

# TH 310 Bertolt Brecht: The Study and Staging of Epic Theater

Seminar Leader: Julia Hart  
Course Times: Wednesdays 3:45-7:00pm  
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30-3:30pm

## Course Description

Nowhere else can Bertolt Brecht's presence be felt more than in the streets of Berlin. But what really is the Epic Theater he is so famous for and what influence does it have on stage in Berlin's current theater scene? This course will not study the plays of Brecht as literature; rather, students will be in dialogue with Brecht as one of the most revolutionary theatermakers of the 20th Century. This seminar will introduce students to Brecht's theoretical texts on the epic theater such as *A Short Organum for the Theater* and *The Street Scene*. Students will not only analyze these provocative theater techniques, but will try to use Brecht's specific acting and directing exercises and devices in rehearsal. Throughout the semester, students will act and direct scenes from two of Brecht's plays: *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Person of Szechwan* to investigate how Brecht and his ensemble worked. This course includes visits to several theater productions in Berlin to see Brecht's footprint on German theater today.

## Requirements

Students are expected to:

- Turn off phones during class time.
- Initiate appointments with the Professor or arts staff outside of class time.
- Always allocate extra time for work preparation and clean-up for independent production.
- Respond to emails from their professors in a timely manner.
- Inform their professors at the beginning of the semester if photos of students, their artwork, or their works in progress are NOT to be taken and / or used for Bard College Berlin.
- Remove all artworks, art materials, and / or any personal belongings before the end of the semester. Failure to remove works or return spaces clean and empty may result in final grade penalization. Donating unrequested artworks and / or art materials is not permitted and will still be considered student property,

expected to be removed by your inspection deadline. Please contact Studio Arts Manager Joon Park for more information: [j.park@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:j.park@berlin.bard.edu)

### **Academic Integrity**

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### **Attendance**

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

**SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2022:** Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

### **Scene Study / Final Project Requirements:**

- choose one scene from either *Mother Courage and Her Children* or *The Good Person of Szechwan* that you would like to explore and conceptualize, devise, and rehearse as an actor or director.
- one additional 3 hour rehearsal to be completed outside of class each week
- Additional preparation assignments will be posted to Google Classroom

### **Scene Study Assessment**

- Students will be graded on their preparation, completion of rehearsal reports ( sent via email, 1-2 paragraphs in length), and the ability to discuss their ideas about the

situation and characters in the scene. Actors will be assessed on their preparation, physicality, use of movement/gesture, delivery of lines, and a clear approach to their characters. Directors will be assessed on their preparation, use of space, movement/gesture, and clear intention of what is being explored in the scene.

## **Written requirements:**

Midterm Essay (2000 words due **15.10.2022**) :

Students will have the choice to write an essay that reflects on specific concepts of the Epic Theatre and aspects of the reading that especially interests them. Students will have the opportunity in their midterm essays to relate concepts of the epic theatre to practical exercises explored in class.

**Grade Breakdown:** Scene Study 40%  
Written Assignments 30%  
Class Participation 30%.

## **Policy on Late Submission**

Assignments (artworks, essays, performances, oral presentations) that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (Example: B+ becomes C+). Professor is not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. Where Professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

\*Course readings will be posted on Google Classroom each week. The plays *Mother Courage* and *The Good Person of Szechwan* are on reserve in the library. The instructor recommends that students purchase both plays for use in rehearsal and recommends the English translation by Tony Kushner.

## **Schedule**

### **31.8 Who was Bertolt Brecht? What is epic theater?**

Introduction to the life and work of Bertolt Brecht  
Introduction to the epic theater

### **7.9 Epic Theater and the Alienation Technique**

Required Reading:  
*Fifty Key Theatre Directors*: 52-56  
*Actors on Acting*: 307-311  
*Brecht Sourcebook*: 23-26

*A Short Organum for the Theater in Brecht on Theatre: 179-205*  
*Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht 57-64*

\*\* Theater Visit: 8pm- 10pm “Im Herzen der Gewalt” at the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz (near S-bahn Charlottenburg)

14.9 **Epic Theater and Acting**

Required Reading:

*The Street Scene in Brecht on Theatre: 121-29,*

*Brecht on Theatre: 136-140, 236-39*

*Actors on Acting: 312-16*

*Cambridge Companion: 219-23, 278-81 (211-19 is optional)*

*Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations. What is Epic Theater? 147-54*

*Brecht Sourcebook: 43-48 (Gestus and the influence of  
American actors)*

*The History of the German Theatre: 190-196, 210-219*

21.9 **Direction, Dramaturgy, and Stage Design**

Required Reading:

*Cambridge Companion to Brecht: Brecht and Stage Design. The  
Bühnenbildner and the Bühnenbauer. 1-10*

*Cambridge Companion to Brecht: The Invention of the Dramaturg  
193-199*

*Brecht on Theatre: 230-33*

*Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht 64-75*

28.9 **Epic Theater Rehearsal Workshop**

**Music and the Epic Theatre**

Review of Epic Theatre Tools and Terms

Workshop in rehearsal methods, character development, and  
conceptual groundwork

Reading: *Brecht on Theatre: 239-46*

*Cambridge Companion to Brecht: Brecht and Music. Theory and  
Practice 1-10*

Assignment: Acting and Directing Exercise Preparation on Google  
Classroom

\*\* 3.10 Theater Visit “The Threepenny Opera” at the Berliner Ensemble. 6pm-9pm

5.10 **Mother Courage and Her Children**

Required Reading: *Mother Courage and Her Children*

Optional Reading: Preface and Introduction by Tony Kushner

-Groups formed for Scene Exercise

- 12.10 Continued discussion of *Mother Courage and Her Children*  
\*First Rehearsals for *Mother Courage and Her Children* Scene Exercise  
Reading: *Five Great Plays:* 207-215  
*Cambridge Companion:* 132-42

**\*Mid-term Essay Due October 15th**

- 19.10 NO CLASS  
Assignment: one rehearsals outside of class before 21.10
- 26.10 FALL BREAK
- 2.11 Mother Courage Scene Exercise Presentations and Evaluations  
Assignment: one rehearsals outside of class
- 9.11 **The Good Person of Szechwan**  
Required Reading:  
*The Good Person of Szechwan*  
*Introduction by Tony Kushner 5-9*
- 16.11 Good Person of Szechwan - Staged Readings, Rehearsal Lab  
\*Groups formed for Scene Study  
Reading: *Five Great Plays* 199-206  
Assignment: Scene Study Preparation Exercise
- 22.11 Scene Study Rehearsals  
Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class
- 30.11 Scene Study Rehearsals  
Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class
- 7.12 Last Day of Class. Scene Study Two Presentations. Rehearsals and  
evaluation for public scene presentation. BRECHT NIGHT /  
Performance Factory.

\*Factory inspection at 9pm following the strike and clean-up of all set

pieces, props, costumes, and tech equipment. Failure to strike and clear materials from the Factory after the show will result in grade reduction

### **Policy on Late Submission of Artworks / Presentations**

Assignments (artworks, essays, performances, oral presentations) that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (Example: B+ becomes C+). The Professor is not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

### **Facility Guidelines:**

“The Factory” – Eichenstrasse 43

### **The Factory Policy Agreement**

- 1) “The Factory” at BCB (Eichenstrasse 43) has space and facilities available to BCB students with an academic purpose for using the building. Mandatory in-class orientations are required to retain chip access to the Factory. Chip access to The Factory is from 7am to 10pm everyday during the semester. At 10pm students will be asked to leave the building by BCB security personnel.
- 2) Students agree to only use the common spaces that are available for their needs, and must respect private spaces that are off-limits. For requesting to reserve the dance / theater space and / or Seminar Room 6, please fill out the online [Factory Reservation Form](#). The Factory Staff will get back to you within two weekdays. (Monday - Friday).
- 3) No smoking is allowed anywhere inside the building. There are to be no projects using open flames (such as candles, torches, lanterns, fireworks, etc.) inside any part of the building.
- 4) Fire exits and lanes must be kept clear of any obstructions.
- 5) Spray painting and handling of any hazardous (chemical or combustible) material is not allowed inside the building. Contact the Studio Arts Manager concerning working with these materials. All work surfaces (indoor and outdoor) must be properly protected with a drop cloth or a packing paper provided by the workshop.
- 6) No sandals, flip-flops, or bare feet will be allowed inside the workshop and studio 6.
- 7) Students must make sure all lights are turned off and doors are closed when leaving the building. No windows or doors are to be left opened or cracked. All electrical items must be unplugged when not in use.
- 8) If BCB workshop tools must be borrowed for a purpose outside of the building, please

- contact The Studio Arts Manager (by appointment).
- 9) There are to be no architectural changes to studios or any areas inside or outside of the building without first speaking with the Studio Arts Manager.
  - 10) During completion week, any space used by a student must be returned empty with clean walls and floors. All garbage must be bagged (or boxed) and properly disposed of. Final grades may be penalized and / or fines imposed if items are left (or renovations unfinished) by the inspection deadline.
  - 11) Contact Studio Arts Manager directly with any questions: [j.park@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:j.park@berlin.bard.edu)

## AV Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)

- 1) BCB's AV (Audio / Visual) facilities provide a limited quantity of AV equipment to support those students enrolled in arts classes that require specific items. AV facilities do not include any black and white or color printing services for students.
- 2) The opening times may change every semester to adapt to specific course times and social distancing conditions. Borrowing equipment is currently implemented by scheduling an advance appointment through this link: <https://janinaschabig.youcanbook.me/> AV facilities are ONLY available during days when classes are held (closed during official BCB holidays).
- 3) All items checked out are due back during AV hours the following day, unless other arrangements have been made in advance directly with AV Staff.
- 4) Items to be reserved on a specific date should be requested at least one week in advance. Without reservation, availability is limited to a first-come, first-serve basis.
- 5) The AV Staff may exclude students from borrowing items at any time, if the student:
  - failed to return items in time
  - failed to return items in person (pick up and/ or return by friends is not allowed)
  - returned items with missing pieces
  - returned items damaged or in poor shape
- 6) AV equipment will be given out only to those students responsible in organizing, picking up as well as returning their items IN PERSON. No exceptions.
- 7) All items returned late, regardless of patron's position at BCB, will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day.
- 8) Any item returned without accessories (such as cables, SD card, batteries, tripod head, lens cap, etc) will be subject to a 1 Euro fine, per day (the same as late returns).
- 9) Any items missing will be subject to patron reimbursement for its value (or under special circumstances, replacement, at the discretion of AV Staff). Any items damaged or malfunctioning are expected to be reported to Staff upon check-in.
- 1) Please use the AV email to inquire about equipment or policy, as well as to reserve ([av@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:av@berlin.bard.edu)). Do not contact AV Staff through their personal emails.
- 2) We strongly suggest personally visiting the facilities to inquire and reserve before borrowing equipment!
- 3) AV equipment is limited at BCB. Whenever possible students are encouraged to use their own devices (computers, cameras) for production purposes.
- 4) Contact AV Staff directly with any questions: [av@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:av@berlin.bard.edu)

Photo Darkroom Facilities – Platanenstrasse 98 (downstairs)  
Computer Pool and Media Lab – Kuckhoffstrasse 24 (upstairs)

\*\* Guidelines to be offered during orientations.