



Section A: Physical Theatre

Physical Theatre

- A style which uses **choreographed movement and dancing** to tell a story.
- These movements can be combined with traditional dialogue or used on their own.
- **Minimal set and props** are used so that the audience can focus on the physical action.
- Sometimes the **actors' bodies are used as objects onstage**.
- There is **nothing realistic** about this way of movement and so this style can be associated with Brecht and Artaud.
- Performers can **communicate emotion** to the audience that would be difficult to convey using dialogue.

Non-naturalistic Epic Theatre – **BERTOLT BRECHT**

- Opposite of naturalism – it aims to distance the audience from the story by reminding them it isn't real.
- This encourages the audience to focus on the play's message or moral.
- Performance techniques are used to remind the audience they are watching a play and this is called the **'alienation effect'**
- The techniques mentioned enable the audience to focus on the (usually political) message of the play.

In the end, you will be able to:

Identify and use the conventions of status and tension within other people performances and your own performances.

Be able to develop effective and appropriate body language for different characters.

To understand and be able to manipulative your physicality to express different emotions, concepts and ideas.

To understand and use Brecht's theory of Gestus in both your own performances and recognise it in other peoples' performances.

To understand and use Berkoff's style of Total Theatre in their performances.

Section B: Bertolt Brecht and Steven Berkoff

Steven Berkoff

A British theatre practitioner (born 1937) who is known for his **experimental style**. His plays often use physical theatre techniques like **mime, exaggerated movement and improvisation**. He believes that actors' bodies should convey the story rather than relying on sets.

Bibliography: Physical Theatre Companies

Frantic Assembly <https://www.franticassembly.co.uk/>
DV8: <https://www.dv8.co.uk/>



Section D: 7 Levels Of Tension

Section C: Body language, status

Body language:

Body language is a type of non-verbal communication. A performer can use movements, facial expression and posture to communicate how a character is feeling.

Status:

Acting status plays an important role in drama. The actor must be aware of the **acting status** of the character he/she is playing. At different times of the play, the acting status of the character can differ. It is about which character has most power at that moment in the play.

Status can also be concerned with the social class of the character:

HIGH STATUS – Royalty – powerful
LOW STATUS – Peasant – weak

7 Levels of Tension – as developed by Jacques Lecoq, who developed an approach to acting using seven levels of tension. Actors can be trained by slowly moving through these states so that they become comfortable with them, then begin to explore them in scenes.

Exhausted or catatonic. The Jellyfish. There is no tension in the body at all. Begin in a complete state of relaxation. If you have to move or speak, it is a real effort. See what happens when you try to speak.

Laid back – the “Californian” (soap opera). Many people live at this level of tension. Everything you say is cool, relaxed, probably lacking in credibility. The casual throw-away line – “I think I’ll go to bed now”.

Neutral or the “Economic” (contemporary dance). It is what it is. There is nothing more, nothing less. The right amount. No past or future. You are totally present and aware. It is the state of tension before something happens. Think of a cat sitting comfortably on a wall, ready to leap up if a bird comes near. You move with no story behind your movement.

Alert or Curious (farce). Look at things. Sit down. Stand up. Indecision. Think M. Hulot (Jacques Tati) or Mr Bean. Levels 1 – 4 are our everyday states.

Suspense or the Reactive (19th century melodrama). Is there a bomb in the room? The crisis is about to happen. All the tension is in the body, concentrated between the eyes. An in breath. There’s a delay to your reaction. The body reacts. John Cleese.

Passionate (opera). There is a bomb in the room. The tension has exploded out of the body. Anger, fear, hilarity, despair. It’s difficult to control. You walk into a room and there is a lion sitting there. There is a snake in the shower.

Tragic (end of King Lear when Lear is holding Cordelia in his arms). The bomb is about to go off! Body can’t move. Petrified. The body is solid tension.



Section E: 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 example, the boss who is corrupt and smoking a fat cigar as his workers starve is representative of every boss who profits through the exploitation of others. For this reason Brecht will often refer to his characters by archetypal names, such as 'The Soldier' or 'The Girl'. The interpretation will be built on the character's social role and why they need to behave as they do, rather than looking inwardly at emotional motivation. So we judge the character and their situation, rather than just empathising with them.

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. Mother Courage's silent scream in the face of her son's dead body is strange. Therefore we think of why she must hide her feelings rather than losing ourselves in the emotion.



Section F: Berkoff's Total Theatre

His concept of **TOTAL THEATRE** fulfils his desire for a spiritual and psychological theatre which attempts to illuminate the text rather than depict it.

TOTAL THEATRE:

- Is a belief that all elements of theatre are **EQUAL** and have the same value in contributing the effect to the audience.
 - Concerned with conveying emotion
- To give the audience an overwhelming experience
- Every aspect of theatre must have a purpose

Key features of Berkoff style theatre:

- Stylised movement (slow motion/robotic)
 - Exaggerated facial expressions
 - Direct address
 - Exaggerated vocal work
 - Tableaux
 - Mask
 - Ensemble playing
 - Minimalistic set
- Exaggerated and stylised mime
- Non-naturalistic set and lighting

