

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

Seminar Leader: Julia Hart  
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Office Hours: Thursdays 2:30-3:30pm or by appointment  
Class: Thursdays 3:45pm-7pm

## 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, but 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 Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* to investigate how Brecht and his ensemble worked and how these methods can be used to create political theatre today. This course includes visits to several theater productions in Berlin, including a visit to the Berliner Ensemble.

## 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 student's identity, artwork, 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.

## **Accommodations**

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, ([accommodations@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:accommodations@berlin.bard.edu)) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker ([j.harker@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:j.harker@berlin.bard.edu)) or Maria Anderson-Long ([m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu)).

## **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 may 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.

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

- choose one scene from either *Mother Courage and Her Children* or *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* 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 and rehearsal reports will be posted to Google Classroom
- Scene Exercise from *Mother Courage and Her Children* will be discussed and critiqued on 30.10.2025
- Scene Study from *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* will be discussed and critiqued on 11.12.2025

## 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:

Scene Study Essays (2000 words due 19.12.2025)

Scene Study Essay should contain the following:

- Rehearsal process: how the scene was chosen, a brief analysis of the scene (the situation, the Brechtian “gestus”, the characters, the central conflict), descriptions from rehearsal, including what rehearsal (as actors or directors) methods and exercises related to the epic theater were implemented, how they were implemented, and any relevant challenges and observations from rehearsals
- Evaluation of the scene presentation and a critical evaluation of the rehearsal process.

**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 Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* 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.

### **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 may make an appointment to discuss assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive 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.

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

\*Course readings will be posted on Google Classroom each week. The Brecht plays are on reserve in the library. The instructor recommends that students purchase both plays for use in rehearsal and recommends the English translations by Tony Kushner.

### **Schedule**

- 4.9           **Who was Bertolt Brecht? What is epic theater?**  
Introduction to the life and work of Bertolt Brecht  
Introduction to the epic theater
- 11.9           **Epic Theater and an Introduction to 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
- 18.9           **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 Complete Brecht Toolkit 47-83*  
Optional Reading: *The History of the German Theatre: 190-196, 210-219*

\*\*please note that class on September 18th will take place on Zoom.

25.9      **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*  
*The Complete Brecht Toolkit 89-115*

2.10      **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

\*Theatre Visit: We will go to see the *Threepenny Opera* at the Berliner Ensemble on October 3rd, 4th or 5th. The exact date will be announced at the beginning of the semester.

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

16.10      Mother Courage Scene Exercise Rehearsals  
Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class and rehearsal report

23.10      FALL BREAK

30.10      Mother Courage Scene Exercise Presentations and Evaluations  
Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class

6.11      **The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui**  
Required Reading:  
*The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*

*Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht: 199-206*

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| 13.11 | <i>The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui</i><br>- Staged Readings, Rehearsal Lab<br>*Groups formed for Scene Study<br><u>Reading: <i>Five Great Plays</i> 199-206</u><br>Assignment: Scene Study Preparation Exercise |
| 20.11 | Scene Study Rehearsals<br>Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class   |
| 27.11 | Scene Study Rehearsals<br>Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class   |
| 4.12  | Scene Study Rehearsals: First Run Throughs and Critique<br>Assignment: one rehearsal outside of class  |
| 11.12 | Last Day of Class. Scene Study Presentations. Last Tech Rehearsals<br>and evaluation for public scene presentation. 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 the use of facilities:

1. The Factory (Eichenstrasse 43) and Monopol (Provinzstr 40-44) at BCB offer space and facilities to BCB art students. Chip access is from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day, including the weekends during the semester. The buildings cannot be used outside these hours.
2. Fire exits and lanes must be kept clear of any obstructions.
3. Students agree only to use the designated class spaces or communal workshops. Respecting the building and its facilities is crucial, as they are shared resources that need to be preserved for the benefit of all.
4. For your safety and the safety of others, smoking and drinking alcohol are strictly prohibited anywhere inside the building.

5. Unauthorized events and/or parties are not permitted. Projects using open flames (such as candles, torches, lanterns, fireworks, etc.) are not permitted inside the building.
6. Spray painting and handling any hazardous (chemical or combustible) material is not permitted inside the building.
7. All work surfaces (indoor and outdoor) must be adequately protected with the workshop's drop cloth before spray painting or working with plaster.
8. During completion week, any space used by a student must be emptied, with clean walls and floors. All garbage must be adequately disposed of. Final grades may be affected or withheld if any item remains by the inspection deadline.
9. When leaving the building, students must ensure all lights are turned off, all electrical items must be unplugged, and doors must be closed.
10. Contact the Studio art manager directly with any questions: [j.park@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:j.park@berlin.bard.edu)

Emergency phone numbers:

Police (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 110

Fire (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 112

Ambulance and Paramedics (calling from a German landline or cellphone): 112

Out-of-Hours Medical Care (calling from a German landline or cellphone) : 116 117