

Conversations with the Devil

by

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Abstract

This paper explores the use of Theatre for Development (TfD) as a set of methodologies for reducing the growing gap between the world as it is presented by media conglomerates and politicians and the same world as it is experienced by 'ordinary' people, helping them to, in Freire's terms, name the world for themselves. The paper grounds the origins of TfD in Brecht's development of the *Lehrstuck* form as his major pedagogy which was expanded into a devised process that incorporated audience interventions by Boal. Two short case studies are then offered which illustrate some of the potential of the genre to open dialogues when the practice is grounded in the personal stories of hitherto marginalised sectors of a given community. The paper goes on to invite a reconsideration of the overstated divide between the practices of TiE and TfD before concluding by raising the possibility of revisiting Brecht's notion of contradiction in order to develop a theatrical process through which to examine the contradiction between neo-liberal economics and human rights in the lives of young people.

Abrégé

Ce papier explore l'utilisation du Théâtre pour le Développement (TfD) comme une série de méthodologies pour réduire l'écart grandissant entre le monde tel qu'il est présenté par les conglomerats médiatiques et les politiciens et ce même monde tel qu'il est vécu par les gens 'ordinaires', et aider ces derniers à, selon les termes de Freire, nommer le monde pour eux-mêmes. L'article base les origines du TfD dans le développement par Brecht de la forme *Lehrstuck* comme étant sa pédagogie principale qui a été étendue dans un processus conçu par Boal qui incorporait des interventions par l'audience. Deux bref cas d'études sont alors proposés qui illustrent quelques potentiels du genre pour ouvrir des dialogues quand la pratique est fondée sur les histoires personnelles de secteurs jusqu'ici marginalisés d'une communauté donnée. L'article invite alors à reconsidérer la division exagérée entre les pratiques du TiE (Théâtre en éducation) et du TfD avant de conclure en évoquant la possibilité de revisiter la notion brechtienne de contradiction dans le but de développer un processus théâtral à travers lequel l'on examinera la contradiction entre les économies néolibérales et les droits de l'homme dans la vie des jeunes.

Sumario

Este artículo explora el uso del Teatro para el Desarrollo (Theatre for Development, TfD) con el fin de establecer una serie de metodologías para reducir la creciente disparidad entre el mundo que presentan los conglomerados mediales y políticos y el mismo mundo que experimenta la gente común, ayudando esta gente, en términos de Freire, a discernir el mundo según sus creencias. El artículo cimienta los orígenes del TfD en el desarrollo de Brecht de la forma de *Lehrstuck*, como su pedagogía principal, la cual fue expandida hacia un proceso estructurado que incorpora las intervenciones del público según Boal. Dos estudios breves de casos experimentales ilustran el potencial de este género para emprender diálogos cuando las prácticas tienen sus fundamentos en historias personales que acontecen en zonas marginadas de una cierta

comunidad. El artículo continua con una invitación hacia una reconsideración de la exagerada división entre las practicas del TiE (Theatre in Education, Teatro en la Educación) y el TfD antes de concluir indicando la posibilidad de reconsiderar la noción de ‘contradicción de Brecht’ para desarrollar un proceso teatral con el cual examinar la contradicción entre economías neo-liberales y derechos humanos en las vidas de los jóvenes.

Author’s biography

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Introduction

This paper will investigate the possibilities offered by Theatre for Development (TfD) for opening dialogues both within communities — formal and informal — and between communities and the wider worlds in which they are situated. The core principles of TfD are participation, democracy and sustainability. It operates ideally as a form of dialogical communication — a means of advocacy for those whose voices are typically unheard or dismissed, and a forum for collective, social analysis. We live in an age of global communication where information is available to us at previously undreamt of speeds, in previously undreamt of quantities, thanks to the technological advances of digital and satellite networks. However, despite the still largely embryonic possibilities of the internet, the nature of almost all of this communication is monological, not dialogical. Consequently, we experience communication as passive, almost powerless consumers of information overload, unable to verify the truth according to our experience of the images and voices set before us. A very small group of people — mostly older white males residing in North America — determine what the world looks and sounds like to the rest of us. They tell us what democracy looks like; they put the epithet ‘starving’ in front of the noun ‘African’ and the adjective ‘free’ in front of the noun ‘trade’ to denote a system of rigged subsidies which ensures their continuing wealth at the expense of the majority’s poverty. They use all available communication resources to assure us that economic growth — *their* economic growth — is essential for the welfare of all in the face of the mounting contradiction between their belief in what they have labelled ‘progress’ and the capacity of the planet to survive this assault upon its non-renewable resources. One of the consequences of this information overload is a growing gap between the ‘official’ or ‘authorised’ world as presented through mass communications, and the world as experienced in the individual lives of ordinary people. This experience gap is fertile ground for the alienation, dispossession and apathy which have manifested themselves most recently in the suburbs of French cities. Passive citizenship may give political and business elites a comfortable ride for much of the journey, but eventually passivity becomes boredom, which becomes resentment, which in turn becomes violence that leads to direct action. The same media organisations that pay no attention to underlying social inequalities and contradictions within the dominant structures swarm like angry bees around the violent manifestations provoked by those causes. The ‘Other’ becomes visible by deviating from the norms of ‘decent’ behaviour, like the bored or neglected child who knows from experience that acts of defiance are the surest way to claim the attention of teacher or parent.

The antidotes to this bleak social prescription are dialogue and ownership — key concepts in any process of active learning. But beware terminology, for the dominant is always quick to colonise the languages of resistance and separate the signifier from the signified via the relentless hegemonic seductions of its media. That which is called ‘dialogue’ more often than not is a conversation between the powerful and the powerless — be it a dialogue between the G8 nations and the majority world or a dialogue between teacher and child. Similarly, ownership can often amount to nothing more than getting someone else to accept your idea as their own. Businesses regularly employ consultants to come up with ways of getting the workforce to own the agendas of management. However, in Tfd there can be no process without the community — individually and collectively — entering into a dialogue whose subject-matter is determined by themselves. The starting point is the stories told about the experiences of living at a certain time, in a certain place with all members enjoying the right to tell their own stories. The specifics of context resist the universalising tendencies of authority. Once stories have been told and listened to, the focus moves to the collective, theatrical process of devising and dramatising into one agreed story which is felt to represent through a democratically expressed majority view, or speak for, the various individual stories previously articulated. In this way, the twin aims of dialogue and ownership are, at least partially, realised.

Origins of a Theatre for Development methodology

The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it. (Marx 1977: 56)

Bertolt Brecht stated that he took this statement of Marx and applied it to the theatre. Thus Brecht’s notion of applied theatre is unequivocal: it is the application of his understanding of Marx to the processes of making theatre. Unsurprisingly, Brecht — in both theory and practice — is the forerunner of what is practised today as Tfd. For the production of several of his *Lehrstücke*, Brecht required the abolition of the distinction between performers and audience. Everyone present was to be engaged in the simultaneous process of learning and teaching, captured in the concept of ‘*Lehr*’. These plays, referred to by Brecht (1971: 126) as his ‘Major Pedagogy’, are explorations of the contradictions to be encountered by the communist society that was anticipated for Germany prior to the 1933 elections. For example, *The Measures Taken* — where all those attending the performance take up a position in the Control Chorus — examines the dialectical relationship between the individual and the collective claims of the revolution. Without the passionate concern of the individual to combat injustice, there can be no revolutionary movement, yet if there is only an uncoordinated individual response, the revolution will fail and the cause of social justice must be set back (Brecht 1977: 34). Here Brecht is using a participatory process directed towards a confrontation with the contradictions that have to be faced if society is to progress towards greater equity. In essence, this is a Tfd process with the important exception that Brecht is operating as playwright and director rather than as the facilitator of a devised process. Even these distinctions are not absolute since, as playwright, he was sometimes obliged to rewrite in the face of the experience of his participants — as in the case of *He Who Says Yes* developing into *He Who Says No*. As the Chorus to *The Measures Taken* concludes: ‘Taught only by reality, can reality be changed.’ (Brecht 1977: 34)

Grounded in the lived experience of its participants, Tfd is a process which starts from reality — from the world as it is. The possibility of developing from that reality is the stuff of its processes: a dialectical relationship between reality and fiction; the theatrical ‘as if’. In the same way, any transformative, educational experience has to begin with the reality that the learner brings to the

encounter with new knowledge and altered understanding. When Brecht's own reality was irrevocably changed by the Nazi assumption of power in 1933, the nature and purpose of his plays changed in response. From this time onwards, he explores the contradictions both within the capitalist system — for example, *The Good Person of Szechwan* — and within Stalinism — for example, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, where one of the principal characters, Azdak, performs, within the tradition of European stage fools, the role of the Joker, provoking the characters with whom he interacts to aspire towards a Golden Age, 'almost an age of justice'.

Because Brecht is associated so closely with Marxism, there has been a tendency to reduce his importance in contemporary, post-modernist theatre. He is frequently viewed as a modernist dinosaur, wrestling with grand narratives bypassed by the current preoccupations of globalisation. Such a superficial view misses the essential point that Brecht's art is directed towards unpicking the contradictions in these narratives from the perspective of ordinary people's experience; for Brecht, the personal is profoundly political. All meaningful political change emanates from the contradictions and discontents located within the psyche of individuals who are hungry for justice and the changes required to produce it. Nevertheless, Brecht's association with mainstream, formal theatre created by his years with the Berliner Ensemble meant that the possibilities of locating his dramaturgy within a grass-roots Tfd context were severely reduced. Consequently, it required the emergence of practitioners operating in majority world contexts to reactivate Brecht's major pedagogy for contemporary applications.

Rather as Marx provides the ideological starting point for Brecht's theatrical practice, so Paulo Freire was the inspiration for the theatrical theory and practice of Augusto Boal, who acknowledges the debt in the title of the book which marks the formal beginnings of the Tfd movement, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal 1978), drawing directly upon Freire's (1972) own publication, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Boal's subsequent publications chart his journey through the various theatrical explorations that constitute his application of the principles of Freire's learner-centred pedagogy to a theatre process directed towards individual and collective social change. In particular, it is his model of Forum Theatre which has come to embody Freire's concept of 'naming the world' — the constant struggle between the powerful who seek to name the world for the rest of us in the interests of an unjust *status quo* and the resistance of the powerless who fight to claim the right to assert the validity of their own lived experience. So the fiction offered by the once all-powerful actors, their 'named world', is now subject to the interventions of the 'spect-actors' who open the door onto the stage to let in an icy blast of their own reality. As for Brecht, so for the invading spect-actor: the stage fiction is only useful insofar as it offers developmental possibilities for changing the world, be that a micro- or a macro-level change. An example of using the personal story as a performed cultural intervention comes from a student project on the MA in Theatre and Media for Development at the University of Winchester.

Two students responded to an invitation from Darryl Wildcat, an activist on his home reservation, to undertake their fieldwork project with the Cree nation at Hobbema, on the wind-swept prairie south of Edmonton. The place took its name from a Dutch landscape painter of whose work it is reputed to be reminiscent. Thus is it mapped on to the cultural memory of the dominant, leaving the indigenous inhabitants to survive in a world they have not named. Tourists heading south on highway 2A from Wetaskiwin to Ponoka pass through Hobbema in about 30 seconds, scarcely aware that they are crossing the ancestral lands of four bands of Cree, lands floating on a sea of oil. Though the boom was past its peak by 1999, the legacy of cash in hand from the sale of

leases to oil companies combined with the crisis of cultural identity was written in the high incidences of foetal alcohol syndrome, drug abuse, diabetes and teenage suicide. The recipe of consumption mixed with alienation, here as elsewhere, was producing deadly results. The colonised mind projected itself into poor self-esteem, which in turn transmitted itself into abuse of the body.

Among the specific initiatives with which the students engaged during this placement was a project with some of the young people attending the Alternate School, and spending time with some of the older people who were inmates of the hospital on the reservation. The small group of young people who regularly participated in the school were among those whose self-image had been severely distorted by the ravages of drug or domestic abuse brought on by the desolation of living with cash in their pockets, and without an image of who they were or whence they had come. For these young people, the notion of school conjures up cultural memories of the front line in the battle to empty their souls and douse their spirits with the cold learning of the white man's world.

The Alternate School was alternative in at least two important ways: it was as anti-authoritarian as was compatible with base lines of health and safety; and it sought to draw upon the students' knowledge and understanding of their own world, rather than displace these with an orthodox curriculum. The student facilitators worked on unlocking their innate creativity, which they then directed towards an identification with the school in the form of advertisements that they devised to encourage others to enrol for the coming Fall semester. The process was at times painfully slow, as the pupils tried to find and identify their authentic voices among the echoes, fragments and debris left to them by the invasive culture. But, in most cases, they were found and with their discovery came confidence, self-assertion and the beginnings of an identity in harmony with the tattered remnants of their cultural memories. The highlight of the process was the visit to the community radio station where their advertisements were recorded for later transmission. From being voiceless beyond the margins of their already marginal society, these young people — at least for a few moments — became, quite literally, the voice of the community.

The MA students also spent considerable time with two women in their late fifties who were suffering from terminal illnesses and who had been more or less left to their own devices for their remaining period of life. As trust developed, conversations turned to stories of their traditional childhoods, brought up according to the rhythms of the hunter-gatherer way of life, following the paths of the Great Spirit. It soon became apparent that the stories and details which these women were sharing with the students were largely unknown to the generation of their own children due to the forced intervention of the residential schools that caused a fatal break in the transmission of culture between generations. The plight of the two women seemed increasingly like a metaphor for the position of Native American culture. Although the hospital was strategically located at the heart of the reservation, its patients were forgotten people whose store of knowledge, stories and myths was destined to die with them, leaving that particular reservation, the Cree nation, and humanity in general all the poorer for having lost some of the means of creative, self-determined survival. Slowly, gradually, over the weeks, these women were persuaded to share the wealth of their understanding with the wider community through a performance. The combination of their infirmities and shyness ruled out conventional theatre, but a story-telling form using shadow puppets and narrative was devised with the support of the students, and this was augmented by musical accompaniment from a relative.

The performance took place inside the hospital one evening. The audience was composed of peers, the children's generation and the grandchildren's generation. The nature of the responses to the stories, which evoked a largely forgotten way of life, was markedly different from generation to generation. The narrators' own peers greeted the performance with a mixture of admiration for the bravery of the women, mixed with delight at sharing the recollections of times when their identity and sense of self had been so much more secure. Simple incidents such as fetching fresh water from the stream and falling off a pony became imbued not only with the joyful glow of nostalgia but also with the increasing confidence and sense of solidarity emanating from shared cultural memory. By contrast, their children — the so-called 'lost' generation of residential school victims — had difficulty relating to the event and appeared awkward and ill at ease with the ghostly echoes of a past that was not their own. The third generation, however, expressed great excitement and interest in the whole event, and many in the audience used that evening as the stimulus from which to open dialogues with their grandparents. These dialogues became, in effect, not only channels of communication but also channels of resistance through which the young people could assert their right to an identity not dependent upon the dominant culture. Perhaps for the first time, the notion of their place in the world — a world in which they had a right to exist — began to take shape as a creative and imagined reality.

The facilitators were able to work in that location because they approached this community in a spirit of dialogue, curiosity and humility — the qualities identified by Paulo Freire as essential prerequisites to learning. Here was an outside intervention not aimed at selling Nike trainers or Molson beer, but at releasing creativity for the benefit of the indigenous community. A counter-model of cultural intervention was used to assist in resisting the ravages of the dominant, neo-liberal model. A dialogue was made between the community which offered its context-specific knowledge and experience — in this case, of traditions and cultural forms on the verge of extinction — and the facilitators who gave their skills in communicating through performance languages (Prentki 2005).

Another example of the way in which the TfD process can move marginal or neglected voices into the heart of the community was provided by a Save the Children workshop conducted in 2000 in the town of Mahaboob Nagar in the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. The director of one of Save's local partners was in the group of facilitators and he had made arrangements prior to the workshop for us to work with a group of about 30 children drawn from two villages. A significant number of these were children whose mothers were Jogins. These are women who, as adolescent girls, are sent by their parents to be brides of the Mother of All. Consequently, they are not allowed to marry. In Andhra Pradesh and neighbouring states, this is an ancient practice by which parents who produce only girls can ensure that at least one is left at home to support them as they grow older. In other cases, children who are unmarriageable through disability or whose parents cannot provide sufficient dowry are also given to the temple. The practice has recently been outlawed throughout India, and has certainly declined — though it is not extinct. Jogins have children as a result of liaisons with higher caste men who take them for a time as a supplement to their wives. They are not considered prostitutes, however, since they only ever have one partner at a time: a sort of marriage extension without rights. As our local facilitator ruefully pointed out, their untouchability (they are Dalits) does not extend to sexual relations. These children without fathers are thus at the very bottom of the social pecking order, the marginalised within the Dalit caste.

Initially, most of the stories were simple narratives which often turned on an incident between the individual and the environment, particularly the danger of snakes. Gradually, however, topics involving human relations began to emerge together with an awareness of their place in society. The girls, in particular, were sensitive to the vulnerability of their position and, towards the end of the story-telling, began to address explicitly their situation as the offspring of Jogins. In at least two cases, this produced notable anguish and tears in the telling so that in our own daily evaluation session that evening we determined that the whole topic of Jogins was too sensitive to provide stories for the devising process. We were very torn between a feeling that we may have been side-stepping the major cultural issue for these children and a contrary feeling that we had no right to force an issue beyond the emotional capacity of the children. I was particularly conscious that, as a result of our orientation, we had entered this community with a predisposition to explore the Jogin issue. Our decision to leave it to the children to determine their own agenda was proved spectacularly correct in ways we did not anticipate.

The following day, the children preceded us to the working area and were hard at work rehearsing a procession with music and singing when we arrived. It was quickly established that this was the temple ceremony of the Jogin initiation and, far from suppressing the topic, the children were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about showing us what such a ceremony comprised. As we watched intently, it was clear that several of the children were totally involved in the emotions of the moment and carried beyond themselves as they recreated an event which they had all witnessed for 'real'.

It was not entirely clear when the ritual had been completed, but we tried to guess, from the ebbing away of the energy, the most appropriate moment to call the group together and continue with the process. We had a short discussion, mostly confined to circumstantial details such as how many Jogins were in their community and when a dedication had last taken place. There was little point in pursuing any evaluation of the content of the ritual, since it spoke for itself in their performance. The emotions it generated among the children were also quite obvious, though hard to describe — a kind of anguished elation is about as close as I can manage. To me it seemed to demonstrate how special, how beyond the reach of daily reality, were their mothers at this moment if at no other in their lives.

When the children discussed their stories from the previous day, each group selected the one they would recreate through the devising process. In some cases, this involved the amalgamation of elements from more than one. Once into this phase, the facilitators were more interventionist in matters of technique and communication, but still had to be circumspect with regard to the narrative. One story concerned the plight of a family whose Jogin mother falls sick. The responsibility for addressing the crisis falls upon the children, for there are no adults willing to involve themselves. Another was about the efforts of a family to save money so that the son is able to go to school — efforts which are thwarted on the first day of school when the teacher refuses to register the boy, who cannot give his father's name since legally he has no father. The third story concerned illegal discrimination against Jogins at a tea-stall, and their attempts to seek redress through corrupt local police. The accuracy and irony with which the police officers were depicted indicated all too clearly how familiar the children were with their behaviour. These three episodes formed the backbone of the performance, but their significance was greatly enhanced by the action of contradiction. It was decided — and looking back I cannot say for sure how the decision was reached, though of course I would like to suggest that it came from the children — that the performance should begin with the dedication ritual which the children had shown us. In

any event, they were keen to do it again in front of their own village. So the special moment which sets Jogins apart from the rest of their community was set against scenes which depicted the reality of their abuse and marginalisation — a major contradiction with which to confront the audience, highlighted by the performance venue: the temple precinct.

As the light began to fail and men and women were returning from the fields, the children began to move through the village, beating their drums and announcing the performance. Gradually the audience assembled: important people on chairs; others sitting on the ground; others standing; beyond them some stood in the trailer and on the tractor parked alongside while others climbed a tree or stood on roofs. By the time the performance was fully underway, there were about 400 people in the audience and the acting area was severely shrunken. The audience was fully engaged by a combination of the subject-matter and the presence of hitherto largely disregarded children taking centre-stage. The confidence of the children swelled to match the occasion and for them this was a clear case of theatre *as* development.

The audience witnessed nothing it did not already know, but the effect of the performance, structured around blatant contradiction, was to begin a process which moved them from knowledge to understanding and, hopefully, on to action. Adults had begun to think about their behaviour; children had discovered through the fictions of representation a boldness, a daring through which to articulate their sense of injustice. One of the initial aims of the work was to create sustainable change by enabling the children to become facilitators in their own right, working with the children of their own villages. The local NGO has experienced the process and been active in it. It was frustrating not to stay longer, since social transformation is a long-haul process; however, sooner or later the communities and those who work with them on a daily basis have to move from development to self-development and, while outsiders can monitor, they also have to trust (Prentki 2003: 45–49).

Theatre for Development or Theatre in Education: Establishing a dialectical relationship

There is no intrinsic value or authority in a label, and it is not the intention of this paper to propose a hierarchy of practices. Rather, this section is concerned with opening up possibilities that can emerge from recontextualising some TfD practices within the bounds of the formal classroom. In so doing, TIE does not suddenly metamorphose into TfD, but rather extends the possibilities of some of its existing practices — especially in the area of participation. Where the participants — usually children — have no choice about whether or not they engage in the process, it is straining definitions to label such a practice TfD. However, the roles of children in setting the agendas for the work — in deciding, in short, what it is to be about — can be significantly enhanced by application of Freirean principles. I am not advocating any one model of practice here — for instance, a TIE team might engage with children as facilitators of their own stories from the start or offer the team's own theatrically devised story as a stimulus or gift to the class in order to initiate the children's creativity — but suggesting that whatever approach is adopted, it needs to connect with the lived experience of the children. The first phases of the encounter between theatre workers and children might properly be considered research into the *real* stories that children want to tell, as opposed to their reading of what the TIE company might regard as a *good* story. As with many practices in TfD, there is often a major contradiction between the radical and the domesticating tendencies of the process. In the contexts in which TIE companies usually have to work, the invitation to come into a school is frequently related to the relevance of their subject to the curriculum, which means that in order to secure work, the company is accepting that authority for naming the world resides with those who create the

curriculum. In the United Kingdom today, as in many other countries, the curriculum designers are not even the increasingly deskilled teachers who have some sense of children's preoccupations from their daily contact with them, but rather government experts with little or no contact with children who are responding to the perceived needs of politicians, business and other lobby groups.

In an attempt to elide rather than confront the contradiction, the TIE team becomes skilled in the arts of pseudo-participation, employing a range of seemingly child-centred ploys so that it appears to the children that they are participating upon their own terms rather than those of authority. They may get to tell the story, but whose story will it be? At best, they can be the tenants, not the owners, of the story building, filling out the details with their creativity and imagination while being guided to remain within the given structure or outline. Such a position accurately mirrors the condition of representative democracy that is the contemporary European and North American model. We are allowed to participate in the democratic process so long as we adhere to the outline shape of the agreed story. Provided we accept the starting premise that there is no alternative to the neoliberal model of economic and social development, any ideas or imaginative solutions we might offer to make it work more effectively (for whom? we might risk asking) or to reform its grosser manifestations are gratefully received as evidence of our free participation. As adults and children alike, we are positioned as passive consumers within a master narrative created elsewhere.

Even where a genuinely participatory, radical practice is achieved within a TIE process — usually the consequence of a dialogical relationship between a deviant teacher and an innovative theatre company — the danger is that the experience becomes entirely disconnected from all other aspects of schooling. The children understand the process as time off from the normal, or real, business of education — which is, of course, the achievement of examination results as a precursor to obtaining the qualifications that are the gateway to employment. Once again, the contradiction between a notion of education to do with responding to the rights and needs of children and what Freire termed the 'banking' system of education has been elided, not confronted. Despite the best intentions of the company, and possibly the teacher as well, the whole process is embraced by the warm hug of the establishment as evidence of the humanity of the system. Notwithstanding the unremittingly hegemonic assault of the mass media upon the consciousness of all citizens, it is in the field of education that the values and precepts of the dominant are most cunningly enshrined. This is why such efforts are taken to ensure that teachers teach only what they are told to teach and, increasingly, told *how* to teach it, lest in the gap between form and content some random weed of the subversive imagination might spring up.

Educating children for a life in a world which is not theirs is, however, in the long run doomed. The components of the system are human: recalcitrant, disaffected and, until blunted by consumerist blandishments, yearning for a fairer world. As the present system fails more and more of its people, and increasingly the planet itself, so a different way of managing our affairs will have to be found. In the search for these other ways, education, in the proper sense of the concept, will have a key role to play in unlocking the creativity and imagination of young people so that they can determine the agendas for change.

Think local, act global

TfD, either alone or in tandem with a learner-centred version of TIE, is no panacea for the alienation of young people across the globe, but it is one means of starting to address the

widening gap between the ‘official’ world of authority and its incessant representations in every branch of the media, and the ‘real’ world of the daily experiences of so-called ‘ordinary’ people. Education, like culture, is about how we make meanings of our lives in relation to the worlds we inhabit and a theatre process that builds on reality to explore the possibilities of alternative ways of being and becoming is uniquely well situated to combine creativity with critique for young people seeking to take an active stake in the future. Children are not trainee adults in waiting but young people with their own rights, ideas and imaginations. They have their own views on what the world should be and what it can be. Education is the space where the encounter between their aspirations and the histories that shape the world as they find it takes place. All too often, this encounter becomes a case of manipulating those aspirations to fit the existing structures of reality, rather than engaging learners and teachers (we are all both) in the debates that forge a dialectic between reality and aspiration. Only by reference to the actual lives that children experience can the monologue of neoliberalism’s master narratives of free choice and unfettered consumption be challenged and ultimately replaced by more human-centred values.

The core element of Brecht’s theatrical method, contradiction, is as relevant now as when he adapted the Marxist concept for his theatre (Brecht 1972). Throughout his career, he developed and refined a practice which enabled the theatre to confront its audiences with the major contradictions within the systems by which they lived. As the emphasis shifted from the epic to the dialectical theatre in the later years of his practice, both as playwright and director, so the locus for change in the societies that he depicted moved from the external to the internal, both in terms of the individual and of the social group. For example, in *The Good Person of Szechwan* it is not only Shen Te’s need for her business-like cousin Shui Ta that exposes the contradictions within her ‘goodness’, but also Shui Ta’s need to reclaim Shen Te that highlights the limitations of his business practice when it is stripped of any philanthropic accessories (Brecht 1966). Such is the overwhelming hegemonic pressure of what Louis Althusser called the Ideological State Apparatus (Cain et al. 2001: 1477), that humans twist and turn in every direction in increasingly futile attempts to accommodate themselves to the contradictions before finally facing up to them as a last resort. Thus contradiction is the motor of social change. Those who exert control at both micro levels (such as the patriarch in a traditional family) and at the macro level (such as the CEO of a transnational corporation) call upon all the resources of human ingenuity to persuade the rest that the present state of affairs is both normal and unchangeable. This is why Brecht placed the notion of *Verfremdung* at the heart of his dramaturgy (Brecht 1972). The defamiliarising of all that is taken for granted, of common sense, is the precondition for social change. It is the recognition that most of what is taken to be natural is actually human-made, and can therefore be unmade and remade by people, that constitutes the ‘development’ in Theatre for Development. Where Brecht has *Verfremdung*, Freire introduces the notion of ‘codification’ to describe the process whereby reality is represented in such a way that it is perceived as capable of being changed by the actions of people (Freire 1976).

Today, the major contradiction facing human societies across the globe is that between the neoliberal economic model, predicated upon the notion of continuous economic growth and requiring, in Noam Chomsky’s famous phrase ‘profit over people’ (Chomsky 1999), and the model implied by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that places people before profit. Currently, we are still in a phase like that depicted in *The Good Person of Szechwan*, where the contradiction is being elided rather than confronted but the environmental factor by which our present way of life will guarantee our extinction as a species is likely to bring this phase to an abrupt end in the interests of survival.

The rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of choice in choosing the means of expression enshrined in Articles 12, 13 and 15 of the CRC means that young people are entitled to the practices of TfD and TIE. Our governments (provided you are not a US citizen) have signed up to these processes and should be held accountable by young people and their teachers and parents where these rights are being withheld. A school curriculum that denies children the opportunity to practise active citizenship is illegal since European Union human rights legislation, the conduit for securing the enactment of the CRC for countries within the EU, overrules any national laws regarding the setting of that curriculum. Perhaps the exposure of this contradiction can offer a subject for the first phase of implementing a pan-European TfD/TIE project: ‘Social Transformation through Young People as Active Citizens’. At the very least, such an approach might constitute a starting point for opening up a conversation with the devil.

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