptation of

⁴¹ Journals, p. 6 [1938].

*Coriolanus*⁴², (Brecht, Willett & Manheim, 1972) by using specific examples from primary sources and the text itself. This chapter will thus reveal Brecht's belief in the concept and demonstrate how Brecht was able to concretely depict it for his audience.

Mao's Concept of 'Dominant' and 'Secondary' Contradictions

According to Mao, a process of development has many contradictions. However, within a process of development there is always one principal or dominant contradiction. Mao states, for example, that the principal contradiction in bourgeois society is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Mao, 1967, p. 31). The other contradictions, in a process of development "occupy a secondary and subordinate position" according to Mao (1967, p. 31). Although, for Mao, there is always one dominant and various secondary contradictions, the relations between them are not always static. The principal and a non-principal contradiction can shift positions. That is, the dominant contradiction can be "temporarily relegated to a secondary and subordinate position" (Mao, 1967, p. 32). This occurs when the reactionary forces of a historic antagonism which have not fully been reconciled threaten the present level of historical progression. Mao highlights, for example, the contradiction between the remnant feudal class and the bourgeoisie, in bourgeois society. As was mentioned above, the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is the dominant

⁴² This play was written circa 1953 and was first published in 1959, three years after Brecht's death (Brecht, Willett & Manheim, 1972). It was first staged at the Frankfurt Schauspielhaus, in 1962 (Willett 1977).

contradiction in bourgeois society. The contradiction between the remnant feudal class and the bourgeoisie, then, would constitute a secondary contradiction. If however the reactionary feudal forces threatened the progress made by bourgeois society the feudal-bourgeois contradiction would become primary and the proletariat-bourgeois contradiction would be temporarily relegated to a secondary position.

Brecht and his associates were definitely aware of these ideas. Evidence for this exists in the allusions to reading *On Contradiction* and the discussion on it found in “Study of the First Scene of Shakespeare’s ‘Coriolanus.’” Moreover, an analysis of Brecht’s *Coriolanus* indicates that these ideas were also incorporated in the text of Brecht’s adaptation.

‘Dominant’ and ‘Secondary’ Contradictions in Brecht’s *Coriolanus*

Brecht made several important changes in his adaptation of *Coriolanus*. As Scofield points out, in Brecht’s version *Coriolanus* and the rest of the Patricians are more aggressive with their hostility toward the Plebeians (Scofield, 2006). It is Coriolanus’ exhibition of this hostility which causes the Plebeians to turn against him. This is, of course, a deviation from Shakespeare’s text which attributes the Plebeians’ changed opinion of Coriolanus to the craftiness of the tribunes. Brecht’s version treats the tribunes in a more dignified manner. The tribunes, for example, are not depicted by Brecht as self-interested schemers as Shakespeare does. Instead, Brecht depicts them as vigilant advocates for the people. Furthermore, Brecht’s overall depiction of

the plebeian class is also more venerable as well. In Brecht's version the Plebeians are not as fickle, comical and senseless as Shakespeare makes them. In fact, Brecht was very critical of Shakespeare's depiction of the Plebeians. Brecht states, for example, that the anti-Plebeian tone of Shakespeare's original "[applies] a theatrical rod to the back of the common man" (Journals, p. 434) [1951]. Contrary to Shakespeare's Plebeians, Brecht's Plebeians are very much conscious of their position in society, are able to articulate the injustice of their position and are willing to fight for justice.

It seems evident that Brecht made these changes to highlight the class antagonism present between the Plebeians and Patricians. These alterations also help to illustrate the working of 'dominant' and 'secondary' contradictions.

The class antagonism is seen from the very beginning of the play. In Act I, Scene 1, a group of armed citizens speak of revolt because of the price of grain. Menenius, a Patrician, enters and gives the people a parable about the senators being the stomach of society which distributes food to the appendages. This parable, of course, is borrowed from Shakespeare who initially appropriated it from Livy. However, in Brecht's version Menenius is more condescending in his telling of it. This suggests more hostility toward the Plebeians. Further suggesting this hostility is Brecht's decision for Marcius (later to be known as Coriolanus) to enter with armed guards in Act I, Scene 1. For Brecht, Menenius' condescending attitude and Marcius' entrance with armed guards is designed to illustrate an elevated level of tension between the Plebeians and Patricians. These elements, along with the ongoing revolt

elsewhere in the city and the Senate's announcement in response that it has appointed two Tribunes (Brutus and Sicinius) shows that the class conflict was of central importance.

This class conflict does not go away during the war with the Volscians which also begins early in Act I. As Brecht states, "[t]he conflict between Patricians and Plebeians is (at least provisionally) set aside, and that between the Romans and the Volscians becomes all-predominant" (BT, p. 256) [1953]. Evidence of the class conflict persisting can be seen, for example, when Sicinius says that if Marcius wins he will be master of Rome and if the Volscians win they will be the masters of Rome. Also Menenius compares the tribunes to hungry wolves and admits that the upper classes think they are conceited, violent, and unpatriotic.

However, during the war, the antagonism between the Romans and the Volscians becomes the dominant antagonism. This is because the Volscians were more of a threat to the progress made by the Romans, in world historical developmental terms. While a full accounting of the progressive position of Rome, at such an early date as the events depicted in *Coriolanus* is debatable and beyond the confines of the current inquiry, it is fair to say that (at least for Brecht) socially, politically, economically, technologically, artistically, etc., the Romans represented an advanced form of social relations. The Volscians represented a prior stage in world historical development. They were undemocratic, unenlightened, etc. Therefore, both the Patricians and the Plebeians whose social relations were certainly far from the perfection sought after in a Marxist communistic vision were nonetheless susceptible

to the reactionary, Volscian threat. While things were not great for the Plebeians, the destruction and subjugation of their state by the Volscians would be worse than the subjugation they experienced under the Patricians. They would, for example, lose all the social gains they had fought for such as the granting of the Tribune. The downside for the Patricians of subjugation by the Volscians is obvious—the master would become slave. Thus, both the subaltern and dominant classes in Rome had reason to put aside the antagonism between each other and focus on the antagonism with the Volscians. There was then a shift between the dominant and secondary contradictions as Mao describes.

After the war with the Volscians and Marcius' (now bearing the honorary title of Coriolanus) triumphant return to Rome, we see a re-intensification of the antagonism between the classes and it, once again, becomes the dominant contradiction for the Roman people.

In order to become consul, Coriolanus has to plead for the votes of the citizens. While at first the Plebeians are warm to Coriolanus' bid for consul, their comments indicate a disgruntled nature. For example, a shoemaker says that his trade can be practiced "with a clearer conscience than certain noble lords can practice theirs" (p. 97). Another citizen tells Coriolanus, "You haven't loved the common people" to which Coriolanus responds, "I love them according to their deserts" (p. 98). These underlying hostilities become overt in little time. Acting on behalf of the people, Sicinius asks what Coriolanus would do with the grain that was taken as spoils in the war with the Volscians. Feeling provoked, Coriolanus replies, "You

don't feed virtue when you give free grain. You're feeding disobedience, fattening it/ For insurrection, for with every wish/ You satisfy, you give the filthy rabble/ New wishes" (p. 100-1). In addition, Coriolanus refers to the people as "scum" (p. 101) and an "unreasoning mob" (p. 102). In response to these comments, the Plebeians become enraged and Coriolanus takes hold of a shortsword in order to fight. This causes Sicinius to say that Coriolanus "stands a usurper of the people's sovereignty" (p. 103). With the crowd becoming increasingly incensed a senator accuses the tribunes of trying to make war on Rome. Brutus, the tribune responds to this by saying, "Who's Rome? You or Its people?" (p. 104). Brutus, of course is trying to expose the Patrician view of entitlement which makes them equate the state with themselves. He is also making clear the ontological distinction between the two classes. This is something Menenius does as well when he says, "Patricians! Here! Defend our Marcius!" (p. 104). However, while both the statements of Brutus and Menenius highlight this class division, Menenius' statement is likely a more obvious example of the antagonism. In it, he refers to the members of his class directly. 'Patricians!' he says, invoking a highly symbolic word. The word not only signifies the legal rank and social privilege of its members but it also, no doubt, elicits a feeling of group identity for its members. It acts as a signifier based on a self-other dichotomy. "Defend our Marcius!" Menenius says, meaning defend that which is ours— our person, our class, our privilege.

With Coriolanus' return from the Volscian war, the class antagonism clearly became the dominant contradiction in society as it was before the war with the

Volscians. Certainly this conflict was behind Coriolanus' banishment by the tribunes in Act III. The tribunes felt Coriolanus' cavalier attitude toward the Plebeians and the power he could exercise against them was very dangerous. However, Coriolanus' defection and allegiance to the Volscians would once again cause a shifting of the dominant and secondary contradictions. As before, the threat of Volscian rule would mean a world historical developmental regression for the Romans of all classes. Again the Patricians and Plebeians were compelled to put aside their antagonism and join forces in order to combat the antagonism presented by Coriolanus and the Volscians. This temporary putting aside of the class antagonism included a rather extreme concession by the Patricians. In order to defend the city, Brutus convinces the Patricians to arm the Plebeians. This is, of course, not a concession the Patricians would have made if the necessity of victory against Coriolanus and the Volscians was not of the utmost importance.

Although the class conflict again became the secondary contradiction, like before, it does not completely disappear. As Brecht says:

We've got a contradictory union of Plebeians and Patricians, which has got involved in a contradiction with the Volscians next door. The second is the main contradiction. The contradiction between Plebeians and Patricians, the class struggle, has been put into cold storage by the emergence of the new contradiction, the national war against the Volscians. It hasn't disappeared though. (BT, p. 262) [1953]

For example, the Patricians are quite open in their criticism of the tribunes during this period. Specifically, they blame the Plebeians for Coriolanus' conspiring with the Volscians. Cominius, a general, for example, says "Now you can take your precious bill of rights/ And stuff it in a mouse hole" (p. 128) and Menenius facetiously says "Good work you've done...with the mighty voice/ Of the Roman working class" (p. 129). The class conflict is also seen in the words of the Plebeians during this period. Brutus, for example says, "If the people who live off Rome won't defend it, then we, whom Rome has lived off up to now, will defend it. Why shouldn't masons defend their walls?" (p. 137). Additionally, when the tribunes hear that Coriolanus' mother, Volumnia is planning to go to her son, in Act IV, Scene 3 they do not prevent her from doing so with that rationalization that as Brutus says, "she'd rather see [the] Plebeians trampled by Romans than Volscians" (p. 138).

In the end, Volumnia convinces Coriolanus to stop the campaign against his countrymen saying that "the proud nobility of Rome/ Must owe the rabble our salvation from the Volscians, or we owe the Volscians our/ Salvation from the rabble" (p. 142). This is a very class based appeal that she makes to Coriolanus. Both of the possibilities she offers are detrimental for the Patricians. Both mean the weakening of their class hegemony. This is another point of departure between Brecht and Shakespeare. While Shakespeare stresses Coriolanus' devotion to his mother as the reason for his retreat, Brecht stresses the message she brings—the destruction of the class which Coriolanus so identified with and ardently defended.

As was demonstrated above, while the class antagonism was secondary during the period of threat by Coriolanus and the Volscians, it did not disappear. Furthermore, after the Volscian leader, Aufidius has his men kill Coriolanus for retreating we see this contradiction again becoming the dominant contradiction. The play ends with a scene in the Senate. Menenius makes a motion to have Coriolanus' name honored in public; but, Brutus makes a procedural motion to block this. Similarly, a motion is put forth to allow Coriolanus' family to publicly mourn his death. This too is rejected by Brutus.

Conclusion

In Chapter 4, it was argued that Brecht attempted to bring forth contradictions to serve the aim of disrupting the worldview of his audience. In Chapter 5 we examined Brecht's portrayal of the contradiction of the self while in Chapter 6 we examined Brecht's depiction of the class antagonism between the princely and clerical classes and the emerging bourgeoisie. In our analysis of *Coriolanus*, we also saw Brecht portraying class conflict between the Plebeians and Patricians. Moreover, this chapter has highlighted Brecht's belief in a rotating and hierarchical system of contradictions within the process of world historical development. While Brecht likely appropriated this concept from Mao, this chapter illustrates how, in his work, Brecht was able to turn this philosophical concept into a concrete depiction of the playing out of historical materialism.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

“[I]t doesn’t take miracles to do away with intolerable conditions.”⁴³

Summary

One of the main purposes of this study was to reconstruct Brecht’s thought into a single theoretical framework. The framework which has emerged is one perhaps best described as a Marxist revolutionary aesthetic. In Chapter 2, we saw that Brecht adopted a Marxist conception of history. History, as Brecht saw it, was progressing toward a communistic stage. But, before that could happen, certain material conditions had to be met first. Specifically, the proletarian class had to recognize itself and its exploited position within society. In short, it had to become class conscious. However, in order for this new consciousness to emerge and history to progress, the old consciousness needed to be done away with. Brecht’s epic theatre was an experiment in disrupting and eradicating the old consciousness, the old worldview so that a new worldview could emerge.

⁴³ From a 1954 letter by Brecht to GDR Minister of Culture, Anton Ackermann (Letters, 1990, p. 529).

In Chapters 3 and 4, we saw that Brecht sought to alter consciousness through two distinct but inter-related ways—cognitive disruption and the demonstration of social contradiction. Chapter 3 discussed the notion of cognitive disruption in Brecht's work. Here it was argued that in an effort to alter the *weltanschauung* of the audience Brecht developed various estrangement effects which were designed to make the familiar world seem unfamiliar. We then examined one effect specifically, Brecht's alteration of Aristotelian narrative structure. This, it was argued, constituted an alteration of socio-temporal order, which has important implications for the way individuals form cognitions. We found that Brecht's manipulation of socio-temporal order is likely to serve the purpose of cognitive disruption and has the potential to alter consciousness. Furthermore, we saw that when Brecht alters Aristotelian narrative structure he challenges its naturalness and exposes this form as reified. By extension this move allows us to infer that other social relations seen as natural and immutable can also be exposed as reified.

Chapter 4 shifted our focus from cognitive disruption to the other method Brecht employed in the destruction of the old *weltanschauung*, the portrayal of social contradictions. In this chapter we first outlined Brecht's conception of ideology and found that Brecht conceived of a dominant ideology which: 1) serves particular interests 2) is historically/socially conditioned 3) obscures contradiction and 4) is, in part, a product of language. In essence, we found that Brecht attempted to remove objects out of the dominant, bourgeois ideology, in an effort to render them pure, essential, unadulterated, etc. This we referred to as eidetic reduction and argued that

its purpose was to remove objects from the commonsense, default position of the inherited language and to expose contradictions. For Brecht, what is left after eidetic reduction, after the stripping bare of bourgeois ideology is not the totalized, unified reality presented by the bourgeois weltanschauung but contradictions. Through analysis of his plays, in the chapters that followed, some of the particular contradictions Brecht portrayed like the antagonism of the self and class antagonisms were examined. Brecht presented contradictions and in doing so offered his audience a new worldview, the dialectical material worldview of Marx. Furthermore, by contradicting the claims of unity and nature found in the bourgeois worldview, Brecht served to undermine the faith one has in that worldview.

Brecht's challenge of the totalized, unified reality presented by bourgeois ideology is illustrated in Chapter 5. In this chapter, we examined a specific example of Brecht's depictions of contradiction present in bourgeois society. Particularly we examined what was defined as the antagonism between the individual-being and the species-being which Brecht revealed through his use of the literary/theatrical technique of the 'split character' in his play *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

We then went on, in Chapter 6, to see that Brecht's attempts to disrupt one's worldview were founded on the idea of creating a Cartesian form of doubt which would call into question the validity of the handed-down worldview. Brecht saw this as the impulse at the heart of the bourgeoisie's emancipation and believed it would be the foundation for the emancipation of the working class as well. However, we also found that doubt in one's weltanschauung is not enough to move one from the realm

of ideology. For Brecht, one also had to have the proper tools of perception, i.e. dialectics.

Furthermore, in our analysis of *Life of Galileo*, Brecht displays a model of the bourgeois revolution which allowed him to outline a dialectic of enlightenment which was founded on his version of historical materialism. From this analysis, we found that Brecht envisioned the state apparatus as a repressive force protecting the hegemony of the dominant class ideology. We also saw that maintaining the dominant weltanschauung is not solely a function of the state apparatus for Brecht. Some individuals may align themselves with interests of the state and ruling classes thinking that they are acting in the interests of the subaltern classes. This was seen in Brecht's portrayal of the call to suppress truth in order to prevent existential anxiety in the masses.

In our analysis of *Galileo* we also saw that Brecht believed Galileo's recantation was emblematic of a larger failing of the bourgeois mindset. Specifically it was argued that Brecht believed Galileo's recantation prevented truth and science from aspiring toward universal interests. Because Galileo did not demand that science be used toward universal emancipation, its use toward particular ends (and the continued suffering of the masses which that entailed) could continue with impunity.

Finally, our study of *Galileo* revealed several important characteristics of Brecht's historical materialism. We found, for example, that Brecht saw the emerging bourgeoisie as possessing the notion that science and truth could be used toward their

ends and that the hegemonic class employs violence, administered through the state apparatus, in defense of the existing order.

Brecht's historical materialism was then further examined in Chapter 7, through analysis of his adaptation of *Coriolanus*. This chapter highlighted Brecht's belief in 'dominant' and 'secondary' contradictions, a rotating and hierarchical system of contradictions within the process of world historical development. This is a notion Brecht appropriated from Mao. Furthermore, as we saw in Chapter 4, Brecht attempted to highlight social contradictions in order to disrupt the worldview of his audience. Chapter 5 examined Brecht's portrayal of the contradiction of the self while Chapter 6 examined Brecht's depiction of the class antagonism between the princely and clerical classes and the emerging bourgeoisie. In our analysis of *Coriolanus*, we again saw Brecht portraying class antagonism, specifically the antagonism between the Plebeians and Patricians. Finally this chapter illustrated how, in his work, Brecht was able to turn this philosophical concept into a concrete depiction of the playing out of historical materialism.

Critique

Although this work has been ambitious in scope, it constitutes only the beginning of an analysis of Brecht's social and political philosophy. By bringing Brecht into the world of the philosopher and outside of the limited formalism of most studies of his work, we should also expect that his ideas now become subject to proper

philosophical and empirical critique. While a full critique of Brecht's philosophy is beyond the confines of the present work, I would like to offer a start. Specifically, since so much of Brecht's philosophy was devoted to creating a revolutionary aesthetic I would like to examine his thought by asking the following question: "What does Brecht lend to a revolutionary aesthetic today?"

We have already seen the possibility that the manipulation of socio-temporal order is likely to serve the purpose of cognitive disruption and has the potential to alter consciousness. However, this does not necessarily imply that the new consciousness will be a purely rationalistic one as Brecht seems to hope for as we saw in Chapter 4.

Indeed the existence of such an epistemic center needs to be questioned. There is a serious genealogy beginning with Nietzsche that stresses that knowledge is inherently perspectival. Nietzsche, for example, rejects the possibility of objective truth or a truth which is not influenced by personal perspectives, feelings, interpretations, or biases. He asserts that "perspective 'knowing' [is] the only kind of 'knowing'" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 98) and that facts do not speak for themselves but stand "mute to the world" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 86). This rejection of objective knowledge stands at the core of what we can possibly refer to as the post-modern critique and can be found in diverse strains of thought from Derrida to Foucault and even Habermas.

On one hand, Brecht understands this Nietzschean position about the relative nature of knowing. For him there is bourgeois truth which can be set against another

truth, a different truth, a new truth, as well as against an older truth, a past truth. However, on the other hand, Brecht fails to seriously consider the likelihood that his truth is merely another perspectival truth. Brecht is confident that one objective truth can be ascertained and that he has done this (as anyone can) through material dialectics. His cocksure assertions like: 1) dialectics are “the only possible aid to orientation” (Journals, p. 47) [1940]; 2) before the discovery of dialectics “the world could not be explained” (BAP, p. 103) [c. 1931]; 3) “plays...cannot be written intelligently in any other framework” (Journals, p. 372) [1947]; 4) dialectics make the “progress towards conscious experience...possible” (BT, p. 276) [early 1950s]; 5) “it will probably be well nigh impossible to demand that reality be presented in such a way that it can be mastered, without [dialectics]” (Journals, p. 120) [1940]; 6) “unless you recognize the dialectical nature of reality it cannot be mastered” (Journals, p. 120) [1940]; 7) dialectics is “the art of arriving at the truth” (Journals, p. 371) [1947], etc., etc. clearly illustrate a worrisome and limiting dogmatism.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Brecht’s over-confidence that he had the Truth was at the center of Adorno’s critique of his work. Brecht imagines his truth as the end truth, the final truth and therefore seems to be vulnerable to the criticism he himself levies against the bourgeois mindset. In Chapter 6, we saw how Brecht castigates the bourgeoisie for betraying the cause of real and total knowledge by claiming they have arrived at the Truth and in Chapter 4 we saw how Brecht condemns bourgeois ideology for its claims of being totalized and all encompassing. However, Brecht makes the same type of assertions. For Brecht, Hegel and Marx appear as final

prophets—Lenin, Mao, perhaps he himself are simply caliphs. Certainly Brecht is correct to criticize the bourgeois mindset on these accounts and we cannot let them off the hook for this failing. In fact, I would argue society would be well served by taking them to task over it. But, if we are to take this critique seriously then we also have to apply it to Brecht.

In my mind, seeking objective, final, transcendent, absolute truth is problematic. Brecht needs to go further. Whereas he advocates for Cartesian doubt to be employed against the bourgeois mindset as it was against the feudal mindset, he stops short of calling for this always, in all future epochs. Mythology, ideology, worldview and *weltanschauung* are systems of ordering, sorting, classifying, associating and relating objects. There are seemingly endless ways to arrange objects in a worldview. Brecht sees that rearrangement is possible but wants to fix the association of objects in one specific manner. In essence he wants to replace one myth system with another. His use of a method of phenomenological reduction (which is predicated on his dialectical reasoning) can be seen as an attempt to apply his truth to a neutral and universal measure or standard and ensure the validity of this worldview. However, in the final analysis, this move has nowhere to go but to fall into pure formalism just like the notion of rationality that the bourgeoisie appropriated from Kant and use to validate their own worldview. Both bourgeois rationality and Brecht's phenomenology do not stand independent of their respective worldviews but are thoroughly entrenched in it. They form it, create it and re-create it, provide it with a justification, give it an alibi, etc. Brecht confuses consistency of

internal logic with Truth. The effect of his dogmatism is to bind, confine, limit, restrict, etc. the realm of possible relations and thus to restrict what is known and thought. It is to limit what is possible in the economic, social, political, scientific and philosophical realms.

Furthermore, Brecht's sole reliance on material dialectics forces an abstract negation of metaphysical pursuits of Truth. While we certainly cannot give preference to metaphysical pursuits of Truth over material pursuits we cannot totally ignore or dismiss them as Brecht would have us do. Because of the dogmatic tendency in Brecht's philosophy we must be wary. However this does not mean we ought to reject him outright as so many liberal thinkers have attempted to do. What is useful from Brecht's philosophy is its powerful demonstration that meaning is socially constituted, historical, localized, etc. and that it can be altered. We cannot underestimate how important it is that Brecht brings to our attention that worldviews can be altered and more importantly that he leads us to consider that the altering of worldviews produces qualitatively different material conditions.

Essentially, what Brecht attempted to do was to change the relations of objects in a schema of understanding. He tries to present objects in a way which forces the audience to relocate them in the web of relations they use to understand the world around them. Clearly such an endeavor is possible. It involves redefinition, reclassification and re-association of the signs that represent objects. In short, it means changing the meaning of an object.

Historically, this redefinition, reclassification, re-association of objects has precedence for the facilitation of social change. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, attempted to reclassify the object, 'negro' in the worldview of the time. Specifically, he sought to redefine African Americans as 'human' and subsequently 'citizen'. This reclassification meant that blacks in America would then be associated with such objects as freedom, equality, opportunity, justice, etc. King's appeal to liberty, etc. was in practice an attempt to redefine race and African-Americans and link them in a worldview to these sedimented concepts of bourgeois society. Humans deserve freedom, equality, opportunity, justice. African Americans are human. African Americans deserve freedom, equality, opportunity, justice. This type of redefinition was not an easy task. It required many to view the objects of 'negro' and race in an entirely new way—one that contradicted the sedimented, fixed, taken-for-granted, everyday way of viewing these objects.

Perhaps an easier re-association of objects was King's attempt to create a clear relation between 'negro' to 'consumer'. Sit-ins and bus boycotts threatened the existence of a social order predicated on profits. The loss of profits spoke to the bourgeoisie precisely in the language which they understand best.

While King helped to change the relations of objects in a schema of understanding, a great difference exists between MLK's attempt to alter perceptions and what Brecht aimed at. Specifically, MLK was attempting to work inside of the hegemonic language whereas Brecht sought to establish a new dominant language. Brecht's reshuffling of objects is more radical. He attempts not only to reclassify the

human subject and thus social relations as King did but also objects like freedom, justice, production, labor, etc.

Even though Brecht's task is very difficult, his notion that consciousness needed to be altered for social change to happen is on the mark. If one common theme emerged from the diverse literature reviewed in this work, it was that worldviews are localized, historical and subject to change. We also saw social relations are often legitimized within a particular worldview with appeals to their naturalness, inevitability and immutability. If social relations are generally seen as immutable or natural there is little hope of changing them. Because of this, any type of revolutionary aesthetic must challenge the current, dominant way of seeing and understanding the world. It must reclassify, re-associate, reshuffle, re-relate objects. As this dissertation has made clear this was Brecht's objective. But the question remains: "Does Brecht's theory work in practice?" Chapter 3 only suggests that in theory it should work; but does it actually? Can one use art to change the worldview of an audience?

Brecht's Estrangement Effects in Practice

As we have seen Brecht's estrangement effects are designed to knock spectators off balance cognitively and alter their perception of the world. In essence, they attempt to produce a cognitive disruption, a doubting of one's worldview, where the granted is no longer taken for granted. Chapter 3 suggested that at least

theoretically estrangement effects were likely to serve their intended purpose.

However, theory and praxis are often discordant. Therefore, one needs to look at empirics to gauge the validity of the theory.

It is unfortunate, on one hand, that there isn't substantial, empirical data about the effectiveness of the particular estrangement effects that Brecht himself employed. Both Barthes and Sartre seem to indicate that Brecht's particular techniques were doing what his theory says they should have been doing. However, neither one of those thinkers analyze or discuss real audiences or particular performances. Instead they speak about Brecht and his work abstractly. Nevertheless, both Sartre and Barthes saw performances of the Berliner Ensemble and therefore it is probably a fair assumption that their conclusions about Brecht were at least somewhat rooted in the empirics of their own experiences. Additionally there exists a report of discussions by audiences members (largely comprised of workers and children) recorded after a 1930 production of Brecht's *He Said Yes* at the Karl Marx School in the Neukölln borough of Berlin (Brecht, 1997, p. 336-338). Some of these accounts hint toward Brecht's effects creating a new way of seeing for the audience. For example, one student who saw the performance discusses Brecht's "discrepancy between music and text" (an estrangement effect) as causing him to critically reflect on scenes other than the one containing the dramatic death of the main character (Brecht, 1997, p. 336). While all these sources lend support to the claim that Brecht's estrangement effects were successful, the evidence is highly impressionistic, not very representative of any

audience as a whole and hard to generalize according to conventional standards of empiricism.

In Chapter 3, we saw a more systematic attempt to gather data on estrangement effects from a performance in 1969. However, this empirical evidence was completely unreliable because Brecht's original estrangement effects were used. At the time of that performance, the audience would have been too accustomed to these particular techniques. As was explained in that chapter, they would have no longer worked as estrangement effects and thus the audience would not be affected in the way Brecht theorized. In order to produce the desired effects this performance would have needed to create new estrangement effects—effects specifically designed for that audience. According to Brecht, “a fresh effort is needed every time” (Brecht, Kuhn & Willett, 2003, p. 363) [1952].

On the other hand, it is of little importance that we do not have substantial, empirical data on the effectiveness of the particular effects Brecht used. Even if the effects Brecht used did not work this would not necessarily mean that the theory was invalid. It would not, for example, negate the idea that one could produce the type of effects which would disrupt the consciousness of the audience. If Brecht's effects were ineffective, he could have just used the wrong effects. He was never positive himself whether or not his techniques would be effective. For example, he believed that the techniques he used in the 1949 production of *Mother Courage* were ineffective (Brecht, Manheim & Willett, 1972, p. 389) and thus developed others for subsequent productions.

Technically speaking something is only an estrangement effect if it works—that is to say, if it estranges. Otherwise, it is simply some other type of literary or theatrical technique. Brecht clearly saw that some effects may work, while others do not. That is why Brecht placed a lot of emphasis on an experimental requirement of epic theatre. Even as late as 1955, Brecht states in a notice on the Berliner Ensemble bulletin board that his ensemble was “learning a very special kind of theatre, which is still in the process of development and gives [him] plenty of difficulties. Thus every production is still an experiment” (Letters, p. 549). In his epic theatre, Brecht tried many different things, different techniques, different effects, in an effort to see what could work. According to Brecht, “a variety of things can lead to success, more than just one path is open” (Journals, p. 209) [1942]. However, Brecht never imagined that he himself had to blaze all these trails. He asserts in a 1955 letter to French critic, Henri Magnan, for example “an [estrangement] technique—though not necessarily [his]—is needed in dramatic art” (Letters, p. 544).

From this discussion, we can see that it is of less importance to know whether or not Brecht developed effective estrangement effects as it is to find out if one could develop them at all and thus elicit the type of critical response Brecht hoped for. If one could do this, it would vindicate one of the most central and unique tenets of Brecht’s philosophy—that art could be used to alter the worldview of the audience and to change society. In the section that follows we will see an analysis of the impact of estrangement effects developed by this author—that is, estrangement effects

developed using Brecht's theory—which provides evidence that indeed one can create effects that seem to function as Brecht theorized.

New Estrangement Effects in Practice

Often while teaching an introductory level of International Relations, I make use of the discussion board which is provided on the university e-learning program. During a recent semester, I began the first two discussion topics by copying and pasting news articles from the Associated Press in the space provided for the instructor to elicit responses. For the subsequent discussion, I provided my students with a journalistic account of a Biblical passage which I prepared specifically for the purpose. It went as follows:

Religious Bloodshed in Northeast Egypt Leaves Thousands Dead

Cairo—Egypt

A militant cleric known only as Musa has claimed responsibility for the deaths of thousands in the Sinai Peninsula who refused to follow him as supreme religious leader. Reports put the number of slain between three and five thousand in a single day of violence.

The attacks were carried out on an unarmed crowd who had gathered to celebrate a religious festival. Earlier Musa circulated a warning not to participate in such religious practices.

In a statement, Musa said, “I decide between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and instructions.”

Musa’s private militia known as the Levi are suspected of carrying out the attacks. This group has been responsible for other sectarian clashes in the area previously.

Despite the violence Musa’s popularity has been increasing and he is said to have followers in Europe and the United States.

This story is an adaptation of a story found in *The Book of Exodus*. In *Exodus*, Moses is told by God to go to the top of Mt. Sinai alone. Before Moses descends the mountain, he enters into a contract with God on behalf of all of the Israelites. In the story, Moses agrees to the terms outlined in the Decalogue. At the end of the negotiations God provides Moses with two stone tablets. These tablets are of course said to have the Decalogue written on it (*Exodus* 24-31). *Exodus* 32 provides an account of the events which transpire upon Moses’ return to the Israelites:

¹When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said

to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." ²So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."... ⁴ And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"... And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. ⁸They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'"... ¹⁵Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain... ²⁶ [And] Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, "Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me." And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. ²⁷And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.'" ²⁸And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. ²⁹And Moses said, "Today you have been ordained for the

service of the LORD, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother,
so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day."

As we can see, fundamentally the adaptation and the original contain accounts of the same events. Even the quote attributed to Musa is attributed to Moses in *Exodus* 18: 15-16.

The journalistic account of the story in *Exodus* employs the Brechtian concept of estrangement. In this adaptation, familiar events are portrayed in unexpected ways. The estrangement effects create the situation where one receives the story in a way one would not expect to receive a story from the Bible. To illustrate we can examine the estrangement effects used in the adaptation. Several are readily observable.

First, the adaptation is written in a tone and style which tries to emulate that of contemporary journalism. For example, the sentences are of approximate word length, the words are at approximate reading level, a quotation was used as a reporter would use one, a headline and partial dateline are added, current vocabulary employed, etc. In short, it attempts to mimic, as close as possible, the style and form which is characteristic of contemporary journalism.

Secondly, the adaptation provides a different temporal context for the events. This was accomplished by the use of contemporary form and language and the measures taken to obscure the original context of the story (e.g. the use of the name Musa not Moses). Instead of taking place in Biblical times the adaptation appear to take place in contemporary times.

Thirdly, the name ‘Musa’ which is the Arabic name-form of Moses was used in order to falsely associate Moses with an Arab nationality. This further estranged the reader from a commonsense, uncritical, taken-for-granted understanding of the events surrounding Moses and at the same time invoked commonsense, uncritical, taken-for-granted preconceptions of Arabs.

In sum, these estrangement effects created a situation where the students were provided with familiar data (i.e. a familiar story), in a context they would not have expected that type of data (i.e. that type of story) to be provided in. In other words, these estrangement effects can be seen as altering the context of the story. As we saw in Chapter 3, context has important implications for human cognition and subsequent conceptualizations of the world (i.e., important implications in the creation and maintenance of a *weltanschauung*).

Biblical stories like that in *Exodus* have their own unique ‘background features’ for most students in the United States. For example, the Bible has a lofty tone, it is generally approached deferentially, it is usually seen as containing Truth, it is often and to many beyond reproach, etc. All of these things are commonplace and fundamental to the way most readers would understand, make sense of, know, talk about, interpret, etc. these stories. They constitute a specific contextual mythos which serves as the background by which Biblical meaning is anchored and which shape people’s conclusions about the stories and their practical actions.

It is essentially the goal of Brechtian estrangement effects to alter the grounds by which individual anchor meaning. This, according to Brecht, will alter the way

people think about things, make them more critical and lead them to new types of conclusions and practical actions.

In the adaption from *Exodus* the familiar (i.e. Biblical) context of the story was deprived from the reader. Thus, the ‘most passing matter of fact’ was substituted with a new context. This forced the reader to consider these familiar events from a completely different context than the one they were accustomed to. As a result they did not recognize this as a familiar story. Instead they experienced the story as if it were the first time they had heard it. In short, the reader was estranged from their accustomed way of considering, understanding, making sense of, interpreting, etc. Biblical stories. Using Brecht’s words, we can say the normal “assume[d] the character of the never-before-known” (Journals, p. 328) [1944].

According to Brecht’s theory and what we saw in Chapter 3 Brechtian estrangement effects should have implications for the ways the students reacted to the posted story. Specifically, we should expect that the students would treat the story differently than they would have otherwise. That is, we should expect them to think about it differently than they otherwise would, if they knew it was a Biblical story and subsequently anchored it in that everyday, commonsense, uncritical, taken-for-granted context. Instead of expecting the default deference to the Bible with which most students have been socialized to approach it with, we should expect a detached (i.e. estranged) more critical reading of the story. In fact, the empirical data supports the theory. The responses by the students indicate the emergence of an untypical discourse on the Bible. To illustrate here is a selection of comments which are

representative of the kinds of responses the adaption elicited. Each quotation is provided by a different respondent.

To me, Musa sounds like an overzealous cult leader bent on obtaining as many followers as possible...By authorizing the deaths of thousands of people, Musa should be considered a war criminal and should be brought up on War Crimes...It is a scary thought that an organization like this could have a following in the Western World.

It sounds to me like this man is becoming a rather radical leader...It is interesting that even though his violence in Egypt is extensive...his popularity is rising. Don't people understand that he murdered all of those people...I am interested to know why he is so popular when he is the cause of so much blood shed [sic]...

This surprises me a lot. This man is going to be no good in the future. Even though they have linked all these killings back to him, he is still able to increase the numbers on his team. He could maybe turn into another Hitler (but just believeing [sic] in a certain religion).

As we can see, the normal deference to the Bible and Moses that one would expect is missing and there is no attempt to justify the actions of Moses. There was, for example, no case made that these actions were done on behalf of a real god and

thus warranted, etc. This applies not only to the quotes above but to all the responses from the entire class of twenty-two.

At one point, in the discussion, a particularly astute student recognized the origin of the story and brought it to the attention to the other discussants. This saved me the effort of having to do so. Once the origin was revealed the students became aware that their taken-for-granted, commonsense, everyday, etc. way of understanding, interpreting, etc. the Bible was preventing them from critically engaging with it. The discourse then became one of critical reflection. Here is a sample of responses:

Old news or not.....this is still VERY relevant! [F]or one, it shows nothing ever really changes, and for two...Moses' followers are today some of the most powerful people in the world, and shape policy and events both in America and [a]broad. These are the shapers of our past and our future...

I think we all forget the violent origins of religion, and not much has changed, unfortunately.

[I]f Moses existed today, he would probably be considered a crazy zealot...

How do you answer the question of faith? If one is truly faithful, there is no doubt, no question. Your god is the truth. To admit the whole thing is a falsehood would be devastating...the mental hospitals are full of so-called prophets. Who's to say that people weren't mistaken from the beginning?

Discussion

Brecht developed his estrangement effects in response to the bourgeois domination of worldview. These estrangement effects were designed to make the familiar world seem unfamiliar. An account of a real-life application of Brecht's methods was provided in order to show that estrangement effects can deprive one of familiar contexts and that the commonsense, uncritical, taken-for-granted, everyday context of a story can be substituted by a new, unfamiliar context. This forces a reader to consider familiar events from a completely different context and thus experience them as if it were the first time they heard the story. This produces a situation where normal deference and uncritical acceptance are missing in the responses of the readers and critical, new ways of understanding the familiar fill their place. Moreover, when the true origins of the story were revealed, a critical engagement with the original text emerged.

Although clearly more empirical evidence could be warranted and there are surely unanswered questions regarding how effective these effects would be on other

audiences, we have nevertheless seen that Brechtian estrangement techniques can produce their intended effects and thus could be of service to the propagators of revolutionary aesthetics today. Brecht gives those interested in creating a revolutionary aesthetic a potentially fruitful place to begin. This is a critical point, which I believe in itself legitimizes the undertaking of this dissertation and shows Brecht's relevance as a philosopher.

Conclusion

As was stated in the introduction to this dissertation, I began this research with two main objectives in mind. The first was to expand the purview of Brechtian scholarship by exploring him primarily as a Marxist philosopher who used art to articulate his philosophy and realize his philosophically determined objectives. This task has been accomplished on two counts. His thought, which exists primarily in fragmentary form and is articulated through diverse means, has been reconstructed into a single theoretical framework. We now have a comprehensive (although not absolute) context in which to understand the Brechtian aesthetic. We have also revealed several interesting and important elements of Brecht's Marxist philosophy as summarized above. It is my hope that this work will serve as the foundation for a new, critical and non-formalistic approach to the study of Brecht and his work. Hopefully it testifies to the value of such an approach not only by revealing more

about Brecht but also because it reveals more about the complex relationship between art, politics and philosophy.

The second main objective for this research was to provide an example of how philosophical meaning can be expressed and extracted from literary and dramatic works. This was achieved through the studies of *The Good Woman*, *Galileo*, and *Coriolanus* presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively. In recent years it seems that the lines between academic disciplines have begun eroding. It is my belief this has happened because scholars are increasingly seeing the value of interdisciplinary research. This allows for new and different types of questions to be raised.

Interdisciplinary research provides for richness in theory and methods and lends itself to insights which cannot be gained by remaining in the fetters of narrowly focused disciplines. It is my belief that the present study lends support to this idea and has demonstrated the value of interdisciplinary research in the fields of political and social philosophy.

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