

# **BERTOLT BRECHT**

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW... (WELL...)



**"Art is not a mirror held up to reality  
but a hammer with which to shape it."**

*-Bertolt Brecht*







# **BRECHT WAS AGAINST NATURALISTIC THEATRE WHERE THE AUDIENCE**

"HANG UP THEIR BRAINS WITH THEIR HATS  
IN THE CLOAKROOM."





**"THINKING IS ONE OF THE GREATEST PLEASURES OF  
THE HUMAN RACE."**

GALILEO



# **SOCIAL OBSERVATION**

A THEATRE FIT FOR  
THE SCIENTIFIC  
AGE.



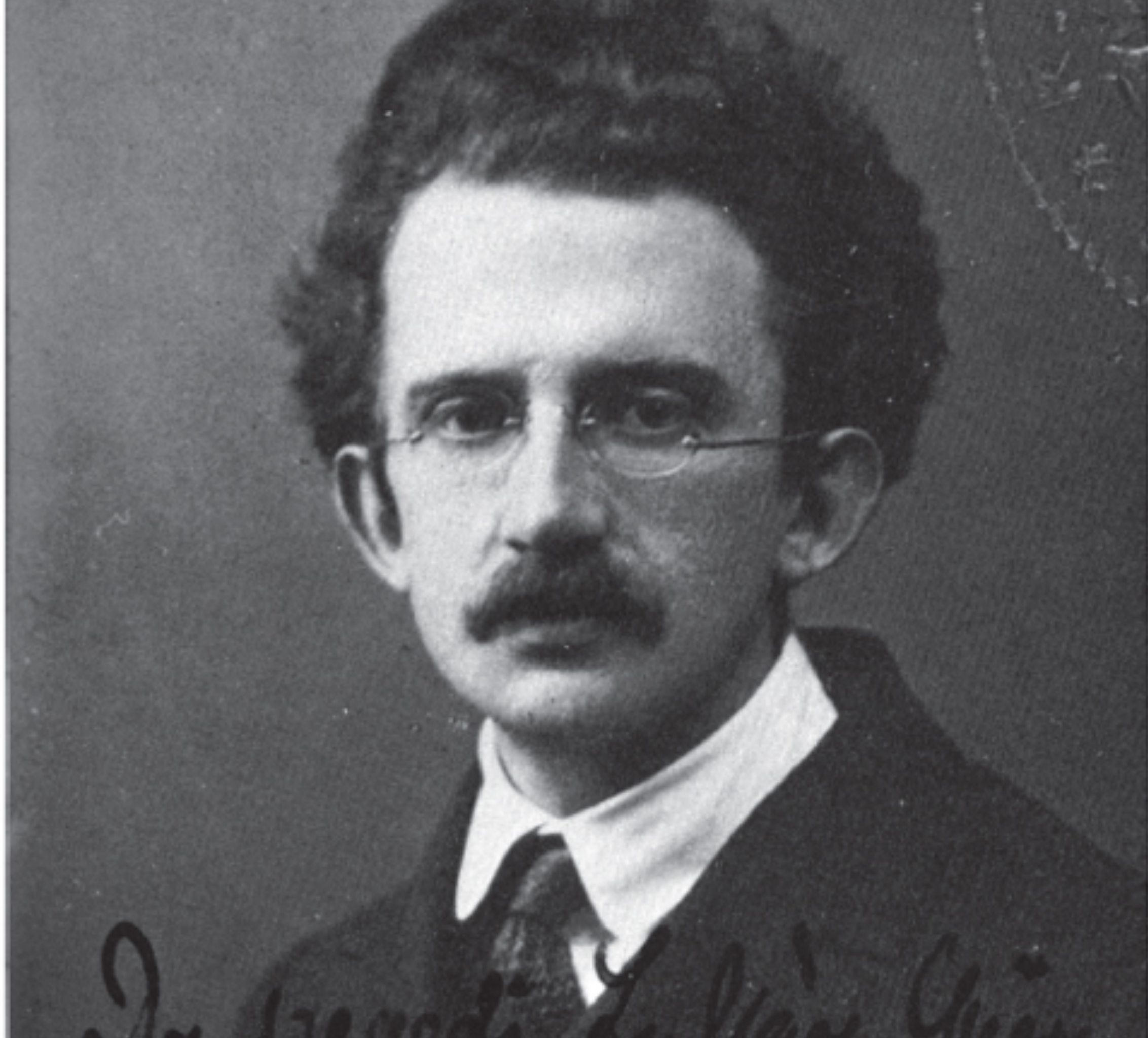


# LOUIS ALTHUSSER:

[BRECHT'S] PRINCIPAL AIM IS TO PRODUCE A CRITIQUE OF THE SPONTANEOUS IDEOLOGY IN WHICH MEN LIVE ... THAT IS WHY NO CHARACTER IS IN HIMSELF 'THE MORALITY OF HISTORY' - EXCEPT WHEN ONE OF THEM COMES DOWN TO THE FOOTLIGHTS, TAKES OFF HIS MASK AND, THE PLAY OVER, 'DRAWS THE LESSONS' (BUT THEN HE IS ONLY A SPECTATOR REFLECTING ON IT FROM THE OUTSIDE, OR RATHER PROLONGING ITS MOVEMENT: 'WE HAVE DONE OUR BEST, NOW IT IS UP TO YOU').



*Georg  
Lukács, em  
1917.*





# WESTERN 'ARISTOTELIAN' THEATRE IS A THEATRE OF:

- "imitation,"
- "catharsis"
- "universal" characters and truths
- "It's only natural - It'll never change," speaks in a spirit of "universality"
- "Great art"
- appreciation of the perfect "imitation" of reality
- "I weep when they weep," - spectators are helpless victims of empathy and "catharsis."



## **DRAMATIC THEATRE:**

- Plot
- Implicates the spectator in a stage situation and...
- Wears down his capacity for action
- Provides him with sensations
- Experience
- The spectator is involved in something
- Suggestion
- Instinctive feelings are preserved
- The spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience
- The human being is taken for granted
- He is unalterable
- Eyes on the finish
- One scene makes another
- Growth
- Linear development
- Evolutionary determinism

## **EPIC THEATRE:**

- Narrative
- Turns the spectator into an observer, but...
- Arouses his capacity for action
- Forces him to take decisions
- Picture of the world
- The spectator is made to face something
- Argument
- Are brought to the point of recognition
- The spectator stands outside, studies
- The human being is the object of the enquiry
- He is alterable and able to alter
- Eyes on the course
- Each scene for itself
- Montage
- In curves
- Jumps



# **VERFREMUNGSEFFEKT**

THE 'V' EFFECT; THE 'A' EFFECT; THE  
ALIENATION EFFECT; DEFAMILIARISATION



# HERBERT MARCUSE:

- To teach what the contemporary world really is behind the ideological and material veil, and how it can be changed, the theatre must break the spectator's identification with the events on the stage. Not empathy and feeling, but distance and reflection are required. The "estrangement-effect" (Verfremdungseffekt) is to produce this dissociation in which the world is recognized as what it is...



# V-EFFEKT:

- Transposition into the third person.
- Transposition into the past.
- Speaking the stage directions out loud.
- Addressing the audience direct as both actor and character.
- Stage "purged from anything magical"
- Use of half curtains
- Making visible the sources of light
- Using signs at the start of scenes



# V EFFEKT:

- placards
- actors putting costume and make-up on onstage
- non-realist sets
- actors coming out of character
- songs commenting on action
- framed moments - episodes
- acting "in quotation marks"

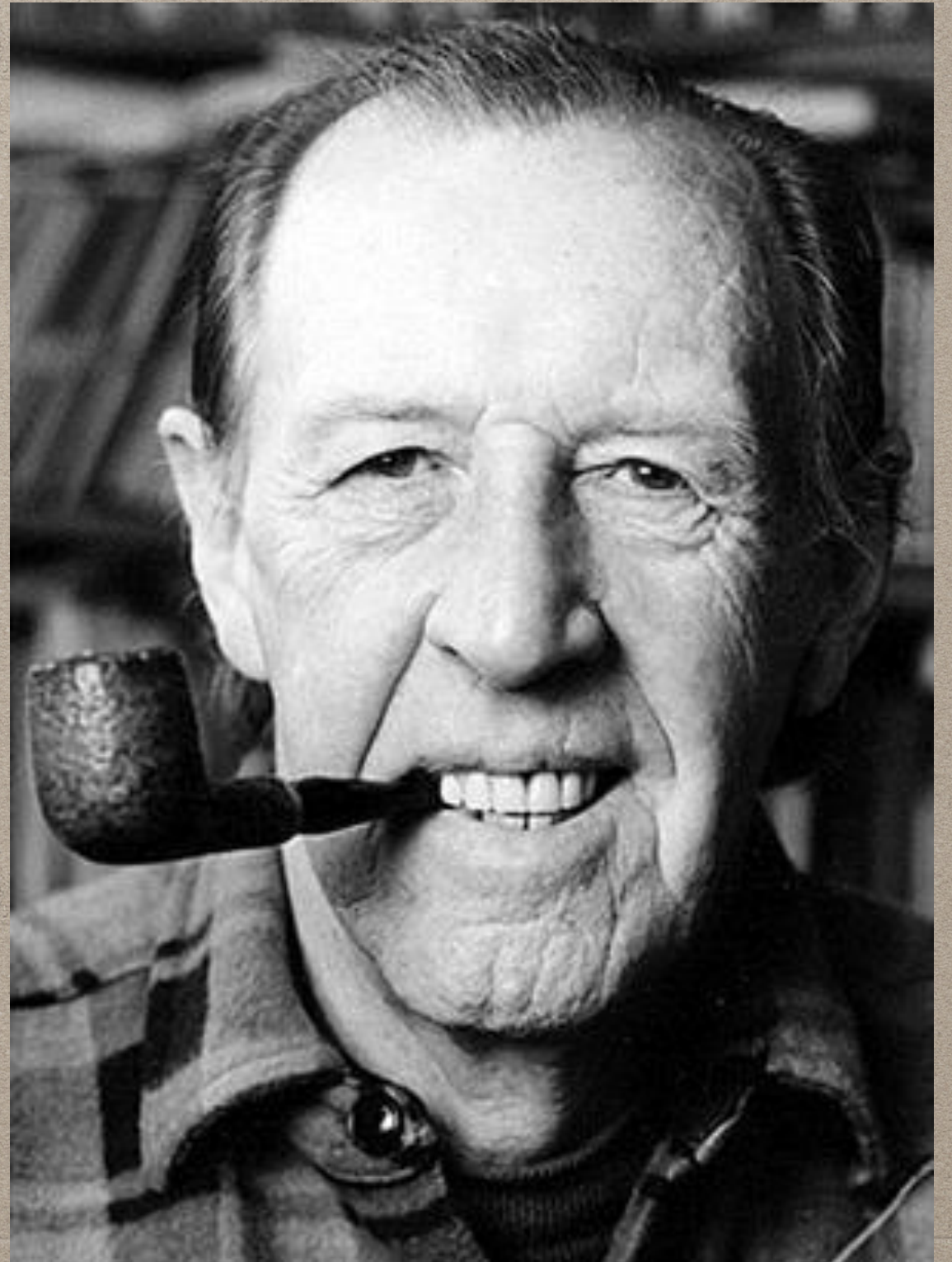


**BRECHT REFERRED TO HIS THEATRE  
AS EPIC, DIALECTICAL, AND/OR  
NON-ARISTOTELIAN**



# RAYMOND WILLIAMS:

- Essentially, what Brecht created, after long experiment, was a dramatic form in which men were shown in the process of producing themselves and their situations. This is, at root, a dialectical form, drawing directly on a Marxist theory of history in which, within given limits, man makes himself.





# WALTER BENJAMIN:

- [Epic theatre] advances by fits and starts, like the images on a film strip. Its basic form is that of the forceful impact on one another of separate, distinct situations in the play. The songs, the captions included in the stage décor, the gestural conventions of the actors, serve to separate each situation. Thus distances are created... detrimental to illusion among the audience. These distances are meant to make the audience adopt a critical attitude, to make it think.



"The relaxed interest of the audience for which the productions of epic theatre are intended is due, precisely, to the fact that practically no appeal is made to the spectator's capacity for empathy. The art of epic theatre consists in arousing astonishment rather than empathy... instead of identifying itself with the hero, the audience is called upon to learn to be astonished at the circumstances within which he has his being."

*-Walter Benjamin*



# STREET SCENE

EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT IT PRESENTS ASTOUNDING DIFFICULTIES... AS SOON AS HE IS ASKED TO SEE THE IMPLICATIONS OF TREATING A STREET CORNER DISCUSSION AS A BASIC FORM OF MAJOR THEATRE;

**A THEATRE FIT FOR A  
SCIENTIFIC AGE.**





# WISSENSCHAFT

- The systematic pursuit of knowledge, learning, and scholarship
- Origin: German, literally 'knowledge'.



# EPISODIC:

FRAMED MOMENTS  
JUXTAPOSED  
EPISODES

SONGS OR  
NARRATION  
COMMENTING OR  
OFFERING  
ANOTHER VIEW

GOOD PERSON OF  
SZECHWAN





# DIALECTICAL THEATRE:

- acting with two faces
- narrator
- breaking the fourth wall
- presenting a character, not being a character
- acting in "quotation marks"









# COMPLEX SEEING

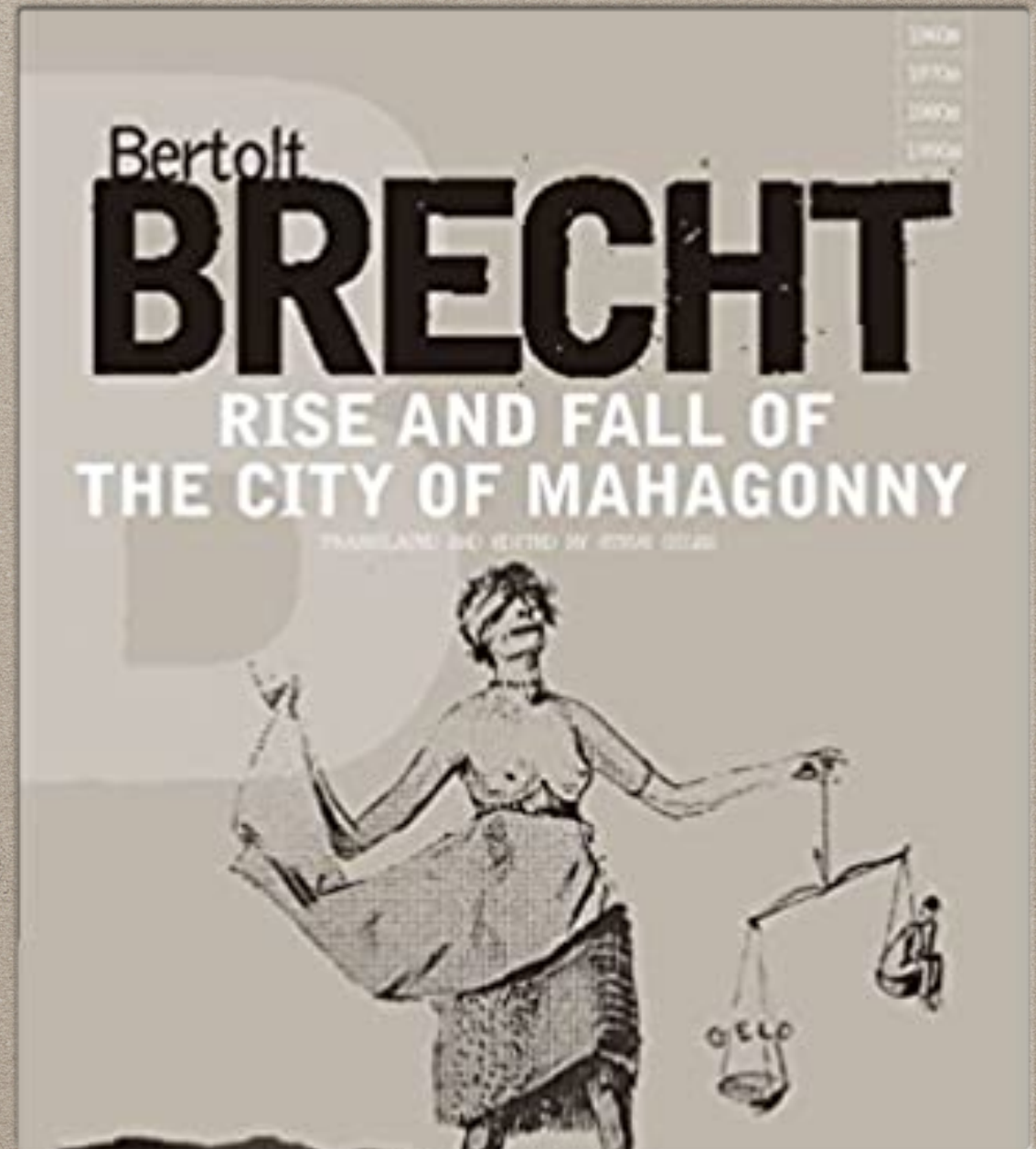
JUXTAPOSITION,  
MONTAGE





# COMPLEX SEEING

- Rejecting Wagner's synthesis of all art forms in the Gesamtkunstwerk (total art work), Brecht and Weill separated the workings of theatre.
- Every element in their musical drama is in ironic juxtaposition to the others. Undermining, commenting and contradicting.





# THE ACTOR SCENE

- Ui: What's that mean 'unnatural'? No human being behaves natural these days. When I walk into that meeting tomorrow I don't want to look natural. I want them to notice that I'm walking in...











# BRECHT:

EVERY SENTENCE AND  
EVERY GESTURE SIGNIFIES  
A DECISION; THE  
CHARACTER REMAINS  
UNDER OBSERVATION  
AND IS TESTED.  
THE TECHNICAL TERM FOR  
THIS PROCEDURE IS  
'FIXING THE "NOT ... BUT...'





# GALILEO

WE SEE THE NEW POPE IN HIS UNDERWEAR. AS HE DEBATES THE USE OF TORTURE AND THREATS TO FORCE GALILEO TO RENOUNCE HIS COPERNICAN IDEAS THE POPE DONS LAYER UPON LAYER OF VESTMENTS. CRIMSON ROBES, A GREAT CAPE, AND FINALLY THE MITRE: WHEN HE IS CLOAKED IN THE POWER OF HIS OFFICE, HE ASSENTS TO THE THREAT OF TORTURE.





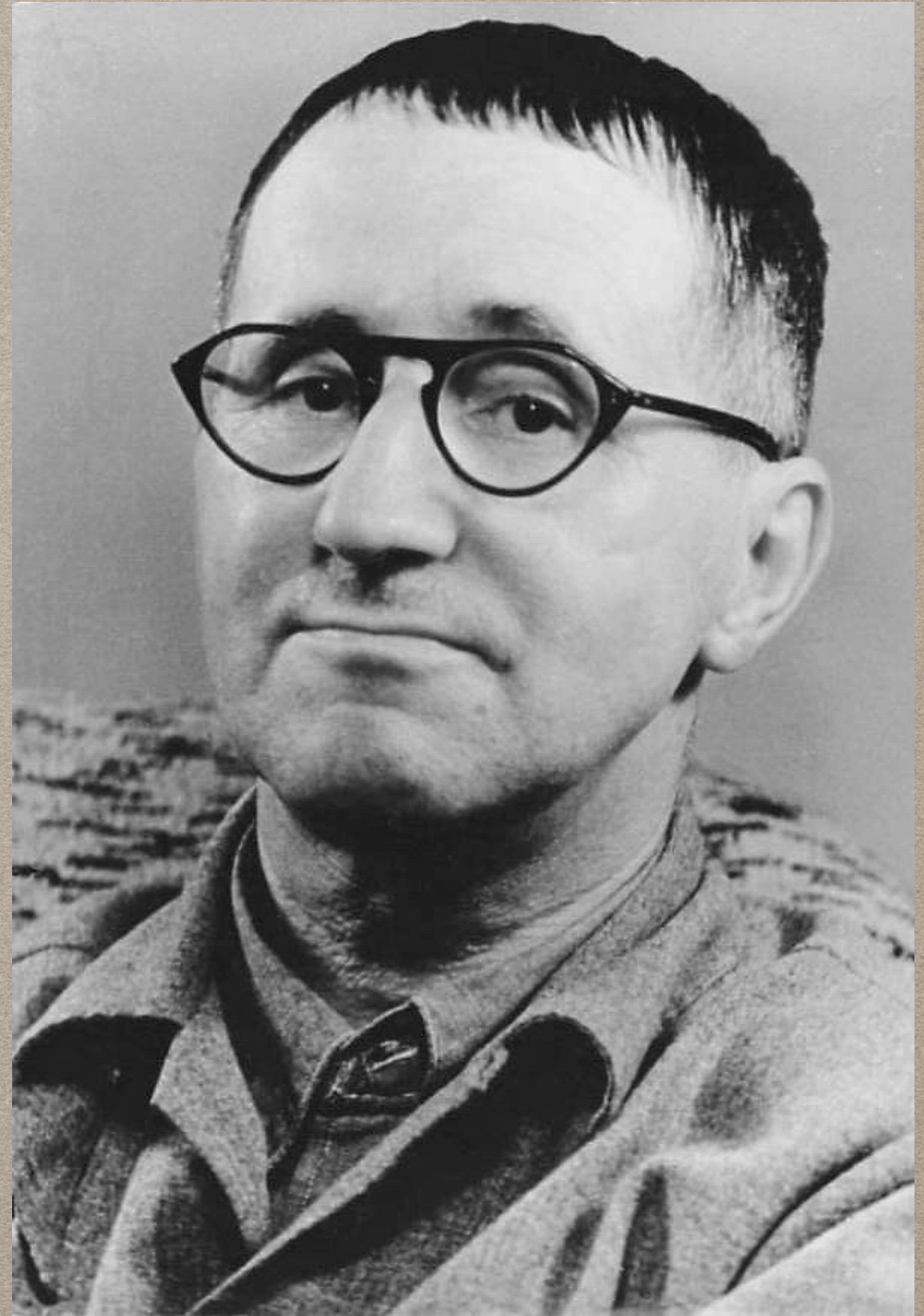
# NOT-BUT

WE SEE THE POPE AS MAN SHOWING WHAT HE  
COULD DO BUT AS A MAN IS **NOT** GOING TO DO...  
**BUT** AS POPE HE *IS* GOING TO



# BRECHT

- The coherence of the character is in fact shown by the way in which its individual qualities contradict one another





# MOTHER COURAGE

KATTRIN'S DRUM





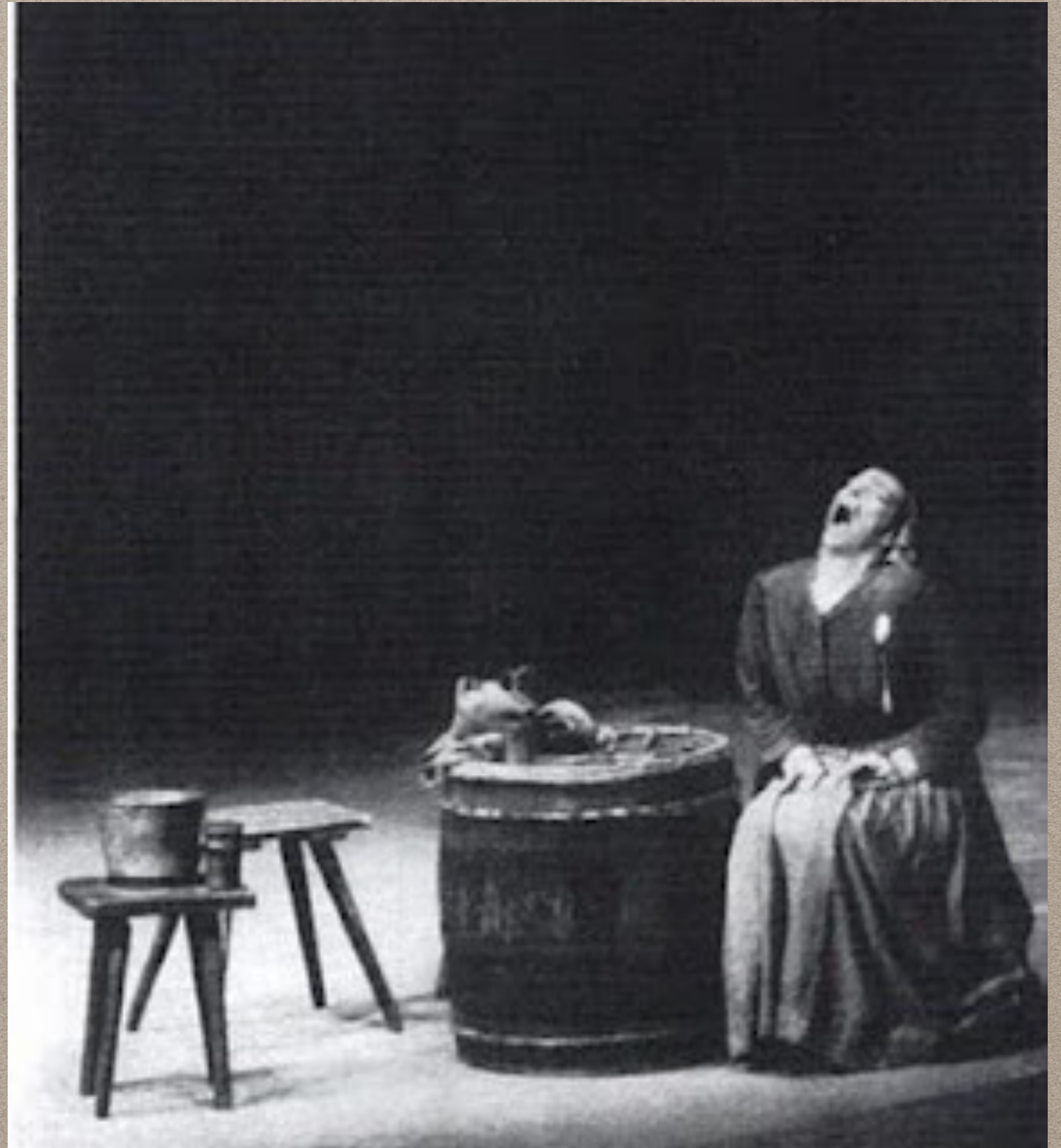
# THE NOT-BUT...

THIS EMOTIONAL SCENE RESONATES WITH AUDIENCES, WE REMEMBER KATTRIN'S CHOICE. BRECHT SHOWS HIS AUDIENCE THAT EVEN IF WE FEEL WE HAVE NO VOICE, WE CAN STILL FIGHT FOR CHANGE.



# THE SILENT SCREAM

OXYMORONIC  
FORMULATION





# MOTHER COURAGE

- the bourgeois, learns nothing...
- her children are dead
- she carries on alone
- courageous ?









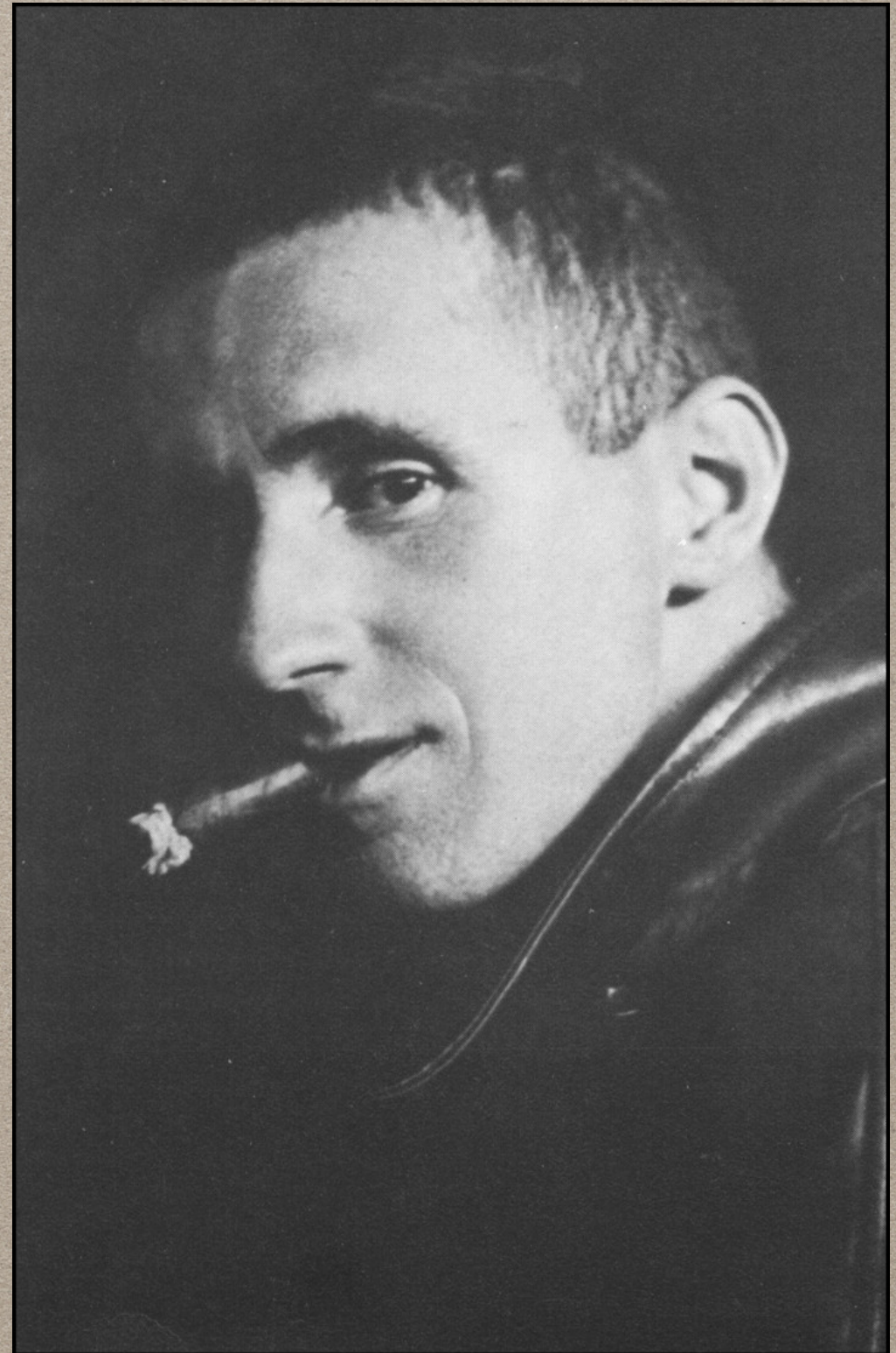
# CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

'INSTEAD OF THE JUDGE BEING A ROGUE, A  
ROGUE SHALL BE THE JUDGE'



# THE PUBLIC, THE AUDIENCE ARE SPECTATORS

- smokers' theatre
- 'smoking is an attitude highly conducive to observation'
- spectators in a sporting arena: are educated participants in the event





# JACQUES RANCIÈRE: THE EMANCIPATED SPECTATOR:

'THE SPECTATOR IS ACTIVE, JUST LIKE THE STUDENT OR THE SCIENTIST: HE OBSERVES, HE SELECTS, HE COMPARES, HE INTERPRETS. HE CONNECTS WHAT HE OBSERVES WITH MANY OTHER THINGS HE HAS OBSERVED ON OTHER STAGES, IN OTHER KINDS OF SPACES.'





# GESTUS

THE OUTWARD EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR EMBRACING  
THE ECONOMIC, EMOTIONAL, FAMILIAL AND RATIONAL REALITY



# BRECHT:

- V-Effects of Chaplin... Eating the boot (with proper table manners, removing the nail like a chicken bone, the index finger pointing outward...Here we have the perfect emblem of the Tramp's comedy, his attempt to imitate the proper habits of a gentleman, yet doing so absurdly in a remote cabin while eating a boiled boot.







# AZDAK TO SHAUVA:

SURPRISED I DIDN'T HAND YOU OVER? ...IT GOES AGAINST THE GRAIN... FINISH YOUR CHEESE BUT EAT IT LIKE A POOR MAN, OR ELSE THEY'LL STILL CATCH YOU. DO I EVEN HAVE TO TELL YOU HOW A POOR MAN BEHAVES? THE BOX IS THE TABLE. PUT YOUR ELBOWS ON THE TABLE, AND NOW SURROUND THE PLATE WITH YOUR ARMS AS THOUGH YOU EXPECTED THE CHEESE TO BE SNATCHED FROM YOU AT ANY MOMENT... NOW HOLD THE KNIFE AS IF IT WERE A SMALL SICKLE; AND DON'T LOOK SO GREEDILY AT YOUR CHEESE, LOOK AT IT MOURNFULLY - BECAUSE IT'S ALREADY DISAPPEARING...



# SPASS/FUN:

- Brecht's last message to the Berliner Ensemble before their tour to London, nine days before his heart attack, advises them to communicate the fun (spass) of making theatre that can change the world.









