

## Philosophical Rationale

Dating back to a very early stage in its conception, the formulation of the idea itself, "A History of the Future" has been overwhelmingly influenced by Brecht and his theories of "Epic Theatre"<sup>1</sup>. The play follows Brecht's politicized and anti-naturalistic model for theatre, in which the performance is designed to "interest"<sup>2</sup> the audience, to provoke them intellectually rather than emotionally. Through achieving this, every part of the production has been harnessed for its singular aim of discussing the feeble human impact on fate and resultant personal importance of individual action. This has led me to take up and study the work of other practitioners that follow a Brechtian pattern, including Sarah Kane and Edward Albee, in order to successfully implement Brechtian theory in a performance context. Therefore, the philosophical and theoretical rationale for "A History of the Future" is borne of the theories of Brecht, and as a subset of this, Kane and Theatre of the Absurd.

Bertold Brecht's theories on the purpose of theatre, culminating in his Epic Theatre, were the primary stylistic influence for "A History of the Future". The purpose of Epic Theatre is to encourage a "active intellectual engagement"<sup>3</sup> towards what happens on stage; borne of a "relaxed"<sup>4</sup> state of mind in which the audience does not empathise with the action onstage and instead considers it intellectually<sup>5</sup>. For a piece that was from the beginning concentrated on its thematic purpose, this was an effective stylistic choice. Besides which, the conceptual rather than "psychologically driven"<sup>6</sup> action was to show the individual "less as the agent of events then the focus of external forces"<sup>7</sup>. The theoretical reasons for this is because external forces – societal, historical and so forth – are Brecht's interest as a political and polemical writer<sup>8</sup>, a remarkable parallel with my work that'd be very helpful.

Given this, I adopted Epic Theatre as the theoretical basis for my production, and this demanded I employ Brechtian methodology. Specific techniques are necessary for successful Epic Theatre, as the "closed cycle of naturalism"<sup>9</sup> where action onstage is merely observed rather than engaged with is insufficient for this message-based theatre. Perhaps the most important of these is "Verfremdungseffekt"<sup>10</sup>, or the distancing effect which separates actor from audience by revealing the "artistic armature"<sup>11</sup> of the play. The piece should

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin., Bostock and Mitchell., Understanding Brecht, pg 15

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pg 15

<sup>3</sup> Allain and Harvie., The Routledge companion to theatre and performance, pg 29

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin., Bostock and Mitchell., Understanding Brecht, pg 15

<sup>5</sup> Allain and Harvie., The Routledge companion to theatre and performance, pg 29

<sup>6</sup> Counsell and Wolf., Performance Analysis, pg 43

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 43

<sup>8</sup> Allain and Harvie., The Routledge companion to theatre and performance, pg 29

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, pg 29

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, pg 29

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin., Bostock and Mitchell., Understanding Brecht, pg 16

make no attempt to hide its nature as intellectual theatre and not emotional reality, allowing it to be "addressed critically"<sup>12</sup>. This governed my heavy employment throughout of anti-naturalistic principles that highlight the artifice of theatre. The lighting, for example, is strongly representational; helping to draw focus to points of my message – especially true of the anti-naturalistic 'advertisements' that foreshadow fate. Within this example there's also the use of "gestus"<sup>13</sup> – where appearance represents a "group of traits peculiar to the individual" – the foundations of representation and symbolism, and this can be clearly seen in the advertisement lighting. It is possible to see here how the techniques of Brechtian Epic Theatre interrelate and aid its, and therefore my, political purposes.

However within these basic representational principles, there is a lot of scope for different expression, and this is why my use of Sarah Kane's "Crave" as a secondary influence was vital. Tying into a huge amount of Brechtian anti-naturalistic technique – characters that titled rather than named A, B, C and M<sup>14</sup> that give only one repeated emotional response – using "Crave" allowed me to further my Brechtian theoretical basis but within the wider context of its practice and expansion over time. Kane's characterization and set design, both "minimal"<sup>15</sup> to preserve her preferred interest in language, are unmistakably Brechtian – language to "Crave" is as fate is to "A History of the Future". This minimalism I used in my own characterization and set design – appreciating how a lack of ostentation in both could aid my expression. It forced me to work with the essence of the two elements, and solely in terms of my message. My characters followed her work, in terms of their inhuman 'labels' and also the gestus I devised for them; picking traits on the basis of purpose in the overall message. The set design of "A History of the Future" as well had its grounding in Kane's minimal set in "Crave" – minimal to the point of non-existence, in her "rejection of stage directions relating to specifics"<sup>16</sup> – to achieve the distancing effect. I identified the essential parts of set for making my point on inevitability, for example the television that foreshadowed fated events, and then put these alone onstage. This meant that, amongst other things discarded, there was no partition between onstage and offstage, so the audience was constantly aware of the movements of the 'crew' that helped suggest a vast unstoppable machinery behind fate. The influence of Kane's "Crave" thus allowed me to distill the broad concepts of Brechtian theory into specific and practical applications that would aid my politicized theatre. My involvement of Theatre of the Absurd in "A History of the Future" was for similar but slightly more conceptual reasons.

The latter of my two secondary influences to Brecht, were the anti-naturalistic and political works of "The Theatre of the Absurd"<sup>17</sup> as defined by Martin Esslin in his book of the same name, and specifically Edward Albee's "The Zoo Story".

<sup>12</sup> Counsell and Wolf., Performance Analysis, pg 43

<sup>13</sup> Pavis., Shantz and Carlson., Dictionary of the theatre, pg 164

<sup>14</sup> crave wikipedia

<sup>15</sup> Saunders., 'Love me or kill me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes, pg 111

<sup>16</sup> ibid., pg 111

<sup>17</sup> Esslin., The Theatre of the Absurd

This style of theatre, symptomatic of playwrights such as Beckett and Genet<sup>18</sup> but with a vast array of writers falling to the category, is defined as plays where "broadly speaking"<sup>19</sup> the absurdity of the human condition is the central theme. This refers to a "sense of the senselessness of life"<sup>20</sup>, an awareness of the futility of human action and a descent into irrationality as a result<sup>21</sup>. There were two central areas in which this connected with my work. Firstly in terms of the Heir, whose reaction to a steady realization that his actions could change only himself and not fate is a rejection of etiquette and social norms – finding the absurdity in being human, pretending importance when knowing insignificance. This "abandonment of rational devices"<sup>22</sup>, so alien to the audience, is a very powerful vessel for political messages, and I've used it as such. Secondly in terms of the costume, in which I followed the ideas of Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" – building up a naturalistic reality in acts one and two to destroy it as illusion with 'true futility' in the third act<sup>23</sup>. This was the basis for my costume – providing emphasis for the anti-naturalism of the characterization and dialogue through a naturalistic appearance. In this way the use of Theatre of the Absurd as an influence to support my Brechtian theoretical centre was highly beneficial.

Epic Theatre is a form in which there's very little room for absconding the central theoretical principles of Brecht. It demands that a performance be carefully constructed in every aspect to convey a political message, to invite an audience into intellectual reflection, and as an influence this is both a source of aid and difficulty. Certainly it gives a strong conceptual backbone which ties the piece together, seen in "A History of the Future" in its commitment to its message. However this process of such total commitment is very demanding, hence my use of secondary influences Albee and Kane to supplement my Brechtian stylistic source with subsidiary theory and practical information. Through the combination of all three, I was able to make certain that the theme of fate and human actions futility in changing it – and significance in defining us – remained strong throughout.

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, pg 7

<sup>19</sup> *op. cit.*, pg 24

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, pg 24

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, pg 24

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, pg 24

<sup>23</sup> Horn., Edward Albee, pg 70

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