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Educational Drama and Radical Theatre Practice

In the early issues of *New Theatre Quarterly*, David Hornbrook initiated a debate on the role and techniques of drama-in-education to which several other notable practitioners subsequently contributed. Since then, the continuing need to defend the very existence of drama within a curriculum-oriented system has perhaps disinclined drama-in-education workers from a theoretical exploration of their methods and purposes. But the argument that the subject should be concerned with theatre practice has, suggest Stephen Lacey and Brian Woolland, overlooked the reality that drama-in-education, in important and fundamental ways, already *reflects* at its own level certain kinds of innovative theatre practice – and they illustrate their arguments from the work of Brecht, Boal, and Paulo Freire, comparing the models they offer with a drama-in-education project as realized by a class of twelve-year-olds in a typical comprehensive. The article concludes with the authors' own analysis of the approaches to character and to dramatic structure employed, and how these reflect a 'radical theatre practice' with which practitioners in present-day 'mainstream' theatre might profitably engage.

WHETHER we like it or not, the advent of the National Curriculum and the new GCSE exams has led to a thorough re-evaluation of the content, structure, and assessment of every subject throughout the English school system. For a subject like drama, frequently regarded as peripheral to the 'core' educational experience even before the recent proposals, this process has often been – and continues to be – particularly anguished.

While it may be too soon to predict exactly where recent debates are leading us, the issues are becoming clearer: and one that has emerged with particular force is the need to introduce a certain rigour into the critical thinking that provides the theoretical armature for educational drama. This, in turn, has led to a renewed interest in theatre itself, and how its relationship to drama-in-education can be considered and developed.

This relationship has had a thorny history, and drama teachers have worked hard to make the subject more than just the annual school play: practitioners of drama-in-education have always been more comfortable arguing for their subject in pedagogical terms – that is, using educational models to posit the discipline as a teaching

activity. Yet many of the leading practitioners of the subject – notably Dorothy Heathcote – have always insisted that the work has its roots in theatre form, that it uses elements that can be found in any theatre performance.

Recently David Hornbrook (initially in the pages of this journal) has argued passionately – though some might say divisively – that one of the main priorities facing teachers is to re-instate theatre as the basis for drama-in-education.¹ His arguments in favour of examinations in drama demand that the subject be concerned with theatre practice, either as the object of critical enquiry or as the basis for individual and group practical work. However, he has given us tantalizingly few glimpses of how this might be achieved or what might result from it.

Clearly, to argue that drama teachers have much to gain from once more seeing their work in theatrical terms must not result in a return to a model of educational drama that ignores the real achievements of the last twenty years. It is a contention of this article, indeed, that even to pose the problems in these terms is to risk missing an

important point: drama-in-education, even in its most improvisatory and apparently 'anti-performance' modes, doesn't simply intersect with 'theatre' in interesting though often marginal ways, but *is itself a form of theatre practice*.

The problem for teachers is not, therefore, one of constructing an entirely 'new' practice out of the ashes of the old, but rather of recognizing that what they actually do every day in the classroom with their students is to make theatre. It may not be the kind of theatre that can be easily discussed within the vocabulary of much conventional drama criticism (and teachers are sometimes rather conservative in their thinking about theatre), but it is theatre none the less.

To view drama-in-education in this way, however, is also to hold out a challenge to theatre practitioners, who have rarely shown a consistent interest in what happens in schools: for the theatre that is happening daily in the classroom is often radical in form and questioning of the issues that it explores, at a time when the cold breath of conformity is felt on the neck of much of our contemporary culture. The purpose of this article, then, is to relate a number of theatre concerns and concepts to current drama-in-education practices.

Post-Brechtian Modernism?

To discuss drama-in-education a 'theatre practice' means little unless it is related to a particular theatre tradition or traditions. While there is room for debate here, we would argue that it is most helpful to see it as one manifestation of a post-Brechtian modernism. This term is chosen carefully, in the knowledge that the nature of modernism – although the plural, modernisms, is more accurate – is itself the subject of debate, particularly in the theatre.

This kind of theatre shares the more general modernist concern with form, and has as one of its central objectives the desire to challenge dominant (mainly naturalistic) theatre practices. What distinguishes it, however, from other kinds of modernism is that the engagement with problems of form is

not simply an end in itself, but a means of confronting contemporary social and political realities in new and more appropriate ways. It is, therefore, a materialist modernism, with both feet squarely in the stream of cultural and political processes, and should thus be distinguished from a more idealist modernism of metaphysical speculation or individual angst (such as German expressionism), for which the term is frequently reserved.²

Brecht is mentioned here not simply as a convenient starting point for defining this tradition, but as a particularly influential example of the way that both aspects of this project combine. Brecht asked profound questions about central aspects of theatrical form: key elements – such as character, the nature and varieties of identification, actor-audience relationships, the nature and function of the protagonist, the role of artifice in the theatre – were not simply the givens of theatrical practice in his work, but were subject to negotiation and debate.

This led not simply to new dramatic forms – and certainly not to 'techniques' that could be detached from the project as a whole and appropriated as 'alienation effects' – but to a redefinition of the theatrical event itself, with the spectator at the centre of Brecht's concerns. And this in turn involved the challenging of accepted distinctions – in particular, the opposition between 'form' and 'content' (where theatre forms are held to be the unproblematic vehicles for the 'issues' of the play, which become the main focus of attention).

Proceeding from a rethinking of the nature of ideology in the theatre, this led Brecht to argue that theatrical forms have ideological implications (in a given context): that they do not simply 'express' content, but shape and mediate reality in complex and historically specific ways. The whole project was, of course, driven by political intentions – the need to create a 'theatre for the times' that did not simply reflect social reality but actively sought to change it.

Not all the practitioners one might want to locate in relation to post-Brechtian modernism share all these concerns, or have

reached the same conclusions as Brecht; but then we are not talking about a tradition that is a self-conscious theatre 'movement', cemented by a manifesto or by common theatrical strategies, but rather a series of often very different theatrical practices that develop and redefine the basic project in new contexts.

It is possible, for example, to see the theatre of Dario Fo in relation to this tradition, or the work of Augusto Boal (which will be discussed below). Nearer home, much British political theatre of the 1970s and early 1980s shared many of the concerns of a post-Brechtian modernism: the work of Red Ladder, for example, and (of particular interest because he has written extensively about it) John McGrath's attempts to build a popular theatre, notably with the 7:84 theatre companies of England and Scotland (a project in which McGrath is still engaged, albeit in new contexts). Like Fo, McGrath's search for (and return to) forms of popular theatre was led by the attempt to forge a political theatre for its age that could be placed at the service of a new, broader, and mainly working-class audience.

It is also useful to place much feminist drama in this context. Feminist theatre often proceeds from the desire to create a 'feminist aesthetic' – a new theatre language that both represents and articulates a feminist consciousness, and displays a confidence with a multiplicity of forms and strategies. The plays of Caryl Churchill, which are also socialist in their ambitions, are a particularly good example.

Brecht and Radical Pedagogy

Within this broad tradition one can also find a concern with pedagogy, with the educational role of theatre. This is frequently an aspect of a perceived political role, and is couched not in educational terms but rather in a language that comes from the rhetoric of social and political struggle. However, we would like to focus now on two practitioners, Brecht and Augusto Boal, who have attempted to theorize the pedagogical role of theatre in a consistent and rigorous

manner, and whose work may be related in a direct way to the practices of educational drama.

Brecht pursued the connections between theatre and pedagogy on several levels. He argued that one of the principal ideological objectives of his theatre was to promote 'pleasurable learning', thereby returning to theatre its educative function without losing what was specific to it – that is, aesthetic and social pleasure.

That this was central to his plays, particularly in the Weimar period, is clear from his discussion of 'epic theatre', notably in the essay 'Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction', in which he tries to dissolve the old distinction between 'learning' and 'pleasure': 'the pleasure of learning depends on all sorts of things; but none the less there is such a thing as pleasurable learning, cheerful and militant learning.'³ That Brecht saw theatre in pedagogical terms is also apparent from the kind of narratives that he chose, especially the 'negative parables', and in his use of the chorus, as in *The Mother*.

However, perhaps the most important of Brecht's experiments in this context were the *Lehrstücke*, written in the early 1930s and constituting an attempt fundamentally to rethink the nature of the theatrical event by challenging the accepted processes of theatrical production, and in particular by redefining the relationship between the actor and audience. Elizabeth Wright has recently argued that the *Lehrstücke* are distinct, both formally and in terms of their political and educative functions, from epic theatre and are central to understanding Brecht's political and aesthetic purposes.⁴

The *Lehrstücke* were designed primarily for the participants, and did not necessarily require an audience other than the actors themselves: 'These experiments were theatrical performances meant not so much for the spectator as for those who were engaged in the performance. It was, so to speak, art for the producer, not art for the consumer.'⁵ The actors in this case were not simply professionals, but amateurs of various kinds: schoolchildren, workers' collectives, and others.

Wright draws attention to a little-known fragment from Brecht's theoretical writings, recently unearthed in the archives, in which he distinguished between 'Major Pedagogy' and 'Minor Pedagogy' – which, she argues, are 'two strategic programmes in miniature'. 'Minor Pedagogy' is Brecht's term for the kind of oppositional theatre in which he was primarily engaged: this theatre, although it challenged the aesthetics of the dominant theatrical forms of Brecht's time, still operated within the established theatrical institutions. 'Major Pedagogy', however, proposed a more radical aesthetic:

Major pedagogy . . . is a model for a radically different theatre of the future, where the distinction between actor and spectator is entirely wiped out. The actors . . . occupy a double role of observing ('spectating') and acting, working and reworking a communal set text which is perpetually alterable, the object being to turn art into a social practice, an experiment in socially productive behaviour.⁶

Although the context is very different, the emphasis on the essential *fluidity* of the roles of acting and spectating, on the creation of theatre in which there are only participants, who can move from enacting to observing and back again, and who have a degree of authorial control over the 'product' unknown in more orthodox theatre forms, is present in much of what we now recognize as educational drama.

Boal and Radical Pedagogy

This movement in Brecht's critical work from a 'minor' to a 'major' pedagogy, which also represents a movement in the way that the spectator is located in the theatrical event, can be paralleled in the career of Augusto Boal. Boal, like Brecht during the Weimar period, began working in 'theatres', in his case the Arena Theatre in Sao Paulo, Brazil, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s.

Boal has written eloquently in *Theatre of the Oppressed* about the developing policy of the Arena Theatre⁷ – a policy determined by the desire to create a theatre that was both clearly Brazilian, and, as the theatre developed, politically radical. It was inaugurated

with the production of European and North American realist 'classics' such as Steinbeck and O'Casey – and with the founding of an Actors' Laboratory, 'in which Stanislavsky was minutely analyzed word by word and practised from nine in the morning until it was time to appear on stage'⁸

However, in the early 1960s, as Brazil entered a period of cultural and political nationalism, the policy changed, and 'the Arena Theatre closed its doors to European playwrights, regardless of their high quality, opening them to anyone who wished to talk about Brazil to a Brazilian audience.'⁹ This led to a challenge to the forms of 'realist' theatre, and Stanislavsky was superseded – or rather, as Boal put it, 'incorporated into a scheme' that was as much political as it was aesthetic.

The result of this was a period of intense formal experimentation, as Arena attempted to find a language – or rather, a multiplicity of languages – in which to articulate its radical political nationalism. 'A healthy aesthetic chaos was introduced', Boal wrote, in which realism, expressionism, symbolism, and surrealism collided violently, producing 'stylistic relief'.¹⁰

This period in Arena's history took the company to what Boal felt were the limits of what could be achieved within a conventional theatre context. On leaving Brazil to work in Peru, he was able to develop this project not in a new 'theatre', but in the context of an educational programme, in which the pedagogical function of theatre – always latent in the work of Arena – could be explored.

Practice and Pedagogy Intertwined

The 'ALFIN project' in Peru¹¹ began as part of a national literacy campaign, and formulated two principal aims: first, 'to teach literacy in both the first language and in Spanish without forcing abandonment of the former in favour of the latter' and second (in our italics!), 'to teach literacy in all possible languages, especially the artistic ones, such as theatre, photography, puppetry, films, journalism, etc.'¹²

Boal's involvement in the ALFIN project was as a theatre worker, but the method, pedagogy, and conception of the whole project was derived from the work of the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire, which stems from the passionate conviction that language and power are inextricably intertwined. Fundamental to the work of both Freire and Boal is the concept of praxis:

I shall start by reaffirming that men, as beings of praxis, differ from animals, which are beings of pure activity. Animals do not consider the world; they are immersed in it. In contrast men emerge from the world, objectify it, and in so doing can understand and transform it with their labour. . . . Men's activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot . . . be reduced to either verbalism or activism.¹³

Boal espoused Freire's pedagogy wholeheartedly: sharing the aims of his fellow workers on the ALFIN project, he began to develop a theatrical form which addressed directly the problems identified by Freire, a form which would activate and change people from being passive 'spectators' of action into active participants in it – active transformers of the dramatic action. He describes these processes as the 'Theatre of the Oppressed'.

Although there are undoubtedly a great many other influences on drama teachers today (notably Dorothy Heathcote, who herself acknowledges a considerable debt to Freire), and there may well not be wide grassroots knowledge and understanding of the work of Boal and Freire, much of the best practice in educational drama certainly exemplifies Freire's assertion that education is of necessity a form of 'cultural action':

cultural action is always a systematic and deliberate form of action which operates upon the social structure, either with the objective of preserving that structure or of transforming it.¹⁴

Praxis demands that cultural action should encourage both reflection and action.

Educational Drama in Practice

It would be useful here to look in detail at some moments from a specific piece of

classroom drama. The outline on page 87 is one of a series of three one-hour classes with a class of thirty mixed-gender, mixed-race twelve-year-olds in a medium-size comprehensive school. As with many drama lessons, the narrative continued over a period – in this case three weeks. In our outline of the content of the lessons, we shall focus on certain key moments to analyze in detail, and these moments appear overleaf in italic type.

In particular, the lesson exemplifies the several ways in which drama-in-education challenges accepted theatrical notions concerning (1) the creation and function of character; (2) narrative; and (3) the concept of *praxis* and spectator-performer relationships. It is important to note here that the work described is not merely a set of exercises, but a coherent theatrical experience, with developing characters and narrative. It is created and performed by the participants, and not repeated to another audience – but it has an audience.

Background and Content

The class had shown considerable interest in then-current cases involving the controversial invasion of privacy by journalists and photographers of the tabloid press. This interest informed the teacher's choice of material. The session began with the teacher clarifying the formal restraints and working conditions, and then introducing the narrative, as outlined overleaf. Although much of this will be familiar to those using various improvisational forms as part of a rehearsal process, it is important to stress that here they are not simply exercises but part of an affecting and effective theatrical experience. Many of the specific techniques have not been described in detail; there are a number of good drama textbooks referenced in the bibliography below which will do that.

If we look at a great deal of contemporary theatre (and not simply at post-Brechtian modernism), it would seem that naturalism (at least in its simple, unproblematic forms) is indeed dying. Certainly, many of the conventions governing the use of time,

space, and narrative associated with this mode are being constantly renegotiated. However, naturalist conceptions of *character* remain and tend to be present even in work which is in other respects thoroughly anti-illusionist.

The Creation and Function of Character

This naturalistic conception is probably familiar, but worth briefly restating: characters are generally offered as 'rounded' individuals, defined by personal histories and individual psychologies, and recognized primarily in terms of a mimetic relationship with a 'known' social reality. We may be asked to 'identify' with these characters, or empathize with them. Finally, we expect the processes of acting to be concealed from us, the actor hidden by the role being played.

A great deal of post-Brechtian modernism is dissatisfied with this, however, and seeks to make the way a character is constructed the subject of a renegotiation and debate – both within the dramatic text and in the social situation that is being represented. All the participants in classroom theatre (including the teacher) are in a good position to foreground the construction of character *as a function of the drama*, thereby challenging easy conceptions of character, generating a deep engagement in the character's *situation*, and demonstrating a desire to explore the social and political reasons for particular behaviour alongside individual psychology.

In the drama described, characters are not only *seen* to be constructed, they are purposefully created by active spectators. At the beginning, the teacher takes on the role of the reporter arguing with his editor. The editor is played by one of the pupils, but she plays this role in the way that the class asks her to, even using lines of dialogue which they give her. It is made quite clear that she is working on behalf of the other members of the class: *she is their representative*. Not only does this give them a stake in the drama – the opportunity to become protagonists in the action – but it also formalizes construction of character in theatrical terms.

This systematic construction of character continues throughout the drama, most notably when the teacher (in-role again as the reporter) asks the class how he should play the interrogation scene with Ministry police. Simple key signifiers will be used to denote the character, but it is neither 'rounded' nor fleshed out. The drama is not focused on the 'psychological reality' of the character; there is no need for the naturalistic paraphernalia which would usually be associated with such a character in many other forms of dramatic fiction. The teacher, 'playing' the reporter does not use a different voice, change clothes, or adopt different mannerisms. One or two very simple key signifiers will be quite sufficient to indicate that the role has been adopted: in this drama a pair of glasses and a brief case are the *agreed* signifiers.

Contradictions and Choices

The character is, however, not simply emblematic, but complex and problematic. The form allows the participants in the drama to focus clearly on particular aspects of character – in this case, on contradictory behaviour. Whereas at the beginning of the drama the teacher assumed a character and played it as a given, that easy assumption of character is itself now problematized: the reporter had behaved in one way in an earlier situation, using dishonest means to obtain the Minister's note, yet the class now want him to behave quite differently – loyally resisting even torture in order to keep a promise to protect his source.

In discussion, the teacher is able to foreground this apparent inconsistency *before* the scene is enacted, in order to highlight the apparently contradictory behaviour – is able to consider why people behave as they do, and how social and political pressures interact with individual psychology to affect our capacity to determine our lives through the decisions we make. But the dramatic *form* is not exclusively concerned with the social and political construction of character: in another drama the psychological dimensions of character might be examined in

The first scene is to be in a newspaper editor's office, which the class are asked to construct. In part this is a mechanical exercise involving positioning of chairs and tables; in part an imaginative one involving analysis and careful consideration of organizing space: working as a group the class make a ground plan of the office, each member of the class adding one item (including for example a filing cabinet, a wilting pot plant, a computer, printer, and coffee-maker).

The teacher asks for a volunteer to play the editor and then asks the class to help Jenny (the volunteer) create the character of the editor. How is she to play the role? In effect they now *construct* her character. The teacher takes on the role of a reporter who has been assigned to cover the apparent disappearance of the Minister of Defence from his country house.

The first scene in the drama is acted out. During this improvised scene the 'reporter' tells the editor that, together with a photographer, he gained access to the house by persuading a housekeeper to let them in. It is apparent that the dealings with the housekeeper were dishonest.

At any time during the enactment Jenny, the girl taking the role of the editor, can stop the scene and ask advice of her peers. How should she respond – more or less aggressively? What should she say? Should she stand up or sit down? There is also the possibility of replaying the action if the class are unhappy with the way the scene is developing: they can ask the 'actors' to stop and go back to a specific point and replay the scene in a different way – perhaps less aggressively, or with different dialogue.

As the scene unfolds, the 'reporter' brings out a brown paper envelope which he says contains a photograph taken in the house. The reporter is initially unwilling to show this to the editor, and then insistent that it should not be published. It appears to show the image of a ghost descending an old wooden staircase.

The teacher then stops the drama and out-of-role asks the class to consider a number of questions: Why is the reporter so unwilling to allow the photograph to be published? What did the reporter say to persuade the housekeeper to allow them access to the house?

The class are now divided into small groups: half the groups are charged with the task of devising a short scene to show how the reporter gained access to the house, with pupils now taking on the role of the reporter; the other half with showing what they think led to the disappearance of the Minister. These prepared improvisations are now shared publicly.

All the scenes involving the reporter and the housekeeper show the reporter being extremely devious. The class begin to show considerable

interest in the character of the reporter. Why does he behave in this way when he appears to recognize that what he is doing is hurtful?

The other groups show their scenes. Some suggest that the Minister was kidnapped by terrorists, some that he was involved in a scandal and has fled the country. One scene shows the Minister leaving an explanatory note for his wife before fleeing: and, although each of the scenes is fascinating in its own way, the class is particularly taken by the idea of the note, and want to see it.

The class agree that they want to go back to the exchange between reporter and housekeeper; as the scene will be played in front of the whole class without 'rehearsal', they want the teacher to play the reporter. Again the scene is played in 'forum' style, with both performers (the teacher in-role as the reporter and one of the girls involved in the earlier scene as the housekeeper) having 'advisers'. With various necessary interruptions, the scene is played out. It eventually transpires that the reporter has stolen the note.

The teacher, out-of-role, asks the class in small groups to write the text of the note. This is a collaborative exercise, resulting in five different notes. The whole class then discuss these different versions, and agree on one which suggests that the Minister fled because he feared a scandal was about to break.

The drama proceeds in this way – with the whole class actively engaged in enactments in small groups, decisions of where to take the narrative, and gradual construction of character, and through this type of process the class decides that through an intermediary (to whom he has promised absolute confidentiality) the reporter has discovered the whereabouts of the Minister and had a telephone conversation with him. Shortly afterwards he has been arrested by Ministry of Defence police. The class decide on an interrogation. They agree on the physical environment in which this should take place, and choose two boys to carry it out.

The teacher then asks the class exactly how he should play the scene: 'Do you want me to be frightened, terrified, able to control my fear . . . ? How should this manifest itself physically? How much do I know?' Before the scene takes place (and after it) there are discussions about the moral implications of the interrogation. The reporter has been seen to be dishonest in his dealings with the housekeeper, yet now he has a source to protect. What sort of man is he? The class want the interrogation to be very tough, and the reporter to resist it, to maintain his integrity. During the course of the interrogation threats against the reporter's family are made. The contradictions in the character and the moral dilemma facing the reporter have become central to the drama.

greater detail than here, and related more directly to the social.

The dramatic form allows for characters whose personalities are not 'fixed', whose actions are not predetermined. The teacher can use his or her own role to convey information, to encourage contributions, to focus attention on specific issues, and above all to challenge easy moralizing by (for example) taking on the role of Devil's Advocate. The class are constantly given the opportunity to create characters and to reflect on their behaviour. Throughout this drama there is a sense that the class can choose to have *their* characters behave differently; they can always 'replay' any scene if they are not satisfied with it.

The plot of the drama appears to be in the thriller genre, but its focus is clearly on the social construction of character: why do people behave the way they do? What are the social pressures which make people take the decisions they do? And, crucially, what if someone chooses differently: what are the different outcomes? One of the central functions of character in this drama is to enable the participants to explore outcomes. A character makes a decision, so we follow him or her down that road: we do not like the outcome, so we can return, request a different decision, and go down a different road.

Kinds of Narrative Structure

It is possible to think of a drama lesson as a form of narrative, in that, like all fictional narratives, it is a sequence of related events with a discernible though variable pattern, and its own coherence. Classroom narratives, like other forms of theatre, are not simply the product of verbal language, but comprise the interaction of all the theatrical elements in play.

In the theatre, these may be props, lights, set, and costumes as well as the physical presence of the actors: in the classroom, the range of possible 'languages' may be limited, but will usually include structured movement and gesture, elements of set – in the lesson outlined above, the class con-

structed an environment for the initial interview between editor and reporter – and a range of carefully-chosen signifiers: wilted pot-plant, photograph, newspaper.

Not all narratives are structured in the same way, of course: our culture is saturated with many different kinds of narrative patterns of varying degrees of complexity. Young people, particularly those who watch television, are exposed to a sometimes bewildering range of stories, and frequently bring this knowledge into the classroom. However, the important point to remember in this context is that narrative patterns are not value-free carriers of thematic 'content': as Brecht constantly reminds us, they imply a particular view of the world, a distinctive conception of reality and the forces that govern it. Narrative conventions have, therefore, *ideological* implications (although these may vary depending on the context), and the choice between one structural pattern and another is never innocent.

Although not all experiments with narrative structure can be seen in relation to post-Brechtian modernism, the conscious negotiation of established patterns, the deliberate disordering of expected sequences, can be found in the work of many of the practitioners to whom we have already referred – not as formal exercises, but because conventional narrative models are simply not adequate to the task that the dramatist is setting.

Brecht thus preferred episodic to 'organic' plots as a means of challenging the inevitability and causality of events, and of analyzing the discrete situations embedded within the narrative. Fo offers us two endings to *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* – and a protagonist of uncertain identity who is known simply as 'The Maniac'. Caryl Churchill is one of several contemporary dramatists who, as in *Top Girls*, plays with chronology to allow a range of juxtapositions and a new causality.

In the example under discussion, we can see how drama-in-education offers the possibility of re-shaping narrative structures in ways that are even more radical than those available to the dramatist: in particular,

classroom narratives are open to *interruption* and *change*. This is possible because of the structural role of the teacher, who, although not the 'author' of the performance 'text', has the power in the situation to intervene and redirect the narrative 'flow'. Also, the conventions of the lesson allow each observer to become a *participant* in the action.

At one stage in our drama lesson the class are divided into small groups and charged with the task of devising short scenes, each of which explores new narrative possibilities, and from which the group must then choose. These are, in fact, *multiple* narratives proceeding simultaneously, made necessary because of the questions raised by the class (functioning as observer-participants) and the teacher about earlier events, the motives of those fictional characters involved, and the paradoxes thrown up by the situation.

Thus: why is the reporter so unwilling to allow the photograph to be published? What did the reporter say to persuade the housekeeper to allow him access to the house? Each improvisation when it is played back to the whole group constitutes an alternative line of narrative development, grounded in the events that have preceded it, and representing the interests and responses of the group producing it.

At this point, any of these possibilities could provide the next stage of narrative. When the group become fascinated by the idea of a possible note, left by the Minister to his wife, the focus switches to an earlier incident (the interview between the reporter and the housekeeper), which is then played differently in the light of this new discovery.

Actor-Spectator Relationships

The playing-out of alternatives, and the radical questioning of the inevitability of events that such dramatic strategies entail, is very much part of a post-Brechtian practice. It produces a narrative structure which, like the form of the lesson itself, foregrounds choice and decision-making, and gives a significant measure of control to the observer-participants. Such narratives may lack the planned coherence of the single

authorial voice, but they can construct a new kind of coherence – one which embodies the experience and values of the class itself.

The problematizing of the relationship between actors and spectators is common to much post-Brechtian modernism. However, for most dramatists the interrogation of the traditional separation of these roles is one that is contained within an institutional structure – the theatrical performance in a recognizably 'theatrical' situation – which sets clear limits to what can be achieved in practice.

The thrust of Brecht's work, notwithstanding the note on 'major' and 'minor' pedagogy referred to above, was to create a *critical spectator* – and the use of an active verb, 'create', emphasizes that this was to be an active process, in part a function of the performance itself. In Boal's words, such a spectator 'delegates power to the actor who thus acts in his place', while reserving 'the right to think for himself often in opposition to the character'.¹¹

Boal's work on the ALFIN project, however, allowed him to go several steps further and, as we have discussed, to propose a radical and systematic restructuring of actor-spectator roles. Similarly, the kind of drama-in-education practice proposed here recognizes only *participants* who can, *when it is necessary for the narrative and when the educational objectives demand*, move between the roles of actor and spectator, without the traumatic effects that such a disruption might have within a more formal theatrical context.

We can see this operating at several points in our drama lesson, for a variety of reasons and with different results. When the teacher asks the group to divide into smaller groups to create their own improvisations, these groups are not only authors of a series of potential narratives, but also actors within them: in practice, the process of improvisation involves a constant shift between acting and observing, 'doing' and 'watching', creating and criticizing. At the point where these narrative possibilities are shown to the class as a whole, the roles are more clearly defined: each pupil becomes an

audience for the acting of others *and* an actor him/herself performing under the critical scrutiny of the class.

To take another example from towards the end of the lesson: the replaying of the exchange between reporter and housekeeper, which is enacted with advisers, necessitates constant interruption, as questions are raised and new possibilities are tried out. This is not only evidence of the way that character can be constructed in a drama lesson, but also an example of how participants – in this case, both the characters involved in the improvisation and their advisers – can accomplish a complex shift between performing and spectating (and back again) within the framework of a single narrative moment.

This structure generates a significant involvement in the theatrical processes, a form of *dramatic tension*, that holds the interest of the class because it demands their active participation. Such dramatic tension is the result not simply of the fictional events of the story (though it is in part, as the improvisation continues), but of the form itself, which provides both a critical and active space within the theatrical event.

Another way of looking at the same moment in the lesson is to say that what is being permitted by allowing a fluidity between acting and spectating is the structuring of *action* and *reflection* into the drama: that is, *praxis*. Narrative devices – such as asking the class to produce different versions of the note left by the Minister – permit precisely that illumination of concrete practical activity by a considered reflection upon it that distinguishes praxis from uncritical and untheorized action. The result may not be the ‘transformation of the world’ that Boal and Freire desired,¹² but it could encourage a questioning and challenging attitude towards it.

Towards an Interactive Theatre

We would like to conclude with some observations – also, in part, warnings – which return us to our starting-point, the present interest in the relationship between theatre

and educational drama. In arguing for drama-in-education as a radical theatre form, there is a danger that the models and practitioners – like Brecht, Boal, and Freire – who provide such a fruitful framework of analysis, can too easily be decontextualized. We are certainly not arguing that Britain in the 1990s is essentially the same kind of society as Peru in the 1970s, or Germany of the early 1930s: the examples work on a different level altogether.

Thus, although only a small number of drama teachers would see themselves as ‘revolutionaries’, a great deal of drama practice is concerned with *empowering* its participants in ways that are similar to those proposed by Brecht and Boal – that is, with giving ‘ownership’ of the material that is being worked through to the participants themselves, so that they may exercise control over both the development of the issues at the centre of the drama experience, and the forms in which these issues are explored. We are not arguing here that children in our schools are ‘oppressed’ in the senses used by Boal and Freire, but they *are* traditionally *recipients* of knowledge. Drama-in-education changes that educational model, encouraging pupils to take responsibility for the material on which they are working.

Much of the recent debate initiated by David Hornbrook has focused on the assertion that those working in the field of drama-in-education have tended to concentrate on pedagogy at the expense of the art form. We would argue that whilst drama teachers do need to develop a critical awareness of theatre practice, it *must* be accompanied by a central informing pedagogy. To ignore this is to ignore the experience not just of drama teachers, but of the theatrical practitioners who have played such an important part in the current analysis.

Without an informing pedagogy – that is, a theory which clarifies the educational nature of theatre, which links all decisions about form to a set of specific educational objectives – there is, indeed, a danger that the move towards Theatre Studies examinations, as a way of giving credibility to classroom drama, will effectively enshrine tradi-

tional (even outmoded) theatrical practices, and that the study of texts will supplant the creation of them.

Finally, there is another way in which the relationship between theatre and educational drama could be considered: if drama practices in the classroom are indeed a form of theatre, then what might theatre practitioners learn from their teaching colleagues? There is not the space here to do more than raise the question, and to suggest that it is not only those involved in theatre in education for whom it is a relevant one.

The possibilities of a genuinely interactive theatre, in which a play's audience can become its protagonists, have hardly been explored in the familiar context of theatre for a general (adult) audience in this country. These are possibilities, in our view, that are worth considering, for drama-in-education at its best is a theatre practice that is constantly transforming itself, creating the possibility of new theatre forms and languages, and recognizing that fully to understand theatre we must make theatre anew.

Notes and References

1. See David Hornbrook, 'Drama, Education, and the Politics of Change', *New Theatre Quarterly*, Nos. 4-5 (1985-86), and his recent book *Education and Dramatic Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

2. There is a useful account of the relationship of Brecht and other materialists to the modernist move-

ment in Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism* (London: Penguin, 1985).

3. Bertolt Brecht, 'Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction' in John Willett, ed., *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 73.

4. Elizabeth Wright, *Post-Modern Brecht: a Re-Presentation* (London: Routledge, 1989).

5. Introductory note to Brecht, *The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke* (London: Methuen, 1982).

6. Wright, op. cit.

7. Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1979).

8. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

11. In 1973 the revolutionary government of Peru began a national literacy campaign called Operacion Alfabetizacion Integral (Integral Literacy Operation), the ALFIN project, with the objective of eradicating illiteracy within the span of four years. It is estimated that at that time, out of a total population of fourteen million, between three and four million Peruvians were illiterate or semi-literate.

12. Boal, op. cit., p. 121.

13. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 96.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

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