Performing theatre theory

IB DP Theatre HL solo theatre piece full package

Performing theatre theory

- read a **theatre theorist** through their **claim**, **vocabulary**, context, practice and critics;
- select one aspect of the theory that can be staged;
- translate the aspect into a performance principle and practical rules;

Performing theatre theory (2)

- create a 4 to 7 minute solo piece that applies the theory for an audience;
- write a report that connects every staging choice to the theory.

Reading a theorist

- A **theatre theorist** is someone who has thought systematically about what theatre is and what it should do, and whose ideas changed practice.
- Four of the most influential:

Reading a theorist (2)

- Read your theorist in five parts:
- 1. the **claim** : the central idea, in the theorist's own words; 2. the **vocabulary** : the technical terms the theory uses, with their exact meanings; 3. the **context** : what kind of theatre and society the theorist was reacting against; 4. the **practice**: the exercises, rehearsals and productions the theory produced; 5. the **critics**: the main objections to the theory, and how it can be defended.

From aspect to application

- The **aspect** is one part of the theory that you will apply.
- The craft is translation, in three steps:

From aspect to application (2)

- 1. **aspect**: one part of the theory.
- For Brecht: the actor **shows** the character instead of becoming it. 2. **principle**: the aspect as an instruction for performance: "interrupt every moment in which the audience might lose themselves in empathy." 3. **rules**: concrete choices that follow from the principle: - a placard before each scene says what will happen, so the audience watches **how** it happens, not **what** happens; - some lines are spoken in the third person and past tense ("'I'm only five minutes late,' he said"), an exercise Brecht himself described for rehearsals; - costume changes happen in full view of the audience; - one repeated gesture becomes the character's **gestus**.

The report

- no paragraph of theory without a staging consequence;
- no staging choice without a reason from the theory;
- refer to the video by timings (”at 3:50 the phone gesture speeds up”);
- separate **primary sources** (the theorist’s own writings, recordings of their productions) from **secondary sources** (books and articles about them).

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Theatre guide* (first assessment 2024).
- B. Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1948) and "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an **Alienation Effect**" (1940), in J. Willett (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre* (1964).
- G. Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (1961), on Weigel's silent scream.
- A. Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938); J. Grotowski, *Towards a **Poor Theatre*** (1968).

Common errors

- Choosing a theorist you have already studied in class.
- Summarising the whole theory instead of selecting one aspect to stage.
- Making a piece that does not clearly apply the aspect, so the video shows no evidence of the theory.

Common errors (2)

- Going under 4 or over 7 minutes, or editing the video.
- Writing a report that describes the piece without connecting choices to the theory.
- Mixing up primary and **secondary sources**, or leaving sources out.

Key terms

- **Solo theatre piece**: an HL task in which a student applies an aspect of a theorist's work in a 4 to 7 minute solo.
- **Theatre theorist**: a thinker whose systematic ideas about theatre changed practice.
- **Aspect**: one part of a theory selected for practical application.

Key terms (2)

- **Alienation effect**: Brecht's technique of making the familiar strange so the audience thinks critically.
- **Gestus**: a gesture or attitude that shows a character's social position.
- **Primary source**: a theorist's own writing or a recording of their own work.

Check yourself

- 1.
- State the time limit, report length and weight of the **solo theatre piece**. 2.
- Name the five parts in which you should read a theorist. 3.
- What is the **alienation effect**, and give one technique Brecht used to create it. 4.