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1 COMPARATIVE drama

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Psychological Aspects of the Expression of Anger and Violence on the Stage

Vladimir J. Konečni

Since the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* in 1872 and William James' *Psychology* in 1890,¹ there has been a steady accumulation of experimental evidence regarding the perception and expression of emotion. It can safely be said that "emotion," along with "mind" and "behavior," stands as one of the three central concepts of psychology. It is also a concept that may be located at the intersect of a large number of psychological subdisciplines, including: *social psychology* (in terms of the communication of emotions and their origin in social situations); *psychophysiology* (in terms, for example, of electromyographic recording of facial muscle movements and the measurement of autonomic arousal—heart rate, blood pressure, galvanic skin response, etc.); *ethology* and the *psychology of learning* (in terms of the biologically important behaviors mediated by acute, pronounced emotional states); *cognitive psychology* (in terms of the importance of interpretation and other cognitive operations in the appraisal of the meaning of emotion-relevant situations as well

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as of the evaluation of internal cues one carries out when deciding which emotion, if any, one is experiencing); *developmental psychology* (in terms of parent-infant bonding and teaching of prosocial emotions as one of the key goals of socialization); and *clinical psychology* (in terms of maladaptive emotional states such as irrational fears, manic-depressive states, and so on).

Where there is powerful emotion in real life and in the theater, there is often anger; where there is anger, there is often violence. There is no doubt that of all the basic emotions, anger has been studied the most extensively. According to modern researchers,² anger has many functions, not all of which are anti-social or undesirable (Seneca notwithstanding³), but the fascination it holds lies in its being a universally acknowledged precursor of aggressive, destructive, and violent actions.

The experimental literature on human aggressive and violent behavior (much of it with some connection to anger) is even larger than that on anger alone. By a conservative estimate there were within the field of social psychology alone more than eight hundred published experimental studies in the last fifty years (since the publication in 1939 of the seminal book *Frustration and Aggression* by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears⁴). This is not surprising when one considers the tremendous socio-political, psychological, and biological importance of aggression and violence in individual and family relations, crime, and war.

For the same reasons, the theater has been preoccupied with every conceivable form of anger and violence, both thematically and theoretically. Indeed, the issue of emotion has been variously implicated in the tenets of some of the most influential twentieth-century theories of the theater and acting technique, specifically Stanislavski's "system" and Brecht's "epic theater."

Finally, just as the principal goal of psychological theorizing (based on laboratory results obtained from human research participants) is to understand the social behavior of ordinary people in everyday life, so discussions of playwriting, directorial, design, and acting techniques ultimately will only acquire a concrete meaning in relation to audience reactions. Psychological studies of anger and aggression may help to understand and predict audience behavior in response to stage portrayals of such events.

In this paper, I will first outline a theoretical model of emotional (especially anger) "episodes" in everyday life—a model based on the current psychological thinking and research. The contrasting treatments in Stanislavski's system and Brecht's epic theater of the relations between the actors' experience and portrayal of emotions and the processes of audience empathy and identification will then be described. In the following section, the classical as well as the modern psychological views of the concept of catharsis and its relationship to the expression of violence will be explored. Finally, the implications of the current psychological evidence for an understanding of the impact of the stage portrayals of violence on the audience in and outside the theater will be discussed with special reference to the views and practices of Stanislavski and Brecht.

Emotional Episodes in Everyday Life: A Psychological Model. The sequence begins with an event the nature of which can be mental (thoughts about, or recollection of, past irritants), physical (an impersonal obstacle to the attainment of a goal), or social (aversive words and actions that emanate from some human being). A verbal insult—an "ego-thwarting" remark—is perhaps the prototypical example of an anger-inducing stimulus.⁵

In order to have an effect, an insult has to be perceived (heard) and understood. Understanding a statement involves at least (a) a detailed analysis of its meaning in the light of a particular linguistic subculture, a specific context, and the prevalent social norms; (b) comparisons to prior involvement with the same and different speakers; and (c) attribution of the underlying intent (motive) to the speaker.

Only after these cognitive operations have been completed (the processing is very fast and assumed to be for the most part unconscious) do there occur events preparatory to action such as an increase in physiological arousal (e.g., blood pressure, pupil diameter, heart and respiration rate, etc.) and facial-expression and body-posture changes. These fluctuations are summarized into "messages" that are sent to the central nervous system, which interprets their significance and integrates them into an overall emotional "label" such as anger. (By this, I do not mean, of course, that people must say to themselves "I'm angry" in order to experience this emotion, but rather that by

this point in the emotional-episode sequence they are *able* to report unambiguously that it is anger that they feel.)

Violence is only one of many different behaviors that an angry person may carry out. Because of the obvious interactive aspects of human social behavior, an aggressive (or other) action that an angry person directs at the anger instigator is likely to result in some type of offensive or defensive counter-measures. These would then constitute an emotion-relevant event starting a new emotional episode. The model therefore contains a feedback-loop assumption in that emotions are seen as occurring in sequential episodes each of which is triggered by the behavioral or cognitive outcome of the previous episode. Pronounced emotions that last many hours are regarded as simply proceeding through numerous loops, with thoughts about the relevant topic being the precipitating events that "fuel" the episodes.⁶

Emotion, the Actor, and the Audience in Stanislavski's "System." In a 1963 article commemorating the centennial of Stanislavski's birth, the actor Yuri Zavadski wrote: "Stanislavsky's theatrical emotions materialise from the actor's living his part on the boards, and living a part is, above all, thinking, behaving, speaking and doing as if . . . the actions of the play were unfolding here and now. . . . It is here and now that the character appraises, thinks, and does. If the actor accomplishes this 'here and now,' he will find that . . . the audience, too, is living the part, that the emotions generated by the events and twists of the play seize the audience as they do himself, the actor."⁷ There are several elements of interest in this statement.

First, there is a reference to Stanislavski's well-known insistence on "true-to-lifeness" on the stage of the Moscow Art Theater.⁸ The idea was to present ordinary human beings,⁹ the sort of men and women that Chekhov, for example, wrote about so convincingly.

Second, the actor's "living his part on the boards" would result in *authentic* emotions, perhaps distinct from those in real life but nevertheless genuine and perfectly appropriate to the totality of the character's situation at a given moment. As Stanislavski put it: "You can understand a part, sympathize with the person portrayed, and put yourself in his place, so that you will act as he would. That will arouse feelings in the actor that are *analogous* to those required for the part."¹⁰ The

actor was to “penetrate the role” by knowing the person he was to play in the most trifling detail.¹¹ Furthermore, as Robert Lewis, one of the early heads of the Actors’ Studio in New York, put it, the actor was to “search into [his] own experience to arouse feelings analogous to those required in the part.”¹²

In the Stanislavski system, then, to be genuine and true to life an actor’s stage behavior must be motivated from within by an “inner motive force” (the title of a chapter in *An Actor Prepares*). He should respond to current events and the behavior of other actors on the stage, but the impact of these is primarily on his thoughts and (especially) emotions and only secondarily (after being mediated by thoughts and emotions) expressed in actions.

The features of an actor’s emotional life on the stage are expected to be greatly enriched by a carefully cultivated “emotion memory” by the actor remembering precisely how he felt in an analogous situation in real life in the past. Stanislavski defined emotion memory as the “type of memory which makes you relive [for example] the sensations you once felt when . . . your friend died.”¹³ In fact, Stanislavski came rather close to modern psychological ideas about the constructive aspects of human memory in statements such as: “Each one of us has seen many accidents. We retain the memories of them, but only outstanding characteristics that impressed us and not their details. Out of these impressions . . . condensed, deeper . . . memory of related experience[s] is formed. It is a kind of synthesis of memory.”¹⁴

Actually, Stanislavski came even closer to the work of experimental psychologists, notably his famous Russian contemporaries Pavlov and Sechenov (by whose work on the conditioned reflexes he was deeply impressed), in developing the “method of physical actions.” “Emotional memory brings back . . . past experiences; to relive them, however, actors should execute logical physical actions. Emotions are easily forgotten, and physical actions are the means to stir them.”¹⁵ Sometimes, physical actions—developed, in part, by inventing the character’s history and repeated again and again—can give rise to an emotion the actor has never experienced before. The emphasis here should be on a logical, integrated sequence of coordinated actions meeting situational demands in an authentic, spontaneous manner. Furthermore, the term “action” should be understood in the broad sense to include voice quality, speech

pattern, postural idiosyncrasies, mannerisms, and other aspects of what Stanislavski called "external, or physical, characterization" necessary in "given circumstances."¹⁶

Greatly oversimplifying, one could say that in Stanislavski's system emotion memory and the method of physical actions are two important elements of "conscious *psychotechnique*" that "can . . . prepare . . . favorable conditions for the approach to the 'region of the subconscious'"¹⁷ or the "conscious means to the subconscious."¹⁸ In Stanislavski's terminology, the subconscious represents the inner mechanism, the uncontrollable complex of emotions, but one that can be "turned on" intentionally by the emotion-memory and physical-action "keys." Thus, Stanislavski was interested in "deliberately arousing emotions [and] indirectly influencing the psychological mechanism responsible for the emotional state of a human being."¹⁹

It is clear that emotions—aroused, experienced, and expressed by the actors—represent a crucial aspect of Stanislavski's entire system. Hence he stated: "Feel your part and instantly all your inner chords will harmonize, your whole bodily apparatus of expression will begin to function. . . . [T]he first, and most important master [of the elements of acting technique is] *feeling*."²⁰

The third, and final, element defined in Zavadski's statement concerns audience reaction.²¹ Specifically, by suggesting that the audience of a Stanislavskian "here-and-now," "true-to-life" actor would be seized by the same emotions as the actor himself, Zavadski invoked an emotion-transfer mechanism that is usually referred to as *empathy* in psychology.

It is very likely that Stanislavski would be in full agreement with the view that a powerful and lasting emotional impact on the audience is perhaps the principal purpose of a theatrical performance and the main source of its aesthetic appeal. He implicitly distinguished between *sympathy* and *empathy*. In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski suggests that while an insulted person may feel anger and a witness would at first only sympathize, this may be transformed into actual anger and direct reaction (*empathy*). The audience might act as a sounding board, returning genuine emotions.

In terms of the model of an emotional episode sequence presented above, the relevant aspects of Stanislavski's system—taking the actor as the focus—can be summarized as follows:

1. The event which begins the emotional sequence can be:

(a) a series of thoughts regarding the past relevant situations in the actor's own life and memories of emotional reactions to these situations ("emotional memory"); (b) a strong focus on objects on the stage (including properties, set, and lighting) to which an imaginary life may be given by the actor through an associative process, preferably in connection with the plot ("sensory attention"); (c) physical activity and other aspects of the external characterization ("method of physical actions").

2. Such events ("stepping into the part") give rise to the physiological-arousal fluctuations. The appropriate information, together with the information regarding the facial and skeletal musculature, is sent to the cortex.

3. Feedback loops connect the different systems. Physical actions and facial configurations, for example, may produce increases in physiological arousal and also facilitate emotional-memory activity, which, in turn, may further increase arousal. Alternatively, the sequence may start with thoughts about past events that stimulate physical actions or create an arousal increase, or both, which then make memories more vivid, thus further increasing arousal and driving the physical and facial activity into more compelling forms, and so on.

4. In general, what Stanislavski called the "region of the subconscious" can be understood in terms of the emotion-related fluctuations of physiological arousal (i.e., the activity of the autonomic nervous system and the reticular arousal system in the brain-stem).

5. Various cognitive operations (monitoring, interpretation, integration, etc.) are applied by the actor to the data arriving from the lower centers. The "quality" of these data (i.e., the extent to which the actor has stepped into the role and the intensity with which he carried out various elements of Stanislavski's "psycho-technique") will determine the outcome of the cognitive operations—that is, whether the actor will feel, for example, genuinely "real-life" anger or some degree of an as-if-anger state. Both the type and the extent of an actor's emotion can exhibit many nuances.

6. The same is true of the emotions felt by the audience. Members of the audience do not typically carry out large-scale physical actions (though even they may increase arousal by clenching fists, grimacing, etc.), but they may empathize with an actor and engage in their own emotional-memory activity facilitated by identification.

In sum, Stanislavski developed a "system" of techniques by which actors can trigger emotional sequences that are presumably highly similar to those that occur in everyday life. These techniques also create images that give rise to emotional bonds with the audience and produce corresponding emotions in the audience members. Thus, certain elements of Stanislavski's system inadvertently anticipated psychological and physiological findings. Put another way, Stanislavski's system was based on assumptions about human nature that have since been proven scientifically correct.

Emotion, the Actor, and the Audience in Brecht's "Epic Theater." After the Bolshevik revolution, Stanislavski willy-nilly presented plays at the Moscow Art Theater to what Brecht would at least have been required to pretend was an ideal audience of proletarians²² but in a style that was anathema to Brecht, who, during the same period, gradually developed his ideas of an anti-illusionist "epic" theater.²³ This could be seen as a revolt against the ponderous German theater of the time—a theater influenced by the views of Goethe and Schiller, who had in turn supposedly based them on the "Aristotelian concept of drama . . . of catharsis by terror and pity . . . of spectator-identification with the actors . . . of illusion."²⁴ Or, as Subiotta states, "Brecht castigated the established bourgeois theatre . . . for encouraging the spectator to leave his reasoning powers . . . in the cloakroom and . . . engage in a trance-like orgy of feeling. . . ."²⁵ Of course, Brecht's views were also in sharp conflict, especially with regard to the role of emotion in the theater, with the basic tenets of Stanislavski's system.²⁶

One of the central features of the epic theater is the prevention of the spectators' psychological identification with the actors—identification that leads to empathy and catharsis. Empathy (*Einfühlung*), catharsis, and other Aristotelian, romantic, and naturalistic baggage are discarded in favor of a detached, analytical, and objective stance by *both* the actors and the audience—an attitude Brecht tried to capture by the term *Verfremdung*²⁷ ("distancing"). Some of the most significant consequences of "distancing" on the intent, form, and structure of the epic theater (in comparison to the "dramatic" form of the theater) were elaborately tabulated by Brecht in 1930 in his notes for *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*).²⁸ Our chief concern

here, however, is with those aspects of distancing that can be expected to have the greatest impact on the emotions (or lack of them) of both the actors and the spectators.

Objective, calm, matter-of-fact dramatization is used instead of allowing the play to be dominated by high-magnitude, exciting actions and tragic situations that would be more likely to arouse physiologically both the actors and the audience. Emotion-producing suspense may be avoided by describing the plot and the ending in advance. Brecht's plays often consist of separate short episodes to decrease momentum and emotional build-up: his is a theater of interruption. As Brooker states, "[I]f a dramatic narrative could be interrupted and held up for comment, then it [should be] possible to alter social attitudes. . . ."29

Actors are discouraged from stepping into roles *à la* Stanislavski by speaking of their characters in the third person, by conscious self-monitoring, by playing additional roles, by wearing masks, and by decreasing the range of their voices. Young actors may be cast in "older" roles (which increases distancing) and taught not to indulge in emotional speeches but rather to "quote" what they have to say.³⁰ It helps if in preparing a part "[t]he actor . . . go[es] on functioning as long as possible as a reader . . . an important step [being to] memoriz[e] one's first impressions [of the elements of the text]."³¹ Needle and Thomson point out that such memorization of first impressions is "calculated to keep the actor at an emotional distance from the character he impersonates" and specifically contrast Stanislavski's "emotion memory" with Brecht's "memorizing one's first impressions": after describing a ghastly street-accident scene conjured up by Stanislavski in *An Actor Prepares*, they insist that the scene "is a world away from Brecht's. . . . There are points where the twain shall never meet."³²

These various techniques minimize the actors' individuality, blur their identity (a satisfactory state of affairs theatrically *and* socially in Brecht's artistic and political canons), and reduce the probability that they will display an organized, coherent pattern of emotions with which the audience could identify or which could lead it to experience catharsis.³³

Distancing elements that reduce the probability of an intense emotional experience in both the actors and the audience are also introduced in the set and lighting design and in the musical numbers. Emotion-producing mystique, awe, and illusion are minimized by simple sets, the use of the half-curtain (so that

the stagehands' activity can be partly seen), placards, and harsh, white lighting. As for the music, to make it appeal "more to the reason than to the emotions," Brecht insists that it should "interpret (not heighten) the text . . . and express an opinion (not illustrate) [it]."34

Brecht's ultimate purpose is a calm analysis of social relations by an alert, unemotional, and therefore educable audience whose newly acquired knowledge would result in social action. Lack of identification with the actors and the consequent elimination of empathy would presumably preclude the occurrence of catharsis.

Catharsis is a concept to which, according to some critics, Brecht devoted "more space in his critical writings than to any other single aspect of traditional theatre."³⁵ Regardless of the exact reading of Aristotle's original statement, Brecht strongly felt that catharsis was a waste of valuable energy presumably by both the actors and the audience that could be utilized for practical objectives of social change. Several authors describe the state of the audience after a cathartic experience in the theater in analogous terms: "Calm of mind, all passion spent";³⁶ "serenity, stillness and reconciliation";³⁷ "a laxative of the soul."³⁸ Or as Gray describes it, "[t]hrough catharsis, the spectator is restored to health, is no longer troubled by the conditions of actual living, and ceases to have the desire to change them."³⁹ Brecht certainly did not want to have any of that. Actually, St. Augustine seemed long ago to have recognized the problem: "Theatrical shows, filled with depictions of my miseries and with tinder for my own fire, completely carried me away. . . . [W]hen a [man] himself suffers, it is usually called misery; when he suffers for others, compassion. But what kind of compassion is in the make-believe things of the theatre? A member of the audience is not incited to give help; rather, he is simply incited to feel sorrow."⁴⁰

One can now examine the various elements of the epic theater, especially the *V-effekte*, in terms of the model of an emotional episode sequence presented above:

1. Considerable efforts are expended in the epic theater not to have an actor step into the role. The noncommittal, restrained approach, where the separation of the actor and character is emphasized by various means—and the actor is encouraged to view the character "from the outside"—adds to an emotional sequence not being initiated. Physical activity is

subtle rather than of high magnitude. Actors talk of rather than as their characters. Emotional memory is replaced by the (distancing) memory of first impressions. In short, there are no "events" to start the emotional episode sequence, to raise the actors' arousal and stimulate extensive facial and skeletal activity. One would conclude from the above that Brecht intentionally largely eliminated or at least minimized both the subjective experience and the portrayal of pronounced emotions in his actors.

Needle and Thomson, however, insist that actors' emotions were important to the "mature" Brecht and cite his *Messingkauf Dialogues* in support of this contention,⁴¹ but there are several reasons why such a disclaimer ought not to be taken too seriously. First, Needle and Thomson themselves impose serious constraints on the range of emotions an actor should be experiencing: "Wherever emotions might obscure or interrupt the audience's critical awareness, the Brechtian actor must shun emotion."⁴² Second, considering that the *Messingkauf Dialogues* were written from 1937 to 1951 and not widely publicized, many would say that Brecht's quoted statement is too little and too late. Third, there is no evidence whatsoever that Brecht developed techniques to cultivate the actors' emotional experiences and portrayals or that he paid attention to this matter in rehearsals.⁴³

2. If actors do not display much emotion, the spectators are less likely to identify with them and to experience empathy. In fact, it could be argued convincingly (see, for example, the quotation from the *Messingkauf Dialogues* in note 41) that whether or not the actors experienced and portrayed emotions would have been immaterial to Brecht had he not believed that such portrayals resulted in the spectators' identification and empathy.

Needle and Thomson categorically state that "Brechtian theatre is never working as it should when actors and audiences are experiencing simultaneously the same emotions."⁴⁴ Others have insisted that Brecht sought a balance of empathy and distancing on the part of spectators.⁴⁵ But it is clear that the emotions were to be of a very specific type to the extent that Brecht wanted his audience to feel something through empathic identification—"legitimate emotions," as Dickson⁴⁶ calls them: a sense of justice, the urge for freedom, righteous indignation.

To this Esslin retorts—and he is supported by psychological

evidence—that “It is highly doubtful whether such emotions could ever be made to play a more than merely marginal part among the feelings engendered by the theatre. In his rejection of identification between audience and characters Brecht comes into conflict with the fundamental concept of psychology that regards processes of identification as the basic mechanisms by which one human being communicates with another.”⁴⁷ Others have agreed.⁴⁸

Again, what the audiences actually feel while watching Brecht’s plays, with their assortment of distancing devices, is an empirical question. Countering the frequent claim that the spectators’ feelings at a performance of *Mother Courage* contradict Brecht’s theory, Dickson states that “among the emotions Brecht is fully prepared to concede are pity for . . . Katrin as [a] victim of injustice.”⁴⁹ But would Brecht really “concede” such pity if it led to the cathartic “anaesthetising of [the spectators’ social actions in] daily life”?⁵⁰

3. Finally, it can be argued that the crux of Brecht’s objections to the traditional “Aristotelian” (“illusionist”) drama was that catharsis was the outcome of the spectators’ exposure to it. In the end, an audience’s empathy and identification with the actors’ emotions were undesirable primarily because empathy allegedly resulted in Aristotelian “pity and fear,” a cathartic release, and consequent quiescence. Such quiescence would presumably not be conducive to critical thought, a sharp opposition to social injustice, and, above all, a commitment to social action.

A number of authors argue that Brecht did not and, given certain interpretations of Aristotle, would not need to reject the concept of catharsis. Gray discusses the merits of a “measured” cathartic response,⁵¹ Dickson claims that “Brecht goes so far as to speak of a catharsis of the emotions that his form of theatre alone facilitates,”⁵² and White attempts to clarify the latter by stating that Brecht “sought replacements for the cathartic emotions of fear and pity . . . [the] desire for knowledge and readiness to help.”⁵³

These arguments are unconvincing and, more importantly, superfluous in the light of the evidence concerning catharsis that will be presented in the following section.

Anger, Violence, and the Tragic: The Concept of Catharsis (Classical and Modern). Spingler, among others, maintains that

modern scholars and dramatists have been concerned with “the loss of a tragic sense in the theatre” and attributes to Jean Anouilh the view that a major cause of this loss is the contemporary “replacement of action by character as the dramatic mainspring.”⁵⁴ To Aristotle, of course, it was action that represented the heart of a play.⁵⁵ Action often meant violence, and its tragic, fate-driven elements led to the spectators’ cathartic experience.

In reviewing the translations and interpretations of the term “catharsis” as used by Aristotle in his statements about the function of tragedy in *Poetics*, Lucas discusses terms such as ‘purification,’ ‘correction or refinement,’ *Reinigung*, *Veredlung*, and the like.⁵⁶ The meaning he strongly favors, though, is “purgation,” in the ancient medical sense of the “*partial* removal of excess ‘humors.’”⁵⁷ By exciting pity and fear, tragedy is supposed to provide a healthy relief to such (and other) emotions in the spectators.

Lucas, on the basis of a meticulous analysis, rejects both a view of the “catharsis of . . . passions” as “mean[ing] that the passions are purified and ennobled” and the opinion suggesting that through catharsis spectators are *entirely* “purged of their passions.” Rather, according to Lucas, “the passions . . . are reduced to a healthy, balanced proportion.”⁵⁸ Lucas further regards as misleading the assumption by some scholars that Aristotle thought of pity and fear as the only emotions that are given a healthy relief in tragedies. He feels that there is enough breadth (or ambiguity) in Aristotle’s formulation (“the relief of *such* emotions”; “of emotions of *that sort*”) to justify the conclusion that “a tragic audience has also such feelings as sympathy and repugnance, delight and indignation, admiration and contempt.”⁵⁹ It seems safe to interpret the combination of negative emotions in this list as akin to anger.

The medical metaphor for what Aristotle meant by “catharsis” seems now to be generally accepted by literary scholars.⁶⁰ Lucas, however, also proposed a “hydraulic” model of how catharsis worked (emotional energy is dammed up like water in a reservoir, and a cathartic release lowers it to a safe level), but his thinking that this quaint model might be psychologically sound was wildly optimistic.⁶¹

In sum, Aristotle’s view of the effect of tragedy can be rendered in modern parlance (keeping in mind the model of emotion presented earlier) as follows: the *observation* of violent

displays should lead to (a) a decrease in the level of physiological arousal, (b) a decrease in the degree of negative emotions, such as anger and indignation, and (c) a consequent decrease in the performance of related behaviors, such as aggression.

The popularity of *The Poetics* and mysteries regarding the true meaning of "catharsis" have quite unjustly led to a neglect of what Plato, in *The Republic*, had to say about similar matters. Large parts of Book II are devoted to a description of the texts that Plato would wish to ban from an ideal polity—or, at least, insure that young people are not exposed to them. Stories, poems, and tragedies by an assortment of authors, from Homer to Aeschylus, would be censored. Great care would be taken that minds were not polluted by texts which described quarrels, treacheries, and fights of the Gods, battles of the giants, violent crimes of sons against fathers no matter how justified. Plato viewed the young as impressionable and trusting of the texts, especially when these were conveyed by parents, nurses, and teachers. Although he did not speak specifically of the audience at a performance of a tragedy, the extrapolation from disciples to spectators does not seem farfetched. The message is clear: do not present vileness, conflict, violence, and other shady aspects of either divine or human behavior, for the consequence will be a learning and subsequent imitation of such actions by the audience.

Lucas quite understandably has considerable difficulty countering Fontenelle's succinct criticism of the core idea of Aristotle's catharsis: "I have never understood the [idea of the] purging of the passions by means of the passions themselves."⁶² Plato can be interpreted as being equally skeptical. Better not have dramatic displays, for they may "arouse violent emotions and stir men to all sorts of passions."⁶³

The Republic's relevance goes further. In Book V, Plato almost casually points out that if "one man is angry with another, he can take it out of him on the spot, and will be less likely to pursue the quarrel further."⁶⁴ This statement significantly extends the traditional domain of the concept of catharsis as it has been defined by literary scholars. Such an extension is crucial if one is to bring into the discussion the behavior of the spectators *after* they leave the theater and also the short- and long-term consequences of their behavior. It is a matter that was important to Aristotle and St. Augustine when they pondered

the social functions of tragedy. It was important to Brecht, who hoped to influence post-performance behavior. And it has been one of the key research areas of human violent behavior in experimental social psychology, as will be seen below.

In sum, and in contrast to Aristotle, Plato can be interpreted as saying (again keeping in mind the model of emotion presented earlier): the *observation* of violent displays should lead to (a) an increase in arousal, (b) an increase in anger, (c) the learning of how to carry out violent actions, (d) a reduction of restraints against violence, and (e) a greater probability of performance of such actions. In contrast, the *performance* of aggressive, vengeful actions by an angry person against the anger-instigator should bring about a decrease in the amount of subsequent aggression.

In part because of a widespread concern over the effects of media violence on young people (remarkably paralleling Plato's educational and socio-political preoccupations), there has been a large amount of experimental investigation in social and developmental psychology of the effects of exposure to aggressive or violent content on subsequent behavior, especially aggression. In these experiments, children of various ages as well as teenagers and adults have observed a variety of aggressive activities against diverse human and inanimate targets in staged or real-life "performances," ranging from those involving adult actors to those animated by cartoon characters, and in diverse media (live, film, television). In some of these studies, experimental participants are intentionally frustrated or annoyed in the laboratory (by means of controlled, credible procedures) prior to observing the violent material, whereas in others (just as in the control conditions of the former group of studies) their emotional states are not interfered with.

In studies in which the experimental participants are not frustrated or annoyed, there is either a mild increase in the amount of subsequent aggressive behavior (in comparison to a control condition) or no effect at all. When the participants are made angry prior to watching aggressive visual material, however, a *large increase* in the amount of aggressive behavior (again in *large comparison* to control groups) is obtained almost without exception. Other findings include the participants' learning of new ways to be aggressive or violent and becoming desensitized (exhibiting less physiological arousal) to portrayals

of violence. The fact that an overwhelming majority of investigators found an increase rather than a decrease in aggressive behavior following exposure to aggressive content led, of course, to the report by the Surgeon General of the United States on the deleterious, anti-social effects of media violence.⁶⁵

Admittedly, in none of these experiments were the participants spectators at a theatrical performance, let alone at one that Aristotle would have had in mind when he wrote about catharsis. Yet one doubts that he would have restricted catharsis to the theatrical context and content had he been aware of other media and materials. It could also be argued that the material used was not as conducive to the processes of identification and empathy as would presumably be the case in Greek tragedies. This issue should provide ample material for future research, but it would appear that modern audiences do identify and empathize with violent screen heroes (*à la* Dirty Harry or Rambo). Finally, the main results of these studies were in terms of the amount of observable aggressive behavior rather than of the healthy relief obtained by experiencing pity and fear. Perhaps here as well future studies could be designed to address theatrical concerns more directly (more appropriate surveys and interview questions could readily be devised). Yet the fact remains that a vast body of very diverse empirical studies has not provided a single shred of evidence in favor of a catharsis-induced quiescent or anaesthetized state that various literary scholars have been writing about.

The evidence, imperfect as it is, supports Plato's rather than Aristotle's contentions. It is perhaps only the First Amendment of the United States Constitution (guaranteeing the freedom of speech) that protects contemporary media violence from the Surgeon General, who seems to have ideas, backed by research, remarkably like those of the censorious philosopher in *The Republic*.

A quite different picture emerges when one examines the evidence from a considerable number of laboratory studies regarding the relationship between anger and the *performance* of aggressive actions. It appears that if certain conditions are met—the principal among these being that the aggression is motivated by anger, that it is physical, and that it is directed at the anger-instigator (as opposed to a substitute target or a scapegoat)—the execution of aggressive actions has a *palliative* effect. Under such circumstances, the level of physiological

arousal and the intensity of anger are both reduced, and the amount of subsequent aggression is significantly lessened as well.⁶⁶ There is thus strong evidence for the physiological, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the cathartic effect resulting from the *performance* of aggressive actions by an angry person. The behavioral aspect of these results—the reduction in aggression as a function of retaliation by an angry person—was, of course, the one correctly predicted by Plato.⁶⁷

In terms of the consequences of both the observation and performance of violent actions, Plato has been shown to have been right: the former usually increases, and the latter may decrease the subsequent aggressive behavior.

The cathartic decrease in aggression following the performance of injurious actions by an angry person is only temporary, however.⁶⁸ Perhaps precisely because aggressive actions can so effectively reduce arousal and anger from aversively high levels, violence may become an even more likely response (if behavioral options exist) in a *future* anger-inducing episode.

Thus, even behavioral catharsis is a short-lived phenomenon; in the final analysis, violence breeds violence.

Violence on the Stage and the Audience: Implications of the Psychological Evidence. If one is to extrapolate boldly from the experimental results obtained by social psychologists about emotion, catharsis, and violence to the theater and the world beyond—that is, to the actors' feelings and behavior and to the spectators' feelings, knowledge acquisition, and their willingness to act upon them outside the theater, the following summary may be in order:

1. The emotions experienced by an actor will be deeper, more genuine, and more finely detailed if they stem from a variety of interrelated sources—cognitive-interpretive, physiological, and muscular—which mediate the various aspects of an actor's "stepping into a role";

2. The more genuine and finely grained an actor's subjective emotional experience, the more consistent and convincing the overall portrayal and emotional communication to the audience;

3. Emotions deeply felt by an actor (for example, feelings of righteous anger) and the resulting convincing portrayal "from within" are likely to lead to considerable identification and

empathy on the part of the spectators, and thus to their correspondent anger;

4. Should violent actions be performed by an actor who has deeply experienced and convincingly portrayed righteous anger, such actions have a better chance of being regarded as appropriate and justified by the audience;

5. Such actions are also more likely to be learned and remembered and to raise further the spectators' arousal (which has already been elevated as the physiological basis of the empathically induced anger);

6. The spectators' exposure to violent actions increases rather than decreases the probability of their aggressive behavior outside the theater, though this probability is presumably small;

7. The probability can perhaps be increased if: (a) the situation outside the theater closely resembles the one depicted in the play; (b) the spectators' anger is *reinstated* outside the theater by the instigators and events resembling those that had given rise to the same emotion in the theater and (c) the motivation to carry out aggressive actions is not outweighed by the anticipation (correct or not) of severe consequences of the actions;

8. Should violent actions be carried out by angry individuals against the anger instigators (and provided that there is no retaliation), these individuals' arousal, anger, and further aggressive activity will be diminished;

9. Should these people's anger be reinstated under similar circumstances in the future, however, violence will become a more likely option than it had been prior to the first outburst.

What are the implications of this analysis for Stanislavski's and Brecht's ideas and theater practice?

Stanislavski. Stanislavski's writing on the theater is passionate and almost entirely devoted to what are essentially aesthetic concerns. Textual analysis, directorial and design conceptions, the actors' preparation, stagework, and even private lives—all of these are meant to be painstakingly cultivated, so that the final objective, performance, can emerge like a perfectly cut diamond. The right combination of talent, hard work, artistic integrity, and respect for the text is presumably to be well received by audiences, and to move and ennoble them. To the extent that the theater has a message, it is to celebrate artistic authenticity. Its educational role is aesthetic and limited to

abstract social concerns—the moulding of the spectators into “better people,” whatever that means. In short, Stanislavski’s “system,” artistic and private life, and his entire *Weltanschauung* were all deeply apolitical.

Stanislavski’s practical work with actors and on performances was admirably suited to his broad aesthetic objectives. Furthermore, the key elements of his system were discovered to have a sound basis in the principles that have crystallized through experiments in the social psychology and psychophysiology of emotions. Elements of an emotional episode sequence presented in this paper closely correspond to elements of a Stanislavskian “beat” or “unit.” Each time a Stanislavskian actor rehearses a unit, or executes it on the stage, he is subject to psychological principles described above.

So long as empathy and an uplifting experience occur, it is irrelevant, from Stanislavski’s point of view, whether or not something like catharsis takes place, whether or not the spectators (who have, for example, seen a naturalistic portrayal of indignant workers in a play break machinery) angrily do it themselves the next day, and what the further psychological and behavioral consequences of such violent actions might be.

Brecht. The fact that Stanislavski’s aesthetics were well served by his system, and that the system was perhaps as useful as it was because it inadvertently capitalized on sound principles of human emotion and cognition, does not, of course, in any sense preclude the viability and appeal of entirely different approaches to the theater. Brecht’s was one such approach, innovative and highly effective, quite apart from pontifications about the *Verfremdungseffekte* as conduits for political messages.

There is no doubt that Brecht’s techniques—the practical realization of *V-effekte* in acting style, staging, blocking, lighting, and sets—have created an enduring theater revolution that has been influential beyond the Berliner Ensemble, beyond the staging of his own plays, and beyond the work of playwrights and directors sympathetic to his politics. Kenneth Tynan’s adjectives “light, relaxed, ascetically spare . . . cool” for the 1949 Berlin production of *Mother Courage*⁶⁹ apply just as well to some of Brecht-inspired stagings of, for instance, Thornton Wilder’s plays. Frugality and a degree of abstractness of the means of expression, the unemotional, detached stance, and brilliantly lit visual images of striking contrast and simplicity

are all remarkably appealing to post-modernist audiences.⁷⁰ Analytic plays and performances lacking in thrills and throat-grIPPING emotions can be beautiful theater; the fact that actors in this type of theater do not use the techniques anchored in the principles that are part of the emotional-episode model is immaterial from the purely aesthetic viewpoint.

What are, however, the implications, of the psychological findings presented in this paper for Brecht's use of the theater for *political* ends? It could be argued that all of Brecht's notions about the epic theater and *V-effekte* were, in fact, entirely aesthetic and that he did not seriously entertain the hope that their application would lead to political education and social action. Yet he phrased his adamant opposition to "illusionist" theater in political terms with such consistency that one is forced to think that he sincerely believed the spectators' empathy and cathartic experiences to lead inexorably to hypnotic stupor and thus to be inimical to the learning of political messages and to social action outside the theater.

Therefore, in the light of the empirical evidence presented here, Brecht made a grave error if his objectives were indeed primarily political. The data suggest that the observation of aggressive activities (for strikes and other types of resistance to authority often of necessity border on the violent) leads to an increase rather than a decrease in subsequent aggression. Furthermore, this anti-catharsis effect is likely to be more pronounced when there is strong identification and empathy with the people (e.g., actors) whose behavior on the stage is later imitated. There is simply no evidence for Aristotelian catharsis that Brecht presumably so feared and because of which (allegedly) he so militantly sought to replace the illusionist theater by the epic.

Precisely because the *V-effekte* tends to decrease the actors' emotional experiences and the spectators' identification and empathy (as we have seen from the data supporting the emotion-episode model), Brecht was more likely to fail politically by relying on such effects. And the failure would be augmented by the calm narrative form and the restrained plots that have their setting in alien, pseudo-exotic locales. Epic theater and the *V-effekte* are likely to lead to social *inaction* rather than to bogus, non-existent Aristotelian catharsis.

Thus one is led to the paradoxical conclusion that if Brecht wanted political results he should perhaps have given the

V-effekte in staging and acting as a gift to largely apolitical writers with abstract, absurdist, or metaphysical concerns (e.g., Ionesco or Beckett) while himself adopting the Stanislavski system for his actors, naturalism for his staging, and fiery revolutionary materials with clear-cut, large-scale (including violent) actions for his themes.

The failure to do so was precisely the ground on which he was criticized by the Soviet and East German cultural commissars. He was useful to them for his Communist views and "defection" from the West as a cold-war propaganda tool but was distrusted for not depicting on the stage, realistically and emotionally, the violent smashing of Capitalism. That Johanna in *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (*Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe*) and the Young Comrade in *The Measures Taken* (*Die Massnahme*) frustrated, even inadvertently, the revolutionary goals by not condoning violence, and that the *failure* of the Paris Commune of 1871 was so vividly depicted in *The Days of the Commune* (*Die Tage der Commune*), failed to provide successful agit-prop in the commissars' eyes (and they were right!).⁷¹

One is tempted to agree with Ionesco's conclusion: "one now notices that all the solutions offered by the ideological theatre, Brechtian or other, were false solutions."⁷² And one wonders if the aesthetic aspects of Brecht's work could have been further refined had he known about the likely anti-catharsis effects of the "illusionist" theater and had he not wasted his creative energies on even the half-hearted agit-prop attempts like *Die Mutter* and various *Lehrstücke*.

NOTES

¹ Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872; rpt. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965); William James, *Psychology* (New York: Holt, 1890).

² See, for example, J. R. Averill, "Anger," *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, 26 (1978), 1-80; R. W. Novaco, "The Functions and Regulation of the Arousal of Anger," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 133 (1976), 1124-28.

³ Seneca, *Morals* (1817; rpt. New York: Harper, 1917), p. 216.

⁴ John Dollard, Leonard W. Doob, Neal E. Miller, O. H. Mowrer, and Robert R. Sears, *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1939).

⁵ See, for example, Arnold H. Buss, *The Psychology of Aggression* (New York: Wiley, 1961); Vladimir J. Konečni, "Methodological Issues in Human Aggression

Research," in *Aggression in Children and Youth*, ed. Robert M. Kaplan, Vladimir J. Konečni, and Raymond W. Novaco (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1948), pp. 1-43.

⁶ For a more detailed exposition of this model of emotion, see Konečni, "Methodological Issues in Human Aggression," and Vladimir J. Konečni, "Social Interaction and Musical Preference," in *The Psychology of Music*, ed. Diana Deutsch (New York: Academic Press, 1982), pp. 497-516. The model has many points of contact with other views of emotion, especially the "peripheralist" (as opposed to "centralist") views. However, since most of these other approaches have tended to emphasize certain parts of the sequence at the expense of others, such as physiological arousal (e.g., James, *Psychology*; George Mandler, *Mind and Emotion* [New York: Wiley, 1975]; S. Schachter and J. E. Singer, "Cognitive, Social and Emotional Determinants of Emotional State," *Psychological Review*, 69 [1962], 379-99) or facial expression and skeletal musculature (e.g., Darwin, *The Expression of Emotions*; Paul Ekman, "Differential Communications of Affect by Head and Body Cues," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2 [1965], 726-35, and "Cross-Cultural Studies of Facial Expression," in *Darwin and Facial Expression*, ed. Paul Ekman [New York: Academic Press, 1973], pp. 169-222; Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, *Unmasking the Face* [Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975]; Carroll E. Izard, *Human Emotions* [New York: Plenum, 1977]; J. D. Laird, "Self-Attribution of Emotion: The Effects of Expressive Behavior on the Quality of Emotional Experience," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 29 [1974], 475-86; G. E. Schwartz, P. L. Fair, P. Salt, M. R. Mandel, and G. L. Klerman, "Facial Muscles Patterning to Affective Imagery in Depressed and Nondepressed Subjects," *Science*, 192 [1976], 489-91), it can be claimed that the present view is more complete or at least more eclectic. In addition, although a certain temporal sequence of events with emotional episodes is hypothesized, the model does not share many other researchers' seemingly exaggerated concern with this issue (e.g., James, *Psychology*; W. B. Cannon, "The James-Lange Theory of Emotion: A Critical Examination and an Alternative Theory," *American Journal of Psychology*, 39 [1927], 106-24; F. S. Fehr and J. A. Stern, "Peripheral Physiological Variables and Emotion: The James-Lange Theory Revisited," *Psychological Bulletin*, 74 [1970], 411-24; Izard, *Human Emotions*).

⁷ Konstantin Stanislavsky, *Man and Actor; Stanislavsky and the World Theatre; Letters*, ed. Sergei Malik-Zakharov and Shoel Bogatyrev (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963), p. 11.

⁸ "True-to-lifeness" is how, for example, the actor Vsevolod Verbitski characterized the desired spontaneity and naturalism of the actors' behavior in his *About Stanislavsky* (Moscow: VTO Publishers, 1948).

⁹ See Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavski System* (New York: Viking, 1960), p. 8.

¹⁰ Constantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1936), p. 167.

¹¹ Even Bertolt Brecht, who regarded realistic theater with contempt, conceded that this was important and desirable; see his *Theaterarbeit, Aufführungen des Berliner Ensembles*, 6 (Dresden, 1952).

¹² Robert Lewis, Introduction, in Konstantin Stanislavsky, *Creating a Role*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1961), p. v.

¹³ Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 158.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁵ Moore, *The Stanislavski System*, p. 57.

¹⁶ Konstantin Stanislavsky, *Building a Character*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949), p. 3; the term 'given circumstances' is Stanislavski's term for the totality of stage action, character history, and interpretive demands.

¹⁷ Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 271.

¹⁸ Moore, *The Stanislavski System*, p. 13.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

20 Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, p. 229. These ideas have been taken very seriously by some psychologists and physiologists, especially in the U.S.S.R. For example, the physiologist, Academician Simonov, has explored the use of conscious Stanislavskian means to influence maladaptive emotional reactions present in some neurotic disorders. See P. V. Simonov, *The Method of K. S. Stanislavski and the Physiology of Emotions* (Moscow: VTO Publishers, 1962).

21 For new theories of audience response relevant to the study of Stanislavski's theories, see Walter J. Ong, "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction," *PMLA*, 90 (1975), 9-21; Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," *New Literary History*, 2 (1970-71), 7-37; and see also Christopher C. Hudgins, "Dance to a Cut-Throat Temper: Harold Pinter's Poetry as an Index to Intended Audience Response," in *Drama in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Clifford Davidson, C. J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1984), p. 292.

22 In *My Life in Art*, trans. J. J. Robbins (New York: Little, Brown, 1924), Stanislavski describes the situation at his theater after the Revolution: "Our performances were free to all who received their tickets from factories. . . . We were forced to begin at the very beginning, to teach this new spectator how to sit quietly, how not to talk, . . . not to smoke, not to eat nuts, . . . not to bring food, . . . to dress in his best so as to fit more into the atmosphere of beauty that was worshipped in the theatre" (pp. 554-55).

At very nearly the same time (1926), Brecht was writing newspaper articles "insisting on the need for what he called a 'smokers' theatre,' where the audience would puff away at its cigars as if watching a boxing match, and would develop a more detached and critical outlook than was possible in the ordinary German theatre" (*Brecht on Theatre*, ed. John Willett [New York: Hill and Wang, 1964], p. 8). Some of these ideas were also expressed by Brecht in *The Elephant Calf* (*Das Elefantenkälbchen*), written in 1924-25 to be performed in the foyer during the intermission of *Man Is Man* (*Mann ist Mann*; see Martin Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, revised ed. [Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1971], p. 297). Introducing the play-within-the-play, Polly Baker says, "So that dramatic art can have its full effect on you, you are requested to smoke to your heart's content. . . . [T]he drinks are one hundred percent, . . . bets will be taken at the bar on how the plot comes out" (*The Jewish Wife and Other Short Plays*, trans. Eric Bentley [New York: Grove Press, 1965], p. 59), and there is then some horseplay between Polly and the soldiers, who are the audience at the play-within-the-play.

23 "I am the Einstein of the new stage form," Brecht is said to have claimed in reference to "epic theater" (see Mordecai Gorelik, "Brecht: 'I Am the Einstein of the New Stage Form . . .,'" *Theatre Arts*, 41, No. 3 [March 1957], 72-73). After 1938, he gradually replaced the term 'epic' by 'dialectic' and 'scientific' (see A. Subiotto, "Epic Theatre: A Theatre for the Scientific Age," in *Brecht in Perspective*, ed. Graham Bartram and Anthony Wayne [London: Longman, 1982], p. 30). Willett points out that at the outset epic theater flowed from the *Neue Sachlichkeit* ("The New Matter-of-Factness") movement of "sober, functional aesthetics associated with the Bauhaus, with painters like Grosz, Schlichter, and Beckmann, with Hindemith's early music, with reportage and (in typography) the abolition of upper-case letters" (*Brecht on Theatre*, p. 17). Piscator's use of documentary films and posters as theatrical "evidence" was presumably one of the influences. Furthermore, some of Brecht's anti-illusionist intentions were put to use earlier by artists as different as Alfred Jarry (see James H. Bierman, "The Antichrist Ubu," in *Drama in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Davidson, Gianakaris, and Stroupe, p. 171) and Meyerhold (see Moore, *The Stanislavski System*, p. 108).

24 Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 130.

25 Subiotto, "Epic Theatre," p. 33.

26 Stanislavski regarded the theater as "a pulpit which is the most powerful means of influence" (quoted in Moore, *The Stanislavski System*, p. 4), but by this he almost certainly had emotionally and aesthetically ennobling ends in mind rather than left-

wing social action. Stanislavski's comparatively benign treatment by the Soviet regime was probably not due to his relative eagerness (genuine or not) to meet its demands, nor to the apparent support for his system by Pavlov's psychological experiments, but because the basic elements of the system could quite readily be put in service of crude Socialist-Realist plays. (Incidentally, Pavlov's are among the few scientific discoveries that are genuinely of great value and lasting importance despite having been turned into dogma by the Stalinist pseudo-scientific establishment.)

There is the paradox of the apolitical Stanislavski system having been the norm in the Communist world, while Brecht's "dialectical" theater, proletarian themes, and "politically correct" *Lehrstücke* were regarded with some suspicion in both Moscow and East Berlin. To deflect attacks in the years immediately before Stalin's death, both Brecht and Helene Weigel tried very hard to say polite things about the Stanislavski system—e.g., at the Stanislavski conference in East Berlin in 1953 (see Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, pp. 188-91). For an account of Brecht's relations with East German critics, Zhdanovian polemicists, and the Communist Party, see Christine Kiebuszinska, *Revolutionaries in the Theater: Meyerhold, Brecht, and Witkiewicz* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1988), pp. 95ff.

27 The term first appears in Brecht's 1935 essay *Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst* (*Distancing Effects in Chinese Acting*), but such effects were a key part of his thinking and theatrical practice much earlier. The translation "distancing," after the French *distanciation*, as Eric Bentley ("Bertolt Brecht and His Work," in *The Private Life of the Master Race* [New York: New Directions, 1944], p. 125) and Alfred D. White (*Bertolt Brecht's Great Plays* [Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1978], p. 28) suggest, indeed seems preferable to the more frequently used "alienation."

28 Quoted by Keith A. Dickson, *Toward Utopia: A Study of Brecht* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 235.

29 Peter Brooker, *Bertolt Brecht: Dialectics, Poetry, Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 52.

30 See White, *Bertolt Brecht's Great Plays*, p. 43.

31 Willett, ed., *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 137.

32 Jan Needle and Peter Thomson, *Brecht* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 138-39.

33 This was essential for Brecht, given his political convictions, because he felt that audiences were "made to identify with the great heroes of traditional drama in order that they might indulge the illusion of power, whereas in reality they [were] at the mercy of economic and political forces beyond their immediate control" (Dickson, *Towards Utopia*, p. 231). Brecht regarded this as a "confidence trick," the success of which depended on the spectator "feel[ing] exactly what the character on the stage feels," and objected, for example, that "King Lear's anger is contagious and that in the traditional theatre the audience's response can only be anger" (*ibid.*, p. 231; see Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke*, XV [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967], 299).

34 White, *Bertolt Brecht's Great Plays*, p. 47; see Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke*, XVII, 1011.

35 For example, Dickson, *Towards Utopia*, p. 233.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 23 (this is Dickson's reading of the final chorus in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*).

37 T. S. Eliot, *Poetry and Drama*, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 81.

38 Bentley, "Bertolt Brecht and his Work," p. 128.

39 Ronald Gray, *Brecht: The Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), p. 81.

40 St. Augustine, *Confessions* III.2; I have used the translation by Vernon J.

Bourke in the *Fathers of the Church*, 21 (1953; rpt. Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1966), p. 50.

41 "Neither the public nor the actor must be stopped from taking part emotionally; the representation of emotions must not be hampered, nor must the actor's use of emotions be frustrated. Only one out of many possible sources of emotion needs to be left unused, or at least treated as a subsidiary source—empathy" (*The Mes-singkauf Dialogues*, trans. John Willett (London, 1965), as quoted by Needle and Thomson, *Brecht*, p. 131).

42 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

43 In the end, the matter of whether or not the Stanislavskian and Brechtian actors (intentionally or not) experience emotions on the stage, and the matter of which emotions are involved, are *empirical* questions. The answers of the Stanislavskian actors can be easily guessed; the objective, analytical Brechtian actors, on the other hand, might provide interesting and even surprising information. Modern social psychology and psychological aesthetics have the methodological tools to deal with such issues. In fact, the Berliner Ensemble itself took the first empirical step by conducting a survey of the views of the members of the company. When asked whether they used a particular style of acting, "the majority of the actors showed considerable uncertainty" (Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 146). The results were explained as "probably due to the fact that neither Brecht nor other directors of the Berliner Ensemble refer to Brecht's theoretical writings during rehearsals" (*ibid.*, p. 146).

44 *Brecht*, p. 132.

45 Bentley, "Bertolt Brecht and His Work," p. 131.

46 Dickson, *Towards Utopia*, p. 237.

47 *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 148.

48 In *Bertolt Brecht in America* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 90-91, James K. Lyon describes the opinions of some of Brecht's theatrical associates, including the scenic designer Mordecai Gorelik, concerning his works *circa* 1944—opinions that had found their way into Brecht's own journals: "He'll never be successful. He can't evoke emotions, he can't even bring about identification, and he makes a theory out of it. He's crazy, and he's getting worse." In another meeting between Gorelik and Brecht, "when Gorelik again insisted on what he held to be basic virtues of drama, the 'flesh and blood' of empathy, suspense, and climax, a bitter quarrel ensued . . . [and] an enraged Brecht threatened to throw him out the window (and might have if [Hanns] Eisler had not intervened)." No *Verfremdung* here, and Brecht might have experienced a true Platonic (as opposed to Aristotelian, as we shall see later) cathartic release had he carried out the "social action" of throwing the reactionary Gorelik out the window!

49 *Towards Utopia*, pp. 237-38.

50 Gray, *Brecht: The Dramatist*, p. 83. Furthermore, according to Esslin (*Brecht: The Man and His Work*, pp. 148-49), Brecht "succeeded at best merely in reducing to some extent the emotional identification of the audience with his characters. He never succeeded in evoking the critical attitude he postulated. The audience stubbornly went on being moved to terror and to pity." White (*Bertolt Brecht's Great Plays*, p. 46) similarly finds evidence that the Berliner Ensemble audiences were not "affected in the ways the theory demands." One eventually becomes impatient with such claims and counterclaims—confidently made despite the lack of empirical evidence—especially when the methodology exists to obtain the evidence on the audience's actual emotional reactions.

51 Gray, *Brecht: The Dramatist*, p. 83. Gray relies on interpretation of the *Poetics* provided in Humphrey House, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London: Macmillan, 1956).

52 Dickson, *Towards Utopia*, p. 238.

53 White, *Bertolt Brecht's Great Plays*, p. 34.

54 Michael Spingler, "Anouilh's Little Antigone: Tragedy, Theatricalism, and the Romantic Self," in *Drama in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Davidson, Gianakaris, and Stroupe, p. 173.

55 Aristotle, *Poetics*, in Alan H. Gilbert, *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden* (1940; rpt. Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 68-115.

56 F. L. Lucas, *Tragedy: Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics* (New York: Collier, 1962), p. 35.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 37; in a footnote on the same page, Lucas also indicates a preference for "healthy relief" over "purgation."

59 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

60 Dickson, *Towards Utopia*, p. 234.

61 More sophisticated "hydraulic" treatments of catharsis had, in fact, previously entered psychology through psychoanalysis (see Ives Hendrick, *Facts and Theories of Psychoanalysis* [New York: Knopf, 1948]), but have been largely discredited by experimental social psychology (see Albert Bandura, *Aggression: A Social Learning Analysis* [Engelwood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973]; Vladimir J. Konečni, "Annoyance, Type and Duration of Postannoyance Activity, and Aggression: 'The Cathartic Effect'," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 104 [1975], 76-102).

62 Lucas, *Tragedy*, pp. 38-39.

63 W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1952), I, 250.

64 Plato, *The Republic*, trans. H. D. P. Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), p. 222.

65 See, for example, A. Bandura, D. Ross, and S. A. Ross, "Transmission of Aggression Through Imitation of Aggressive Models," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 63 (1961), 575-82; L. Berkowitz, "Some Aspects of Observed Aggression," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2 (1965), 359-69; L. Berkowitz and R. G. Geen, "Film Violence and the Cue Properties of Available Targets," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3 (1966), 525-30; A. N. Doob and R. J. Climie, "The Delay of Measurement and the Effects of Film Violence," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 8 (1972), 136-42; L. D. Eron, "Relationship of TV Viewing Habits and Aggressive Behavior in Children," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67 (1963), 193-96; R. H. Walters and L. E. Thomas, "Enhancement of Punitiveness by Visual and Audiovisual Displays," *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, 17 (1963), 244-55.

66 The relevant findings were obtained: for the level of arousal, by J. E. Hokanson and S. Shetler, "The Effect of Overt Aggression on Physiological Arousal Level," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 63 (1961), 446-48; for anger, by Vladimir J. Konečni and A. N. Doob, "Catharsis Through Displacement of Aggression," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 23 (1972), 379-87; for aggressive behavior, Konečni, "Annoyance, Type and Duration of Postannoyance Activity," pp. 76-102, and Vladimir J. Konečni and E. B. Ebbesen, "Disinhibition Versus the Cathartic Effect: Artifact and Substance," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34 (1976), 352-65.

67 The same experimental procedures that led to a decrease in arousal, anger, and aggression also resulted in interesting decreases in self-exposure to novel or complex stimuli and alcohol consumption; see, respectively, Vladimir J. Konečni, J. B. Crozier, and A. N. Doob, "Anger and Expression of Aggression: Effects on Aesthetic Preference," *Scientific Aesthetics/Sciences de l'Art*, 1 (1976), 47-55, and A. Marlatt, C. F. Kosturn, and A. R. Lang, "Provocation to Anger and Opportunity for Retaliation as Determinants of Alcohol Consumption in Social Drinkers," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 84 (1975), 652-59.

⁶⁸ Konečni, "Determinants of Aesthetic Preference and Effects of Exposure to Aesthetic Stimuli: Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Factors," *Progress in Experimental Personality Research*, 9 (1979), 149-97.

⁶⁹ Cited by Needle and Thomson, *Brecht*, p. 141.

⁷⁰ As Esslin (*Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 150) and other non-Marxist critics have pointed out, there is no reason why Brecht's theatrical aesthetics cannot be divorced from Marxist ideology. Dickson's statement (in *Towards Utopia*, pp. 229-30) that "the theatrical rebel [i.e., Brecht] who demanded an unemotional anti-illusionistic kind of theatre is quite consistent with the rationalist to whom Marxism appealed so strongly" is a poor counter-argument. Marxism does not appeal to many people precisely because they are rationalists, and an unemotional, anti-illusionistic performance of a Marxist play may well effectively, if unintentionally, drive the opposite point home to the "distanced" spectators (see Esslin, *Brecht: The Man and His Work*, p. 150). One can even write a play using Brecht's staging, documentary, and narrative techniques to debunk aspects of left-wing ideology (my play *The Boomerang*, soon to be published in *Swift Kick*, is an example of this).

⁷¹ Even a highly didactic play like *The Mother: Life of the Revolutionary Pelageya Vlasova of Tver* (*Die Mutter: Leben der Revolutionärin Pelagea Wlassowa aus Twer*) struck spectators, otherwise sympathetic to Brecht, as politically uninspiring. Jay Williams (in *Stage Left* [New York: Scribner, 1974], p. 182) comments on a performance of *The Mother* by a left-wing workers' theater in New York in 1935: "Burns Mantle [a sympathetic critic] said that he had expected 'when those earnest propagandists set their minds and their hearts, their enthusiasms and . . . workers' zeal at the business, . . . I should have an emotional urge to stand in the aisle and shout a bit myself,' but alas, most of the drama took place offstage [referring to Brecht's violent disagreements with the director] and . . . he had only felt the urge to yawn."

⁷² See Eugene Ionesco, Préface, in *L'Avante-Garde Théâtrale*, ed. Tom Bishop (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1970): "on s'aperçoit maintenant que toutes les clef données par le théâtre idéologique, brechtien ou autre, étaient de fausses clefs" (p. ix).