



Philosophizing Brecht

Critical Readings on Art, Consciousness,
Social Theory and Performance

Edited by Norman Roessler
and Anthony Squiers

BRILL | RODOPI

Consciousness
Literature & Arts 55

Consciousness, Literature and the Arts

General Editor

Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe

Editorial Board

Anna Bonshek

Per Brask

John Danvers

Amy Ione

Michael Mangan

Jade Rosina McCutcheon

Gregory Tague

Arthur Versluis

Christopher Webster

Ralph Yarrow

VOLUME 55

Philosophizing Brecht

*Critical Readings on Art, Consciousness,
Social Theory and Performance*

Edited by

Norman Roessler

Anthony Squiers



BRILL
RODOPI

CHAPTER 3

Consciousness in Brechtian Acting: Defamiliarizing the Self

Peter Zazzali

Abstract

In describing Charles Laughton's agreement to play the title role in *Galileo*, Brecht observed that the actor wanted to make a "contribution" to society through the "dissemination [of] ideas...about how people really lived together." Performed in Los Angeles in 1947 during the aftermath of the Second World War and on the cusp of Senator Joseph McCarthy's so-called "Red Scare," Laughton's *Galileo* was apt for the politics of its time, insofar as the play jointly addressed institutional dogmatism, government corruption, and the fearful ignorance of the body politic. Laughton's performance exemplified Brecht's *gestic* approach to acting by defamiliarizing himself from the role in favor of underscoring the drama's sociopolitical messages. As such, his approach was in stark contrast to the widely practiced Stanislavskian method in which actors were expected to "find themselves" in a role towards creating a character that "truthfully" represented human behavior. What was Laughton's self-awareness or consciousness of his performance? Whereas the Stanislavskian actor uses himself to subconsciously gel with a character, Brecht's theory is the opposite: "the actor should refrain from living himself into the part..." These two varying approaches raise questions about the acknowledgement and function of the "self" in an actor's work, thereby offering an intriguing point of analysis for Brechtian performance. This article will examine the Brechtian actor's aesthetic through the lens of consciousness. Thus, it will account for the actor's praxis relative to the sociopolitical implications of Brecht's epic theatre.

In describing Charles Laughton's agreement to play the title role in *Galileo*, Brecht observed that the actor wanted to make a "contribution" to society through the "dissemination [of] ideas...about how people really lived together."¹ Performed in Los Angeles in 1947, during the aftermath of the Second World War and on the cusp of Senator Joseph McCarthy's so-called "Red

Scare," Laughton's *Galileo* was apt for the politics of its time, insofar as the play jointly addressed institutional dogmatism, government corruption, and the fearful ignorance of the body politic. Laughton's performance exemplified Brecht's *gestic* approach to acting by defamiliarizing himself from the role in favor of underscoring the drama's sociopolitical messages. As such, his approach was in stark contrast to the widely practiced Stanislavskian techniques in which actors were expected to "find themselves" in a role towards creating a character that "truthfully" represented human behavior.

What was Laughton's self-awareness—or consciousness—of his performance? Whereas the Stanislavskian actor uses himself to subconsciously gel with a character, Brecht's theory is the opposite: "the actor should refrain from living himself into the part..."² These contrasting approaches raise questions about the acknowledgement and function of the "self" in an actor's work, thereby offering an intriguing point of analysis for Brechtian performance.

This essay will examine the Brechtian actor through the lens of consciousness by accounting for the actor's praxis in the context of the epic theatre. My methodology will infuse Brecht's theatrical theory, especially as it pertains to acting, with studies in consciousness, neuroscience, and cognitive psychology. As such, I attempt to bridge the institutional schism between science and the humanities that according to Bruce McConachie has resulted in "two cultures," within which "many humanists and scientists have tended to regard their academic 'Other' with a mixture of bewilderment, skepticism, and scorn."³ In keeping with McConachie's cross-disciplinary logic, I will deploy the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's theories of "the self" to elucidate Brechtian acting. Thus, Damasio's theory of the three selves—the proto, core, and autobiographical—frame my analysis.

To further demonstrate how consciousness works in Brechtian acting, I put Viktor Shklovsky's theory of "defamiliaration" in conversation with the *Verfremdungseffekt*. I will likewise compare Brecht to Stanislavski's acting system while calling upon Damasio to explain the neurobiological differences between their two approaches. Finally, I will apply this paradigm to the work of Augusto Boal, a notable Brechtian actor trainer, whose methods can be seen as an echo of his forebear. Ultimately, the essay's goal is to better understand how consciousness operates in Brechtian acting. Specifically, I will show that like the Boalian actor, the Brechtian actor makes multiple uses of his consciousness

¹ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Methuen, 1964), 164.

² *Ibid.*, 137.

³ Bruce McConachie, "Preface," in *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn*, eds. Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart (New York: Routledge 2006), x; also see Bruce McConachie, *Theatre and Mind* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2013).

exemplifying what Damasio calls an “ensemble of brain devices” that allows us to perceive, understand, and act upon the world around us. This paradigm is applicable to both Brechtian and Stanislavskian actors, insofar as they too use some combination of their three selves. However, I will show that while both depend on their autobiographical selves (albeit in distinct ways) there are important differences in how they engage the core self and proto-self.

One of the foremost experts on Brecht, his former assistant Carl Weber, suggests that the former had little interest in actor training: “Brecht had scant confidence in theatre schools; he firmly believed in learning-by-doing...”⁴ Perhaps that explains in part why most scholarship has focused on Brecht’s theatrical theory, directing, and dramatic oeuvre. Despite his significance to twentieth- and twenty-first-century theatre, and the corresponding amount of published materials to prove as much, his approach to acting has been underrepresented. To be sure, there is a handful of outstanding writings that examine Brechtian acting, namely John Rouse’s “Brecht and the Contradictory Actor,” Margaret Edershaw’s “Actors on Brecht,” and most recently David Barnett’s *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory, and Performance*.⁵ While these works address Brechtian acting, none undertakes the role of consciousness therein, much less examines the actor’s sense of “the self.” This essay endeavors to do both.

Throughout history consciousness has been difficult to define. From Plato’s theorization of the soul and Hippocrates’ depiction of the senses to Cartesian duality and monistic approaches in philosophy and psychology, our understanding of consciousness has remained unresolved since the beginning of civilization. The fact that multiple academic disciplines and professions study it, each with their own range of conflicting theories, demonstrates as much. Consciousness’ multivalence ranges from philosophy, neuroscience, physics, and psychology to more correlative fields such as religious studies, artificial intelligence, and of course, the arts. As William James once said, “its meaning we know as long as no one asks us to define it.”⁶ It is a philosophical and scientific conundrum.

In distancing from strictly philosophical discourses on the subject, the scope of this essay locates consciousness in the context of neuroscience,

4 Carl Weber, “Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds. Peter Thomson and Glenda Sacks (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press 1994), 169.

5 See John Rouse, “Brecht and the Contradictory Actor,” in *Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, ed. Phillip B. Zarilli (New York: Routledge 1995); Margaret Edershaw, “Actors on Brecht,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds. Peter Thomson and Glenda Sacks (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press 1994); and David Barnett, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory, and Performance* (New York: Bloomsbury 2015).

6 Quoted in Arne Dietrich, *Introduction to Consciousness* (New York: Palgrave 2007), 20.

before applying it to Brechtian acting. To frame my analysis, I would like to fundamentally identify consciousness as a “way of being” in which an individual becomes “aware of something within oneself,” especially an awareness of the mind–body continuum of one’s emotional and corporeal experience.⁷ Thus, our definition addresses the nexus between a person’s emotions, thoughts, sensations, physical state, and volition in relation to external or internal stimuli towards contextualizing the actor’s consciousness. I am therefore positing consciousness as subjective, a move that makes sense in that I am relating it to actors, who have agency in making “conscious” decisions in constructing their performances, much in the spirit of Laughton’s Galileo referenced earlier. While any responsible study of consciousness must address and include the reciprocal role of the “subconscious,” or a state of being in which one is unaware of one’s experience, my aim is to understand the actor’s varying levels of awareness during rehearsal and performance alike: or to put it more simply, the extent to which he consciously goes about his work.

I want to focus on the actor’s conscious—and unconscious—experience through the lens of Damasio’s neuroscience and then apply it to Brecht. At the risk of overstatement, Damasio’s early writings position him in the pantheon of philosophy and physiognomy, most especially as it applies to Descartes, Spinoza, and James. His titular choice *Descartes’ Error* suggests as much, as he frames his case against Cartesian dualism by debunking his subject’s contention that the mind and body are separate “machines” devoid of a neurobiological system causing one to experience emotion, feelings, physical sensation, or relatedly, to reason, think, and make judgements, moral or otherwise.⁸ His critique can also be read as a tacit denial of Plato’s bifurcated conception of the body and spirit, as especially conceived in *The Phaedo*, in which Socrates’s soul is explicitly divided from his corporeal demise.⁹ Moreover, Damasio locates the mind and body as an “organismic” integration, thereby hearkening the philosophical framework of Spinoza, whose depiction of emotion and feelings as an “ensemble of affect” is germane to his own thinking some 350 years later.¹⁰ Spinoza proves to be the basis for Damasio’s corrective, which also problematizes the comparatively recent work of James, who despite his seminal findings in

7 Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary and Thesaurus, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consciousness> (accessed 25 February 2017).

8 Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books 1994), 249–250.

9 See Plato, *Selections from The Phaedo*, Internet Classics Archive, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedo.html> (accessed 26 February 2017).

10 Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (London: Heinemann 2003), 8.

physiognomy, neglected to comprehend the complex role that emotions (and feelings) play in determining consciousness by “giving little or no weight to the process of evaluating mentally the situation that causes the emotion.”¹¹ Thus, Damasio presents the experiencing of emotion as a psychophysical dynamic that is as complex and symphonic as it has been historically controversial and confusing, most especially when addressing it in relation to consciousness.

Damasio defines consciousness as “a state of mind in which there is knowledge of one’s own existence and of the existence of surroundings.”¹² This knowledge depends on “content” such as the awareness of others performing everyday actions, all of which are perceived through the senses. As such, consciousness occurs in varying levels of presence and can be understood as a fluid and fluctuating condition contingent on given circumstances. If one were doing something routine, for example, their level of awareness would be significantly less acute than if they were having a triumphant or traumatic experience. Essentially, we engage our consciousness in multiple degrees and contexts during the course of any given day when we are awake.

Consciousness is distinct from wakefulness, however, in that it pertains to being present to oneself and one’s surroundings. While one needs to be awake to be conscious, there are gradations of wakefulness that correspond with one’s presence and sense of self. It is the neurological recognition of the self that is the basis for Damasio’s analysis of consciousness; the two are mutually inclusive, as “the self bespeaks individuality, without which consciousness is inconceivable.”¹³ This of course is crucial to understanding the work of the actor, insofar as his sense of self will fluctuate from moment-to-moment in a given performance, and moreover, vary according to his approach. Thus, the Brechtian and Boalian actor is considerably more self-reflective in his performative experience than the Stanislavskian, who is trained to transform into his character by “subconsciously” becoming the role.

The very concept of self is a complex and dynamic process that comes in many forms.¹⁴ What Damasio terms our “proto-self,” for example, pertains to our primordial feelings (e.g., pleasure or pain) that spontaneously infuse our consciousness into a symphony of emotions occurring throughout our day while sleeping or awake. When we are driven by sexual desire or become

11 Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 130.

12 Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Vintage Books 2010), 165.

13 Antonio Damasio, “Feelings of Emotion and the Self,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* vol. 1001 (October 2003): 254.

14 *Ibid.*, also see, Antonio Damasio, *The Feelings of What Happen: Body and Motion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt 1999), 168–233.

emotionally overwhelmed, we encounter our proto-self; viscera govern this state of being. This level of consciousness is distinct yet related to the “core self,” which Damasio describes as a modification, indeed a “pulse” of the proto-self that allows individuals to sense their thoughts relative to their surroundings. As such, the core self is a slightly more evolved state of being than its primordially-oriented counterpart. Both the core and proto-self are experienced in the present—“the here and now”—without significant awareness of the past or future. They are not confined to human experience, but exist in animals, reptiles, and birds too. Whereas the proto-self is entirely instinctual, the core self allows us to process and perceive objects (e.g., external as well as internal) and order them into some sense of meaning and comprehension. When a being uses its sense of sight, for example, it engages its cognitive ability to see an object and correspondingly “formulate a perspective,” (no matter how infantile or sophisticated), towards underscoring the being’s individuality and consciousness.¹⁵ Our core self operates when we “mindlessly” complete everyday activities such as getting up in the morning to shower, shave, and indulge in morning coffee; it is the recognition of “the self” at its most fundamental level in the context of the habitual. Like the proto-self, it is a basic level of consciousness and can operate outside the realm of language, which explains why Damasio claims that nonhuman species also function at this level of awareness.

Damasio’s third level of consciousness, and the one most distinctive to being human and applicable to the work of actors, is what he calls the “autobiographical self.” The “autobiographical self [is] a set of memories of the individual’s unique past,” a storehouse of experiences defining one’s “biography”; as such it is the grist that shapes the actor’s process.¹⁶ Whether a Stanislavski-trained actor using his personal experience to build a character or a Brechtian performer deploying critical thinking to support the political ethos of a production, some form of the actor’s autobiographical self is at play. Unlike the core and proto-selves, which operate in the present, the autobiographical self combines an “individual’s unique past” towards achieving “expected experiences,” or to put it in the language of actors, the use of one’s personal background to create a character in service of a performance.¹⁷ It operates by sending signals through our neural pathways that allow us to behold a phenomenon, to listen intently to important information, or experience physical affection among thousands of other human actions and interactions. As the core self remains intact during

15 Antonio Damasio, “Investigating the Biology of Consciousness,” *Physical Transactions of the Royal Society of Biology* vol. 353 (1998): 1880.

16 *Ibid.*, also see Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 180–183.

17 Damasio, “Investigating the Biology of Consciousness,” 1180.

these moments and the proto-self produces primordial feelings, the autobiographical, or “extended” self, functions with one becoming acutely conscious of one’s situation; it is a heightened state of awareness—a presence—that results in lasting memories. This “extended consciousness” constitutes the ontological state for most live performance and applies therein to the work of actors, insofar as the actor is “consciously” crafting his performance from his repository of learned experience: memory. This is not to suggest that the actor is only practicing the so-called “Method approach” of recalling a personal event to substitute for the character’s emotional experience. While what Stanislavski termed “emotional recall” does indeed exemplify Damasio’s autobiographical self, the latter’s depiction of “extended memory” is nuanced to the point of being applied to numerous approaches and contexts relative to acting. Indeed, extended consciousness could as readily pertain to the Brechtian’s use of *gestus* or the Boalian’s embodiment of the “Joker.” It is not a zero-sum game, but rather a matter of degree of use relative to a specific approach to acting, within which Damasio’s three selves and their corresponding levels of consciousness form an “ensemble [that] produces the result we seek to explain.”¹⁸

The question then remains what combination of these levels of consciousness do actors employ in their work. Does it differ from rehearsals to performances and if so, how? Moreover, do these levels of consciousness vary according to a given acting style? The latter is particularly germane to this essay since Brechtian performance deploys a decidedly different self-awareness than other acting styles, namely those associated with Stanislavski. Brecht distinguished his approach from Stanislavski’s, claiming the Russian master’s method “[throws] the actor back on his ‘natural sensibilities’” to create a life-like performance measured by the “truthful” rendering of the human emotion. Stanislavski trained his actors to achieve a subconscious way of playing in which their imagination is the conduit for a “sense of belief” in their character and its given circumstances.¹⁹ His process, however, would be consciously explored through psychophysical actions in pursuit of clearly chosen character objectives. These choices function as stimuli that arouse the actor’s creative state “towards putting [the] subconscious to work” in achieving “artistic truth.”²⁰ Thus, the Stanislavskian actor’s conscious mind gives way to his subconscious one.

18 Ibid., 24.

19 Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 95.

20 Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Handbook*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books 1963), 134–135.

Damasio adds to the chorus of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century psychologists who credited Freud’s study of the unconscious. Describing this state as a process operating below the “sea level of consciousness,” Damasio aptly articulates how artists have used their subterranean mind to stir their creative muse:

Freud certainly seized on a wellspring of evidence for the unconscious when he concentrated on dreams... This same wellspring has been tapped by artists, composers, writers, and all manners of creators attempting to free themselves from the trammels of consciousness.²¹

The freedom Damasio cites applies to an artist’s psychophysical constitution at the point and time of engaging a creative act. Whether it occurs in the exploration and/or refinement of said artwork—the sculptor chiseling away at a block of cement; the musician becoming one with her etudes; the actor exploring character choices in rehearsal—or whether it unfolds during performance, the artist’s creative domain is his subconscious. The surrealism of Dali, atonalism of Schoenberg, and transcendentalism of Emerson exemplify how the subconscious serves as a muse for artists. Indeed, this phenomenon suggests why many creative discoveries actually come to people in their dreams or shortly after they have awakened. A corollary to this is when artists reach a point in the creative process when they simply trust their technique and surrender to the subconscious for inspiration. In a certain sense, they proverbially throw away their technique, or rather, they strategically choose not to think about it in favor of allowing their creative forces to work. In the case of Stanislavski, this lives in the actor’s ability to trust that his consciously applied choices (e.g., scoring a role; learning blocking and lines; etc.) will unlock his imagination towards experiencing emotional truth in his role, thereby providing the audience with a credible replication of human behavior derived from fictional circumstances.

Contrarily, Brecht was not interested in exact representations of life onstage: *verisimilitude*. As David Barnett asserts, he sought an “abstracted approach” in which the actor “emphasizes artificiality” to distance himself from the “figure” he plays, thereby causing the spectator to investigate the play’s sociopolitical considerations. In what Barnett terms “cognitive realism,” the actor “cleaves” himself from the part to “signal” a theatricalized—unnatural—reality negating

21 Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 189.

the audience's proclivity for empathy.²² Brecht therefore privileged a work's narrative, and by extension, its implications for society and the human condition. Though his actors would bear some semblance of reality in rendering a "character," they did not become immersed in a role to the point of transformation and catharsis. Whereas Stanislavski's system was designed to "truthfully" represent three-dimensional figures from realistic and naturalist dramas, Brecht deconstructs mimesis and was motivated by sociopolitical messaging. Thus, he positions his epic aesthetic in opposition to a "dramatic one," with the former contradicting the linear, plot-driven, empathic approaches derived from an Aristotelian ethos. This point is underscored by Boal, a self-described Brechtian, who famously criticized Aristotle's legacy. Echoing Brecht, he steadfastly claimed that theatre should "educate, inform, organize, influence, [and] incite to action [and not] simply be an object of pleasure," or be reduced to the "culinary" as Brecht might say.²³ Whereas Stanislavski and his acolytes followed nineteenth-century developments in behavioral and natural science towards "implicating the spectator in a stage situation [the main ingredient for catharsis]," Brecht sought a stylized affect in which the audience's ability to empathize with a character was substantially subdued, if not outright negated, thereby enabling them to critically consider relevant sociopolitical themes.²⁴ Thus, Brecht's well-documented *Verfremdungseffekt* caused a shift in the consciousness of the spectator.

Brecht drew much of his philosophy on acting from Eastern performance traditions, most especially from the famed Chinese actor, Mei Lan-fang:

When Lan-fang was playing a death scene a spectator sitting next to me exclaimed with astonishment at one of his gestures. One or two people sitting in front of us turned round indignantly and ssshhh'd. They behaved as if they were present at the real death of a real girl... In their case the A-effect had misfired.²⁵

The Chinese theatrical tradition emphasizes storytelling through a self-referential style that bears commonality with a "circus" or "fairground"

22 David Barnett, 106–111. For a useful analysis of Brechtian acting, see Barnett's "Brecht and the Actor," in *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory, and Performance* (New York: Bloomsbury 2015).

23 Augusto Boal, "Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy," in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: TCG 1985), ix–50.

24 Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 37.

25 Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 95.

performance.²⁶ Whereas the Stanislavskian actor uses his conscious mind to deploy his subconscious towards absorbing the character, his Chinese counterpart contrives a presentational style consisting of physical and vocal gestures that transcend the psychological and empathic. Borrowing from an Eastern ethos, Brecht asks his actors to comment on their performance as if they are "acting in quotation marks" instead of attempting "to become another person." This practice is perhaps best demonstrated by Brechtian *gestus*, otherwise understood as the audience's didactic decoding of the semiotics pertaining to a deliberately crafted gesture that underscores the narrative's sociopolitical themes. The quintessential example of *gestus* is Helene Weigel's famous "silent scream" as Mother Courage. Upon learning that she has lost yet a third child during the Thirty Years War, Weigel's Courage recoiled into a ball while seated, before unwrapping her torso, extending her arms upward, and opening her face as she undulates forward. Yet no sound accompanied these movements. Hers was a gest that resonated in accordance with the titular character's tragic discovery. By not vocalizing the experience, Weigel caused the spectator to witness the shell, "the quotation," of a mother losing her child in the cruel path of war, a war that Courage has taken full advantage of financially by shilling her wares to both factions. In the key of *gestus*, Weigel very consciously deployed what Damasio calls the core self, insofar as she deliberately prompted the audience to engage the economic implications of warfare, a level of didacticism that would have become muddled had the audience empathized with Weigel's character.

Damasio describes our three selves as a "moveable feast" of mindsets that are as fluid as they are collaborative.²⁷ While each relies on different parts of the brain (e.g., brain stem engineers the proto-self), they collectively participate in the process of self-formation. Following Damasio, the vernacular of Western acting suggests a blending of the primordial and autobiographical selves towards achieving transformation. With the former representing our primordial feelings and the latter our extended memory, it stands to reason that they apply to a Stanislavskian approach. Commonly used terms and phrases such as "becoming the role," "surrendering to the character," "emotional and sensory recall," and "using the 'self' to find a part," all indicate ways of being that transcend the simple completion of pedestrian tasks such as those brought to bear on the core self. Thus, the actor's subconscious becomes the path to sublimity for Western actors. But is this really the case? And where does it leave us in considering the reciprocal roles of self and consciousness in the work of Brechtian

26 *Ibid.*, 2.

27 Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 182.

actors, especially as it applies to sociopolitical themes? The remainder of this essay will endeavor to unpack, explore, and answer this very question.

1 The Role of Consciousness in Defamiliarizing the Familiar

Damasio depicts the three gradations of consciousness (proto, core, autobiographical) as fluid and interrelated. While the core consciousness is essential to acknowledging “the self” relative to one’s surrounding circumstances and the proto level of consciousness pertains to the rawness of the primordial, our extended consciousness (autobiographical) consists of the warehouse of our experience and is therefore largely responsible for how we create meaning: “Extended consciousness is the capacity to be aware of a large compass of entities and events, i.e., the ability to generate a sense of individual perspective, ownership, and agency, over a larger compass of knowledge than that surveyed in the core consciousness.”²⁸ Actors render meaning onto their roles according to the context of the work. Whereas a Stanislavskian actor would presumably use his warehouse of memory to create a character that represents human behavior to elicit the audience’s empathy, his Brechtian counterpart would use the same repository of experience to a decidedly different affect. Or put another way, the Stanislavskian actor relies on a commensurate balance of his proto and autobiographical selves to cause the spectator to enter a state of emotional identity with the character, whereas Brecht’s actors primarily operate from the latter in seeking to “defamiliarize” the familiar. As Damasio argues, the autobiographical self “calls for very elaborate coordinating mechanisms, something that the core self can, by and large, dispense with.”²⁹ Likewise, the Brechtian crafts and delivers his performance with a state of awareness that is decidedly reliant on his conscious mind; Weigel’s very choreographed and didactically purposed silent scream is such an example—as would any other form of *gestus*. The Boalian would assume a similar state of consciousness in playing the “Joker” or construing a work of Forum Theatre, insofar as they are techniques requiring a tactical deployment of extended experience largely devoid of intuition and viscera, the traits most closely associated with the proto-self. On the other hand, the Stanislavski actor is comparatively driven by a combination of his primal (proto-)self, which he uses in conjunction with his extended memory; the degree to which he does so and to what affect differ from the Brechtian, and by extension, Boalian. As such, he has a rich emotional

28. Antonio Damasio, *The Feelings of What Happen*, 198.

29. Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 212.

experience commencing from the neurological “structures of the insula,” the area of the central nervous system in the brainstem responsible for the cognition and formation of emotion, the process for which is motivated by the subconscious.³⁰

The operative word in the title of this chapter, defamiliarization and its application to the Brechtian actor’s consciousness can be traced to Viktor Shklovsky’s “Art as Technique” (1917). In helping to shape Russian formalism, Shklovsky coined “defamiliarization” towards explaining the role consciousness has in the presentation and reception of art. Arguing that “the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known,” to make objects “unfamiliar,” he describes, “[the] habitual and unconscious” as performative and spectatorial states that lull the artistic beholder into listlessness.³¹ A blithe appeal to an audience’s empathy is consistent with this theory in that a reiteration of the familiar will cause the spectator to surrender her agency by emotionally responding to a performance at the expense of engaging it with imagination and intellectual critique. Following Shklovsky, the artist must represent the natural world by perceiving it anew by honoring the grotesque and transcending the pedestrian: “After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it... but we do not see it—hence we cannot say anything significant about it.”³² Using Tolstoy as a model, Shklovsky contends that the artist makes the familiar appear strange towards reimagining and rethinking a given subject or object. In keeping with Tolstoy as an example, he cites *Kholstomer*, a short story with a horse as its central character. The personification of the beastly protagonist facilitates a debate about property ownership in Czarist Russia, a particularly relevant subject for the time (1886), and therein exemplifies Shklovsky’s theory. By defamiliarizing the reader’s commonplace—or habitual—understanding of both horses and bourgeois society, Tolstoy presents his message: a sociopolitical critique of land (and slave) ownership in late-nineteenth-century Russia. Brecht likewise deploys defamiliarization in the key of contradiction in many of his dramas. To name just a pair of examples, the anatomical strangeness of the binary citizenship of “Yahoo” in *Roundheads and Peakheads*, as well as the contradictoriness of the dapper yet demonic Macheath in *The Threepenny Opera*, each demonstrate a dialecticism in which the familiar is made unfamiliar. With respect to the latter, for instance, a nameless Street Singer introduces the lovable villain of SoHo

30. Damasio, “Feelings of Emotion and Self,” 260.

31. Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” https://paradise.caltech.edu/ist4/lectures/Viktor_Sklovski_Art_as_Technique.pdf (accessed 20 November 2016): 2.

32. Ibid.

to Weill's lively jazz and the comforting rhythms of an organ grinder, while serenading his audience with lyrics portraying Macheath as a grisly killer, rapist, and thief. The song's musicality is juxtaposed against its lyrics, a *gestus* that lays bare the fact that Macheath—like many unscrupulous individuals in positions of sociopolitical power—is a walking contradiction of charm and dastardliness, elegance and corruption. The “familiar” characteristics associated with someone of status and grace become problematized through the V-Effect by “defamiliarizing” the subject and exposing him for what he is: a cruelhearted killer.

The Brechtian actor exemplifies this process by contradicting the familiar. A decidedly conscious practice, he relies on his warehouse of memory—his autobiographical self—in conjunction with his core self to craft a performance that prompts the spectator's critical consideration of sociopolitical matters. With respect to the former, the actor's life experience consists of conscious and subconsciously infused memory that predisposes him to behavioral patterns and selections of human action. When one sees a hot stove, for instance, assuming their autobiographical self is not impaired and they are not a child whose memory is ignorant to the potential danger at hand, the image “hot stove” and knowledge that to touch it would result in burning oneself prevents one from doing so.³³ Borrowing from the basis of semiotics, the image is a sign bearing meaning and known information. Such “lifelong learning” develops as part of a coordinated neurological process that is psychophysical—experience developed through the mind–body continuum—and has a determinative effect on how we jointly perceive and “act” in the world. The Stanislavski actor, therefore, uses his autobiographical self as a resource for personalizing the role in hope of arousing the audience's empathy, a goal achieved through familiarity and an associative identification with the character's given circumstances. Perhaps the most applicable example of this would be Stanislavski's emotional recall technique, an extrapolation of late-nineteenth-century psychology by which an actor focuses on an object associated with a past event towards re-experiencing the emotions of the event. A wide range of these so-called “Method” actors have used emotional recall throughout their careers, most notably those trained under Lee Strasberg in the U.S. The depth and size of an actor's emotional release would determine the extent to which his proto-self is engaged, insofar as he experiences a raw and primordial attachment to his emotions thereby causing him to play “subconsciously” and elicit a cathartic affect. Brecht's actor uses his autobiographical self quite differently while disengaging the proto-self in favor of the core self. Instead of eliding his life experience

33 Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind*, 214.

to form a personal and emotional attachment to the character, he relies on his autobiographical self to harness information steeped in signage that he can contradict. Again, Weigel's scream suggests as much. Instead of trying to experience Courage's emotional loss, something that the autobiographical self would logically prompt her and her audience to do, she pushes against this impulse to defamiliarize the familiar. Once this *gestus* is practiced to the point of being woven into her performance, the modifying function of the core self then allows Weigel “to sense that the contents of [her] thoughts are [her] own,” thereby regulating her performance in the key of defamiliarization.³⁴

This approach is also exemplified in a handful of notable performances of the signature character in Brecht's allegorical satire on Nazism and the blithe pursuit of power, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. Written during the apotheosis of Hitler's rule (1941), the play centers on the corrupt rise of a Chicago gangster who will stop at nothing to satisfy his desire for power and greed. Making his fortune in the cauliflower trade, the title character wields terror and revenge against his sworn and perceived enemies in a humorous parable that is applicable to many sociohistorical contexts. Henry Goodman's portrayal of the role, in the National Theatre's 2013 production, balanced “Monty Python” with “Richard III” by striking the contradictory attitudes of a “wimpy...bandy-legged, sniveling” gangster whose despotism reigned supreme. Goodman “channeled Charlie Chaplain” in an appropriately exaggerated performance that juxtaposed the comical and the sinister.³⁵ As such, he could be compared to Antony Sher's Ui some twenty years earlier, in which a “Chaplinesque” approach facilitated the antonymous traits of an awkward and shy street thug.³⁶ In a 2010 production of the play done in the U.S., German director Heinz Uwe Haus cast Ui as a very short woman while having her render the role as a man. A clear example of Brechtian *gestus*, or the “gist” and correspondent “attitude” towards breaking the spectator's framework for the familiar, Haus used cross gender casting to distance the audience from the narrative.³⁷ Staged at the University of Delaware's Resident Ensemble Players, the leading actress, Carine Montbertrand, executed Haus's vision by craftily seducing the audience in what one critic termed “a creepy review” while still creating space for them to “resist” being taken in by Ui's Machiavellian machinations.³⁸ Haus cast Montbertrand

34 Damasio, “Investigating the Biology of Consciousness,” 1880.

35 Lyn Gardner, “*The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*—Review,” *The Guardian*, 26 September 2013.

36 Margaret Eddershaw, “Actors on Brecht,” In *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, eds. Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 269.

37 Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 42.

38 Norman Roessler, “Brecht's *Arturo Ui* in Delaware (1st review): Brecht Dissects Hitler (with a little help from Looney Tunes),” *Broad Street Review*, 8 May 2010.

to accentuate Ui's contradictoriness as an awkward charmer and a conniving despot. "Not trying to fool anyone that [she] was a man," Montbertrand adjusted her voice to speak in a lower range "to suggest a man" while not calling attention to it "being obviously false."³⁹ She also used costume pieces to assume the role in different stages of representation, namely Ui the thug, Ui the dictator, and a female announcer at the play's outset. In changing personas, Montbertrand created a gest by which the audience plainly saw she was an actress deliberately moving in and out of these different roles (and genders), thereby fulfilling Haus's strategy for distancing and prompting critical analysis.⁴⁰

From Goodman to Montbertrand, these approaches demonstrate the defamiliarizing of the familiar as discussed earlier. In what is famously known as *Verfremdungseffekt* (Alienation Effect), this technique is the cornerstone of Brecht's epic theatre, an aesthetic jointly adherent to entertainment and instruction. With respect to the former, it is important to remember that while Brecht maintained a sociopolitical ethos in his work, he strongly believed that theatre first and foremost had to amuse the audience:

Generally there is felt to be a very sharp distinction between learning and amusing oneself. The first may be useful, but only the second is pleasant. So we have to defend the epic theatre against the suspicion that it is a highly disagreeable, humorless, indeed strenuous affair.⁴¹

Indeed, Brecht's admiration for Shaw's balancing of didacticism and "fun" is foundational to epic theatre.⁴² The timely use of music, placards posting scene titles, and a gestic acting style all constitute Brecht's ability to address sociopolitical subjects through humor and cheerfulness. Such an approach is contingent on clear storytelling and a deft deployment of gestic devices that jointly distance and defamiliarize the audience from the narrative's otherwise dire contents. We can see this in his plays, nearly all of which wield amusement in the context of seemingly serious circumstances. From Courage's loss of her children and Ui echoing Hitler to Macheath's murderous lechery and Gayly Gay's automaton-like conscription, matters of sociopolitical significance are couched in narratives rife with slapstick, farce, one-liners, song, and musical interludes that appeal to the spectator's sense of fun while providing instruction.

39 Quoted from Peter Zazzali, "Interview with Carine Montbertrand," *Communications from the International Brecht Society* 39 (Spring 2010): 123.

40 "Interview with Andrea Barrier," *Communications from the International Brecht Society* 39 (Spring 2010): 132.

41 Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 72.

42 *Ibid.*, 12.

In establishing empathic distance between the audience and the characters, an actor must craft a performance towards defamiliarizing the former with the latter's given circumstances. For example, Brecht cites Peter Lorre's Gayly Gay in *Man Equals Man* as appropriately "acting nothing but episodes" that "establish new rules for the art of acting" by "playing against the flow."⁴³ Instead of disappearing into a three-dimensional character filled with emotional truth relative to Gay's harrowing circumstances, Lorre "worked on the spectator in an [un]usual way" by breaking up the syntactic delivery of his lines in abrupt, meandering, and disjointed undulations that withdrew the spectator from empathically identifying with Gay "and left to make her own discoveries."⁴⁴ This was especially the case during Gay's execution scene when Lorre's delivery contradicted the severity of the character's circumstances through modulating his pitch and tempo in making his lines nonsensical, thereby underscoring the political gest being communicated: Gay is a victim of social engineering whose misguided wartime courage results in his unjust execution.

We can assume that Lorre's consciousness during this sequence pertains to Damasio's core self in that he very deliberately utilized a deconstructed speaking style that commented on the character's situation as opposed to filling it with emotional truth and conviction. Core consciousness connotes the very quotidian process of the self in action and completing tasks. It is not an ethereal state, but rather, a concrete way of being in which humans—and animals—focus upon a given object relative to said task. Thus, an actor executing a stylized gesture like Lorre's speaking or Montbertrand's signature walk for Ui exemplifies the usage of the core self, the most fundamental state of consciousness, at moments such as these in performance. When asked what was going through her mind when she would traverse the stage, Montbertrand claimed, "I am always aware of what I am doing with my body and voice and how I want to use them to effect the audience."⁴⁵ To return once more to the Stanislavski/Brecht binary, her description relied more on the core consciousness's application of a technique as opposed to the Stanislavskian actor's reliance on his emotional reservoir amassed throughout his life: the autobiographical self.

The core self is also the primary source for how the Brechtian actor delivers a story. Perhaps this point is best explained in Brecht's essay, "The Street Scene," where in the context of a "demonstrator" recounting a traffic accident he argues, "the object of the performance is to make it easier to give an opinion on the incident"—the spectator's opinion, not the actor's. This is the very

43 *Ibid.*, 54–55.

44 *Ibid.*, 54.

45 Carine Montbertrand, interview with author, 15 November 2016.

point of how the thorny consideration of the actor's emotional life factors into Brecht's template for performance. The actor's job is to simply and clearly communicate the story, a task oftentimes hindered by becoming overcome with emotion. Claiming that the demonstrator "need not be an artist," he must avoid "transforming" into a character who has a point of view on the accident he reports.⁴⁶ He therefore assumes an objective role in distancing himself, and by extension, the audience from becoming empathically engaged in the incident. This distancing—or estrangement allows the actor and spectator alike the mental capacity to then "criticize constructively from a social point of view."⁴⁷

The Brechtian actor's primary responsibility is to communicate the sociopolitical message of the narrative, an outcome achieved by "shifting focus away from the character" in favor of prioritizing the story. As John Rouse argues in his essay, "Brecht and the Contradictory Actor," "Brecht reveals himself as a director who gives the text absolute priority" by treating it "as an historical document" to be "painstakingly researched" in transmitting a narrative that is subjected to the audience's sociopolitical critique.⁴⁸ For such a critique to ensue, the actor summons a keen text-analysis skill towards creating a performance replete with stylized gestures and distancing techniques that disassociate himself and the audience from becoming immersed in any single character's experience. The actor's role is to function as a signpost for communicating social ideas in conjunction with storytelling, a practice that emphasizes the sociopolitical responsibility of his work and does not delve into the psychological complexities and motivations of the character.

When transmitting a story such as described in "The Street Scene," the actor orchestrates his actions and feelings in a clear and calculated manner. Traditional neuroscience suggests that one's feelings are internally induced whereas emotions are stimulated physically, and as such, the former is a more conscious state than the latter. This has telling consequences for actors in that when they become immersed in emotion they are doing so unconsciously and vice versa when it comes to experiencing feelings. Oftentimes, Brecht's Alienation Effect is misunderstood as an attempt to divorce the actor—and audience—from feeling anything, which is preposterous in that humans are always feeling something. Distinguishing between feelings and emotions can therefore help us better understand the way actors use their reservoir of emotions as formulated by and contained within their extended memory for the

46 Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 124.

47 *Ibid.*, 125.

48 John Rouse, "Brecht and the Contradictory Actor," In *Method Acting (Re)Considered*, ed. Phillip Zarrilli (New York: Routledge 2002), 250–251.

purpose of creating a role. Damasio differentiates feelings from emotion in claiming that the former "should be reserved for the private, mental experience...while the term emotion should be used to designate the collection of responses, many of which are publicly observable... No one can observe your feelings."⁴⁹ The emotional responses he references are of course stimuli, the manifestation of which "do not require consciousness."⁵⁰ Moreover, they are noticed by others, a distinguishing characteristic from how Damasio explains our feelings: "In practical terms...you cannot observe a feeling in someone else although you can observe a feeling in yourself when, as a conscious being, you perceive your own emotional states."⁵¹

Thus, the manifestation of feelings is a conscious and decidedly private experience occurring at a subdued scale in comparison to how we encounter and express our emotions. When Weigel is crafting her "silent scream" she is most certainly experiencing her feelings, but given the empathic distancing of the *gestus*, her emotional activity is kept in check. Contrarily, the Stanislavskian actor portraying a cathartic moment would be inclined to harness and deliver his wealth of emotional expressivity—all of which would be drawn from his autobiographical reservoir—in prompting the audience into a similar emotional encounter. Nonetheless, this neurobiological framework is not a binary, as both our feelings and emotions coexist along a continuum in which consciousness and unconsciousness pivot. For the purpose of this essay, again, it is a matter of degree in differentiating how consciousness and emotion occur in these two approaches to acting.

An actor who curtails his emotional expressivity in favor of a distanced, perhaps even detached transmission of his role/character towards telling a story requires a skillset that is distinct from the actor who attempts significant levels of emotional pitch. To borrow yet again from Damasio, "we can control, in part, the expression of some emotions—suppress our anger, mask our sadness—but most of us are not very good at it and that is one reason why we pay a lot to see good actors who are skilled at controlling the expression of their emotions."⁵² Whether an image, a thought, a memory, or some other inductor, emotions are prompted by both literal and nonliteral objects, a biological function that undergirds the actor's process. As indicated earlier, we can plainly see this in Stanislavski's emotional recall, a technique that had significant implications for modern acting in that an actor could re-experience an emotion

49 Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 42–43.

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*, 48.

and channel it into his performance by homing in on the requisite trigger: an object/image closely connected with a select memory. This orchestration of emotion is likewise relevant for Brechtian actors in that they have command of their psychophysical instruments to the point of controlling their emotions in facilitating Brecht's aesthetic: telling a story in disjointed episodes that cause the spectator to critically engage sociopolitical matters. To return again to Weigel's iconic gest, her approach to the silent scream disallows both the actress and audience to experience what would otherwise be a cathartic event. Despite the moment's tragic implications, Courage has gained financially from the war, thereby contributing to the narrative's contradictory essence. Weigel thus rendered a dialectical attitude in responding to the untimely death of her third child, thereby making the mother's loss of a child appear "unfamiliar." In doing so, she had to emotionally distance herself from Courage's given circumstances and consciously utilize her autobiographical and core selves to defamiliarize the familiar. Consequently, the spectator was able to critically consider the narrative's sociopolitical messaging.

2 Consciousness and the Boalian Actor-Spectator Relationship

Brecht's legacy can be traced to numerous theatre practitioners, the most significant of which is arguably Augusto Boal (1931–2009). A political activist who spent fourteen years in exile from his native Brazil, Boal incorporated Brecht's teachings into a "Poetics of the Oppressed," a theatrical movement dedicated to social justice. Otherwise known as "Theater of the Oppressed," Boal's system is as daring as it is practical in its attempt to "transform society" through techniques designed to empower spectators to be proactive in contributing to the theatrical experience.⁵³

Following Brecht, Boal juxtaposes his system against Aristotle's *Poetics*, which he labels "coercive" in its reification of a hegemonic order that causes spectators and performers to shed any sense of political justice in favor of becoming immersed in "fear" and "pity," the Aristotelian recipe for an emotional purgation: catharsis.⁵⁴ The protagonist elicits an empathic response from the audience and correspondingly compromises their ability to critically engage and actively contribute to the performance. Boal's ideal spectator is not a passive bystander, but an invested participant in shaping the theatrical event.

53 Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Urizen 1979), x.

54 *Ibid.*, xi.

This is oppositional to Aristotle and the ways in which his *Poetics* has been interpreted for centuries as a guide for luring the spectator into an emotionally immersive experience by which the *status quo* surreptitiously prevails. The spectator is compelled as if by nature to share in the protagonist's experience and worldview, with the latter occurring as a fixed entity immune to social change. As such, this phenomenon can be applied to a number of theoretical paradigms, including Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Bourdieu's symbolic violence, both of which examine how culture can be used interchangeably for democratic and totalitarian purposes.⁵⁵ From an Aristotelian perspective the protagonist becomes a source of judgement, and it is the actor's portrayal that mesmerizes the audience into believing the theatrical truth of the character's downfall towards a shared catharsis. Boal critiques this process for its "purgation of all antisocial elements," thereby leaving the spectator without agency or ownership in the production and reception of the theatrical event. An act of "intimidation," Boal aptly asserts that the Aristotelian model has been the basis of dramatic structure for centuries and continues to frame the "consciousness" by which actors and audiences perceive scripted drama in media ranging from theatre and film to television and the internet.⁵⁶ In brief, he sees it as an antiquated system privileging empathy over social awareness and critical discourse in formulating what Brecht pejoratively tagged as "culinary."⁵⁷

Boal's Forum Theatre perhaps best signifies his deployment of performance as a vehicle for social change. Steeped in a Marxist ethos, Boal describes Forum Theatre "as a sort of fight or game" replete with rules and guidelines involving actors and spectators alike who "facilitate serious and fruitful discussion."⁵⁸ He founded the technique in 1973 while working in Peru for a government official with "leftist ideas."⁵⁹ In exile from Brazil, at the time, Boal sought to apply theatre to prompt awareness of the injustice being endured by an impoverished community on the outskirts of Lima.

55 See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. and trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia Univ. Press 1994); and Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Derek Boothman (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press 1995).

56 *Ibid.*, 46.

57 Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 39.

58 Augusto Boal, "Forum Theatre," In *Acting (Re)Considered* 2nd edition, ed. Phillip Zarrilli, (New York: Routledge 2005), 268.

59 For an informative history of Boal's Forum Theatre, see Michael Taussig and Richard Schechner, "Boal in Brazil, France, and the USA: An Interview with Augusto Boal," *Tulane Drama Review* 34.3 (Autumn 1990): 50–65.

The real beginning was when I was doing what I called simultaneous playwriting using people's real experiences. In one of these a woman told us what the protagonist should do. We tried her suggestions over and over again but she was never satisfied with our interpretation. So I said, 'Come onto the stage to show us what to do because we cannot interpret your thoughts.'⁶⁰

The decision to invite spectators onto the stage to shape the outcome of the narrative provided the basis for Forum Theatre. Essentially, it works with the players presenting a situation that bears sociocultural relevance to the audience and therein poses questions, problems, and solutions for enacting political change. There is a scripted text that "clearly delineates the nature of each character" to allow the spectator "to recognize each one's ideology" relative to the issue under investigation.⁶¹ The narrative plays out to a moment of social crisis at which point a spectator is permitted to intervene, replace the protagonist, and change the trajectory of the narrative by introducing her solution for the crisis. This process unfolds in an improvisatory manner with one of the actors serving as a "joker" whose responsibility is to orchestrate and facilitate the game while "encouraging both parties (actors/audience) not to stop playing."⁶² The event concludes after a number of participants have shaped and reshaped the narrative by undertaking the role of the protagonist, thereby lending to the Forum Theatre's culminating activity: a discussion of the experience with the aim of promoting sociopolitical action. It is the latter point that is crucial to Boal, who defines theatre as a "weapon" that is useful only to the extent that it incites social change on behalf of the oppressed.⁶³

Like Brecht, Boal's approach to theatre is Non-Aristotelian in that it "does not produce catharsis," but instead tries to "[stimulate] our desire to change the world."⁶⁴ It therefore demands a level of consciousness among the actors and audience that is distinct from conventional theatrical fare in that their awareness focuses on the sociopolitical relevance of the narrative at the expense of becoming emotionally attached to a character. Whether creating a Forum

60 Ibid., 56.

61 Boal, "Forum Theatre," 268.

62 Ibid., 270.

63 Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, ix. Brecht also describes theatre as a weapon in the battle for sociopolitical change. For a useful comparison of their two aesthetics, see Andrew Robinson, "Augusto Boal: Brecht and Beyond—The Boal Method," in *Ceasefire* (August 2016) <https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/augusto-boal-brecht-boal-method/> (accessed 3 March 2017).

64 Boal, "Forum Theatre," 274.

piece that claims justice for exploited farmers or an oppressed social group, the actors and spectators jointly partake in a performance that summons a dialectical consciousness involving Damasio's three selves: the proto, core, and autobiographical. In the case of the latter, the participants rely on their extended memory for the intellectual and emotional knowledge amassed from their past. The laborer who has spent decades tirelessly working for a pittance in draconian conditions, for example, has an ontological connection to being exploited by the capitalist superstructure in ways that no fictional character in a drama could ever have. One is actual, the other make-believe—which is precisely Boal's point. Thus, the worker's autobiographical self keenly contributes to the production and reception of a Forum Theater piece and is viscerally connected to its contents based on a lifetime of memory. Given that the purpose of Forum Theatre is to perform for the very group being oppressed and/or exploited, the audience will understand firsthand the subject being presented. The actors are also likely to have a deep emotional connection to the issue being addressed. The Boalian actor and spectator are thus motivated in part by their subconscious, proto self, insofar as they are innately attached to the piece's subject matter. Again, no one understands the need for agrarian reform better than a farmer whose livelihood so closely depends on it. Its challenges and potential solutions are in his bones—so to speak. By removing the veneer of the performer/spectator relationship, Boal empowers all participants to share in a pedagogical encounter that prompts social awareness and corresponding political change. This is distinct from the Brechtian actor whose aesthetic is still just that: an aesthetic and not a political exercise.⁶⁵ While Brecht's theatre is obviously political, a point that attracted Boal to his work in the first place, it is a director-driven approach in which the audience does not contribute to the performance as active participants, as is the case with Forum Theatre. Surely Brecht did not want his audience to be lulled into passivity either. Indeed, he clearly sought to engage their critical judgement towards enacting change. Perhaps the variance in their related approaches can be traced in part to their decidedly different experiences as exiled émigrés, insofar as Brecht led a comparatively plush life in the U.S. and Western Europe while Boal's was fraught with struggle and poverty. Thus, Boal's plight to create

65 In describing Boal's approach to performance as a "political exercise," I am addressing the fact that he worked with amateur actors and members of marginalized communities, in what, in my view amounts to a performative event that is distinct from Brecht's highly crafted, designed, and rehearsed "aesthetic." I do not intend to minimize Boal's project; indeed, his work has obviously had a significant impact on acting theory and theatre for social change initiatives. Nonetheless, it would be misleading to characterize his work as theatrical productions conceived as an aesthetic enterprise.

performances that could change the lives of the marginalized, disaffected, and oppressed would appear to be more viscerally induced than his predecessor.

3 Conclusion

The Boalian actor's multiple uses of his consciousness exemplify what Damasio calls an "ensemble of brain devices" that allows us to perceive, understand, and act upon the world around us.⁶⁶ This paradigm is also applicable to the Brechtian and Stanislavskian actors, insofar as they too are using some combination of their three selves (proto, core, and autobiographical); the question is a matter of degree in that the former engages his core self and the latter his proto-self. Both depend on their autobiographical selves, yet do so in distinct ways, with the Stanislavski-trained actor relying on his reservoir of experience to generate the emotional firepower to fill his role and the Brechtian using it as a way to forge an empathic distance in the actor/spectator relationship. For his part, the Boalian deploys a comparative balance of his selves and corresponding levels of consciousness. As indicated above, his proto-self subconsciously informs his autobiographical self, thereby spawning the basis for the Forum Theatre experience: a viscerally felt political cause in conjunction with one's lived experience (extended memory) as driving forces behind the production and reception of the theatrical event. The manifestation of the event is dependent upon the actor's core consciousness, which orchestrates his performance into something tangible. The core self causes us to make decisions such as what story to tell, what action to play, how to approach a character, how to acknowledge a feeling, and ultimately, it allows us to construct a performance. It is at the heart of Brecht's strategy for making the familiar seem unfamiliar, which explains why it is the level of consciousness most applicable to the Brechtian actor's work. Though the Stanislavskian and Boalian likewise use some part of their core self to consciously make choices in crafting their role (e.g., the very act of learning lines is a core-self activity), Brecht's approach to theatre lends to cool-minded didacticism inherently disassociated from empathy, a performative state by which one's emotional experience is suppressed if not erased. As such, the Brechtian actor and spectator alike are free to cerebrally engage a topic in the context of an aesthetic that uses distancing techniques that are specifically designed to make the commonplace appear strange, render the logical illogical, and defamiliarize that which we would otherwise deem familiar.

66 Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 22.