

Transcript of Seminar: In role as a theatre director.

Good morning cast. I'm here to talk to you about how I plan to direct the play, Caucasian Chalk Circle. I'll be focusing on scene three in this particular seminar and inform you all of the Brechtian Features I will use.

So, Bertolt Brecht was an influential theatre practitioner of the 20th Century and called his type of theatre, Epic Theatre. The themes in the play are social themes such as 'corruption in religion', 'avarice and greed for money', 'money vs love' and 'justice vs the law'. Brecht's intention is to prevent the audience from becoming emotionally involved with the characters, and to consider that bad things happen because of the choices and actions people make. Take Jussup's mother for example. Her desire for money is much larger than the concern she has for her son; she is representing the fact that society is losing the value of family over wealth.

The scene from Caucasian Chalk Circle that I am informing you about is Scene 3. In this scene, 'In the Northern Mountains' Lavrenti convinces Grusha to marry a dying peasant, Jussup. She reluctantly agrees. Guests arrive at the wedding–funeral, including the Singer and musicians and gossip endlessly. At this event Jussup returns to 'life' and it becomes clear he was never dead, only 'ill'. The purpose of this situation is to jolt the audience to think, or question how they are living their lives.

Grusha is a young girl who finds a child that was lost in the war and takes him in as her own. Grusha represents purity and the spiritual side of humanity in times of war. Taking a baby in shows courage and lets the audience think about how the inhumanity of war and the measures people go to keep others safe. This character is to be kind hearted, sweet, shy, softly spoken, and innocent and pure looking. Lavrenti, her brother looks out for her wellbeing and tries to protect her. Jussup is the harsh spoken, man that pretended to be dead so that he didn't have to go to war. Representing Jussup as a 'rebel' like character to those in authority. He shows himself as 'non brainwashed' as he has no willingness to go to war, or help his country. Brecht uses Jussup to make the audience think about his actions and opinions on the war and authority and allows them to question who is in power. He's a coward but acts like he's too good for everyone, especially Grusha. He'll speak with a low voice and have a confident stride when he walks. His mother, the mother in law's main motive is to present a good image of herself, by dressing well and socialising. Her second motive is to earn money. The function of her role is to demonstrate the theme of money vs love. The monk acts as the priest that marries Grusha and Jussup, however he is quite obviously drunk sneaking sneaky sips of alcohol on stage and even offering a bottle to the guests. This is to highlight the theme of corruption in the religious realm, and show that religion is not always as pure as it appears to be.

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In this scene the features I aim to use are:

The Alienation effect – This is making a character or event unfamiliar or strange so the audience 'look again'. We use this convention when two women exchange characters in front

of the audience. Physically they swap hats or wigs and change the pitch and tone of their voices. For example lowering their voice, to portray they have 'transformed' into a new character. They will wear a blacks as the base costume so when they play another role, they add/change one item to signify a different character. This could be a hat or a wig etc. This is reminding the audience that what they are seeing is not real, it is all just a play and will help the audience identify change and new characters.

2

One of the purposes of epic theatre is for the audience to always be aware that they are watching a play and to observe rather than empathise. This leads the audience to be observers, watching characters behaviours, values and point of views. The story is being told to make a political point of religious corruption, money vs love, in times of war.

3

We will break the fourth wall to disrupt realism in this play. I will use this convention when the singer is narrating what is in the scene that follows. This is to pre-tell the story so that the audience focus on the ideas in the scene to come rather than the narrative. After the narration, Jussup and Grusha move into a series of tableaux that represent the core action in the narration rather than acting out the whole scene. This is a reminder that action on stage is a play and distances the audience from the emotions within the characters.

4

The third Brechtian feature I want to incorporate in this scene is simple staging. For example, the bath that Jussup gets in near the end of the scene will already be set up as well as the chairs for the guests, and his bed (rostrum) at the back. I want to use simple costumes, props, musical instruments and lighting. The stage is brightly lit so that the actors are in the same world as the audience. No special lighting effects will be used and the source of light will be visible. Musical instruments will be pots and pans that can be found round the house or in shops for a small cost. The music should contrast with the action on stage. Props will be involved in the story telling or used or symbolically.

Masks will be used to show ugliness and a character's true colours. Jussup will have a mask to reveal his negative qualities, and the monk will have one to contrast the private persona versus the public image.

5

The fourth convention feature is exaggerated physical action. For example, Jussup is bold and has a lot of emotion. He will show his anger and superiority to Grusha by taking big strides and using large arm gestures because this is a way to show his emotions and the way he is feeling without speaking words. This is a gestus in this scene with the social relationship of superiority and dominance contrasting with Grusha's inferior status and the social attitudes around this. Grusha's weak and fragile posture is juxtaposed with Jussup's authoritative stance.

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So that concludes this discussion, I'll see you all at our first proper rehearsal next week, if you can't make it then please tell me as soon as a possible and with a note. Thank you! ☺