

Transcript of Seminar: In role as a theatre director.

Good morning! Welcome to the first full cast and crew meeting of the season. Today we are going to look at the 'Caucasian Chalk Circle' by Bertolt Brecht as a whole and I'll quickly talk to you about how I intend to direct a specific scene. This will give you some idea of what I am looking for in the performance. It can be daunting when looking through the script for the first time without knowledge of what Brecht wanted his audience to feel; because he did want them to react a certain way.

Brecht wanted his audience to be uncomfortable; he wanted them to remember ALL the way through the play that those on stage were acting. That way the audience would forget about the individual characters and focus on the ideas he was presenting. I want to apply a number of these conventions to this play.

Caucasian Chalk Circle play is about law vs. justice and money vs. love, hypocrisy of religion and greed. My intention in directing this play is to highlight these themes by using the Brechtian conventions.

Now let's look at scene 3 and identify features in it. This scene starts on page 43, line 6 in the script and ends on page 51. If you could turn to page 44 in your scripts now, we'll take a look.

So on page 44, you'll see, near the bottom of the page, a character called The Singer. In this play Brecht uses this character as a narrator, setting the scene and telling the audience what will happen. This is a feature Brecht used in many of his plays which stopped the audience wondering what was going to happen and moved their focus to HOW things would happen, thus making them question the social ideas he presented.

①

For example, line 10 page 44 the singer says,

"The bridegroom was on his deathbed when the bride arrived.  
The bridegroom's mother was waiting at the door telling her to hurry.  
The bride brought a child along.  
The witness hid it during the wedding."

These clear sentences are all statements of what will happen in the following scene. Once the audience knows this, they have an understanding of what is going to happen, so are not preoccupied with following a story. In this scene, once an audience knows the story, their eyes are opened to what is going on behind it. They can see that Brecht is portraying human weaknesses and ironies by having a wedding and a funeral combined. The double irony is while the Mother in Law is trying to have the wedding quickly before her son dies so she can earn money; her son is actually pretending to be ill so he can get out of being a soldier. By creating this irony, Brecht is showing his audience the human faults of greed and selfishness, but is painting them in a satirical way. This shows just how pathetic and self-serving our behaviour can be.

①

In our production, I really want to draw attention to the narrator, make her stand out and interrupt the flow of the play. I want her moving around the audience – talking to them and keeping them involved but also aware that the action was merely a play which the audience is observing. So, in this scene, when she speaks her line, I want her to speak with high volume and after finishing her line, to go and sit in the audience. This will make her lines slightly unnatural and reinforce the idea that she is a narrator stating facts, not one of the actors onstage. This will also help break up the scene and remind the audience that what they are watching is merely a story being told and not something to be emotionally involved in.

②

This is an example of breaking the 4th wall in this production – which is another Brechtian used to keep the audience involved. The fourth wall is, (in a typical theatre), under the proscenium arch. This forms a box around the stage – containing the actors, separating the audience – encouraging them to watch the play from a safe, comfortable distance. I will get the actors coming into the audience as often as possible and in this scene, when the musicians come on and begin to play at the funeral/wedding, they will sit in allocated seats in the audience.

Music is another way Brecht created ideas and emotion - he used it to interrupt the flow of the story and to wake the audience up. Songs were often contrasted to the action onstage by being opposite to the current emotion or by being played loud and off putting. On page 49, when the Drunken Peasant and the Monk sing their crude drinking song, I want this tune to be as loud and abrasive as possible. This is a contrast to the mood of the scene, which is somber because Jussup is on his deathbed. The music will break up the flow of the scene, and encourage them to question and consider. The audience should realise that the irony of a drinking song at a funeral sung by a drunken monk. This supports the themes of the play as a whole – how Grusha has paid to marry Jussup, not for the love of the child not the husband. Jussup's mother, in this scene, for instance, is complaining about the cost of a funeral supper while her son is dying. The audience are provoked to consider the themes.

4

We will place a row of seats at the very back of the stage, where the actors will sit between scenes when not 'onstage'. There is no backstage area; the actors will watch the onstage action. Everything is visible, lighting source/operator, stage crew, any mechanics associated with the set. I want the audience to move from a state of watching, to a state of consciously observing and considering the ideas. They cannot get lost in the story when there are so many reminders around. By not losing themselves in the emotion, the audience can calculate and consider the ideas of law vs. justice and how that affects their lives.

3

The intention of Brechtian theatre is to change people's opinions; politically and morally, (often the two were connected.) Today, because communism is no longer as viable as it was in Brecht's time, instead of seeing this play as a communist play, I want to take those ideas and bring them to a modern audience. In today's society there are wars over resources. This is the idea that the play hinges upon; love vs. wealth. It's about sharing resources with those in need and taking care of what you have. Brecht wanted to challenge his audience and make them question their values. That is my aim too. I want the audience to leave the theatre inspired.

Costume, props and scenery throughout the play will be kept to a minimum. In this scene, for example, I will use rostra as the 'deathbed' on stage right and have Jussup behind it. This means he is out of sight and the character playing Jussup can play other characters (as is the Brechtian style). I have also decided to use a small placard to label the deathbed to reinforce the minimalistic set design and also focus the audience.

5

I will have, stage left, a small table and four or five chairs for the guests to sit. That is really the entire set for this scene. The costumes for the entire play will be stage blacks with an item that represents each character. For example, in this scene, the old woman will have stage blacks and a shawl to reinforce her age and Jussup will wear stage blacks and a plain linen night shirt to reinforce the fact he has been in bed and 'unwell' for a long time. This minimalistic scenery and costuming again is a visual reminder that the important thing in this play is the ideas that are presented.

Thanks everyone for listening. There is a lot to think about in this one scene and I know that this play will be a huge task. My aim is to try and recreate the Brechtian style and keep the Caucasian Chalk Circle true to its roots. We want the audience to leave thinking about the ideas we've put in their head. Everyone take a 10 minute break before we begin the read through.