

“Select Performance Skills associated with Epic Theatre”

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Function of the Actor and Play

As the overall message of the play, *The Mother* by Bertolt Brecht was focussing on how horrid the living conditions were for the Russian workers in communist Russia during the Russian Revolution, the function of the actor was to communicate this issue to the audience as best as possible. One way that I informed the audience of this message was by the miming of the chopping of the meat, and showing the audience my character, the butcher's position in society as he cuts the meat for the strike-breakers, who he really has a strong feeling of distaste towards. "And I have to serve this trash my best soup..." is one example of the hatred. This allows the audience to understand that the Russian workers have been forced to serve for these people that do not treat them well, and attack them for striking, almost every day. In addition, the way that I educated the audience of the message of the strike-breakers opinions - completely different from the butcher's anti-communistic opinion - of how horrid it was that the strikers were throwing stones at people that they thought were strike-breakers, was by stepping out of role to become the narrator, to address the audience and allow them to be engaged as an observer of the story, and not engaged as an audience usually would be in something that was a non epic theatre piece. This allows me to step outside of role, and directly reflect upon the situation in the story, educating the audience. I do this by completely losing my strong, raspy Russian accent from the butcher, referencing to his angry and slightly unclean self, or completely losing my more pompous Russian accent from the strike-breaker, referencing to his over-confident, cocky self. I also lost any physicality I had used for the character, and spoke to the audience directly, such as when I say "She's got a lump on her head, look, there it is...". The effect that my character, the butcher, has on the audience leaves them feeling quite uncomfortable. The audience become almost scared by the butcher as he begins to get extremely angry in the way that he is beginning his striking, whereas the effect that the strike-breaker has on the audience is almost the opposite to that of the butcher. The audience understands that the strike-breaker completely disagrees with the stone throwing at Vlasova from the strikers, even though Vlasova believes this is completely okay. The audience understands the strike-breakers distress in Vlasova's ignorance in the stone throwing, by me using a slightly pompous frown and speaking very matter-of-factly when telling the butcher and his wife about what happened to Vlasova.

Symbolic gesture

For strong gesture I raise my arm in a fist, boldly making a statement of unison ...a sort of recruiting symbol.

Costume to enhance the purpose of the scene.

Our group is dressed in neutral black costume as a Brechtian play is all about the message that the actors are trying to educate the audience with....we do wear hats to imply that we are strike breakers.

Alienation device

We use frozen image as a device to halt action while its message is emphasised .
On the line –“This Russian woman was pelted with stones”, we use freeze frame to allow the actors to speak to the audience directly.

The alienation effect is used by my group by stepping out of character completely, and talking to the audience, educating them of the situation that our roles are in, the butcher and his company being in the early stages of striking and the strike-breakers talking angrily of the strikers; “This Russian woman

was pelted with stones by Russian workers...”. In addition, towards the end of our extract we also educate the audience of the strong female character, Vlasova’s position, as, almost the leader of the uprising, by the use of chorus; “This is our comrade Vlasova, hard working, cunning and reliable...”. Bertolt Brecht wanted to make sure that the audience didn’t lose itself completely in the characters, but rather, realise that they are being taught about the issues occurring in society and wanted them to be watching as a ‘consciously critical observer’.

Presentational performance

We mimed props and food .As a group we decided that eating did not strongly link towards the message we are trying to educate the audience with.

The presentational style of my groups’ performance of the extract from ‘*The Mother*’ breaks the illusion of the genuineness of the storyline by having the actors speak to the audience, educating them of what is going on in the piece, having the actors transition between characters while on stage, such as my line where I start as the butcher saying “Yeh, and Russian ones too...” and then transition back to myself, look towards the audience and direct “And I’m supposed to serve this trash my best soup...” to them. In addition, the lack of costume, props and set is also anti-illusional, therefore, letting the audience know that they are watching live theatre. By breaking down the script into parts, the story and the explanation of the story, the anti-illusional technique has been used by my group in our Epic theatre piece to try to explain to the audience that reality is changeable.

Gestus

I just stand there with my face crunched in anger, my teeth gritted to show the huge disagreement with strike breakers. I am pro-communist, they are anti-communist.

During the extract that my group presented from ‘*The Mother*’ by Bertolt Brecht, my character the butcher slaps his wife across the face, very angrily when he believes that she has made the food too hot for Vlasova. With the slapping action, showing that the butcher has the power over his wife, I am using the classic epic theatre technique of gestus. This gesture implies that the Butcher has the upper hand, in the same way that Hitler had the upper hand against the Jewish people at the time. Although the Butcher’s situation doesn’t directly link to Hitler’s reign, the gesture of the slap does resemble the same form of authority that the Nazi’s had over the Jewish people. In this, Brecht would have been trying to educate the audience on the problems that are occurring in the world in his day, such as the second World War, however, I believe that the gestus that I use is also educating the audience on domestic abuse, and violent relationships, and how easily someone can lash out, just as a warning for them.

Multiple roles

On the Wife’s line, You sit here, I’ll make you a cold compress, I take the hat from the person originally playing the first strike breaker, to show that I have changed roles.

Chorus

On -A Russian mother, pelted with stones, we use chorus to highlight the moment.
Again on -Others like her fight cunningly, reliably and with a will.

Staged violence as a presentational device.

On the line – Do you have to serve the food... I represent striking my wife, without connecting a blow, to show my violent anger without actually hitting her