

TECHNIQUES AND FACTS

By  
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28 Plays Later

Day 7

February 7, 2021

ACT I

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP - A THEATER

An audience sits on stage. In the house, are strewn, hither and yon, the cast of characters for this epic. When the house lights have reached full, and the soft stage lighting has dimmed, STAGE MANAGER walks down the aisle to the front of the stage, places a ghost light, and turns it on. DIRECTOR stands.

DIRECTOR: Brecht was the key figure of our time, and all theatre work today at some point starts or returns to his statements and achievements. Peter Brooke. Theatre director.

An "Applause" light comes on for the audience to see. Should they NOT applaud, STAGE MANAGER should cough once and point at the sign.

THEATRE CRITIC stands. He wears a placard that says "Theatre Critic." Everyone else is costumed similarly.

THEATRE CRITIC: I am not smart enough to understand what you're saying. Explain Brecht to me simply, like you would to a child, or a theatre critic.

DRAMATURG: Bertolt Brecht was born in Germany in 1898. He was a poet, playwright and theatre director. His most famous plays include Life of Galileo, Mother Courage and Her Children, and The Caucasian Chalk Circle.

PRODUCER: Brecht's groundbreaking directing style has been hugely influential to many directors and designers over the decades. Playwright David Edgar once said 'Brecht is part of the air we breathe.' His influence is still present in much of theatre and many would argue that Brecht changed the face of modern theatre.

MARKETING: Brecht made his theatre highly political. He wanted to spark an interest in his audiences' perception of the world, not just sit passively and get lost in a show's story. But, rather, to make them think and question the world they live in, encouraging them to be critical of society. His work was often mischievous, provocative and ironic.

SET DESIGNER: Brecht wanted audiences to remain objective and unemotional during his plays so they could make rational judgments about the political aspects of his work. To do this he invented a range of theatrical devices known as epic theatre.

CHOREOGRAPHER: Epic theatre is a type of political theatre that addresses contemporary issues. Brecht believed classical approaches to theatre were escapist, and he was more interested in facts and reality rather than escapism. Epic theatre doesn't attempt to lay down a tidy plot and story, but leaves issues unresolved, confronting the audience with sometimes uncomfortable questions.

COSTUME DESGN: *Verfremdungseffekt*, or the 'estrangement effect,' was used to distance the audience from the play and is sometimes called the alienation effect. Brecht did not want the audience to have any emotional attachment to his characters, so he did various things to break it.

ASSISTANT DIR: Breaking the fourth wall, where the "wall" between the audience and actors on stage is broken. Rather than allowing the audience to sit passively and get lost in the show, the actors will sometimes directly address the audience with a speech, comment or a question - breaking the fourth wall.

DIRECTOR: (to audience) You get that, right?

An "Applause" light comes on for the audience to see. Should they NOT applaud, STAGE MANAGER should cough once and point at the sign.

DRAMATURG: Montage, where short movie clips were put together, often to show factual events. Sometimes the clips were edited to juxtapose each other, and/or sometimes the montages were used to highlight the issues Brecht is trying to communicate.

CHOREOGRAPHER: Some of Brecht's work includes songs, music and dance. This helps to remind the audience that they are not watching real life. Sometimes the songs are juxtaposed ironically, with cheery upbeat music but with dark lyrics. One of the most famous song lyrics comes from Brecht's 'The Threepenny Opera'

PRODUCER: (singing) Who is the bigger criminal: he who robs a bank or he who founds one?

MARKETING: Narration was used to remind the audience that they were watching a story. Sometimes the narrator would tell the audience what is about to happen in the story, before it happens, because if the audience knows the outcome then they may not get as emotionally involved.

SET DESIGNER: We are about to tell you about sets, costumes, props and lighting.

COSTUME DESGN: Brecht believed the stage should be brightly lit at all times. That sets should not be realistic, just suggestive. And that actors should use minimal props, often only one per character.

SET DESIGNER: Also props can be used in several different ways, for example a suitcase may become a desk.

ASSISTANT DIR: Actors would sometimes come out of character, often at heightened moments of drama, to remind the audience that it is a piece of fiction that they are watching.

DIRECTOR: A placard, or projection screen could be used to give the audience some extra factual information, for example it might have said how many people have died in a particular war. Placards can also be used to introduce characters in generic ways, e.g. 'mum,' or

'director.' Placards are also used to introduce a new scene, or to tell the audience when one has finished.

DRAMATURG: The actors would sometimes go into a freeze frame to break the action so that the audience could stop and think critically for a moment. And sometimes it was done so that the narrator could speak, or so that an actor can come out of character and perhaps break the fourth wall.

PRODUCER: There are many other techniques he invented too, but these are some of his most famous.

MARKETING: Brecht has many admirers—and many critics. Some critics argue that to touch an audience deeply you need to affect them emotionally, which Brecht was opposed to doing. Others criticise Brecht because he was very opposed to corrupt post-war East Germany, but still accepted money from them to create his company the Berlin Ensemble. Theatre critic Michael Billington (who seems to admire Brecht as well as criticise him) wrote that Brecht, 'was a shameless magpie who stole from everyone, often without acknowledgement.'

DIRECTOR: Whether you love, hate or feel indifferent toward him, Brecht was a creative, influential, controversial and often contradictory man who is still relevant to theatre today.

STAGE MANAGER: By Sam Marsden.

The whole cast save the STAGE MANAGER and  
THEATRE CRITIC freezes.

THEATRE CRITIC: What?

STAGE MANAGER: This whole essay was unashamedly cribbed and adapted from an essay by Sam Marsden published on Drama Classes dot Biz.

THEATRE CRITIC: Oh.

An "Applause" light comes on for the audience to see. Should they NOT applaud, STAGE MANAGER should cough once and point at the sign.

BLACK OUT.

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**Brief 7 - Due by 8 Feb at 10:00am UK time**

Aristotle?! What does he know?

What's with all that relatability and catharsis malarkey?

And this illusion that theatre is meant to represent some present state? All it does is make the audience emotive and forget - like boring dinner.

Naa... Not on my Bertoltian watch!

Time to make a difference in the world and make our audience think. After all, if they feel - they stop thinking, and then they forget - so what's the point of that?

I think it's time for some Brechtian epic theatre!

No more 'here' and 'now', only 'then' and 'there' (thankfully, we're fully versed in past tense writing). Tell a story and comment on it as you report it.

Don't attempt to create identification with your characters, make them do strange things that break the illusion all the time (that's what 'verfremdungseffekt' means - not alienation as is often mistranslated).

As for the structure of the play, go wild - be loose, forget everything you think you know about how to structure a story with climaxes (climaxi?) catharsiseseses (catharsi?) suspenseseses (suspensi?) it can even be episodic (shout out to all my DDD playas).

Oh... and don't use the word 'alienation'... it hurts my ears... eyes... heart! No! Brain! It hurts my brain! Screw my heart! I mean... don't screw my heart... That's... weird... ooh, but then it verfremdungseffekts! So maybe you should? Oh dear...