



**2016 specification**  
first exams in 2016 (2017 for AS)

# **Brecht: A Complete Guide**

For AS and A Level Edexcel

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# Teacher's Introduction

Bertolt Brecht is a highly influential theatre practitioner and is studied on both GCSE and A Level Drama and Theatre Studies. This resource is intended to be used to support the teaching of the new specifications for **Drama and Theatre Studies**. Within the new specification, the qualification requires students to study two influential theatre practitioners.

Within **A Level Component 1: Devising**, centres must provide students with a key text of a theatre practitioner as a stimulus. Within **Component 3: Theatre Makers in Practice**, centres must choose from a list of eight practitioners and apply their interpretation of a play text.

For **AS Level Drama and Theatre**, the resource can be used to prepare students for the **Performance**, in which students create a group performance which is informed by a key theatre practitioner.

This resource is intended to provide teachers with engaging practical activities, worksheets and research which can be used immediately in the classroom and drama studio. The breadth and depth of Brecht's long career as a playwright, director and practitioner provides teachers to explore his methods and body of work both theoretically and practically. This resource provides a 'page to stage' approach embedded within the new specifications. This creative approach to Brecht's methods and ideas is further consolidated with opportunities for students to complete a range of practice questions and note-writing activities.

## How to use this resource

This resource explores and examines the social, cultural, historical and political context of his innovative working methods and approaches, and his significant influence on theatre over the last hundred years. Each page has a title which specifies either 'Student Handout', 'Teaching and Learning Resource' or 'Independent Study'. 'Student Handouts' can be used in lessons by students for detailed notes about the practitioner. The 'Teaching and Learning Resource' pages are for the teacher. These pages introduce and explain key activities, which enable students to explore the practitioner practically. The 'Independent Study' pages can be given directly to students for revision. All teacher notes, detailed research and model examples appear in the 'Teaching and Learning Resource' pages.

## Assessment Objectives AS and A Level Drama and Theatre Studies

Assessment objectives set by Ofqual apply to all AS and A Level Drama and Theatre Studies and are used by all exam boards. Exam and class assessments will determine how successful students are in following AOs:

- AO1** Create and develop ideas to communicate meaning as part of the theatre and explore connections between dramatic theory and practice.
- AO2** Apply theatrical skills to realise artistic intentions in live performance.
- AO3** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how drama and theatre is created.
- AO4** Analyse and evaluate their own work and the work of others.

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**Table 1: Weighting of the Assessment Objectives – Edexcel A and AS Drama and Music (new specification – 2016)**

AS

Component	AO1 %	AO2 %	AO3 %	AO4 %
Component 1: Exploration and Performance	30	30	0	10
Component 2: Theatre Makers in Practice	0	0	27	13
<b>Total for GCE A Level</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>23%</b>

A Level

Component	AO1 %	AO2 %	AO3 %	AO4 %
Component 1: Devising	20	10	0	10
Component 2: Text in Performance	0	20	0	0
Component 3: Theatre Makers in Practice	0	0	30	10
<b>Total for GCE A Level</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>20%</b>

**Table 2: Assessment Objectives**

Key Features	AO1	AO2
Social, Cultural, Historical and Political Context	✓	
Brecht’s Life and Work	✓	
Artistic Intentions	✓	✓
Theatrical Purpose and Practice	✓	✓
The Innovative Nature of Brecht’s Work	✓	✓
Brecht’s Working Methods	✓	
Brecht’s Style and Theatrical Conventions	✓	
Collaboration with Other Practitioners	✓	
Influence on Other Practitioners	✓	
Exam Focus	✓	

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# Social, Cultural, Historical and Political

## Overview

**Brecht (1898–1956)** was a pioneer of **radical theatre**. As an artist who upheld his beliefs, he faced many challenges. Throughout his lifetime he reacted to the society in which he lived and worked. In Brecht's Germany he encountered **war, economic catastrophe** and

## Research Questions and Tasks

- 1) Read the **Student Handout: Timeline of Key Events** and highlight/underline the events which you feel may have impacted on Brecht's theories and ideas. Build a list below:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

- 2) **Political Context Research Task – Brecht and Marxism**

- Who was Karl Marx?
- How did Marxist theory influence Brecht?
- Was Brecht a member of the Communist Party?

- 3) **Cultural Influences Research Task**

Brecht maintained **continuity of purpose** throughout his career. He wrote for a theatre which could be used as a tool for **changing society**. However, he did not use a single style in order to achieve his purpose. Throughout his career he was influenced by, an eclectic mixture of theatrical modes.

Research the following cultural forms and how they specifically influenced Brecht's methodology:

**Japanese Noh Theatre, Greek Theatre, Circus, Cabaret, Bavarian Folk Music, Music Hall, Sporting Events and Silent Films.**

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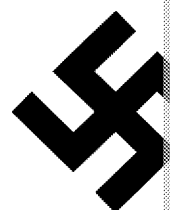


## Timeline of Key Events

1914–1918	Germany started the First World War in 1914 and lost in 1918. Following Germany's defeat in 1918, Western Britain and France, forced Germany to sign the Treaty of Versailles. Germany to pay for the damage her armies had inflicted, which totalled £7,000 million. In Germany, war veterans formed the German Workers (Nazi) party under Adolf Hitler.
1923	In a desperate attempt to pay off its debts, the German government was printing more and more money. This resulted in catastrophic hyperinflation; in a few months, the currency was worthless.
1929	The Great Depression was sparked off by the Wall Street Crash. Unemployment in Germany soared to 33%. State and local elections saw the Nazis gain.
1932	The Nazis, on the brink of taking power, proclaimed that it was forbidden to include George Bernard Shaw, Strindberg and Brecht's books were burned in Germany.
1933	Hitler was appointed Chancellor. The German parliament was shut down and the Nazi Party took the opportunity to block the Reichstag. They fled Germany and went to Denmark.
1939	Nazi Germany invaded Poland and the Second World War began. Germany successfully occupied Poland and France, but in 1941 the Soviet Union heralded the beginning of the end for Germany.
1945	With much of Germany in ruins, the Second World War ended. Germany was defeated. Hitler committed suicide.
1947	As a consequence of Germany's defeat and the onset of the Cold War, Germany was divided into the East and the West. A period known as the Cold War began. During the McCarthy era, Brecht was called to appear before the American Activities Committee in order to investigate his communist beliefs. Soon after this, he moved back to Germany.

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## The Influence of Marxism

**Brecht's aim** was to create theatre which was **analytical** and made his audience think. Throughout his career he always remained committed to the **political left**.

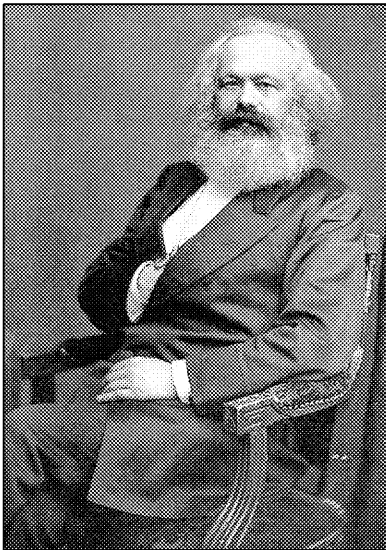
A significant moment in Brecht's career was in 1926 when he began to study **Marx**. In Marx's writing he felt he had found a philosophy that matched his political views. Not all of Marx's theories but they provided him with a basis for, and measure of, his own.

### Who was Karl Marx?

- He was a philosopher and writer who lived from 1818 to 1883.
- Throughout his life he worked alongside his friend and fellow philosopher Friedrich Engels.
- He had a deep distrust of capitalism because he saw economic power concentrated in the hands of a few and society's structures and politics.
- His ideas were the basis for the Russian Revolution in 1917.
- He believed that human behaviour is not shaped by the individual, but by the economic environment. Therefore, in order for people to change, society must change.
- With Engels, wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848.
- **Socialism**, in Marx's theories, is seen an intermediate stage between Capitalism and Communism.

### Influence of Marx on Brecht

Brecht agreed with Marx, that underneath the surface of capitalist society there are forces that are controlling our existence.



In Brecht's later plays, he wanted to educate his audience about what he saw as the 'rotteness' of bourgeois society.

He thought that by making audiences acknowledge their role in society, they would be empowered to change it.

In the book *Brecht on Theatre*, Brecht sums up his philosophy as a playwright:

*'I wanted to take the principle that it was not the world that was interpreting the world but of changing it.'*  
(p. 248)

This principle was influenced directly by Marxist theory. Most philosophers so far have only interpreted the world, the question is to change it'.

Brecht believed that the audience should respond to a particular performance by using their own lives and taking action, on either a personal or political level. He wanted audiences to believe not 'fate' which controls destiny but 'man is alterable and able to alter'.

### Brecht and Communism

Communism is the system of organisation pioneered by Marx with the following principles:

- All economic and social activity is controlled by the state.
- The idea of a classless society is advocated.
- Private ownership is abolished and production belongs to the community.

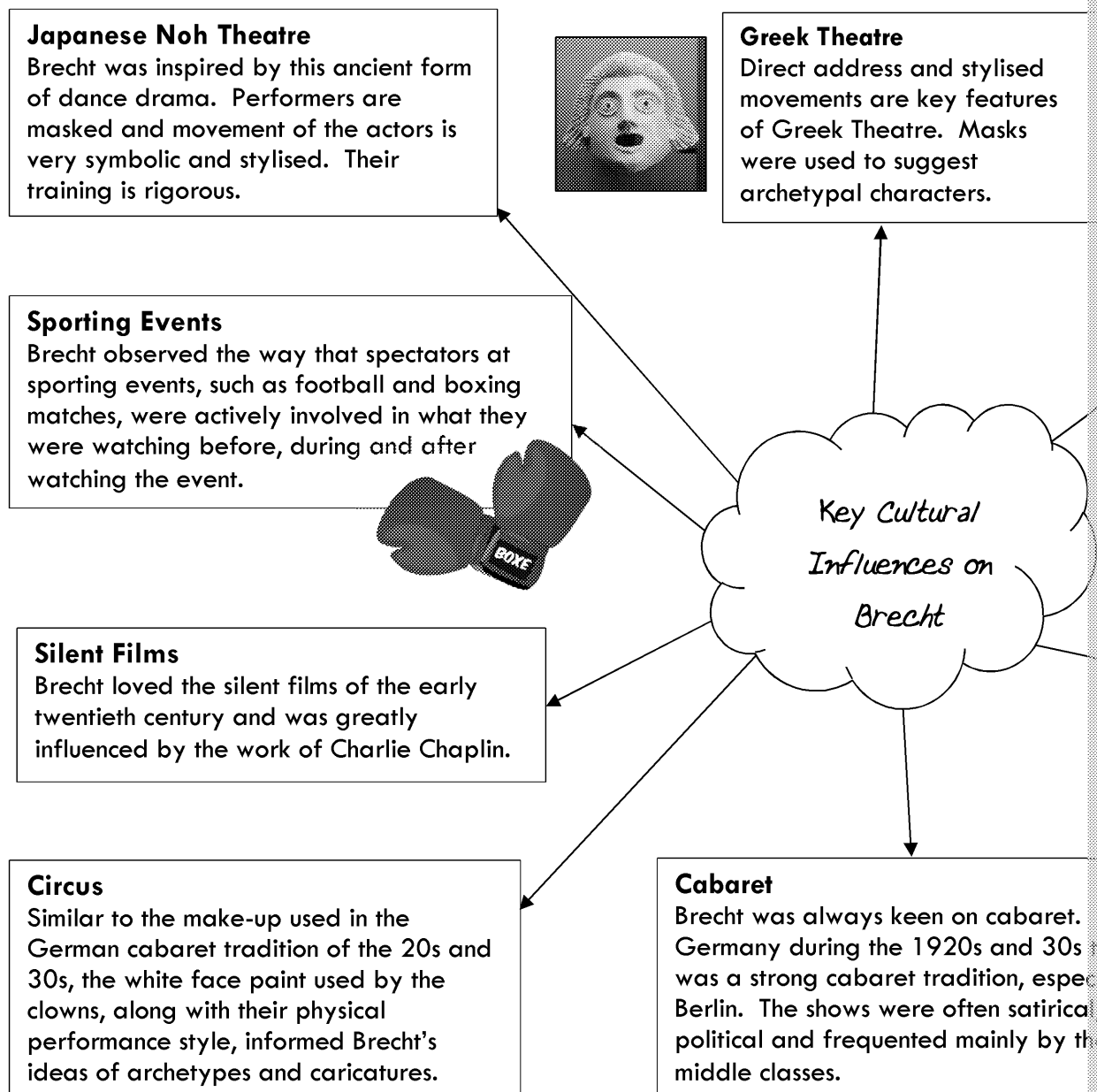
It is unclear whether Brecht actually joined the Communist Party. Some reports say he did, others suggest he did not. However, it is certain that he supported the Communist Party throughout his career.

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## Key Cultural Influences on Brecht



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## Silent Film

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### Cultural influence of silent films and Charlie Chaplin

- Brecht praised early silent films because he felt the focus was not on the actor as a basis for motivation, but the social, external focuses affecting their performance. Charlie Chaplin. He felt his 'Tramp' character behaved in the way that he did because of how he was treated, not due to his individual personality.
- He was also influenced by the way the subtitles and images worked together in silent films.
- Brecht loved early silent films because people could enter and leave the cinema. This supported Brecht's anti-**bourgeois** aims because it was informal.
- Silent film acting also focused on external action rather than the psychological. For example, they included a lot of slapstick and visual/physical theatre.

### Other elements within silent film which influenced Brecht:

- Use of titles and images (informing the audience what will happen, before the action begins to focus less on narrative)
- Informal element of a film screening for the audience
- Acting styles within silent films (anti-realism)

### Keyword Focus – Bourgeois

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Brecht felt contempt for bourgeois society, the capitalist middle classes. Brecht's theatre was a reaction to naturalistic theatre and represented:

- materialism and money
- science
- intellectualism
- authority of society, politics, home and religion
- social obligations
- public opinion
- traditional learning through books

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## Silent Film

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### Independent research

Watch clips of silent films from the early twentieth century. Look specifically at the films of Charlie Chaplin and his film from 1915 entitled *The Tramp*.

Consider:

- What happens to the 'Tramp' character within the film and how are his actions influenced by society?

### Student Notes:

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- Why do you think Brecht loved silent films and why do you think he copied Charlie Chaplin's recurring character the 'Tramp' from the 1915 film?

### Student Notes:

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## Weimar Cabaret

### Cultural Influence of Weimar Cabaret

During the 1920s and 1930s in Berlin there was a performance tradition called cabaret which influenced Brecht's theatre greatly. Therefore, it is important that students understand the influence of cabaret. An excellent introduction to this is the 1972 film *Cabaret* by Bob Fosse. This film was based on Christopher Isherwood's semi-autobiographical book *Goodbye to Berlin* which is a good source for students to look at in order to get a sense of Berlin and the Weimar Republic. The key features to consider when considering why Brecht was influenced by cabaret are:

- The informality of performance (audience could drift in and out at which time they could eat and drink during the show).
- The stage space (it was not a formal audience setting but the audience was part of the performance).
- Direct address and 'breaking down the fourth wall' (the actors spoke to the audience and often mingled among them).
- The topic of the cabaret often explored current issues and contemporary politics.
- Satire was used by the performers to convey a political message.
- A mixture of song, dance, acting and puppetry was presented.
- Stylised make-up was used to enhance anti-realism.
- For Brecht, it was the perfect mixture of entertainment but also a vehicle for social and political commentary.

### Practical Task for Students

Students must watch the film *Cabaret* and read Christopher Isherwood's book *Goodbye to Berlin*.

### Key Questions for Students

What are the key features of cabaret as a style of performance? Which of these do you think Brecht was influenced by?

Students must select a current news story in the press and present it in the style of a cabaret performance. They must ensure that the clip is five minutes in length and with the key features they have identified. The stage space is set up appropriately (45-minute Devising Task).

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### **Living Museum Practical Task**

The information in the previous sections is a starting point for your context. Choose one of the areas of context from the following list and work in pairs or groups to create a 'Living Museum' exhibit.

**Historical:**

- World Wars I and II
- The Impact of the Great Depression

**Political:**

- Karl Marx
- Communism

**Cultural:**

- Japanese Noh Theatre
- Greek Theatre
- Circus, Cabaret
- Bavarian Folk Plays
- Shakespeare
- Music Hall
- Sporting Events
- Silent Films

Here are your Success Criteria for your creative presentation:

- ✓ The audience will move around to each exhibit station to learn more about the topic.
- ✓ Use a range of drama techniques to bring your exhibit to life, such as: role-play, placards, narration, images, projections, props and sound effects.
- ✓ Most importantly, your presentation must explore the connection between the research and Brecht. Why, and specifically how, was he influenced by the research? How does this influence his theory and practice?

### **Extension Task**

Can you create a handout for your audience members to take away with them?

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# Brecht's Life and Work

## *Brecht's Life*

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### Research Questions

Use the Timeline for Brecht (1898–1956) as a resource to answer the following questions.

- 1) At the age of 20, where did Brecht decide to live and how did his life change there?
- 2) Which production was Brecht's first major success? (Extension: Research into the impact of this production on the German theatre scene.)
- 3) Why did Brecht leave Germany and become 'exiled'?
- 4) Why did Brecht leave America in the late 1940s?
- 5) What was the McCarthy era and how was Brecht involved?

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## Timeline for Brecht (1898-1956)

Germany	1898	Born in Augsburg, southern Germany. His father b
	1917	Called up for the army and was sent to Augsburg orderly.
	1918	Went to study in Munich after the First World War broke ties with his family and went to live in Munich songwriter.
	1924	Moved to Berlin. By this time he had written severa
	1928	Brecht's <i>Threepenny Opera</i> was performed – his first Collaboration began with musicians, writers and des
	1929	Studied theory and writings of Karl Marx.
In Exile	1933	The day after the Reichstag Fire in February, he fle Nazis with his wife (Helena Weigel) and his son, Fr
	1933–39	Lived in Denmark. Wrote <i>The Mother</i> and his first c
	1939–41	Lived in Sweden, then Finland.
	1941–47	Moved to America. Came up against an anti-left v US government committee investigating activity in h him. He left America for Germany soon after.
Return to Germany	1949	Brecht and Weigel's own state-subsidised company established. Brecht settled in East Berlin.
	1954	Berliner Ensemble acquired its own home in Theate Brecht was awarded the Stalin Peace Prize. Contr
	1956	In poor health after the spring. On 10 <sup>th</sup> August, Br rehearsal. On 14 <sup>th</sup> August, Brecht died of a heart
	Post 1956	Following Brecht's death, the Berliner Ensemble con most important theatres in Europe and is still perfor plays continue to be staged in Germany and throu

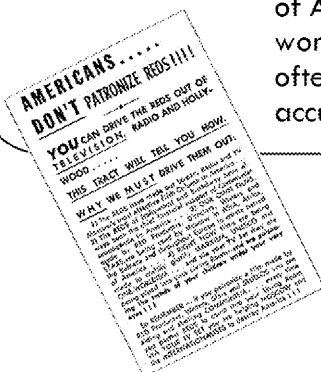
## Keywords and Terminology

### Exile

Being away from your home country but threatened w if you return. Brecht was exiled because he was Jew left-wing radical artist. The Nazis would have killed Germany at this time.

### McCarthy Era

The McCarthy era was a period in forties and fifties' of Americans were accused of being communists and worked in the entertainment industry were specifically often little evidence to support the accusations being accused and questioned by the 'House Un-America C



US anti-communist propaganda of the 1950s, specifically addressing the entertainment industry

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## Brecht's Work

Brecht's output was huge as both a playwright and director. He was involved in many stage works, which include operas and adaptations. It is difficult, if not impossible, to list them all definitively. He did not sit down and write a play and then regard it as finished. He was liable to involve revisions of the text, which means that his texts were always in flux. However, Brecht's work can be considered in three stages.

### Task

Read the information below and create the following in order to revise:

- 1) Create a mind map for each of the phases – make them visual and concise.
- 2) Write an extended paragraph which demonstrates your understanding of Brecht's work and how his career progressed, giving examples of the style and form of each key phase (300–400 words). For example:

*In the early period of Brecht's career, between 1918 and 1928, key elements of his style and Theatre were already apparent. His early plays began to attack bourgeois society and political questions to the audience. Songs were also used to communicate his ideas. This can be seen in Brecht's first major success, The Threepenny Opera, which dealt with crime and criminality in Victorian England. By 1928, Brecht's plays were becoming more and more radical.*

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## Three Phases of Brecht's Career

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### The Early Period (1918–1928)

- Plays contain expressionistic elements (e.g. characters depicted as stereotypes / episodic narrative structure).
- Use humour, but are also bleak and cynical.
- Pose social and political questions.
- Attack bourgeois values.
- Reject the convention of the 'fourth wall'.
- Songs are used to comment on action.
- The Instruction Plays (1928–1930)
- Mostly short pieces, written to instruct audiences.
- Contain some elements of Epic Theatre, such as captions and projections.
- *The Mother* is a longer play from this era and deals explicitly with political issues.
- The Mature Years (1930–1956)
- Contain many elements which link to Brecht's theories of Epic Theatre.
- In *Mother Courage and the Life of Galileo*, each scene is prefaced by a sign that says 'This scene is about to happen'. In performance, these can be displayed or read out.
- In *The Good Person of Sezuan*, the actors step out of their roles and comment on their actions.
- In *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Brecht uses the device of a 'play within a play'.

### Extension Task

Can you find images from the productions within each phase? How do they develop as Brecht's career evolved?

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**Task 1 (45 mins)**

**Gestus:** A clear character gesture or movement which captures a moment or makes a social comment.

To demonstrate this, ask a student to march across the stage as a soldier or student to do the same movement but ask other students to be dead bodies the soldier walks over. The second performance is 'Gestus'. When students discuss their discussions on the second scene, conveying a clear socio-political message and who is to blame for the loss of life in war. The topic of war was explored especially in his play *Mother Courage* (1948).

'Geste' covers the use of an individual actor's facial expression and body language used to describe the whole stage picture. Within a whole stage picture, the message must be expressed with clarity. This means that everyone on stage must be clear about the attitude they wish to convey to the audience as a whole group.

In groups, students must create two contrasting tableaux of the following nature: 'Corruption in Downing Street' and 'Trust grows in new Government'.

Followed by

'The Hero's War' and 'The Loss of War'.

You must discuss as a group the attitude you are trying to convey so that the photographs of the images, as Brecht did with his company, and discuss what would be made clearer. How could design elements be used to enhance or reinforce (props/costumes)?

**Remember** – Gestus can be **subtle**. Through Gestus, Brecht wanted to communicate to an audience.

Students can use the following vocabulary, linked to non-verbal communication in their work:

**facial expression / levels / positioning / gestures / posture / status**

**Task 2 (1 hour)**

Having developed an understanding of 'Gestus' and 'Gestic Tableaux', students must read and revise all of the handouts about **Brecht's Life and Work**. Ask students to identify key moments from his life and work and create a 'Gestic Tableau' for each key moment.

Students must then spend 30 minutes devising a performance, by developing their Gestic Tableaux into 30-second mini-clips or 'episodes'.

As an **extension activity**, students can begin to introduce a few key features and form into their work. For example:

- Could each 'episode' have a scene title using mini-whiteboards?
- Will characters be stylised or exaggerated, perhaps even satirical?
- Could songs be introduced to interrupt the action?
- How will direct address be incorporated in order to make the audience watching?
- How could they incorporate 'Gestic Tableaux' into their performance in order to convey political messages within the piece?

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# Brecht's Life and Work - Hot Seating Activity

Hot-seat Brecht at different points in his career. In this exercise, you should discuss Brecht's theories and plays at key moments in his career. Each hot-seating session should last three and five minutes.

- 1) In which year will you be hot-seated? .....
- 2) What was Brecht doing at this time in terms of his life and work?  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....
- 3) Research additional information about Brecht's life and career in this year and give a summary of the play he was specifically working on in this year and give a summary of the characters and key themes.  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....
- 4) Write a list of five closed and open questions below which you want to be hot-seated. For example: 'Where are you living at present?' 'What are you working on at the moment'

1)
2)
3)
4)
5)

### Extension Task

Why don't you try hot-seating Helena Weigel, Brecht's wife, who worked extensively during his career?

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## Brecht's Artistic Intentions

### *Dramatic versus Epic*

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In order to fully understand Brecht's key beliefs and theories, it is important to know the type of theatre he was reacting against... **Naturalism** and the **Dramatic** play.

- 1) Research the term 'Dramatic Theatre'.
- 2) Who was Aristotle and what is the structure and concept behind the 'well-made play'?
- 3) How do the audience become emotionally involved when watching 'dramatic plays'? How does Brecht consider this to inhibit his artistic intentions?
- 4) Define the genre of 'Naturalism'. When did it start and what were the key characteristics?
- 5) Why did Brecht detest Naturalism and react against it?

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## *Dramatic versus Epic*

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### **What is Dramatic Theatre?**

The roots of **Dramatic** play can be traced back to the Greek philosopher **Aristotle** (born 384 BC).

The basis of 'Aristotelian' theatre is the idea of the '**well-made play**' which builds and sustains suspense throughout, and builds to a moment of **climax** and **catharsis**.

The audience become **emotionally involved** in what they are watching, sharing in the actor's experiences.

Dramatic theatre also presents events from the **hero's viewpoint** and as happening in the **present**.

### **Brecht's Reaction**

- Brecht thought that if the audience became emotionally involved with what they were watching, they could not remain objective and think clearly about the issues in the play.
- He also felt that by showing only the hero's viewpoint, that the audience would be misled.
- Finally, he thought that the audience should be made aware that events were happening (happening now) but must be past events, with a commentary provided.

### **Keywords**

- Climax**     The highest point of tension in a scene or play.  
**Catharsis**     Releasing strong emotions.

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## *Brecht's Reaction to Naturalism*

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### What is Naturalism?

- Naturalism was an artistic movement which **started in literature** and then spread to other areas.
- Naturalists in theatre were concerned with **reproducing real life** on stage.
- **Intricate** props, costumes and set design would be used to create the effect of reality down to the finest details. If the setting was a kitchen, for example, there would be a cooker, china tea cups and real food.
- It was soon replaced with **Realism**, which only showed the necessary moments and not every single detail.

### Stanislavski

The Russian actor and director Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1938) was the main pioneer of Naturalism and Realism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He created a whole acting 'System' based on the idea that the illusion of reality should be reproduced on stage. Central to his System was the idea of the 'Fourth Wall', the idea that there should be an invisible 'line' which separates actors from the audience, meaning that the audience should never be acknowledged by the actors on stage.

### Brecht's Reaction to Naturalism

Naturalism was associated with the **bourgeoisie**, or the **capitalist middle classes**. For Brecht, the bourgeoisie represented **materialism, intellectualism, authority, money, family obligations** and **public opinion**. Brecht detested these values.

Brecht did not want to 'trick' his audience into thinking they were watching something real. Instead he wanted to continually remind them they were sitting in a theatre, watching machinery and actors. Only then, he felt, would they be able to react objectively rather than being put into what he called a 'trance'. Brecht sought to break this using **direct address**.

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## *Epic Theatre - Costume, Lighting and Props*

Central to Brecht's theory and practice was his desire to continually remind the audience of the fact that they are watching a play, in order that they remain critically objective. In naturalistic theatre, the set is used to reinforce a sense of realism. For example, naturalistic theatre often uses realistic costumes, painted scenery and 'decorative' furniture on stage. In Brecht's Epic Theatre, the set uses elements to break the 'deceitful illusion' of reality created by Naturalism. He uses elements like lighting, costumes, props and scenery to remind the audience that they are in a theatre, surrounded by artificial and mechanical elements like lighting, scenery and curtains.

### **Task**

Research how Brecht used Lighting, Costume and Props within his theatre to achieve his intended artistic effect. Write your findings below in bullet-point form:

#### **Lighting Research:**

#### **Costume Research:**

#### **Props Research:**

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## *Epic Theatre - Costume, Lighting and Props*

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### **Lighting**

- Bright light flooded the stage and the auditorium, as opposed to being dim. This enabled the actors to see the audience clearly while they were directing, breaking the 'fourth wall'.
- Lights were visible on stage, rather than being hidden.

### **Costumes**

- Key items of costume are used to denote character (e.g. hat, bag, scarf).
- The real clothes of the actors are revealed underneath costume.
- Costumes are changed in full view of the audience (for example, there are no curtains with costumes on).
- Items of costume were used to signify 'multi-role', as an actor transformed into several different actors playing one character, Brecht believed this would prevent the actor becoming emotionally attached to the character.

### **Props**

- Props are used sparingly and are incorporated into real tasks undertaken on stage (e.g. hanging of sheets, scrubbing the floor, etc.)
- Props which were used were sometimes symbolic and significant. For example, a table prop throughout *Mother Courage* to signify the key theme of the 'common man'.

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## Brecht and Writing

Brecht did not believe that a script should be fixed. He frequently changed. Therefore, his plays were constantly evolving. Brecht's primary aim was to be specific to a specific time, socially and historically. He welcomed, therefore, each new piece of work as an opportunity to rework his material and to produce something better suited to the historical and local circumstances.

### Narrative – Linear versus Episodic

A feature of the 'well-made play' which Brecht so detested is a Linear Narrative. The action builds to a 'climax' in order for the audience to experience a 'climax'. Brecht wanted the audience to think about and reflect on the action as it was happening. They would not be critically thinking about what they were watching if they were just waiting for what to come next. How do you think he tried to stop the audience thinking ahead?

### Keywords

- Linear Narrative** A story which includes plot, setting and characters, but ends with a resolution.
- Episodic narrative** A narrative divided into 'episodes' or scenes which do not build up to a climax, but rather than creating a slow build-up of tension.

### Task (1 hour)

Ask students to find a contemporary news story which deals with a social issue that engages them. They must work in groups of 4–6 and devise two performances based on the news article. They should bullet-point a story or narrative into six sections.

- 1) Students must create one version of the play which follows the model of a 'well-made play'. This will have a linear narrative, will build to a climax, or high point and the audience will be carried along with the suspense and emotion within the story. They must be guessing about what will come next and play on this element of suspense. The audience must be emotionally moved by the performance.

### Extension Task

The students could also incorporate realistic props, costumes and staging elements into their performance. Ask them to consider the elements of naturalism already explored in the text.

- 2) Create a second version which aims to emulate Brecht's idea of Episodic Narrative.
  - How can you let the audience know what will happen next, using text, signs, placards and projections?
  - How do you prevent a 'climax' happening but not playing on the audience's emotions?
  - How can the scenes be reordered to help this? Add a title to each of the scenes. How can the titles be conveyed to the audience? If so, how? How does this affect the audience's experience?

### Plenary

Discuss the following questions with the students when peer-assessing the performances.

- Which theatrical devices did you use to create Linear and Episodic Narrative?
- As an audience member, how did you feel when watching both versions?

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## *The Influence of Erwin Piscator (1893-1966)*

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### **Why was Piscator such a major influence on Brecht?**

Crucially, Piscator shared Brecht's Marxist beliefs. The roots of Brecht's Epic Theatre lie with Piscator. He, like Brecht, was interested in creating theatre which explored social and political issues. Together, they named their new dramatic form 'episches Theater', or 'epic theatre'.

Behind Piscator's theatre there were **two main aims**:

1. To break through the 'middle-classness' of so much contemporary drama.
2. To use theatre as a weapon on behalf of working-class strugglers.

### **Piscator's Theatre**

- His productions were most often performed in working-class halls, meeting places and factories. Brecht toured his play *The Mother* around factories.
- He believed that the audience should be at the centre of the actor's attention, breaking the 'fourth wall'.
- The audience were encouraged to react to and participate in the events.
- He created a form of 'mixed-media' theatre. Film clips and projections were used in performances, running in the background of the acted play.
- Placards and signs were used to show titles to the audience.
- He used an array of machinery on stage, such as revolving platforms and lifts.
- He sometimes turned search lights onto the audience.

### **And finally...**

It is true that many of Piscator and Brecht's methods and experiments coincided, but it is important to understand that there are also significant differences. One main difference is Piscator's emphasis on audience 'involvement' and Brecht's focus on 'alienation'. Brecht indeed wanted his audience to be active spectators in an intellectual sense, not just passive watching. However, Piscator took audience involvement to another level, and his audience sometimes take part in the play they were watching and influence the outcome. In some of his plays ended with a vote being taken by the audience. Also, Piscator's theatre used more stage elements than Brecht's... such as revolving stages and conveyor belts!

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### Dialectical Theatre

Brecht's Epic Theatre is also known as **Dialectical Theatre**. Brecht wanted to show the dialectic of his characters. Therefore, he always presented contrasting characteristics within each character and narrative he created. For example, presenting a character as 'girly', as well as sexual. By presenting a no-single-dialogic position, the character is never a single, settled and 'final' interpretation of a particular character or situation. This forces the audience to think critically and actively about what they were watching. This is in Brecht's seminal play *Mother Courage*, where the eponymous character has contrasting characteristics of 'mother' and a dogged determination to survive.

### Placards and Scene Titles

Brecht used placards and scene titles throughout his career in order to achieve a clear dramatic intention. Scene titles would let the audience know what was going to happen in the scene (e.g. a poor man dies pointlessly in the savage war). He felt that if the audience knew what was going to happen, they would focus more on how and why it happened. This also helped to reduce tension and suspense, by removing the audience's sense of anticipation. Signs, placards and projections are used to display:

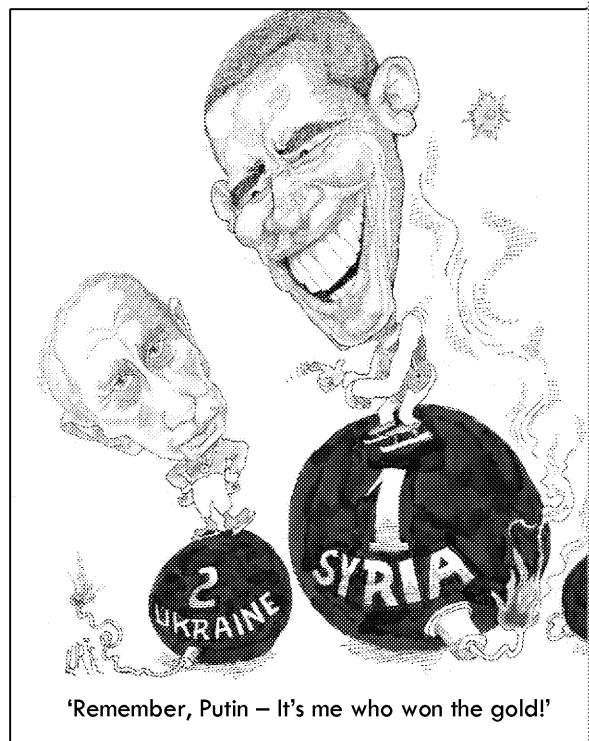
- facts and statistics
- powerful images or symbols
- rhetorical questions

### Keyword Focus

A key feature of Brecht's **satire**.

#### Definition of Satire

The use of humour, irony and exaggeration to examine the flaws or vices of a person or context of political or social behaviour. It is often used to convey someone who is clumsy or incompetent. Brecht frequently used satire in his plays, such as *The Rise of Arturo Ui*. The play *Have I Got News for You* is a classic example of modern satire.



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## Wider Research

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- 1) Brecht loved sport, especially boxing and football. He wanted his audience to see the theatre as spectators would view a football match. Consider how spectators respond after a game and discuss why Brecht used this sporting event to do so. Write notes below:

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- 2) Research images from stage productions which use placards or signs in their set design. Show your class a range of images with your class. Try to find a range of signs in different formats (e.g. the cyclorama / sign boards turned over at the front of the stage / banners / placards held by the actors).

- 3) Research the following satirical magazines and television programmes. Show your class which clearly communicates satire? You could also research how Donald Trump have been satirised by comedians and illustrators in recent years.

- *Have I Got News for You*
- *Spitting Image*
- *Punch*

- 4) Research Bertolt Brecht's play *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*:

- Plot/narrative
- Characters
- Audience reaction to the original performance
- Key productions and images
- How does he use 'satire' in this play?

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## The Active Spectator

The revolutionary practitioner Bertolt Brecht had strong ideas about the effect he wanted to have on an audience. As an introduction to Brecht's key theories and beliefs, consider the following question:

*As an audience member, what do you expect when you go to the theatre?*

### Task

Discuss the statements below with a partner and number them in order of importance. Give feedback. Feed back your ideas to the group. Justify your decisions by referring to the material you have studied.

#### When we go to the theatre we expect to...

- ...be entertained
- ...be asked questions
- ...feel emotion
- ...experience tension
- ...follow a clear story
- ...be given answers
- ...learn something about ourselves
- ...be shocked
- ...gain insight into interesting characters
- ...experience something new

Brecht didn't want the audience to 'hang their brains up with their hats' before the theatre. During a performance he wanted the audience to remain as intelligent as the actors on stage, and continually think about what they were watching. He called them **spectators**.

#### And finally...

Discuss Brecht's belief that an audience should always be actively engaged while watching. Do you agree that this should be an audience's experience when watching theatre? Relate your discussion to the statements above. Which of the above statements would you consider the most important?

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## Key Brechtian Techniques

These exercises introduce many key Brechtian ideas and it's worth having some early stages of introducing Brecht's ideas so that the students can talk about actors and audience members, and also ask questions about his theories in pairs.

The key points about **Brecht** which should be focused on in the early stages are:

- Brecht's focus on anti-realism, as a reaction to Stanislavski's bourgeois realism.
- He invites a different relationship between actor and audience.
- Actor and audience are part of an ongoing critical and objective process of performance.

### Practical Exploration

Students should work in pairs or threes. Create and perform a prepared text of the following scene in a naturalistic style:

'Two siblings are fighting over the tv remote control. A huge argument breaks out. You decide how the scene ends. In a moment of anger one sibling reveals a secret to calm the situation down. In a moment of anger one sibling reveals a secret to the other parent... You decide how the scene ends.'

- Perform the second version of the scene this time as if you are telling the story in the first person. Each character describes what they were doing at each moment. 'She grabbed the tv remote from him and shouted for mum.'
- The third version of the scene is the same as version two but each character describes their actions and the third person. For example, 'She grabbed the tv remote from the living room house'. But each actor continues to describe their own actions.

In this exercise you have been introduced to some key Brechtian acting techniques:

- Speaking lines in the past tense
- Speaking lines in the third person
- Speaking stage directions
- Directly addressing the audience

Brechtian acting can involve speaking as the character in the past tense and as if she was). This allows the actor to stand outside of the character being played and observe their character's actions. Also, by directly addressing the audience and telling them what is happening before or while it is happening, the actor is able to direct the audience's attention to the character's actions rather than their thoughts and feelings, their 'inner life'. Brecht intended to prevent the audience from becoming emotionally involved in the 'present moment' and instead make them think of the character's actions objectively.

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## The Innovative Nature of Brecht's Approach

### *Innovative Techniques and Ideas*

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The following techniques and ideas are central to understanding the innovative approach to theatre-making. Research the following:

- 1) Who was Sergei Eisenstein and how did he influence Brecht's innovative approach to theatre-making?
- 2) What does the term 'social being' mean in relation to how Brecht created and directed his actors?
- 3) What is Expressionism? How did Brecht build on the genre of Expressionist style of Epic Theatre?

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## Brecht and Acting

It is important when considering Brecht's approach to acting to think about his naturalistic style of acting which Brecht was reacting against. The following will help you understand the role of the Brechtian actor and his relationship with the audience. Compare this to Stanislavski's ideas about actor and audience. Contextualise innovation!

### Practical Task (30 mins)

Each student must lie in the space and in their own time act out a mime showing a typical day for them – for example, waking up, getting dressed, brushing teeth etc. When a selection is performed, the actor must describe to the audience the reality of the performance.

When the scene is performed a second time, the actors must perform the scene as before but this time they must describe and comment on what they are doing. They must imagine that the audience is a friend whom they are sharing their thoughts with. The commentary might be in the first person such as 'I'm rubbing my eyes to get ready for the day ahead', or in the third person, such as 'Look at how she's applying her make-up. She's trying to impress?'

### Discussion

What was the difference between the first and second version of the scene and the audience?

In version 1 the discussion may explore the fact that, as an audience, we are drawn into the character, what they are thinking and feeling. This focuses our whole attention on the inside of them. In version 2, the performance is objectified so that the audience can see the actions and expression of the character. In version 2, the actor dissociates himself from what he is doing and, in this instance, the audience are prevented from being 'drawn in'.

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## *Sergei Eisenstein*

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### Further Research

Watch the final 'slaughter' sequence from Sergei Eisenstein's film *Strike* (1925)

 [zzed.uk/7482eisenstein](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzed.uk/7482eisenstein)

Discuss the clip and answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the images which are juxtaposed?
- 2) Do these images progress the narrative?
- 3) What is the visual metaphor being created?
- 4) How does this idea link to Brecht's idea of Epic Theatre, which is **didactic**?

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## People as Social Beings

### Discussion

- Are real-life people consistent in their behaviour and actions?
- Do you agree with Stanislavski or Brecht?
- Consider situations when you have contradicted your own behaviour. Consider literature, plays and films now. Think of characters who behave consistently.
- To what extent are your lives and decisions shaped by society and culture?

Brecht's epic theatre aims to show characters who contradict themselves. He shows a number of years, in a number of situations, responding directly to these situations. The needs of the moment dictate. This is also linked to the idea that an actor makes choices – that one path they choose is only one of many possible choices. This is different from Aristotle who believed that a character's fate was inevitable. Making choices identifiable reminds us that we have the power to change things: we are not governed by fate. Brecht seems to suggest. In Epic Theatre, Brecht wanted to show human beings as individuals and as a product of their socio-political circumstances.

### Practical Task- 1 Hour

This task is about characters not having a through line or a back story but reacting in the moment. Read the brief synopsis of the 2014 film *Deux Jours, une Nuit* (Two Days, One Night) starring Marion Cotillard. Alternatively, you could watch a clip of the film to encourage discussion in its entirety.

The character 'Sandra' has two days and one night to persuade her fellow workers that she is not redundant. In order to do this, she must persuade them to not accept a redundancy. Each worker she approaches has their own issues and reacts in different ways. Discuss the different responses to their situation and then create three short scenes showing different responses of the 'workers'. This could be three responses from the workers or from just one character.

### Extension Task

- Can you incorporate the use of multi-role into your scenes?
- How do you explore the issue of social responsibility in your performance?

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## Brecht's Working Methods

### *Brecht and Music*

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#### **Music in Performance – Initial Research**

Music was integral to Brecht's work but he had very specific ideas about how it should be used in theatre.

- 1) What were Brecht's key ideas about how music should be used within his theatre?
- 2) Name three composers who collaborated with Brecht.
- 3) Which musical styles was Brecht mostly influenced by and did he play any of them?

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### Further Research

- 1) Brecht was influenced greatly by Erwin Piscator in his approach to using music. In what way was he influenced by Piscator? Research a production called *The Good Person of Szechwan*. What music was used within the performance.
- 2) What were some of Brecht's more specific ideas about music and how should be used within performance? Consider:
  - the relationship between dialogue, lyrics and music.
  - music used as an 'alienation' or 'distancing' device.
  - the relationship between narrative and music.
- 3) Piscator often used a gramophone on stage. Brecht used this idea in *The Good Person of Szechwan* in 1927. What is the effect of music coming from a gramophone character turning it on, as opposed to the 'source' of where the music is seen? How does this link to Brecht's key beliefs and ideas about Epic Theatre?

### Use of music in Brecht's plays:

- Songs could comment on a character's feelings as a third-person narrator.
- The music interrupted the text and the songs were signalled in various ways.
- The action stops at a point in the action which is tense or where the audience is emotionally involved or attached to a character. A song occurs to break the tension.
- The songs invite the actors to step out of their roles and directly address the audience.
- He detested the 'illusion' of reality; the idea that people could seem to feel automatically. In his plays he wanted actors who could sing rather than just act. He wanted the audience to always be listening to the words or text, rather than just the melody of the music. Within musical theatre, music is often used to heighten emotion within a scene. Brecht did not wish to use music to embellish the action.
- Songs did not progress the narrative but commented on the action.

### Practical Exploration

- Listen to a piece of musical theatre (e.g. Andrew Lloyd Webber, *Les Misérables*). Do you think Brecht disliked this particular genre of theatre?
- Brecht's lifelong collaborator and singer was Lotte Lenya. Listen to some of her singing. Discuss her singing style.
- Create a scene which shows two characters seeing each other for the first time. Add music to the scene to heighten emotion (either sung or recorded). What effect does the music have? How is it used in film or television? How could you use music on stage? How is it used in film or television? How could you use music to heighten emotion?

## Brecht and Acting

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Remember! Brecht was reacting against Stanislavski's system of acting which of actor and character...

### Brecht and Acting – Key Beliefs

- The actor never hides the fact that he is performing.
- The actor must always be aware of the audience.
- He praised 'bad' or amateur acting as he saw it as a way of reminding watching a play.
- The actor shows, instead of imitating or impersonating.
- The actor must not believe he is the character he is playing – character and actor remain separate.
- The Brechtian actor must always be in control of his emotions on stage.
- There must always be the sense that characters have a choice in terms of action, not driven by fate.
- The Brechtian actor must work at expressing social attitudes in clear and direct Gestus or Geste.

### Brechtian Acting Techniques

Techniques used to ensure the actor and audience remain critical and objective.

- Use of direct address which breaks fourth wall.
- Text is spoken in the third person, when characters talk about themselves.
- Text is spoken in the past tense, rather than present, so that a critical distance is maintained.
- Stage directions can be spoken by the actors.

Think about – he loved Charlie Chaplin's acting style within silent films.

**Example** – Peter Lorre in *Mann ist Mann* – to express terror, he turned his back to the audience, painted his face in chalk and turned back round to the audience, literally 'white-faced' – the influence of clowning here too.

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## Brecht and Acting

Brecht's theory of 'Gestus' forms the basis of his theories on acting. Therefore, to understand what 'Gestus' means if you are going to explore Brechtian techniques.

Brecht's principal aim was to convey a message to the audience and he believed that body language and facial expression was essential in communicating this message. Brecht and his actors would spend hours looking at photographs taken during a performance to be sure that each photo captured and communicated what was supposed to happen at that particular moment.

### Practical Exploration (30 mins)

#### Warm-up: Double-glazing exercise

In pairs, divide the group up into As and Bs, so that As are in a line facing Bs, a few metres away. Tell As to imagine they are inside a house and that Bs are outside with double-glazing. As must first of all try to communicate something to Bs so that Bs can hear each other, so they must only use body language and facial expression. For example, 'Your house is on fire', or 'There's a burglar trying to break in through your window'.

The aim of this exercise is for the students to recognise the importance of body language in conveying a message. Discuss the difficulties with just using body and no words.

#### Task

Students walk around the space and create 10-second freeze frames in pairs for various ideas (e.g. sun and rain, fast and slow) and then concepts which can suggest an attitude (e.g. rich and poor, war and peace).

Ask all the students to look around the room at each other's freezes for 'Rich and poor'. They probably be very similar. What attitudes or opinions are being expressed? What do these images 'tell' an audience? What is the message? Does it seem to be the same?

Tell them they have unknowingly created a 'Geste': they have used body language and facial expression to express an attitude or opinion.

#### Teacher's note

In the above exercise the students created their 'Geste' subconsciously. But Brechtian actors to be *conscious* of what they were doing at every single moment. Nothing is improvised or spontaneous. Everything had to be prepared and deliberate. The attitude or opinion they are trying to express.



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## Brecht and Acting

### Satire Workshop (1 hour)

Brecht frequently used 'satire' within his plays. In order for students to explore performance and characterisation, ask them to consider the key features of a 'pompous politician' (e.g. a large belly to suggest indulgence and gluttony, a hand in the air to suggest a snobbish personality, representing the 'bourgeoisie'). They can choose one characteristic which could be exaggerated and to create this person. They can then explore how the character walks and moves around the space, the sound which this character makes. You can spotlight some of the best character exercises, always encouraging students to evaluate the effect created for the audience.

The students can then develop the characters into a scene conveying a group of politicians in Parliament, discussing the introduction of a new bill. The scene should incorporate:

- characters performed in a satirical style (exaggerating one key feature)
- focus on sound rather than dialogue
- use of unison and canon
- use of Gestus or Geste within their characterisation

### Extension Task

Students in different groups could explore politicians at key points in history:

- Politicians in the Edwardian era discussing whether women should be allowed to vote.
- Politicians in 1914 deciding whether Britain should go to war.
- Politicians in 2016 discussing Brexit.

### Teacher Tip

It also works well to use visual images of politicians for this exercise. For example, for Nigel Farage or Tony Blair could you emphasise or exaggerate?

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## Brecht's Style and Theatrical Conv

### *Buchner and Wedekind*

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- 1) Who was Georg Buchner and how did he influence Brecht in terms of st
- 2) Which two seminal plays did he write?
- 3) Who was Franz Wedekind and how did he influence Brecht in terms of

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## Brecht's Influences

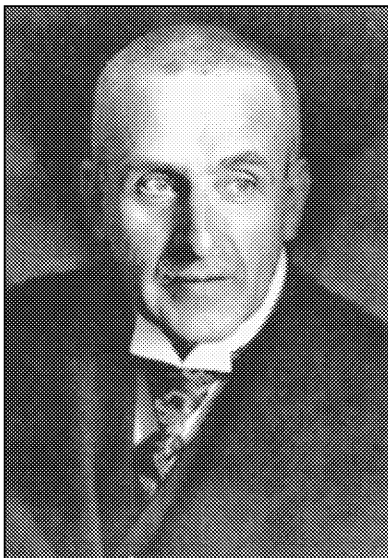
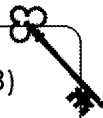
### Georg Buchner (1813–37) was...

... considered to be a major influence on the Expressionist movement.

- He died aged 23 of typhoid fever, without having seen any of his plays produced.
- In his short life he was involved in political activism.
- His work was more radical than what had come before.
- Plays are structured in a series of dramatic 'incidents', each making its own point.
- The play *Woyzeck* was unfinished at the time of Buchner's death. It was found in the form of around 27 unfinished, unnumbered scenes which have been put together in a variety of different ways ever since.

### Key texts:

*Danton's Death* (1902) and *Woyzeck* (1913)



### Frank Wedekind (1864–1918) was...

... admired so much by Brecht that he named his first son after him.

- Wedekind was a playwright, cabaret performer, and poet.
- Similar to Brecht, he detested bourgeois morality.
- His plays influenced Brecht in terms of structure. His plays have short scenes, or episodes which then build to a climax which is often death.
- Plays include elements of melodrama, symbolism, and naturalism.
- Philosophical mouthpiece at the end of the 19th century.

### Key texts:

*Spring Awakening* (1891), *Pandora's Box* (1901)

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## Dialectical Theatre

There are many questions which arise when students start exploring Brecht's work. The key points about **Brecht** which should be focused on in the early stages of study are:

- Brecht's focus on anti-realism, as a reaction to Stanislavski's bourgeois realism
- He invites a different relationship between actor and audience.
- Actor and audience are part of an ongoing critical and objective process of performance.

### Practical Task (1 hour)

Students must bring research to the practical lesson about a war they wish to perform. Each group should include a range of statistics. Each group must discuss the research and decide on the war they wish to explore.

- 1) Students must create a two-scene performance which conveys one character's experience of the war. This must be a realistic portrayal of the event (e.g. subtle gesture, linear narrative / dramatic climax). Show back and discuss the dramatic effect.
- 2) The students must then incorporate the following Brechtian techniques into their performance and they perform it again:
  - Reordering the scenes to create a 'flashback' structure
  - Placards (scene titles / rhetorical questions / facts and statistics)
  - Moments of direct address
  - At least one clear moment of Gestic Tableaux
  - Moments when the action freezes and characters step out to reflect on the action / person / past tense

### Extension Task

Insert a clear moment of satire. For example, could the action cross-cut to politicians discussing the war in a careless or trivial way?

### Discussion and Evaluation

The discussion and evaluation of the work is crucial in terms of developing a deeper understanding of Brecht's theories and ideas. Key questions you might want to ask are: The following table can be used as a template for students to structure their evaluation of the techniques.

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## Theatrical Conventions

Watch the performances about 'war' and make notes about how each group uses theatrical techniques and what was the effect created for the audience:

Technique	How was it used?	Effect
Reordering the scenes to create a 'flashback' structure		
Placards (scene titles / rhetorical questions / facts and statistics)		
Moments of direct address		
At least one clear moment of Gestic Tableaux		
Moments when the action freezes and characters step out to reflect on the action in third person / past tense.		
A moment of satire		

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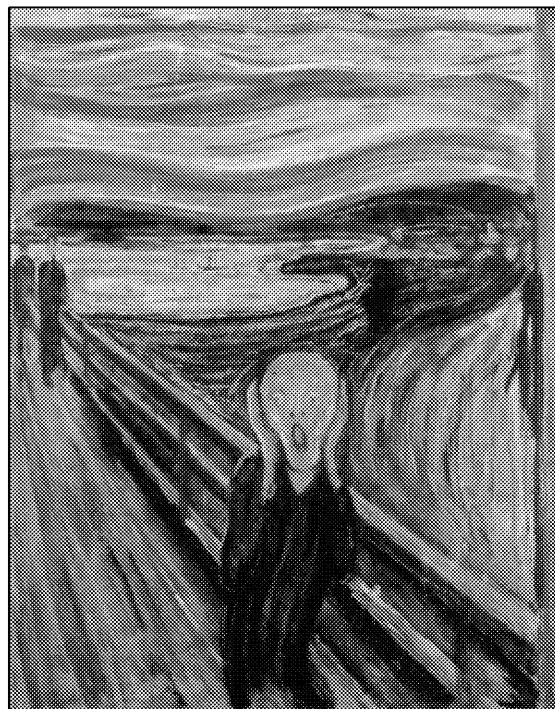
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## *Expressionism*

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- 1) Research Expressionism of the 1920s and 1930s.
- 2) Research examples of art works which are expressionistic in style (films)
- 3) What are the key features of Expressionism which influenced Brecht?



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## Expressionism

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Brecht's distinctive voice cannot be tied to one single movement. However, it was explored as a significant influence on his ideas and theories... **Expressionism**

Expressionism was an artistic movement encompassing all the arts in Germany. It was first applied to painting but then soon after it was also applied to music and drama. The movement embodied the key concepts of **youth against authority**. A common feature of all expressionistic plays is **anti-realism**. Playwrights rejected the realistic style as being imitation.

Brecht used expressionistic elements in his early plays, before he developed his style known as 'Epic' Theatre. Brecht's first play *Baal* (1918) had some expressionistic elements.

**Examples** of expressionism in other art forms include the painting *The Scream* by Edvard Munch and the silent film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* by Robert Wiene (1920).

### Features of expressionist plays which influenced Brecht

- Plot and structure often broken into episodes, with each episode making a point.
- Settings were not realistic but made up of bright colours and bold shapes. This impacted greatly on Brecht's ideas about minimal stage design.
- The style of acting included movements which were bold, almost mechanical, rejecting the realism of Stanislavski's system. This impacted greatly on Brecht's ideas about acting.
- Characters lost their individuality and were identified in the script as stock characters instead (e.g. 'The Father', 'The Workman'). Brecht frequently presented his plays.

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## Caspar Neher

### Who was Caspar Neher?

Brecht met Caspar Neher at school. They were lifelong friends and collaboration. Their relationship lasted for nearly 30 years. Neher designed many of Brecht's plays, including *Threepenny Opera* (1928) and *Man Equals Man* (1931).

### Brecht's key beliefs on Set Design:

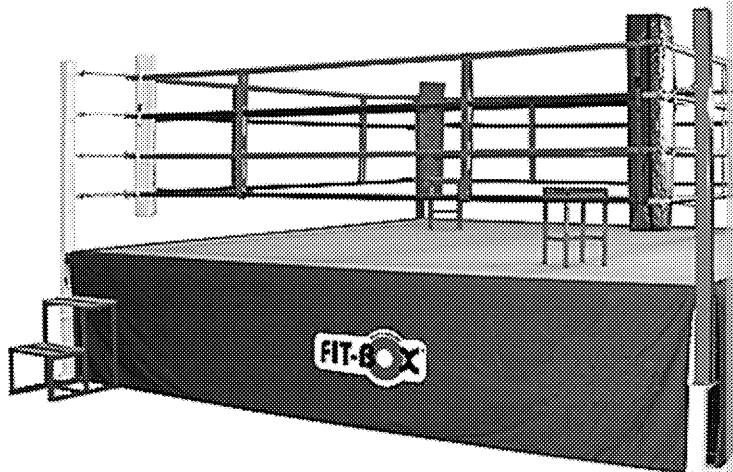
- Set is minimal – often a bare stage. Only pieces of furniture deemed essential, not 'decorative'.
- Projections, placards and noticeboards are used to display titles or images.

### An example of Neher's innovative approach to design:

- The *Mahogony-Songspiel* (1927) was performed early in Brecht's career at a Chamber music festival.
- The concertgoer who would have gone to see this opera found himself at a stage where the singers wore identical black evening dress in the ring.
- Behind the ring was a large screen onto which were projected illustrations of the plot by Neher.
- The projections were used by Brecht to communicate his intended message.

### Research Task

Research images of Caspar Neher's innovative set designs and share them.



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*Musical Collaborators*

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- 1) Who were the three main composers who Brecht collaborated with?
- 2) Research each of the composers and consider how Brecht's working relationship with them affected his work.

Composer 1: .....

Composer 2: .....

Composer 3: .....

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**Extension Task**

Find at least two examples of music which each composer contributed to Brecht's work.



## *Musical Collaborators*

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### **Kurt Weill (1900–1950)**

Brecht met Weill in 1927. Weill worked closely with Brecht during the early part of his career, composing the music for Brecht's first big success, *The Threepenny Opera* (1928). In their early collaborations, their working relationship eventually broke down and their opinions diverged on the function of music within theatre. Brecht was always focused on the text shining through the music, while Weill was more on the music. Their divergent views on the primacy of the text eventually led them down their own paths. Brecht left behind opera and commercial theatre and went to New York and achieved success on Broadway during the 1930s, continuing to work for the general public. Weill's use of jazz within his music added a lightness and freedom to Brecht's 'down to earth' vernacular.

### **Hanns Eisler (1898–1962)**

Eisler collaborated with Brecht both before and after the Second World War. His music was more suited to his notion of Epic Theatre than Weill's. Most notably, he composed the ballads and choruses for *The Mother* which Brecht maintained was a classic example of epic theatre. Whereas Weill's flowing melodic lines tended to 'swamp' and obscure the text, Eisler's music paid close attention to the shape and inflections of the text.

### **Paul Dessau (1894–1979)**

Paul Dessau was the last of Brecht's musical collaborators and is most associated with the productions of his last years at the Berliner Ensemble. Dessau composed the music for *Courage and Her Children* (1945).



*Brecht and Eisler, Berlin 1950*

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## Brecht's Influence on Other Practitioners

*Joan Littlewood, Caryl Churchill and Kneehigh*

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### Initial Research

Brecht's influence has permeated deep into theatrical tradition and elements in many areas of modern theatre practice. However, there are a few modern practitioners who have been significantly influenced by him. Research the following three practitioners on their key works and how specifically they have been influenced by Brecht.

**Joan Littlewood (1914–2002)**

**Caryl Churchill (1938–present)**

**Kneehigh Theatre Company**

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## *Joan Littlewood, Caryl Churchill and Kneehigh*

### **Joan Littlewood (1914–2002)**

The director and playwright Joan Littlewood moved to Manchester in 1934 with socialist theatre groups. Littlewood's group performed many agitprop influenced by the influence from Erwin Piscator. In their manifesto they expressed a desire to create theatre for working people. Like Brecht, Littlewood's pieces were all with scripts being redrafted right up to and throughout the run of performance. Theatre Workshop came to London and had a permanent base at Stratford. Littlewood staged her seminal work *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1963), a satirical piece of songs and titles of scenes. Her companies always worked collaboratively against the hierarchy of theatre, with the director at the 'top'. Therefore, her social focus was not only the plays she staged but how the company was structured.

### **Caryl Churchill (1938–present)**

The playwright Caryl Churchill has always avoided being pinned down to a single style. Throughout her career she has constantly experimented with form. However, you can see Brechtian influences. Many of her plays depart from the linear narrative structure that Brecht detested. Instead, open-ended usually prevails over a neat climax. *Tom* (1976) contains several Brechtian elements. It is about witchcraft in the 17th century and consists of short scenes, punctuated with songs which draw parallels with feminist movements of the 20th century.

### **Kneehigh Theatre Company**

Kneehigh Theatre started in Cornwall in 1980 when a village schoolteacher started to do workshops in their spare time. This evolved into a company which staged productions in venues, ranging from village halls to clifftops, and involved people of the local community. They now stage productions all over the world but still remain faithful to their roots and their political focus. The company uses a range of Brechtian techniques in their work. In their production *The Red Shoes* incorporated song and dance, a narrator figure, and a

### **Further Research**

Kneehigh have an informative website: [www.kneehigh.co.uk](http://www.kneehigh.co.uk) Research into their productions in order to develop a greater understanding of their links to Brecht.

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## Exam Preparation

### *Edexcel AS Drama - Exploration and Performance*

In this unit you are required to develop a group performance or design realisation. Your work must be informed by the methodology of a theatre practitioner. If you decide to be a theatre practitioner, use the following exercises to guide you:

#### **Case Study – *An Inspector Calls* by J B Priestley**

In the 1990s, theatre director Stephen Daldry resurrected J B Priestley's play, creating a new and innovative interpretation at the National Theatre. This production used Brechtian and Epic Theatre techniques to convey clear political ideas to the audience.

#### **Research Task**

Research Daldry's production and share this research with your group. Consider the following questions:

- 1) Which Brechtian techniques were used within the performance?
- 2) What were Daldry's reasons for staging such a political version of this play?
- 3) What images can you find from the production? Which Brechtian techniques were communicated through the images? (Consider set design / use of stage)

#### **Practical Exploration**

Read the first act of *An Inspector Calls* and consider how you would apply Brechtian techniques to this section of the play.

- Actor/audience relationship – are there any key moments in which director and audience 'break the fourth wall' could be used?
- As a designer, how could scene titles be incorporated?
- Use of symbolic props.

#### ***Our Country's Good* by Timberlake Wertenbaker**

Read Act 2 of *Our Country's Good* and consider how Brecht's methodology of direct address, rehearsals and interpretation of the text. You could:

- explore how the set designs of Casper Neher and Erwin Piscator could be used in your production (e.g. projections / actor-audience relationship / scene titles)
- take photographs of key images from rehearsals so that you can analyse them in detail, when staging your scenes.
- examine and explore the role of the aborigine character. How will he be used in order to convey the impact of the First Fleet's arrival on this indigenous population?

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In this unit, you are required to create an original piece of theatre, using one performance text and a theatre practitioner as a stimulus. If you decide to use a theatre practitioner, use the following exercises to develop ideas:

### **Extract 1 – *Machinal* by Sophie Treadwell (Nick Hern Books, 1993)**

Sophie Treadwell's play *Machinal* uses a range of expressionistic elements to explore oppression, hypocrisy and bureaucracy within society. Read Episode 1 and Episode 8 extracts practically, applying Brecht's methodology in your rehearsal.

#### **In Episode 1:**

- How could you use projections and rhetorical questions to enable the audience to see the world through the eyes of the protagonist?
- How could you use satire and archetypal characters to convey the grotesque nature of the 'Husband', as seen from the Young Woman's perspective?
- How can you explore 'Gestus' and 'Gestic Tableaux' in order to convey the oppressive environment?

#### **In Episode 8:**

- Experiment practically with portraying the events in the courtroom from the perspective of The Young Woman / the public / the journalists / the Judge / the Jury.
- How could satire be used in this scene to portray the men in the courtroom (e.g. stylised make-up / Gestus.)

### **Developing your devised piece**

The play is set in 1920s America. However, you may want to explore contemporary issues in today's society. For example, the treatment of women in court cases today, harassment claims. Is it still intimidating for women to appear in court today?

The trial of Ruth Snyder, on which *Machinal* is based, was incredibly high profile with 180 reporters being assigned to it from around the country. It was a media circus with thousands of people attending. For the first time in history, microphones and speakers were used so that everyone could hear the testimony. How could this be explored in a devised piece? How could this be examined in relation to 'fake news'?

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## Edexcel A Level Drama - Theatre Makers in Practice

For Section C of the written exam entitled *Interpreting a Performance Text*, you will be asked to write a response question on an unseen section from your chosen performance text. Your response should explain how your production concept will communicate ideas to a contemporary audience and how the work of your chosen theatre practitioner has influenced your overall production. You should also explain how the work of your chosen theatre practitioner has influenced your overall production in relation to the original performance conditions in your response.

### Applying Brecht's Methodology to *Woyzeck*


*Woyzeck* by Georg Buchner is an ideal text to consider in relation to Brecht's methodology. In the nineteenth century, the play influenced Brecht considerably in terms of dramatic structure. Notably, Buchner's use of an episodic structure as opposed to a more traditional linear structure is innovative and new. If you apply Brecht's key theories to your dramatic interpretation, you should use the following practical activities in your lessons:

### Task – Two-hour Workshop

- Read Scene 3, set in the fairground.
- Simply stage the scene using basic 'blocking' and positioning.
- Work in pairs to come up with Brechtian-inspired explanations/descriptions of the scene.
- Take it in turns to model and sculpt the character. Can you reduce the character to their essential elements? Then two and finally one? (Gestus)
- In your pairs, Student A moves around the space as this person imitates the character's walk, etc. Student B then follows and imitates these physical qualities. Student A then exaggerates these. Student B then follows and exaggerates. The pair then discuss how they have developed a heightened and highly physicalised version of the character.
- Now begin to incorporate other Brechtian elements into the scene such as shouting directions out loud and breaking the fourth wall.
- How could you use slapstick in this scene, followed by a more serious, dramatic moment? What contrasts?
- Experiment with the technique of slow motion to explore and highlight key moments. Major sees Marie for the first time.
- Experiment with ways of interrupting action, e.g. song/narration

### Further Research into *Woyzeck*

Watch the following clip of Splendid Productions performing *Woyzeck*:

 [zzed.uk/7482woyzeck](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzed.uk/7482woyzeck)

Which Brechtian elements can you identify?

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## Teacher Notes

### P. 26 – Theatrical Practice and Purpose – Independent Study

Brecht loved sporting events and wanted his audiences to respond to a performance as if they were spectators at a football match. When spectators watch a football match they are often the 'experts' on the game and all express opinions about what they have seen. In Brecht's theatre, spectators leave the theatre and discuss what they had seen, creating a dialogue and a shared experience. Football is also a sport which is not elitist but enjoyed and appreciated by people from all backgrounds.

### P. 29 – Initial Research about Brecht's Innovative Approach

**Sergei Eisenstein** was a Russian silent film director (1898–1948). His innovative approach to film influenced Brecht in a number of ways:

- 1) Eisenstein used montage within his films to convey clear messages to his audience by juxtaposing different images, maybe longshots and close-ups.
- 2) Normal action is interrupted by shots that do not contribute to the action moving forward but comment on it.
- 3) He chose 'faces' for his films rather than trained actors. For *Battleship Potemkin*, he chose a boy from the local town to 'star' in his film. He chose the people with the most expressive faces. He was looking for archetypes or caricatures – such as 'the poor old lady' or 'the woman'. He wanted to make films about 'types' of people, rather than individuals.
- 4) The subject matter of his films dealt with largely socialist political issues of the time, such as the life of the worker and proletariat.

### P. 31 – Analysis of the film *Strike* by Sergei Eisenstein

For example, in the final sequence of his film *Strike* (1925) he intercut images of a bull being butchered in a slaughterhouse with shots of a factory. Through this use of montage, he conveys the idea of the 'human slaughterhouse' as a visual metaphor.

### P. 32 – People as Social Beings

Central to Brecht's innovative approach to theatre was his portrayal of characters. Stanislavski believed that characters behave consistently and they can be guided to death. However, Brecht believes that social situations change the way people behave. People often contradict themselves. Their behaviour is not always consistent. For Stanislavski, character is the basis for action; for Brecht, situation is the basis for action.

### P. 33 – Initial Research – Brecht's and Music

- 1) Brecht's key belief was that, as with other dramatic elements on stage (such as lighting), music should not reinforce the text but should make a statement in **opposition**. Brecht wanted music to act as **counterpoint** to the text. He wanted music to **heighten emotion** and did not want music to have this function on stage. Music was a paramount concern to Brecht so he did not want anything, including music, to distract from the text.

Brecht was primarily concerned with the relationships between the words and the music. When creating an opera, a ballet or a play, he would always ask: What grows out of the text? What is the nature of music on stage and are there particular types of music as theatre music?

- 2) He collaborated with several different composers and musicians, most notably Hans Eisler.
- 3) Brecht's musical interests stemmed from **music hall** and **cabaret**. He would often accompany himself on guitar.

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## P. 49 – Edexcel AS Drama – Exploration and Performance

Key Brechtian techniques utilised by Daldry in his groundbreaking production

- The concept of the 'play within a play' established through the use of 'us and listen to the play from the 'outside'.
- The use of 'diegetic' sound and the use of the radio on stage, operated
- Characters talking directly to the audience and 'breaking the fourth wall'
- The 'inspector' character as narrator, directly addressing the audience for key political and socialist views.

In the early 1990s, Great Britain was emerging from a decade of Tory government under Margaret Thatcher. The key message in Daldry's production, elicited from Priestley's play, was with rejecting the capitalist ideals of the previous decade and presenting an

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