‘Brecht in Practice’: Critical Reflections on Staging Drama Dialectically

The Challenge of Making Brechtian Theatre: Ends without Means

This article considers how contemporary theatre-makers might seek to activate Bertolt Brecht’s writings on a politicized theatre. It is predicated on the categorical difference between theory and practice, which Brecht exploited to encourage practical experiment by setting a series of theoretical goals. I will be arguing that Brecht constructed clearly articulated ends for his theatre, but deliberately failed to provide sufficient means to realize them.

In his essays, notes, and fragments, Brecht hardly conceals the kind of theatre that he wants to stage. His is a dialectical theatre, and perhaps the most inclusive understanding of dialectics he offers can be found in the *Me-ti*, in which he uses the phrase ‘the great method’ as a less technical surrogate:

The *Great Method* is a practical science of alliances and dissolving alliances, of making use of changes and of dependence on changes, of bringing about change and changing those who bring it about, of the separation and formation of unities, of contraries’ lack of independence without each other, of the reconcilability of mutually exclusive contraries. The *Great Method* allows us to recognize and make use of processes in things. It teaches how to ask questions that make action possible.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The chiastic style signals the full reach of dialectics: processes are mutually interdependent so that nothing remains unchanged after a dialectical encounter. Reality is in constant flux and thus subject to intervention. In such an understanding of the nature of things, naturalistic representation is unable to probe the depths of interpenetration that give rise to the phenomena it is used to portraying. Brecht opposes naturalism because it is a faux realism: ‘Naturalism is to realism as sophistry is to dialectics, or better: as vulgar mechanical materialism to a dialectical one’.[[2]](#footnote-2) It is worth dwelling on this quotation because it contains a number of indicative positions in its single sentence. First, the foregrounding of the dialectic is clear. If one is to represent reality, an engagement with dialectics is necessary. Second, naturalism offers a veneer of reality, but, on closer reflection, this veneer reveals nothing about reality’s workings and thus presents itself as impotent. Third, realism is dependent on a materialist analysis, but it must not be founded in determinism, the philosophical point of departure for naturalism,[[3]](#footnote-3) but a dialectical presentation of the action on stage. Two main objectives of such a theatre that can be derived from this brief summary are a critique of the natural as inevitable and unchangeable, and the articulation of the dialectic’s motor, contradiction.

 As is well known, Brecht offers a number of suggestions of how such a theatre could be realized. It starts with the interpretation of the play’s action in the form of a *Fabel*. Carl Weber, one of Brecht’s assistants, elaborates on the nature of the interpretation: ‘“Fabel” was, of course, Brecht’s preferred term, designating a play’s plot as it is retold on stage from a specific point of view [ . . . ]; a *Fabel* was always to reveal the contradictions of a plot’.[[4]](#footnote-4) For Brecht, a *Fabel* could encompass a production as a whole. According to the dramaturge Käthe Rülicke, he summed up the *Fabel* for his production of *Life of Galileo* (1956) in the English rhyme ‘Humpty Dumpty’.[[5]](#footnote-5) That is, once Galileo had recanted, there was no way for him to repair the damage, he could not be ‘put back together again’. Consequently, the production as a whole was concerned with building Galileo up in order to tear him down, although, as always, the figure was not simply one thing or another, but dialectically both at the same time. The concept of a *Fabel* also extended to whole scenes or sequences of actions within scenes. In all cases, the *Fabel* is an interpretive guarantor that Brecht considered absolutely central to any production’s storytelling.[[6]](#footnote-6) Without a *Fabel*, Brecht believed that a production lacked the guidance required to articulate dialectical contradictions clearly as they unfolded over time.

In the light of the *Fabel*, relationships on stage are then to be represented visually in the form of *Arrangements*. That is, Brecht hoped that the positioning of actors on a stage and the development of that positioning as the action progressed would provide a clear sense of the social relations, even if the audience were watching from behind a glass screen, unable to hear the dialogue. The actors then perform the *Arrangements* ‘gestically’. As Meg Mumford has pointed out, the word *Gestus* is a polyseme in the first place; Brecht’s use of the theatrical neologism is hard to pin down.[[7]](#footnote-7) Marc Silberman suggests:

The performance of *Gestus*, understood as a typical, recognizable form of behavior, aims at externalizing actions that traditionally are considered internal, psychological. The *Gestus* is not, however, the expression of a personality, rather externalization allows actions to be observed by actors and audience with the goal of producing an aesthetic image of the functional laws of a society.[[8]](#footnote-8)

*Gestus*, as a socially representative basis of physicality, provides a point of departure for how the actors move and hold themselves on stage and this is to be arrived at dialectically. This non-deterministic process suggests that an actor playing a worker, for example, might choose to show how strenuous labour has ruined the figure’s body or how it has strengthened it. *Gestus* is then refined by *Haltung*, the German word that combines mental attitude with physical comportment. As such, actors adjust their physicality to tell the story of their changing relationships to each other, events and/or ideas over time. Such an approach can articulate contradiction, as when, say, a middle manager might play the taskmaster over those working under him, but cower and scrape before his boss. Actors perform clearly demarcated actions and reactions, inviting the audience to ask what has provoked such opposing behaviours. The hope is that spectators will trace them back to the situations themselves and to the social rules and conventions that have made them possible.

 For the most part, it is not difficult for theatre-makers to negotiate the movement from the dialectical analysis of stage action by carefully identifying and perhaps accounting for contradictions to a dynamic series of physical embodiments. Things become more challenging when they consider the further aims of a Brechtian theatre. An epic theatre, following Aristotle’s division of artistic genre in the *Poetics*, combines the narrative with the dramatic. Brecht wanted the actor not to be the character, but to show it, to narrate it as a more flexible figure. He also sought to subject the action on stage to a process, *Verfremdung*, which may be translated as ‘making the familiar strange’. As he noted:

Briefly, this is a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labelling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, that is not to be taken for granted, not just natural.[[9]](#footnote-9)

And, additionally, Brecht introduced the notion of historicization as a form of *Verfremdung*:

The actor must play the incidents as historical ones. Historical incidents are unique, transitory incidents associated with particular periods. The conduct of the persons involved in them is not fixed and universally human.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Historicization, again understood as a theatrical process, is not the same as staging the past in minute, naturalistic detail. Brecht noted in a discussion of naturalism in the *Buying Brass* project that Stanislavsky’s pre-Revolutionary productions were like being in a ‘museum’.[[11]](#footnote-11) Brecht’s idea is more dialogical. As Tom Kuhn notes, such a contextualization has a ‘two-way’ flow: ‘there may be active analogies between past and present, and there may be continuities’.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The actor as demonstrator, *Verfremdung* and historicization all share a desire to interrupt the spectator’s perception of the performed action. Yet, as Freddie Rokem argues with respect to Walter Benjamin’s interpretation of interruption in Brecht, it is not astonishment at the interruption that produces knowledge. Instead, ‘our knowledge about the world […] must adjust itself to the fact that this exception has actually become the rule’.[[13]](#footnote-13) That is, what had previously appeared ‘normal’ is actually something to which we have become inured, and the theatre has drawn our attention to this.

What should also be clear from this second group of concepts is that they do not suggest practical methods for their own realization. How is one to show a figure rather than to be a character? How does one make the familiar strange? How does one both make an incident historical and bring it into dialogue with the audience in the present? I suggest that Brecht *deliberately* leaves these questions open and fails to provide concrete means for realizing them. That is, he clearly describes the ends that his politicized theatre should achieve, but does not provide the concrete means. There are a number of reasons for adopting this strategy.

 First, theory, by its very nature, is an attempt to generalize a set of principles. Practice is the application of theory to specific instances of concern, in this case, to particular plays. It would be pointless to propose broad approaches in order to address the specific problems of any given play. Second, the refusal acknowledges the non-deterministic nature of dialectics, set out in the quotation from *Me-ti*, above. Brecht was concerned with creating lively theatre, founded on the rich surprises the dialectic produces. Prescribing the route to achieving successful *Verfremdung*, for example, would undermine the philosophical basis of Brecht’s understanding of realism. Third, if one understands making theatre as a dynamic process, engaged with the specificities of the theatre in question, then its means will change over time. By refraining from stipulating the specific means of realizing his aims, Brecht was licensing theatre-makers to make their own discoveries, appropriate to their social, political and theatre-historical contexts. Fourth, since his encounter with Marxism in the mid-1920s, he became increasingly suspicious of the theatre as institution under the conditions of capitalism: ‘[theatre] “theatres” everything into theatre’.[[14]](#footnote-14) That is, what might be enlivening or provocative on the page can be turned into a consumable commodity by an institution whose main concern is its own profitability. Resisting such mechanisms by compelling theatre-makers to develop their own means is a way of de-standardizing theatre practice. The more a theatre has to work to find appropriate means of representing dialectical realities, the less likely it is to be able to blunt their force, or at least, not initially. And finally, Brecht’s work at the company he co-founded, the Berliner Ensemble, clearly prioritized the practice of ‘learning through doing’. In a document distributed to the new assistants to the BE’s first production, Brecht stressed the importance of pursuing one’s own theatrical interests, acquiring a ‘theoretical ‘toolkit’ and [making] it serviceable’.[[15]](#footnote-15) For example, part of the training of his directorial and dramaturgical assistants involved them compiling descriptive and reflective notes of rehearsals, the *Notate*. Brecht did not charge one assistant with this task, but preferred to have several engaged simultaneously. The practice of observation, articulation and deliberation allowed each participant to develop in their own time, under Brecht’s initial supervision, without prescribed benchmarks.[[16]](#footnote-16)

 One could counter the thesis that Brecht provided no means for realizing his theatre by referring to the modelbooks, the annotated documentations of Brecht’s theatre practice. However, they offer the end point of the production process, not a blueprint to enact it. In the introduction to the *Courage Model*, for example, Brecht noted: ‘although [modelbooks] are meant to simplify matters, they are not simple to use. And they were designed not to make thought unnecessary but to provoke it; not to replace but compel artistic creation’ (*BoP* 183). In the modelbooks, the productions themselves represent potential ends that are still open to further negotiation, but the means are once again lacking – here, by design.

 Brecht’s refusal to map out the specifics of a route to realizing the theatre he imagined and documented in his writings may explain why it is difficult to understand precisely what producing a Brechtian theatre may entail for theatre-makers. This gap in knowledge provided the point of departure for the ‘Brecht in Practice’ project that is the focus for the rest of this article.

‘Brecht in Practice’: Scope and Ambitions

‘Brecht in Practice’ was a practice-as-research project that I ran from September 2016 – October 2018 at the University of York, UK.[[17]](#footnote-17) It was designed not only to address the problem, outlined above, of how contemporary theatre-makers might effectively engage with Brecht’s theories, but also to reflect on the productive potential of such theatrical means. The project was also to be outward-facing, disseminating its findings as widely as possible.[[18]](#footnote-18)

 The choice of plays to be staged was also important in that I was interested in understanding how Brecht’s aims for performance could be reconciled with plays that were not written in the Brechtian tradition. In *Buying Brass*, the Philosopher gives the following advice to the theatre-makers, regarding plays that may be considered realistic: ‘All you ought to do is take the incidents themselves as seriously as possible, and the playwright’s use of them as lightly as possible’.[[19]](#footnote-19) That is, realistic plays, as they stand on the page, are often configured in such a way (through the speeches themselves, the stage directions and other paratext) to offer readers or theatre-makers a guide to working that will produce verisimilitude in performance. Such a formal framework is at odds with the claims of Brecht’s realism that sought to expose the nexus of social forces acting on the figures and their actions. Consequently, I wanted to work with plays that could be presented in a markedly different manner from their conventional reception in order to shed light on that which is usually left unperformed.

 My first choice was *Closer* by Patrick Marber. This play is about the tangled love lives of its four characters: Dan, an obituary writer; ‘Alice’,[[20]](#footnote-20) a waitress and stripper; Anna, a photographer; and Larry, a dermatologist. Over the course of twelve scenes, the characters couple, de-couple and re-couple. It was premiered on May 22, 1997 at the National Theatre in London; transferred to Broadway in 1999; was an Oscar-nominated and BAFTA award-winning film in 2004; and further productions were staged across the world in Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America. I was led to ask what might account for the international success of a play that is set in London with recognizably British characters.

In the original script of the play, each scene had a specific date attached to it. For example, the first scene is set in January 1993; the final in June 1997.[[21]](#footnote-21) In the play’s subsequent revisions, however, the dates are relative and vague. The first scene now takes place in ‘January’; the second in ‘June (the following year)’.[[22]](#footnote-22) This movement from the temporally specific to the general suggests that the playwright has detached the action from its specific historical moment, and this may well account for the play’s popularity across the world. A tale of the travails of love as a universal source of pleasure and pain turned the play into an international hit. Our production’s overarching aim, then, was to historicize the action in the London of the mid-1990s in order to show a relationship between the behaviours on stage and their specific historical moment.

The second play for the project was *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller. This much-performed drama concerns the Salem Witch Trials of 1692-3 and the role of the farmer John Proctor in them. He starts as a tainted figure, an adulterer who has had an affair with Abigail, the leader of the servant girls denouncing the townsfolk of Salem. He later redeems himself by standing up for the truth and condemning himself to be hanged for refusing to sign a false confession of complicity with witchcraft.

The play’s gendered representations have caused consternation for some decades. Iska Alter opens her feminist critique of the play with the contention: ‘It hardly needs to be argued that Arthur Miller is preeminently [sic] a playwright concerned with exploring the dimensions of male authority and defining the constituents of male identity within patriarchal systems of culture’.[[23]](#footnote-23) Wendy Schissel extends the critique to the actual representation of women in the play: ‘In forty years of criticism very little has been said about the ways in which *The Crucible* reinforces stereotypes of femme fatales and cold and unforgiving wives in order to assert apparently universal virtues’.[[24]](#footnote-24) She is referencing Abigail as seductress and Proctor’s wife Elizabeth as the frigid spouse, even though she has borne Proctor two children and a third is on the way by Act III. The play also offers some remarkable dialogue, such as when Elizabeth excuses Proctor for his infidelity in Act IV: ‘I have sins of my own to count. It needs a cold wife to prompt lechery’.[[25]](#footnote-25) That a male writer can put such words into Elizabeth’s mouth to obviate his protagonist’s guilt and allow the martyrdom to continue unhindered was an indicator that the play required fundamental review in performance.

In both plays, the project’s Brechtian ambition was a critical one: to challenge the playwrights’ configurations of the plays themselves by resisting the implicit staging instructions and ideological underpinnings encoded in the scripts. Dialectical productions would offer the audience new readings of popular drama, but they would also require the development of rehearsal and performance practices not explicitly provided by Brecht.

Commonalities in Rehearsal

Brecht sets out a production schedule in the book that documents the first six productions of the Berliner Ensemble, *Theaterarbeit* (*Theatre Work*).[[26]](#footnote-26) In the fifteen phases, that begin with the analysis of the play and end with the first public performance, the emphasis is on the provisional nature of the work. The set design, the costume and make-up, and even the casting only become definite around the tenth phase, the ‘Überprüfungsproben’ (roughly: ‘rehearsals to review the work already done’). The build-up to these, in terms of the work the director does with the actors, unfolds thus: the main action is blocked as a series of *Arrangements* to allow the main action of the *Fabel* to be visualized. Elements of *Gestus* and *Haltung* are slowly developed here, too. The focus then shifts to what Brecht calls the ‘details’: ‘the actors construct their figures’ actions with respect to the others and get to know their own figures. When the main action has, to a certain extent, been established, particular care is given to the “transitions” [between those actions]’.

 On the whole, Brecht’s scheme is useful, but it assumes two important pre-requisites: that one is working with actors who understand the principles and working practices of a dialectical theatre and that rehearsal time can be extended for as long as is necessary. ‘Brecht in Practice’ used four professional actors for *Closer* and twenty student actors for *The Crucible*, all of whom were unfamiliar with the practice of Brechtian theatre. Each project was also limited to a four-week rehearsal period prior to the performance week (which included one technical and one dress rehearsal). Brecht’s approach could not be applied to ours due to the very different conditions under which we were working. And, as will become clear, other divergences from the Brechtian path also arose.

 Rehearsals opened with some exercises I have developed to familiarize actors with some basic principles of Brechtian theatre (gestic acting, a theatre of showing).[[27]](#footnote-27) Prior to rehearsal, the full-length texts were divided into roughly four equal parts, so that rehearsal, each day, might work with familiar groupings of acts, scenes and sub-scenes. Each day’s rehearsal typically ran from 10-1 and 2-5, with a break in each three-hour session for the obvious reasons. Brecht’s opening strategy of constructing initial *Arrangements*, however, struck me as reducing the agency of actors unfamiliar with his theatre by imposing blocking decisions before we had had a chance to work through what was happening on stage. Instead, we worked on the spoken language of the scenes in order to tease out the potential bases for the relationships between the figures. The historicized social backdrop and dialectical nature of those relationships had already been provisionally established by dramaturgical analysis carried out prior to rehearsals, and so, we were not working in a vacuum. As will be discussed below, the analysis drafted a *Fabel* for *The Crucible*, but something looser for *Closer*.

The linguistic articulation of social relationships offered the actors a starting point for considering options for delivery, and my role as director helped to bring this out by simply encouraging the actors to think carefully about which word they were stressing in each sentence. The crucial question ‘why?’ became something of a refrain whenever an actor’s decision was unclear. Such a simple intervention invites the actors to be self-critical and judicious from the outset. Over-emphasis in delivery at this stage pointed clearly to how the one figure related to the other in a clear and sensible way. Only once this work had been done could blocking take place, and in proceeding like this, the actors could relate the work done on language to the developing spatial representations of relationships on stage. This activity took place over four days and allowed the actors to move neatly from a spoken to an embodied theatre. The linguistic focus was not, however, to be confused with table work, the mere discussion of possible meanings. The rehearsal undertaken here involved the actors articulating their arguments through their performances.

 What followed were four days of what I call ‘forensic rehearsals’, an equivalent to Brecht’s ‘rehearsals of details’. The difference between the two, however, manifested itself in two ways. First, the focus returned to language as a means of articulating nuance and specificity, which, in turn, tightened the loose physicalized forms sketched previously. Take, for example, Proctor’s response to his servant Mary when he discovers that she knows about his affair with Abigail: ‘She’s told you!’.[[28]](#footnote-28) The obvious stress for this short sentence is on ‘told’, the shock that the news is out. However, on closer inspection, a more brutal social point could be made by emphasizing the ‘you’, that someone as lowly as Mary could know such a secret. Consequently, the actor playing Proctor shifted his delivery from shock to contempt in rehearsal, underlining the social import of the line. Second, the ‘forensic’ stages allowed me to develop and, indeed, enforce a principle taken from a note Brecht made in rehearsal in 1955: ‘don’t put everything under one hat; on the contrary, always pull out a new rabbit from the hat. This is an art that’s hardly understood in the theatre’.[[29]](#footnote-29) I understand this exhortation to suggest that only one thing happens on stage at a time, something that offers a practical analogue to an important principle that Brecht was seeking to set out on stage. As Anthony Squiers notes: ‘What Brecht means by the “laws of cause and effect” is the laws of dialectics’.[[30]](#footnote-30) In this understanding, the ‘new rabbit’ provides a new link in the surprising chain of actions that can be obscured or ignored when an actor speaks, gestures and moves simultaneously. In order to make causal connections clear to an audience, I introduced and directed a law of my own: ‘not walking and talking’. That is, an actor may deliver a line, perform a gesture or move, but not at the same time.

 Suffice it to say, I have yet to encounter an actor who has found this way of working easy. It is profoundly unnatural and requires a great deal of concentration to execute correctly, and thus cannot be applied in the first phase of rehearsal: there would be too much for the actor to contend with. Yet its virtues for a politicized performance extend beyond a desire to create chains of cause and effect. The principle turns the business of acting into a task-based activity, the performance of actions rather than the expression of inner motivations – a clearly gestic modus operandi. Because the tasks vary with the situation, the practice of changing *Haltung* emerges in this phase, without having to be named as such to the actors. In Scene 9 of *Closer*, for example, Alice, for the first and only time in the play, admits her own selfishness: ‘I stole Dan from someone else [in Scene 1]’ (89). Alice had previously won a small victory over Anna and stood upstage from her, but after this line, Anna moved behind Alice in an attempt to capitalize on this admission. The to-ing and fro-ing of this exchange produced differing *Haltungen* in the actors as they portrayed their evolving relationships not only to each other, but to their off-stage lovers. The emphasis was on discontinuity, something that is realistic, lively and surprising.

In the forensic rehearsal phase, the actors started to develop and learn a choreography, which was deliberate and precise. This choreography was derived from the work done on relationships as articulated through language and, as a result, short-circuited the discussion of interiority and psychology. Actors focused on their social position and what this might mean for a particular exchange or action. In turn, this approach offers a practical response to the question of what epic acting might entail if it is to combine the dramatic and the narrative. That is, the actor oscillates between being and showing a figure: the deliveries are all recognizable and meaningful, yet the unnatural movements and rhythms prevent the actors from fully inhabiting their figures. As Brecht noted in 1954, from his own experiences:

the contradiction between acting (demonstration) and experience (empathy) often leads the uninstructed to suppose that only the one or the other can be manifest in the work of the actor […]. In reality we are of course dealing with two mutually hostile processes that are combined in the actors’ work […]. The actors derive their true effectiveness from the tussle and tension of the two opposites, and also from their depth. (*BoT*, 257).

The play of the natural and the artificial also instantiates the process of *Verfremdung*, making the familiar strange, in that the audience is constantly negotiating the two contradictory impulses performed on stage.

 Hans Curjel noted that Brecht worked with his actors as a sculptor would,[[31]](#footnote-31) and I found that the dominant aesthetic of the productions was statuary. Following Brecht’s idea, no-one moves without good reason, and every gesture has been carefully prepared.[[32]](#footnote-32) This has the effect of focusing the audience’s gaze on what is happening at any given time. However, it should be clear that a play like *Closer*, with its cast of four, is very different from *The Crucible* that, in Act III, can involve sixteen actors on stage at one time. In Figure 1, Mary struggles to feign supernatural possession while the girls add to the pressure with a chorus of malevolent grins. The focus of the spectators’ attention should be apparent, while the rest of the image presents clear, yet disparate responses to the central action.

 Once the production has a solid sense of the relationships between its figures and their actions, runs of gradually increasing length can take place to shore up and to test the emerging choreography. It was only at this point that I realized that the Brechtian notion of *Gestus* as a socially physicalized base for each actor had actually been woven into the figures’ different *Haltungen* throughout the rehearsals. Yes, Brecht started to work with *Gestus* far earlier in the process as a starting point for the articulation of *Haltungen*. However, it proved difficult for untrained actors to consider their physicality in a general sense while negotiating the specificity of their deliveries and the stop-start rhythms of not walking and talking. Instead, the task-based actions developed the actors’ general physicalities through the precision I demanded in the articulation of their changing relationships to each other. Understanding the political force of an action or a delivery was more important for the actors than considering the idea of a basic *Gestus*. Indeed, as the great Brechtian actor Ekkehard Schall put it, ‘a figure is the sum of its *Haltungen*’.[[33]](#footnote-33) Again, this is a useful anti-psychological approach to acting; actors produce a series of contradictory relationships. As long as each one is justified, they offer the audience a discontinuous set of behaviours that nonetheless cohere. It is then the audience’s job to make sense of the different qualities.

 This rehearsal process, which was developed when working on the first production, *Closer*, and was consolidated for *The Crucible* a year later, offered an actor-focused structure. It began by exploring relationships and then allowed for the discovery of nuance that retained Brecht’s imperative to keep decisions provisional for as long as possible. The move from dramaturgical analysis prior to rehearsal to its testing and enhancement in practice proved to be a productive process that allowed progress to be made based on social rather than psychological considerations.

Fashioning and Historicizing the *Fabel* for *The Crucible*

Although *The Crucible* was the second production of the project, it followed a more established Brechtian methodology, and this is why I am discussing it first. The articulation of the *Fabel* is the usual point of departure because it offers an interpretive framework for the action, and in the case of this play, one of the contradictions at the heart of my reading concerned the problematic relationship between form and content.

 Ostensibly, *The Crucible* is about how power is wielded: under the cover of witchcraft, local citizens seek to settle scores and enhance their wealth by denouncing their neighbours. The fiction of witchcraft then has to be defended in court in order to enforce its validity, and several innocent people are sent to the gallows in a show of arbitrariness and cruelty. The content thus advocates for reason over hysteria and evidence over hearsay. The form, however, is driven by the passions of its protagonist. At the point at which Elizabeth lies for Proctor before the Deputy Governor in court, he is directed to ‘*cry* […] *out*’; when Mary Warren turns on him later in the same act, we see he ‘*laughs insanely*’; and in a speech grappling with his self-definition before his wife, ‘*he moves as an animal, and a fury is riding in him, a tantalized search*’ (103, 108, and 125, respectively). On the one hand, such emotional outbursts reflect the pain and the emotional investment of Proctor, yet on the other, they play a more covert dramaturgical role. Through the channel of undisrupted empathy,[[34]](#footnote-34) the audience has little choice but to feel with Proctor rather than to step back and consider his actions. The form is thus coercive; the forceful emotionality that Proctor performs manipulates the spectator into agreement, something that is at odds with the rationalist content. But this is not simply a formal or an aesthetic problem, it is a political one, too. Proctor is a deliberately flawed figure; without error, there would be no redemption. However, his redemption can only take place if his seamier sides are forgotten by positioning the audience on his side in the second half of the play. In the text, he is misogynistic and violent, qualities that do not disappear as he faces his final reckoning. Yet these qualities, in a materialist dialectical reading, are not just foibles; they run through the society we see on stage. Proctor is a typical product of this patriarchal community, and his final act, the apparently heroic decision to face death voluntarily, is revealed to rest on a position of privilege that is granted by his sex and social position.

 This production sought to tell a story that clearly established the class and gender relationships of the seventeenth-century puritans in order to dramatize their contradictions. At the first rehearsal of the opening of Act II, for example, the actors playing Proctor and Elizabeth talked as if they were a modern couple, something that was clearly at odds with the historical context. Yet by placing Proctor at the table with Elizabeth behind him, and articulating their bodies in positions of satisfied expectation and routine deference, respectively, the actors delivered their lines in more markedly differentiated and antagonistic ways. After, for example, a reflective moment, when Proctor enquires about Elizabeth’s melancholy, he could explode at her only lines later. Here he attacks her for weakness when she reveals that she could not prevent their servant, Mary Warren, from leaving the house and attending the court. The flexibility in the actor in moving from care to aggression was one mark of the production, a willingness to follow the contradictory facets of the figure that are provoked by changes in the situation.

 A dialectical *Fabel* has to encompass all the figures on stage, of course. When Mary returns later in the act, Proctor is still angry at her for the dereliction of her domestic duties. Elizabeth is not directed to be hostile in the text, yet she is nonetheless Mary’s mistress. Here, Proctor and Elizabeth assumed the same *Haltung* with hands on hips, indicating their social superiority to and disapprobation of Mary through gesture. Elizabeth was thus presented as a contradictory figure herself: with Proctor his woman, with Mary her mistress. The careful articulation of body to reflect social role was designed to elicit questions from the audience, but also to show the fluidity of roles played in this particular society.

 Establishing social and gendered positions for the cast was an important prerequisite to enact the *Fabel*’s critique of Proctor. The dialectical intention for his portrayal was to set out the contradictions of his martyrdom. On the one hand, he is a truth-seeker, the loudest voice to expose the sham of the witch-trials. He also accepts that he must die in order to stand up for the truth, assuming the role of martyr. On the other hand, he is a truth-denier: his redemption is only possible because he is unable to recognize his own privileges in a class-based, patriarchal society. He is also self-centred and individualistic in his pursuit of the truth, insisting that his name cannot be associated with the lie of a confession. And he fails to acknowledge the material poverty into which his death will plunge his wife and children. His redemption is fundamentally compromised, and this was what the *Fabel* sought to convey.

First, it was important to show the audience Proctor’s privileges throughout the play. When we meet him in Act I, he interrupts the servant girls’ conspiracy, and they all assumed a deferential *Haltung* with heads lowered and hands together as an automatic response to the presence of a master. Proctor’s tendency to violence, a normal part of this society’s patriarchy, was never underplayed, and, at certain points, was appended where the script itself suggested none (see the following paragraph). With such unpleasant behaviour on show, the action itself made Proctor’s self-justifying speeches in Act IV ironic and self-deluding. In order to bring out these qualities, the actor playing Proctor was directed to develop gestures and a posture to indicate a self-pitying narcissism, so that when he, for example, says to Elizabeth: ‘Would you give them such a lie? Say it. Would you ever give them this? (*She cannot answer*.) You would not’ (125), the tone was one of enraged accusation, not sympathetic understanding.

Elizabeth herself played a crucial role as a commentator on Proctor in Act IV. Her admission of frigidity was delivered highly ironically,[[35]](#footnote-35) as an open provocation to Proctor rather than as an admission of guilt. In our production, the baiting worked, and Proctor raised his hands subsequently as if to beat her, an action interrupted only by the appearance of Judge Hathorne. Later, she provided ironic commentary to Proctor’s self-justifying speeches by crossing her arms and looking on wearily as if she had heard it all before. Her final act of defiance came with the play’s curtain line, when she says: ‘He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him!’ (131) With stresses on the ‘his’ and the ‘I’, the audience was in no doubt as to Elizabeth’s attitude to his apparent heroism.

Elizabeth’s role in the final act also reflected how historicization might work as a ‘two-way’ flow. As should be clear, the production sought to present a society different from our own in terms of class and gender relations. It would be difficult, however, to imagine Elizabeth behaving as she does toward the end of the play. This was an example of a contemporary sensibility stepping outside the social conventions and behaviours of the time, acknowledging that the audience was not in a museum, but in a production that sought their opinions in the present.

The critical *Fabel* the production told ran through the production and often made major interventions into the script as articulated by Arthur Miller. For Miller, Proctor was a version of the author himself: guilt-ridden, yet striving to redeem himself.[[36]](#footnote-36) Such an impulse ran counter to this production’s social investigation and was jettisoned. What replaced it was a dialectical interpretation that shifted the focus from the individuals to the social context in which they act, re-presenting a much-staged play with a very different set of emphases. Consequently, the *Fabel*’s reach could be said to include both the political basis of the society Miller represents in *The Crucible* and his particular articulations of that society in the language and behaviours of his figures.

*Closer*: Directing without a *Fabel*

In my book on Brechtian theory and practice, I construct a ‘micro-*Fabel*’ for scene 7 of *Closer*.[[37]](#footnote-37) Here, Larry visits a strip club at which Alice is working. He offers her money to tell him her real name. This she does, but he (and the audience) believe that she is lying. He asks three times and leaves himself penniless, finally requesting a loan from Alice for a taxi home. Here, the *Fabel* sought to clarify the way in which money corrodes trust and truth in a scene based an apparently asymmetrical financial relationship. Yet the rest of the scenes stubbornly refused to reveal a socially focused *Fabel* at all: their dynamics mostly revolve around a series of permutations concerned with the fickle love lives of the four figures.

 In order to understand the play under its social aspects, the relationships needed to be played in such a way that the social elements could be identified and made meaningful. The dialectic is a necessarily relativistic structure; its contradictory facets can be interpreted differently from different standpoints. Yet as Bernd Stegemann notes, when Marxists employ dialectical analysis, the interests of social groups take precedence over the perspectives of the individual, and these groups are defined by class.[[38]](#footnote-38)

*Closer* is hardly a piece of social realism and pays scant attention to social questions throughout. Indeed, its symmetrical structure led some critics to consider it a dramatic ‘quadrille’, emphasizing its form over its content.[[39]](#footnote-39) That said, the text reveals some social clues about three of the four figures. Early in the play, Dan remembers the dull confines of suburbia, we learn that he is now a journalist and his father was a teacher. All three point to a middle-class upbringing and career. Anna is upper-middle class; she comes from ‘old money’ and decides to pause her work as a photographer at the end of the play to return to the country, her well-heeled place of provenance. Larry appears to be middle-class; he is a doctor, after all. But after a hint of social inferiority at the close of Scene 5 when he asks whether Anna’s parents thought he was ‘beneath her’, he confesses to suffering from ‘working class guilt’ in Scene 6, balking at the opulence of their designer bathroom (47 and 51, respectively). Alice is the only figure whose social status is not discernible. As a result, I chose to fix this in performance based on two small details. In Scene 9, when Alice finally confronts Anna, the latter asks why it has taken her so long to do so. Alice replies that ‘it’s taken me five months to convince myself you’re not better than me’ (88). In British society, such a statement usually implies a class element. And later, when it becomes apparent that the name Alice is a pseudonym, the real Alice is revealed to be the daughter of a bricklayer. On the back of these two details, I decided to make Alice working class in order to round off the social definitions of the figures.

I only arrived at this decision one week into rehearsals and the actor playing Alice was initially resistant. She feared that lowering her social status would negatively affect the figure’s agency, but this was not the case. Just as in *The Crucible*, social status is not a deterministic reflection of power or impotence. In a materialist dialectical analysis, the noumenous ‘thing-in-itself’ cannot be said to exist;[[40]](#footnote-40) everything on stage is a contradictory whole, in dialogue with its social contexts. Dan, for example, exuded the confidence and arrogance of a middle-class journalist, a connoisseur, as it were, of the human condition. But these qualities, that impress Alice and Anna, were also a weakness: a *Haltung* the actor employed on several occasions was one of incredulous disappointment – he did not understand the world and found himself visibly shaken after a particular twist or turn of the plot. Similarly, the men treated Alice with an amount of disdain, born of their social superiority, but Alice did not find herself imprisoned by this and used her place on the social ladder to deploy her intelligence and guile to great effect, such as when she tells Larry the truth in the strip club, safe in the knowledge that it will be taken for a lie.

The absence of a delineable *Fabel* led us to take a more pragmatic approach to establishing the figures’ socially predicated relationships in rehearsal. Brecht outlines a model for rehearsal practice in an essay of c. 1939, ‘The Attitude of the Rehearsal Director (in the Inductive Process)’ (*BoT* 212-13). This is hardly a lengthy treatise, but it does contain a number of useful points.[[41]](#footnote-41) Rehearsal becomes a testing ground, not for the director’s vision, but for the actors’ socially focused experiments in performing relationships. The director assumes the role of a kind of ‘lie detector’, testing the realism of the offers made by the cast. There is nothing in the short essay, however, on the material that the actors offer, its quality or how they are to arrive at their decisions in the first place. In our case, the actors, unfamiliar with a Brechtian theatre, required direction, and so this became a forum for me to experiment rather than the actors, initially at least.

What emerged from the investigation of the scenes constructed a gestic stage world of relationships in which particular gestures were performed and re-used. In Figure 2, Dan introduces his girlfriend Alice to Anna, having just betrayed Alice with Anna. Dan grasps Alice as a proprietor, showing Anna what he has given up for her. In Figure 3, the same gesture recurs when Dan remembers telling a cab driver: ‘Yes... she's *mine*’ (104, emphasis in the original). In the course of the inductive rehearsals, a network of gestures was developed and then deployed at strategic moments. The repetition of such gestures fulfilled Brecht’s definition of *Verfremdung* by making the familiar strange and striking. These *Haltungen* became visual reference points for the audience, and because different figures might employ the same *Haltung*, the system of coupling, de-coupling and re-coupling assumed the quality of a supra-individual transactional mechanism. Politically, this was a significant development in that it suggested that all the figures were operating in the same social context, one that valorized the individual over the group, its desires over those of the others.

Historicizing a play that was scarcely twenty years old was also a challenge. It was possible to present some lines in ways that acknowledged the temporal difference. In Scene 1, for example, Dan talks about the euphemisms he uses when writing obituaries. He decodes: ‘He valued his privacy’ as ‘gay’ (10). This the actor delivered in a salacious stage whisper in an attempt to note how this sexual orientation is far less the stuff of innuendo and secrecy today. Scene 3 is set in an internet chatroom, a facility that would be chockful of digital dust in a world of smartphones. At the time, though, they were new and exciting, and the actors played the scene thus. The main historicizing factor, however, was the behaviour itself: the ego-centricism, the immunity to the pain of others and the quest for personal satisfaction were emphasized as ways of acting that we may not recognize as pervading today’s Britain. These qualities are, of course, still present, but the play’s unremitting focus on them offered sustained contrast.

Our Brechtian production of *Closer* sought to connect class relations with a set of attitudes and actions that could be read as ‘post-Thatcherite’, even though the former Prime Minister is not mentioned in the play. The personal deferred to a collective network of behaviours in which interpersonal relationships began to resemble the market for commodities: with the exception of Alice, the figures traded in old models for something newer and more exciting, and these mechanisms laid the foundation for the production as a whole. As Graham Saunders observes: ‘Character development in the play is shown more as a form of slippage’.[[42]](#footnote-42) This formal feature allowed the overlapping and repeated processes to infect all the figures, pointing to a de-individualized system of power relations at work in the play.

As the posters for the two productions indicated, an aim of the project as a whole was to move from the particular of the plays’ action to more general insights into the ways social groups interact.[[43]](#footnote-43) The poster for *Closer* showed two figures, artists wooden mannikins, that can be posed in a variety of positions. One is offering a love token to another, yet the technical measurements around each model provided a template for this exchange, a format already given. Brecht was a firm critic of the particularity of the individual: ‘the realization “how very different people are!” is a partial realization’.[[44]](#footnote-44) The poster invited spectators to reflect on the apparently ‘natural’ ebbs and flows of the interpersonal relationships represented on stage and to see them in a broader social context of sanctioned behaviours. The poster for *The Crucible* blanked out the eyes from Grant Wood’s painting, *American Gothic*, in a bid to make a similar point: it is not so much the individuals on stage, but their relationships to each other and society that count. A way of suggesting a more generalized reading of the productions was derived from the stylized performances themselves. The actors’ precise and deliberate choreography deindividuates the performers from what they are doing because the embodied relationships attain a citational quality over time. That is, the network of gestures, expressions and movements quote from each other, retaining and/or varying elements dependent on the situation. This understanding of action as social choreography was designed to elicit the question from the audience as to who was staging this elaborate dance, in the hope that the audience may have looked to the social context for an answer.

Critical Reflections

Perhaps one of the greatest senses of achievement was to have rehearsed the two productions to performance standard in the space of four weeks, a typical rehearsal period in the UK for much professional theatre. This emphasis on product over process is at odds with Brecht’s almost fanatical monitoring of productions in performance through nightly reports written by his assistants and his re-rehearsals throughout runs that developed new angles and eliminated material that was no longer working. Both of our productions ran for three nights only. However, the underlying position that a production is never finished because it is always in dialogue with its society is one with which any Brechtian production should concur.

 A major discrepancy between Brecht’s phases of rehearsal and our own was the unwillingness to block *Arrangements* and develop *Gestus* before engaging with the actors’ speeches. As already discussed, these decisions mostly sprang from limited rehearsal time, the casts’ inexperience of Brechtian theatre and my willingness to introduce them to it in a more engaging manner. It should be remembered that both approaches to the process were driven by either the *Fabel* for *The Crucible* and the figures’ social relations in *Closer*. Consequently, rehearsal for both Brecht and ‘Brecht in Practice’ sought the most appropriate means to reach the same end – the production of socially critical and provocative theatre. My order of the phases differed from Brecht’s and reflected the pressure to produce in a strictly defined period. The most surprising discovery, however, was that careful work on *Haltung* was all that was required to produce a figure’s basic *Gestus*. The productions were certainly gestic – changing gestures and deliveries articulated changing social relations – but here *Gestus* was not an overarching term, rather it underwrote every exchange. In addition, Brecht’s desire to keep decisions provisional and open was diminished in our productions, but the reconfiguration of his schema led to a productive method that nonetheless sought to achieve his aesthetic and political ends.

Initiating actors with no previous experience of Brechtian theatre into ways of working that were alien to them was at times a struggle. The professional cast for *Closer* were mostly trained in Stanislavskian techniques and these proved difficult to overcome at times. While the actors’ ability to deliver complex speeches and dialogue with conviction and presence was already in place, they found it difficult to negotiate the unnatural strictures of the prohibition on walking and talking, or the requirement to represent an emotion rather than fully to embody it. This also manifested itself in a resistance to performing contradictions back to back. That is, the actors sometimes had difficulty lining up a moment of deep sorrow next to one of levity or joy because they were used to presenting more unified characters rather than contradictory figures. Conversely, the students in *The Crucible*, who were all untrained, required more careful direction to deliver the language engagingly, but were more open to an encounter with the workings of an unfamiliar theatre and rarely balked at the contrasting positions they had to take up with their figures.

The actors in both productions also came up against a concrete problem that arises from the imperative to perform relationships between flexible figures in a Brechtian theatre rather than the rounded integrity of a sovereign character itself. As should be clear from the illustrative Figures featured in this article, meaning is significantly articulated by a connection between different *Haltungen*, positioned in an *Arrangement*. In order for an *Arrangement* to make sense, the actors are dependent on outside eyes to evaluate the outcome of their work; they can no longer test for truthfulness within themselves as in a psychologically anchored production. On the one hand, this situation binds the creative forces on either side of the rehearsal room, but, on the other, it deprives the actors of a way of gauging the effectiveness of their own performances. This is probably an inherent contradiction in the Brechtian rehearsal process as practiced here, although I would speculate that a greater familiarity with this method may allow actors to assess the success of their approaches to staging particular relationships, if not being able to evaluate the success of an entire stage picture.

An emphasis on the visual integrity of the production also suggests another contradiction inherent in the process. Ideally, the role of the director in Brechtian theatre, as stated above with respect to inductive rehearsal, is not to act as a visionary, but as a defender of the production’s dialectical realism. As such, the director asks questions and makes suggestions rather having a more dominant role. However, it would be difficult to call the final productions anything other than a director’s theatre. That is, the degree of artifice presented through a carefully and deliberately constructed performance signals sustained intervention. Again, one could reasonably expect that a more seasoned cast, familiar with Brechtian theatre, would make more viable embodied suggestions in rehearsal and allow the director to take up the role Brecht envisaged.

More importantly, perhaps, the approaches taken produce a deictic theatre, a theatre of pointing. The stage beckons to the audience, tells it where to look and proposes that that is where the significant material is to be found. As such, it is a theatre that seeks to control its audience’s gaze. This is very much in keeping with Brecht’s own practices, as John J. White notes in an essay on Brecht’s relationship to semiotics: ‘one finds virtually nothing in [Brecht’s] theatre that could not be construed as in some respect “gestisch” and hence possessing a semiotic function’.[[45]](#footnote-45) This kind of theatre could thus be understood as one that fetishizes the director’s composition of stage images. Meg Mumford has identified an ideological myopia in Brecht’s actual staging practices at the Berliner Ensemble, a restriction of audience response to the dialectical problems represented on stage.[[46]](#footnote-46) She notes implicit, socialist solutions to the productions’ problems. These violated a principle Elin Diamond notes with respect to meaning-making in Brechtian theatre, that there is ‘a triangular structure of actor/subject-character-spectator. […] no one side signifies authority, knowledge, or the law’.[[47]](#footnote-47) As should be clear from the analysis above, this was the case in both productions, and this approach was certainly an attempt to avoid the trap implicit to a deictic theatre. That is, there is a temptation, when carefully articulating contradictions, to imply solutions.

In terms of interpretive openness, however, the project’s productions were quite some distance from the varieties of post-Brechtian theatre found in continental Europe. Such a theatre extends the reach of the Brechtian performance tradition in a couple of ways. Angelos Koutsourakis notes how a strict adherence to a *Fabel* is at odds with a greater spectatorial engagement with the complexity of the dialectic.[[48]](#footnote-48) Stanton B. Garner, Jr. draws attention to the body’s import ‘as the principle site of theatrical and political intervention’ in post-Brechtian theatre.[[49]](#footnote-49) Our productions, on the other hand, were fairly orthodox in their Brechtianism, following Brecht’s critical method, but rejecting its loaded ideological inflection. Indeed, the project was designed to understand what Brecht could still offer contemporary theatre-makers. In the UK, this kind of theatre and the methods used to produce it are still unusual and novel.[[50]](#footnote-50) This approach offered the audience new perspectives that were not based on fanciful re-readings, but on an excavation of social material often neglected or discarded in performance. As such, there is still room for the further development of projects like these in the UK and in similar theatre environments where naturalism and aesthetic realism tend to dominate, and where the political is relegated to providing content rather than form.

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1. Brecht, ‘The Great Method’, in Brecht, *Bertolt Brecht’s Me-ti. Book of Interventions in the Flow of Things*, ed. and tr. Antony Tatlow (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bertolt Brecht, ‘Über Realismus’, in Brecht, *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, vol. 22, eds. Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei and Klaus-Detlef Müller (Berlin and Frankfurt/Main: Aufbau and Suhrkamp, 1993), pp. 435-6 (p. 435). Further references to this edition appear as BFA followed by volume number and page numbers. All translations from the German are mine unless otherwise acknowledged. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, for example, Emile Zola’s essay ‘Naturalism on the Stage’, written in 1881, that states: ‘I am waiting for environment to determine the characters and the characters to act according to the logic of facts combined with the logic of their own disposition’, in ed. Toby Cole, *Playwrights on Playwriting: From Ibsen to Ionesco* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), pp. 5-14 (p. 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Carl Weber, ‘The Actor and Brecht, or: The Truth is Concrete’, *Brecht Yearbook*, 13 (1984), pp. 63–74 (71). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Käthe Rülicke, ‘*Leben des Galilei*. Bemerkungen zum Schlußszene’, *Sinn und Form*, Zweites Sonderheft Bertolt Brecht (1957), pp. 269-321 (p. 319). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Brecht, ‘About Our Stagings’, in Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, third edition, eds. Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, and Tom Kuhn (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 274. Hereafter: *BoT*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Meg Mumford, ‘Getting the Gist of Gestus’, in *Showing the Gestus.* *A Study of Acting in Brecht's Theatre* (PhD diss, University of Bristol, 1997), pp. 1–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Marc Silberman, ‘Brecht’s *Gestus* or Staging Contradictions’, *Brecht Yearbook* 31 (2006): pp. 319-35 (p. 319). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Brecht, ‘The Street Scene. A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre’, *BoT*, pp. 176-83 (p. 180). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Brecht, ‘Short Description of a New Technique of Acting That Produces a *Verfremdung* Effect’, in *BoT*, pp. 184-8 with appendices pp. 188-95 (pp. 187-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Brecht, *Buying Brass*, in Brecht, *Brecht on Performance*, eds. Tom Kuhn, Steve Giles and Marc Silberman (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 11-118 (p. 29). Hereafter: *BoP*. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Tom Kuhn, ‘Brecht Reads Bruegel: *Verfremdung*, Gestic Realism and the Second Phase of Brechtian Theory’, *Monatshefte*, 2013; 105: 1 (2013), pp. 101-122 (p. 105). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Freddie Rokem, ‘‘Suddenly a Stranger Comes into the Room’: Interruptions in Brecht, Benjamin and Kafka’, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 2016; 36:1, pp. 21-26 (p. 24). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This is my translation of ‘[das Theater] “theatert” alles “ein”’, BFA 24, 58. The most recent translation in *BoT* offers ‘[theatre] ‘theatricalizes it all’ (71). As Brecht’s theatre often exploits theatricality, the ‘theatreness’ of the theatre, I find this translation misleading. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. [Brecht], ‘Pflichtbesuch’, September 25, 1949, Berliner Ensemble Archive File 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See, for example, Egon Monk, *Regie Egon Monk. Von ‘Puntila’ zu den Bertinis. Erinnerungen*, ed. Rainer Nitsche (Berlin: Transit, 2007), p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project carries the serial number AH/N003047/1. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Visit <http://brechtinpractice.org/> for extensive documentations and reflections on the productions staged. In the calendar year from July 2019 – June 2020, the site attracted over 21,000 visitors (statistics provided by Google Analytics). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Brecht, *Buying Brass*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Spoiler alert: we learn in the final scene that this is not her real name. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Patrick Marber, *Closer* (London: Methuen, 1997), n.p. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Patrick Marber, *Closer*, Students edition, ed. Daniel Rosenthal (London: Methuen, 2007), p. 4. Hereafter, referenced as a page number in the text itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Iska Alter, ‘Betrayal and Blessedness: Explorations of Feminine Power in *The Crucible*, *A View from the Bridge*, and *After the Fall*’, ed. June Schlueter, *Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), pp. 116-45 (p. 116). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Wendy Schissel, ‘Re(dis)covering the Witches in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*: A Feminist Reading’, *Modern Drama* 37, no. 3 (1994): pp. 461-473 (461). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*, Student edition, ed. Susan C. W. Abbotson (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 124. Hereafter, referenced as a page number in the text itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. All the following descriptions are taken from its translation as ‘Phases of a Stage Direction’, *BoP*. pp. 230-2. I have, however, used my own translation in the subsequent quotation. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. These exercises, ‘Social Salutations’ and ‘The Posh Restaurant’ can be found here: <http://brechtinpractice.org/download-zone/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Miller, *The Crucible*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Brecht, quoted in Heinz Kahlau, ‘*Winterschlacht* Notate’, undated, p. 25, Berliner Ensemble Archive File 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Anthony Squiers, *An Introduction to the Social and Political Philosophy of Bertolt Brecht. Revolution and Aesthetics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See Hans Curjel, ‘Brecht’s *Antigone*-Inszenierung in Chur 1948’, in Clemens Witt (ed.), *B. Brecht. Gespräch auf der Probe* (Zurich: Sanssouci, 1961), pp. 9-19 (p. 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Brecht, ‘Grundarrangement’, BFA 23, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ekkehard Schall, *The Craft of Theatre. Seminars and Discussions in Brechtian Theatre* (London: Methuen, 2008), p. 21. The official translation of ‘*Haltungen*’ is ‘stances’, but I have used the term Schall uses in the German original for clarity. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Bruce McConachie offers a useful definition here. Empathy is a process ‘by which one person can come to know something about what another person is intending and feeling. In this sense, empathy is a kind of mind-reading that allows one person to step into the shoes of another and experience that person’s world from her or his point of view’, in *Theatre and Mind* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. With hindsight, providing the actor playing Elizabeth with a cushion under her costume to indicate her pregnancy would have compounded this effect, reminding Proctor and the audience that their relationship could not have been that cold that recently. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Arthur Miller, ‘Why I Wrote *The Crucible*. An Artist’s Answer to Politics’, *The New Yorker*, October 21, 1996 (available at <http://www.plosin.com/beatbegins/archive/millercrucible.htm>) [accessed 1 August 2019]. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See David Barnett, *Brecht in Practice. Theatre, Theory and Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 198-201. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See Bernd Stegemann, *Lob des Realismus* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2015), p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See, for example, Charles Spencer, ‘Marber Lays Bare the Passions of Betrayal’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 31 May 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See, for example, John H. McClendon, *C.L.R. James's ‘Notes on Dialectics’: Left Hegelianism Or Marxism-Leninism?* (Lanham MD: Lexington, 2005), pp. 239-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Barnett, *Brecht in Practice*, pp. 139-42 for further discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Graham Saunders, *Patrick Marber’s ‘Closer’* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See <https://brechtinpractice.org/plays/closer/production-poster/> and <https://brechtinpractice.org/plays/the-crucible/production-poster/> [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Brecht, ‘Die Verschiedenheit um der Verschiedenheit willen dargestellt’, *BFA* 22, p. 688. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. John J. White, ‘Brecht and Semiotics: Semiotics and Brecht’, in Steve Giles and Rodney Livingstone (eds.), *Bertolt Brecht: Centenary Essays* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 89-108 (p. 90). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See Meg Mumford, ‘Brecht on Acting for the 21st Century: Interrogating and Re-Inscribing the Fixed’, *Communications from the International Brecht Society* 29, nos. 1 and 2 (2000), pp. 44-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Elin Diamond, ‘Brechtian Theory/ Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism’, *TDR* 32, no. 1 (1988), pp. 82-94 (p. 90). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Angelos Koutsourakis, *Politics as Form in Lars von Trier: A Post-Brechtian Reading* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Stanton B. Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaka: Cornell UP, 1994), p. 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Based on 53 anonymous audience responses to an online questionnaire on the production of *The Crucible*. This represents roughly a sixth of the total audience and is a representative sample. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)