

A SHORT ORGANUM FOR THE THEATRE

The Political Illiterate e *A Short Organum for the Theatre* são textos de Berthold Brecht que servem como ponto de partida para a elaboração de um sistema relacional. *The Political Illiterate* (ou Analfabeto Político) assenta sobretudo num "apontar de dedo" àqueles que, por ignorância ou vontade própria, se afastam da política, enquanto que *A Short Organum for the Theatre* é um texto longo e descritivo em que Brecht descreve os fundamentos do teatro épico. Servem como dois pontos de tensão para a criação de uma rede de referências e "contra-referências" acerca da visão política de Brecht.

João Desidério, 7528



ORGANUM

The *organum* is one of the first instances of polyphonic sounds. Its definition is first settled in the *Musica Enchiriadis*, from the 9th century. There are several kinds of *organa*, each with their own distinct features.

EMCN: Organum: Uma forma de polifonia primitiva

MUSICA ENCHIRIADIS

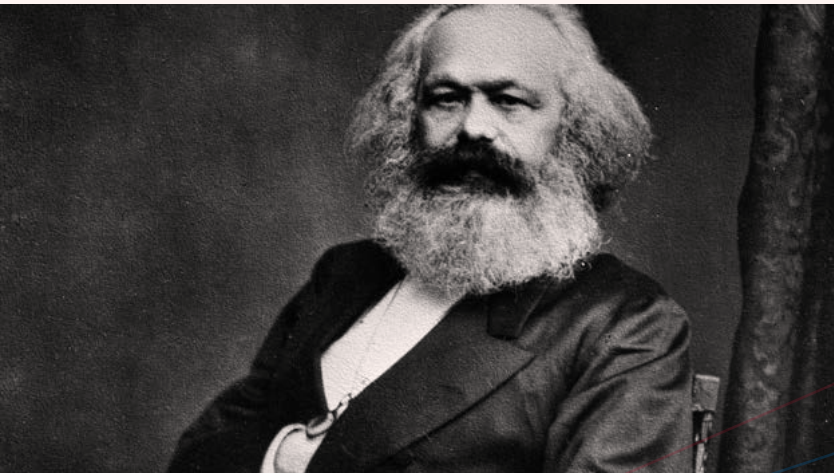
Anonymous musical treatise from the 9th century. It is the first attempt to establish a series of rules for polyphony.

MANIFESTO OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

BOURGEOIS AND PROLETARIANS

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other – Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. Meantime the markets kept ever growing, the demand ever rising. Even manufacturer no longer sufficed. Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionised industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, Modern Industry; the place of the industrial middle class by industrial millionaires, the leaders of the whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois. We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange.

Karl Marx e Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1948



Karl Marx

POLITICS

POLITICS, BOOK I, PART I

Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good. As in other departments of science, so in politics, the compound should always be resolved into the simple elements or least parts of the whole. We must therefore look at the elements of which the state is composed, in order that we may see in what the different kinds of rule differ from one another, and whether any scientific result can be attained about each one of them.

THE GREEK THEATRE

POETICS, SECTION I, PART VI

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper **purgation** of these emotions.

Tragedy is the imitation of an action; and an action implies personal agents, who necessarily possess certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought; for it is by these that we qualify actions themselves, and these — thought and character — are the two natural causes from which actions spring, and on actions again all success or failure depends. Hence, the Plot is the imitation of the action — for by plot I here mean the arrangement of the incidents. By Character I mean that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents. Thought is required wherever a statement is proved, or, it may be, a general truth enunciated.

BRECHTIAN STAGING

MULTI-ROLING

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. This means the audience are more aware of the fact that they are watching a presentation of events.

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. This keeps that character representational and inhibits emotional involvement and attachment on the part of the audience.

MINIMAL SET / COSTUME / PROPS

Set, costume and props are all kept simple and representational. Elaborate costumes might mean that the sense of theatre, of pretending to be something else, was lost. For example, Mother Courage's cart in the National Theatre production is stocked full with realistic props that Mother Courage would need for authenticity. The cart is the fifth member of the family according to Brecht so there are examples of props being as important as characters in his plays.

CATHARSIS

POLITICS, BOOK VIII, PART VII

We maintain further that music should be studied, not for the sake of one, but of many benefits, that is to say, with a view to (1) education, (2) **purgation** (the word 'purgation' we use at present without explanation, but when hereafter we speak of poetry, we will treat the subject with more precision); music may also serve (3) for enjoyment, for relaxation, and for recreation after exertion. (...) For feelings such as pity and fear, or, again, enthusiasm, exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence over all. Some persons fall into a religious frenzy, whom we see as a result of the sacred melodies — when they have used the melodies that excite the soul to mystic frenzy — restored as though they had found healing and purgation. Those who are influenced by pity or fear, and every emotional nature, must have a like experience, and others in so far as each is susceptible to such emotions, and all **are in a manner purged and their souls lightened and delighted**. The purgative melodies likewise give an innocent pleasure to mankind. Such are the modes and the melodies in which those who perform music at the theatre should be invited to compete.



Marina Abramovic

APATHY VS ENGAGEMENT

MARSHALL MCLUHAN: UNDERSTANDING MEDIA

Telephone is a cool medium. or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information. And speech is a cool medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener."

[TV] When hotted up by dramatisation and stingers, it performs less well because there is less opportunity for participation. Radio is a hot medium. When given additional intensity, it performs better. It doesn't invite the same degree of participation in its users. Radio will serve as background-sound or as noise-level control, as when the ingenious teenager employs it as a means of privacy. TV will not work as background. It engages you."

TV is above all a medium that demands a creatively participant response. (...) TV has changed our sense-lives and our mental processes. It has created a taste for all experience in depth that affects language teaching as much as car-styles."

"The TV actor does not have to project either his voice or himself. Likewise, TV acting is so extremely intimate, because of the peculiar involvement of the viewer with the completion or "closing" of the TV image, that the actor must achieve a great degree of spontaneous casualness that would be irrelevant in movie and lost on stage.

Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The extensions of men, 1995

SYMBOLIC PROPS

Often one item can be used in a variety of ways. A suitcase might become a desk, or a car door or a bomb.

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. The important thing is that the audience still see the theatre, so often they will see production personnel, such as backstage crew, in action on the stage rather than hidden.

BBC Bitesize: Epic Theatre and Brecht



Aristotle
The Internet Classics Archive – MIT

EPIC THEATRE

The narrative starts and ends, leaving issues unresolved, confronting the audience with questions about what they'll do. Ideally Epic theatre will be an inspiration to action whereas Brecht thought Dramatic theatre was entertainment. Epic theatre also shows an argument. It's a clear political statement. Brecht was against cathartic theatre. He believed that while the audience believed in the action onstage and became emotionally involved they lost the ability to think and to judge. He wanted his audiences to remain objective and distant from emotional involvement so that they could make considered and rational judgements about any social comment or issues in his work. To do this he used a range of theatrical devices or techniques so that the audience were reminded throughout that they were watching theatre; a presentation of life, not real life itself. He called the act of distancing the audience from emotional involvement the *verfremdungseffekt* (The 'V' Effect).

THE ARTIST IS PRESENT

It is 2010 and a woman sits in the atrium of The Museum of Modern Art. She wears a white robe and across from her sits someone else, a museum patron, or more generally a human being. The woman sits motionless, staring straight into the face of the person facing her, not looking away or breaking eye contact for any reason. When the patron in front of her feels like they have had the experience they wanted, they get up and walk away. The woman looks down with eyes shut, preparing herself for the next person. She does this continuously, seven to ten hours a day for three months straight. People sit in front of her, some look at her with trepidation, others blankly, still others openly weep. She is able to tap into something, something powerful. For some, it is extraordinary pain. In the end, she acts as a mirror to whoever is in front of her. She allows the person, by removing any kind of filter of thought, conversation, or pretense, to see deep inside themselves and to pull out something profound. Some people break down as they walk away, and many appear to be deeply affected by it in some way, at least momentarily.

The Creators Project: I Tried the 'Abramovic Method' [And I Think I Passed Out]



The Evening Herald's first page about Archduke Franz Ferdinand's death

OTHER BRECHTIAN DEVICES

MONTAGE

It's no accident that montage is a term that we'd more readily associate with cinema. Brecht consciously borrowed the idea from silent movies. A montage is a series of short self-contained scenes grouped immediately after each other whose juxtaposition or contrast highlights the important issues with absolute clarity. This idea of separate scenes also allows for a focus on minute details if the situation of the play demands it. Brecht was influenced by the film director Sergei Eisenstein's greatest demonstration of the power of montage in the 'Odessa Steps' sequence of his 1925 film, Battleship Potemkin. In the famous sequence involving a runaway baby carriage, Eisenstein uses montage to arouse emotion and create suspense.

NARRATION

Narration is used to remind the audience that what they're watching is a presentation of a story. 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.

COMING OUT OF ROLE / THIRD PERSON NARRATION

Commenting upon a character as an actor is a clear way of reminding the audience of theatricality. For example, midway through a heightened scene the action might break for the actor to comment upon their character in the third person, 'Darius felt his anger rise. He wasn't being listened to and wanted revenge', before returning to the scene.

USING 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. The musical, Miss Saigon, for example, used a slideshow to demonstrate the loss of lives in the Vietnam War. What's important is that the information doesn't just comment upon the action but deepens our understanding of it.

DIRECT ADDRESS

Speaking directly to the audience breaks the fourth wall and destroys any illusion of reality. An example would be the moment where Grusha pleads to save baby Michael in The Caucasian Chalk Circle by Brecht: I brought him up, shall I also tear him to bits? I can't.

SPEAKING THE STAGE DIRECTIONS

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.

MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN

In 1949, Mother Courage's characters, creator, cast and audience shared a war-weariness and an athen, heartsick terror at the prospect of more war. It was manifestly one of Brecht's ambitions for the play to expose the transactional, economic nature of war. But by the end of Mother Courage, arguably the bleakest conclusion Brecht wrote, his adage that war is business carried on by other means feels inadequate and hollow. The play reveals war not as business but as apocalypse, as the human nemesis. War devours life. Emblazoned on the house curtain of the Berliner Ensemble, whose signature production was Mother Courage, was a peace dove drawn by Picasso. In a poem about those curtains, Brecht admiringly describes Picasso's peace dove as streitbare – "argumentative" or "cantankerous". If there's a pacifist, anti-war spirit stirring within Mother Courage, it too must be described as streitbare, to say the least. It's a problematic sort of anti-war play, given that its climactic, least ambiguous and most hopeful moment is the one in which a town of sleeping people are awakened and summoned to battle against a merciless foe. The great moment of heroism and sacrifice is not a refusal to fight, but rather a call to arms.

It places us in judgment of the actions of a woman who inhabits a universe defined by war, who often makes calamitous choices; but her choices are unbearably hard, and sometimes all but impossible. She refuses to understand the nature of her tragic circumstances; she is afraid that looking back will weaken her. She reaches correct conclusions and then immediately discards them. We watch her world grow lonelier and less forgiving with each bad choice she makes. We feel we are watching her dying, yet she refuses to die. Her indomitability, her hardiness, come to seem dehumanising, less mythic than monstrous.

In her blindness, Courage embodies an uncomfortably familiar modern disfigurement: a relationship to commodities, money and the marketplace that perverts human relationships and is ultimately inimical to life. And yet what else can she do? If she is oblivious to the consequences of hanging on, she is eagle-eyed about the consequences of losing what she has. She will not have to sell herself as long as she has boots, buckles, beer and black market bullets to sell instead. She isn't neglecting any plausible alternative. In choosing to write about a canteen woman trailing after armies in war-ravaged 17th-century Europe, Brecht precluded any other options from presenting themselves.

The Guardian: Mother Courage is not just an anti-war play



Berthold Brecht

BERTHOLD BRECHT

The playwright Berthold Brecht was born in 1898 in the German town of Augsburg. After serving as a medical orderly in the First World War and appalled by the effects of the war, he went first to Munich and then to Berlin in pursuit of a career in the theatre. That period of his life came to an end in 1933 when the Nazis came to power in Germany. Brecht fled and during this period the Nazis formally removed his citizenship, so he was a stateless citizen.

As an artist, Brecht was influenced by a diverse range of writers and practitioners including Chinese theatre and Karl Marx. The turmoil of the times through which Brecht lived gave him a strong political voice. The opposition he faced is testament to the fact that he had the courage to express his personal voice in the world of the theatre.



Helene Weigel as Mother Courage

BURGUESIA

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors", and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self interest, than callous "cash payment". (...) It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. (...) Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify.

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.

Karl Marx e Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1948

GESTUS

Gestus, another Brechtian technique, is a clear character gesture or movement used by the actor that captures a moment or attitude rather than delving into emotion. So every gesture was important. Brecht and his actors studied photographs of the plays in rehearsal to ensure each moment worked effectively. Could the audience tell by the actor's gestures alone what was happening in the scene?

Brecht didn't want the actors to be the character onstage, only to show them as a type of person. For this reason Brecht will often refer to his characters by archetypal names, such as 'The Soldier' or 'The Girl'.

Gestus is also gesture with social comment. For example, a soldier saluting as he marches across a stage is a gesture. But if he was saluting as he marched over a stage strewn with dead bodies, it would be Gestus as a social comment about the type of person he represents.

SPASS

Spass literally translates as 'fun'. Brecht wanted to make his audience think. He realised that while we are laughing we are also thinking. Spass was also an excellent way to break the tension. Brecht needed to break rising tension to stop the audience from following characters on their emotional journey. It might be used in the form of a comic song, slapstick or physical comedy or even a stand-up routine. It's 'silliness' in effect but often makes strong social comment in the way it's used in the treatment of a serious subject.

THE ABRAMOVIC METHOD

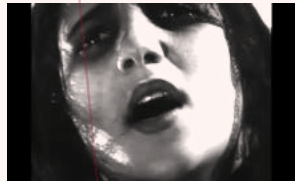
In front of us there were several wooden chairs and benches, each and every one of them embedded with crystals. I sat on a backless bench and soon shared the space with a woman right behind me. I tried to sit straight and loosen up my shoulders as much as I could, which worked out nicely. My mind started clearing out extraneous thoughts, and by the end, I had the feeling of "turning to myself." If Marina Abramovic's aim was meditation, she ends up with even more than that.

How Creatives Work: The Emotional Performance Art Of Marina Abramovic

THE 'V' EFFECT

Verfremdungseffekt actually translates (...) to 'distancing'. However, it's still often called the alienation effect or is shortened to the 'v' effect and there are many ways of using it. Brecht definitely wanted his audience to remain interested and engaged by the drama otherwise his message would be lost. It was emotional investment in the characters he aimed to avoid.

His approach to theatre suits work which has a political, social or moral message. Epic theatre breaks the fourth wall, the imaginary wall between the actors and audience which keeps them as observers. They are active members of the theatrical experience as they are kept thinking throughout, not switching off.



Sequência Odessa Steps do filme Battleship Potemkin de Sergei Eisenstein (1925)

THE POLITICAL ILLITERATE