

Bertolt Brecht:

Knowledge Organiser

BACKGROUND INFORMATION	
BORN - DIED	1898-1956.
NATIONALITY	German
AIM OF WORK	Aimed to appeal to less privileged classes, treating contemporary issues such as war, stock-markets, poverty, unemployment and corruption in high places.
OCCUPATION	Marxist playwright, poet and director. Political writer and director.

BRECHT'S THEORY AND STYLE	
Epic Theatre:	This is the term used to describe Brecht's theory and technique.
'Verfremdungseffekt':	This means 'alienation' or 'distancing' effect. The familiar is made strange so the audience think about the issues in the piece clearly rather than getting too emotional.
Didactic Theatre:	This means theatre that teaches the audience a moral message.

KEY TECHNIQUES IN EPIC THEATRE		
1	Montage	A montage is a series of freeze frames, images, projections or scenes put together in no particular order. Often music is played over the top.
2	Narration	The actor tells the story out loud. Sometimes the narrator will tell us what happens in the story before it has happened. This is a good way of making sure that we don't become emotionally involved in the action to come as we already know the outcome.
3	Direct Address	Speaking directly to the audience breaks the fourth wall and destroys any illusion of reality.
4	Gestus	A clear gesture or movement used by the actor which captures the attitude of a character or situation.
5	Figures (not characters)	Brecht didn't want the actors to play a character onstage, only to show them as a 'type' of person in society.
6	Third Person Narration	Commenting upon a character as an actor is a clear way of reminding the audience they are watching a play. It means they don't get emotionally attached to characters and think more about the message.
7	Speaking stage direction	This device was used by Brecht more frequently in rehearsal than performance. It helps distance the actor from the character they're playing. It also reminds the audience that they're watching a play and forces them to study the actions of a character in objective detail.
8	Multi-role	Multi-roling is when an actor plays more than one character onstage. The differences in character are marked by changing voice, movement, gesture and body language but the audience can clearly see that the same actor has taken on more than one role.
9	Split-role	This is where more than one actor plays the same character. For instance, the actor playing the main character might rotate from scene to scene.
10	Placards	A placard is a sign or additional piece of written information presented onstage. Using placards might be as simple as holding up a card or banner. Multimedia or a PowerPoint slideshow can also be used for this effect. What's important is that the information doesn't just comment upon the action but deepens our understanding of it.
11	Lehrstucke	The Lehrstücke are shorter, parable pieces - a simple story used to illustrate a moral lesson)
12	Spas	Spas literally translates as 'fun'. By presenting a serious subject in a funny way, it makes the audience laugh, and then question why they laughed. This makes them think about the message of the piece.
13	Minimal set /costume /props	Set, costume and props are all kept simple and representational. Although the stage setting was usually minimal, there was always a sense of authenticity to production elements (this means real, accurate props from the time period, for example).
14	Symbolic Props	Often one item can be used in a variety of ways.
15	Lighting	Brecht believed in keeping lighting simple as he didn't want the production values to overshadow the message of the work. He believed in using harsh white light as this illuminates the truth.
16	Song and Dance	This is a good way to ensure that the audience sees the theatre and are reminded of the fact they are watching a play. Often in Brechtian theatre the style of the music and the lyrics contrast each other e.g. serious lyrics with jolly music. This makes create a sinister feel and emphasises the message.
17	Visible stage Mechanics	Stagehands visible when changing sets, lighting units visible etc.

Contextual Links: An Introduction to Brecht (National Theatre): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-828KqtT8A>
Five Truths (Brecht): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62-gYCO6jY>