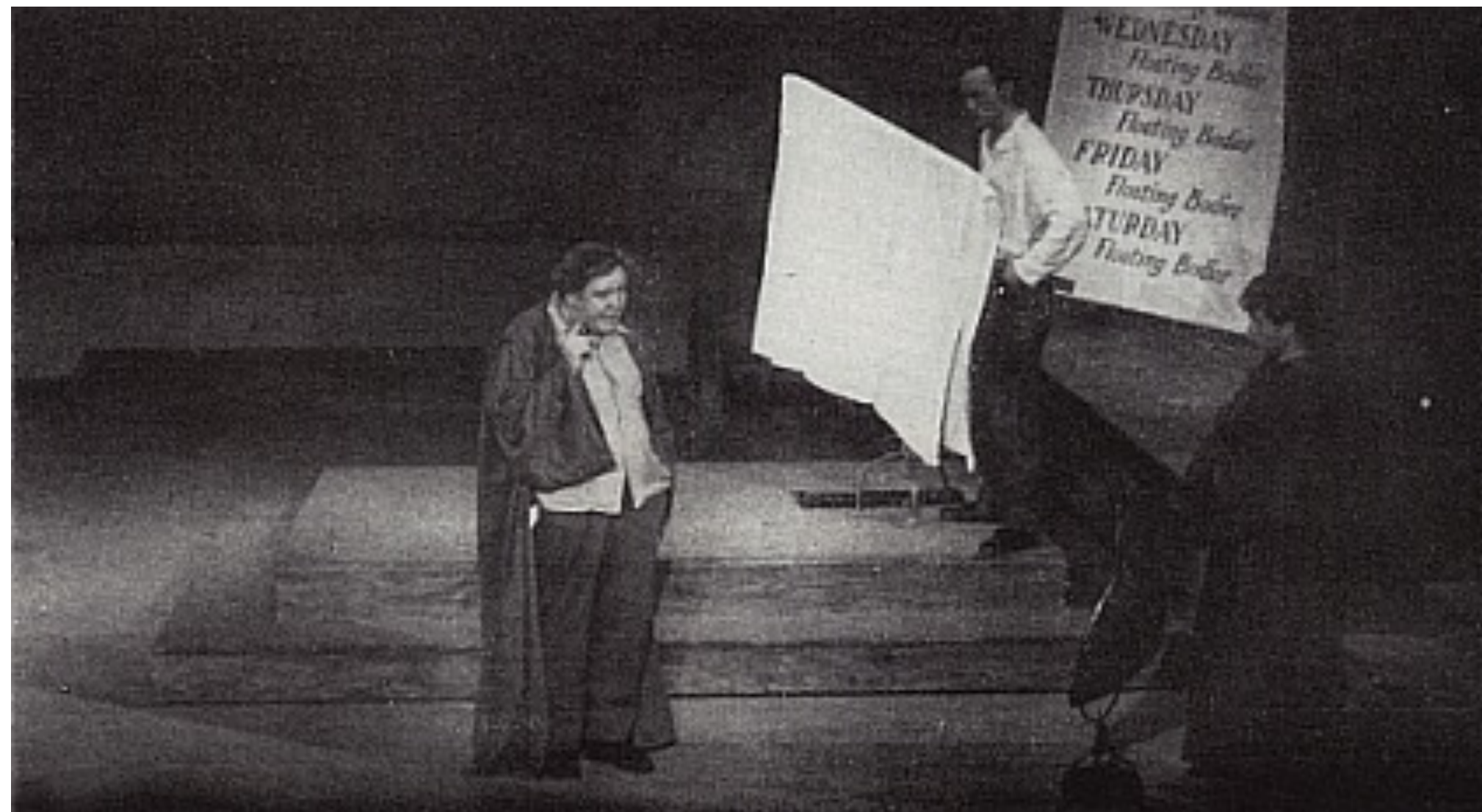


EPIC THEATER

according to Bertolt Brecht

IMA • Doc II
Marty Lucas
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From “The Modern Theater is the Epic Theater” (1930)

One of the questions that arose on the left in the 1930's was why large numbers of working people would support fascist leaders who clearly did not represent their best interests.



- **Hegemony** refers to rule based on the construction of consent from the governed through cultural values.. This modern connotation was first developed by the Italian communist **Antonio Gramsci** in the 1930s.
- For Gramsci capitalist society maintained control because people identified on a psychological level with the thinking of their rulers, rather than their own interest.

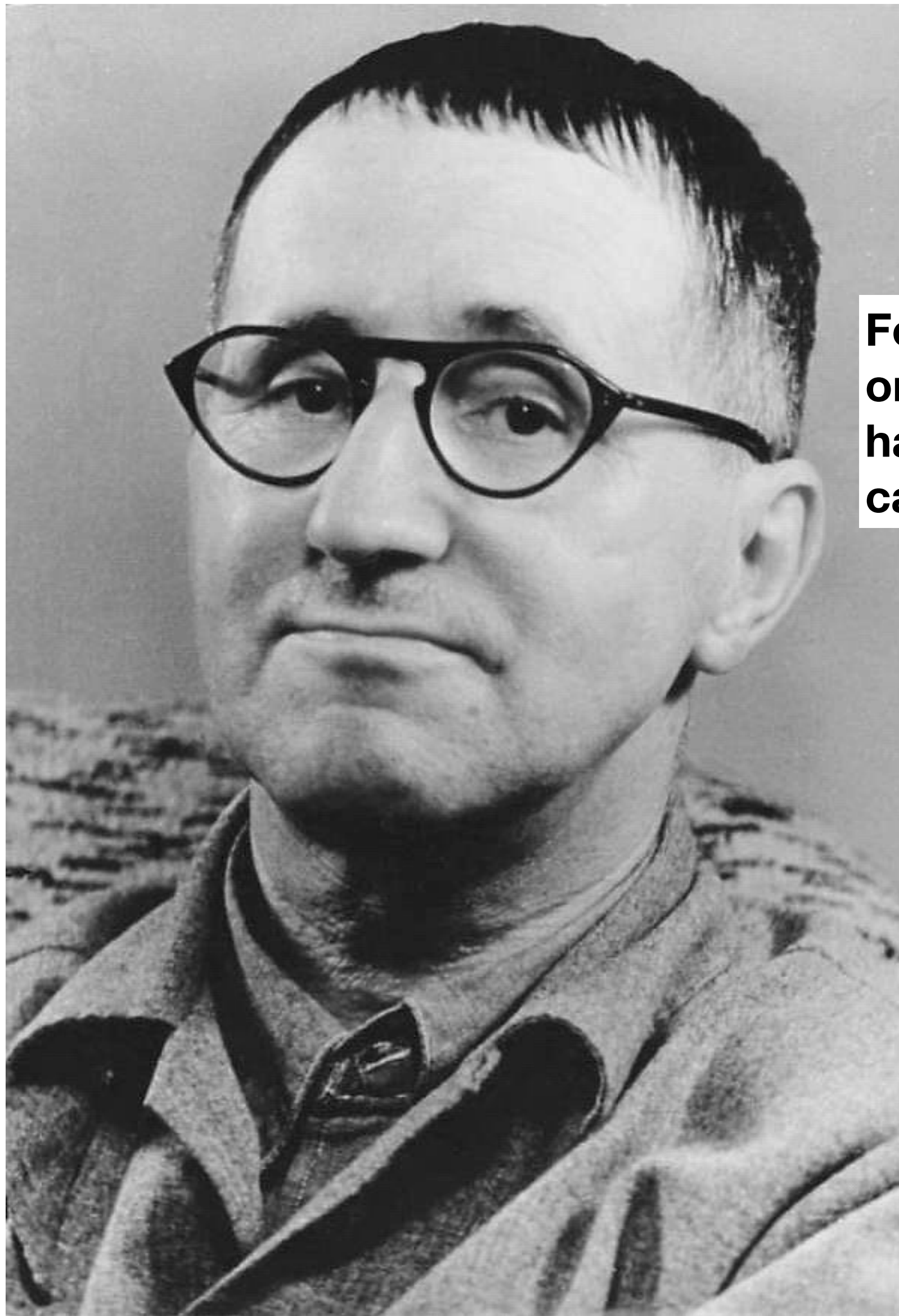


Antonio Gramsci (1891 - 1937)



“The occupation of our visual field by identical forms is the esthetic order which celebrates a secure political hegemony.”

Leo Bersani *The Forms of Violence*



(1898-1956)

This Theater Fights Fascists

For playwright Bertolt Brecht, theater had to be turned on its head. In place of encouraging *identification*, it had to promote *alienation*, a distancing from the cathartic journey of the drama.

Brecht distinguished his new “epic” theater from the type of theater handed down from the Greeks, which he called “Aristotelian” after the Greek philosopher who first characterized the way drama functions by offering viewers a catharsis, a cleansing of the emotions that comes from being the audience for a play.

Lotte Lenya in *Three Penny Opera*





Brecht's *Galileo*

Aristotelian Theater

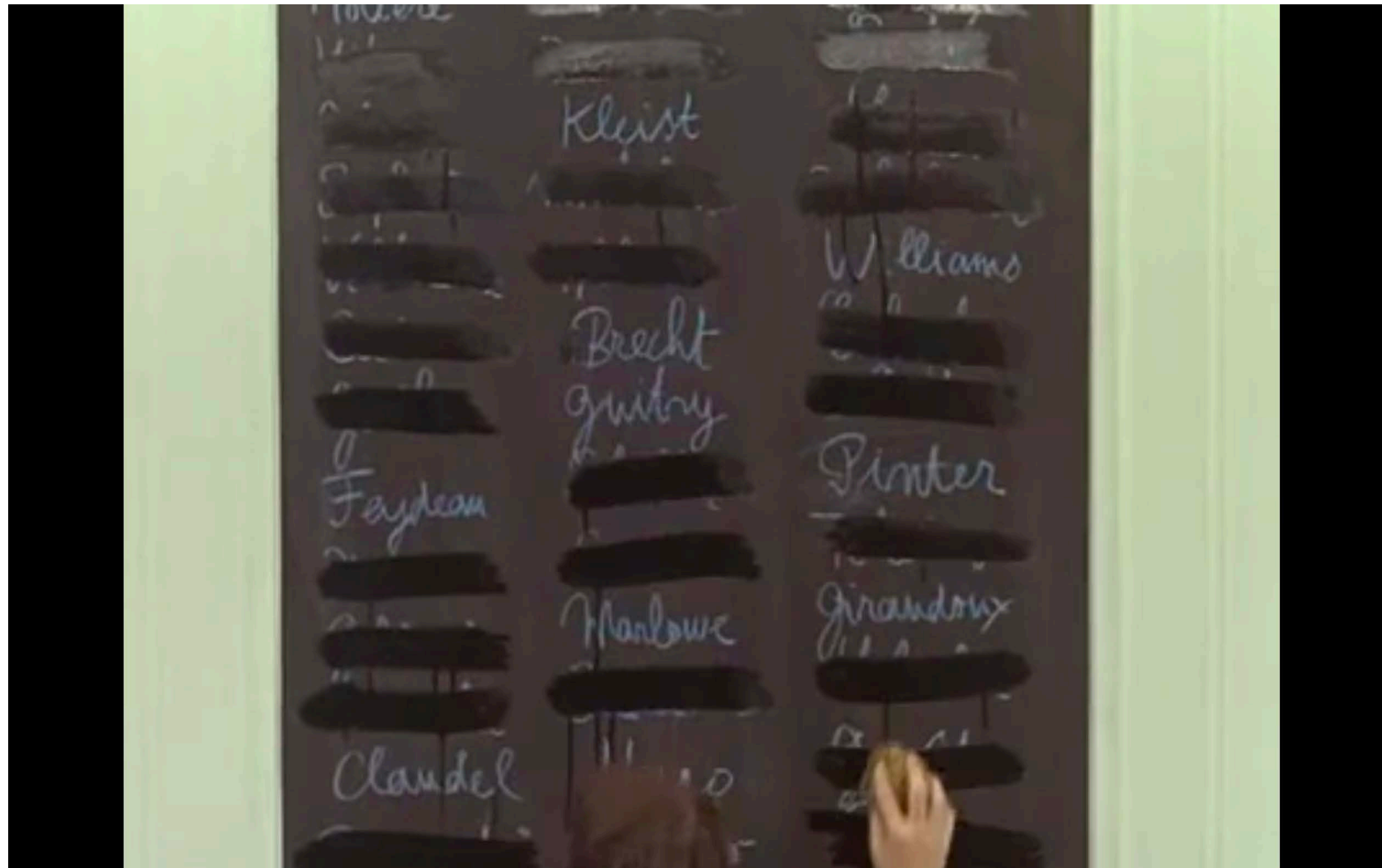
- Plot
- Implicates the spectator
- Wears down capacity for action
- Provides sensations
- Offers experience
- The “human being” is taken for granted
- Man is a fixed entity
- Thought determines feeling & being

Epic Theater

- Narrative
- Makes the spectator an observer
- Arouses capacity for action
- Pushes viewer to take decisions
- Offers a picture of the world
- The human being is the object of inquiry
- Man as a process
- (Social) being determines thoughts/feelings

Techniques Used by Brecht

- Direct address (breaks “4th wall)
- Use of intertitles and declamations to announce acts
- Use of rhyme / song (denaturalization)
- Multiple endings (makes narrative desire obvious)



Brecht was a key figure among political artists for filmmaker Jean Luc Godard. Once when asked if he did “*cinema verité*”, Godard answered, “No, I do theatre verité.”



**An executioner demonstrates his technique.
Act of Killing • Joshua Oppenheimer (2012)**

Brechtian approaches in film.



***This is Not a Film* • Jafar Panahi (2011)**

Brechtian approaches in film.



I am not an actress. I am a performer.

Brechtian approaches in film.