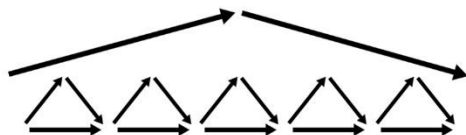


# PRACTITIONERS: BRECHT

Naturalism was at its peak, but Brecht thought that theatre should be political and be a force for change. He wanted his audiences to remain objective and distant from emotional involvement, so that they could make considered and rational judgements about the issues in the play - this is called Epic Theatre

Components  
2 and 3

**Episodic Structure/Montage:** The play is split into separate episodes, that can 'stand alone'. The episodes jump around in time, place and featured characters; so that the audience doesn't become 'engrossed' in a specific moment.



**Gestus:** A gesture which represents a character's attitude, status or social position (eg a servant's bow). These gestures are repeated by characters to make them more stereotypical.



**Narration:** Actors narrate what their character is doing either just before they do it or as they are doing it.

**Placards:** held up by the character(s) to detract the audience's attention away from the emotion; they usually show thought provoking facts, statistics or information.



**Music/song:** Characters often sing in the middle of the scene, or add music and movement sequences instead of using words and dialogue. Sometimes nursery rhymes with changes to the lyrics are used.



**Fourth Wall:** This is the imaginary wall between the audience and the performers. In naturalism it is as though the audience is looking through the fourth wall, into the world of the play. Brecht wanted to 'break' the fourth wall, preventing the audience from forming an emotional attachment with/to the characters.

**Verfremdungseffekt (Veffect):** The process of 'making strange'. This the process where the audience experience something familiar, but it is presented in an unrecognisable way or the context is unfamiliar - it is now in contradiction with itself. The audience then have to reach a new understanding in order to 'move past' the contradiction.

The Veffect was a way of distancing the audience from the emotion of the performance. Brecht wanted his audience to always be aware that it was not real life - it was a performance, performed by actors.

This effect can be created through the use of:

- Direct Address
  - Narration
  - Placards
  - Montage
  - Multi-rolling
- Speaking stage directions
  - Music/song

## DIG DEEPER QUESTIONS

How might Brecht's techniques help you to develop a performance?

How could using placards in a scene change the meaning for the audience?

Brecht said that in naturalistic theatre, audiences: "hang up their brains with their hats in the cloakroom". What do you think he was saying about naturalistic theatre and its audience?

What makes a successful, Brechtian/political theatre performance?

When do you think using Brecht's techniques might not be useful?