

from true feeling, stifles and camouflaging the spirit in a blind collection of facts and concepts.'

(Conference of the Birds: John Heilpern P. 69 Faber and Faber 1977)

Some thoughts on drama and theatre forms

But of course the false dichotomy between the meanings and concepts of 'theatre' and 'drama' is another challenge to us who use the art forms of drama to engage in 'all that life can offer.' Theatre and drama meet on the common ground conceptualized by Taylor Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief', or as we use so often use in our more simplified way, 'make believe'. This amazing function of the mind to willingly accept a living fiction, as if it is/were actual/real, is at the heart of the art forms of drama/theatre as it is the live action process in the actual moment of time that is the focus rather than *where* the art form is manifesting itself. For example, theatre does not have to be in hallowed grounds of the National Theatre or any other designated holy space. We witness theatre form in the first encounters children have in trying to understand the world in the make believe play they invent, spontaneously enabling their toys to speak and become alive perhaps? Or where objects around them take on other meanings, the chair representing the house of the teddy bear, a pillow becomes the roof and the toy dinosaur becomes the bears mother for a moment. We could recognize all this activity as theatre form, for the child, it is 'as if' the bear can talk, live in a house with a roof, converse with a dinosaur/bear mother.

However, when (and if) a child introduces elements of tension in their make believe play, we have 'dramatic play', where perhaps the little bear in the playing of a child now becomes lost and can't find its mother....the tensions become palpable as time in this playing moves on, requiring the players to resolve all that they invent in the now of time-the transfiguration process that is the unique feature of our strange and shape shifting medium.

For me this transfiguration process occurs when either the dominance of theatre form is present as in 'theatre/drama' or when the dramatic elements are dominant as in 'drama/theatre'. Elements of 'now-time' disappear in the reality of our living so that the fictional make believe now-time takes over as we experience the art form as the current time 'as if' it is real. The willing suspension of disbelief but also TIME!

In the past, conflict dramas were very much in vogue, lots of shouting and tempers flying as, for example, when the bailiffs attempt to remove the homeless people camping out in a public park. If you have been around in the drama field as long as I have you will know what I mean!

As a trained drama teacher in the North East school of drama where I took my Masters degree as a full time year long student with Dr Dorothy Heathcote, Dr John Fines and Gavin Bolton, I found that using the word 'form' very helpful in getting my head around how we make sense of the two words that also seemed to generate a gulf between practitioners who leaped to the defense of either, especially if there was a hint of challenge. Over the past 15 years I have been working with Dr Heathcote (up to her death in 2011), to encourage schools to adopt her drama system *mantle of the expert*, as a way of teaching and incorporating drama and theatre forms into learning

experiences mostly in primary schools. Mind you I have also taken yearly tutorials with her every year since 1982 with many discussions on education, drama and theatre in her West Midlands study, but the most recent work has focused attention on the complexities of one of her wonderful inventions, Mantle of the Expert.

It soon became very clear that complex interactions in the use of drama form in learning and the invoking of theatre form in the planned make believe structures, made understanding the strategies skills and methods within curriculum applications of MoE, much clearer.

DH: 'Drama and theatre? Its two sides of the same coin, Luke!' or, in her more cutting teachings:

DH: 'There are lots of manifestations of theatre and drama, Luke, you are so bound by your experiences! Try to stop converging on just one of them and get a bit more divergent in your thinking, after all the arts are about developing a high tolerance of ambiguity.....'

I tried to struggle with these rightful chidings from my mentor to transform these concepts into practice. After all, if I was to work with other teachers eventually, to pass onto them how it all worked, surely I should know what I was talking about?

So why does it matter if we do or don't do drama/theatre?

Taking Brook's words above concerning the ability of theatre to 'wipe the slate clean,' we can begin to understand why the Greeks used the exploration of deep dramas represented in theatre form. Understanding the sexual love between a mother and son as portrayed in Oedipus Rex ranges across humanity. Portraying taboo, disturbing, victorious events in this way help us understand how and *why* we behave as we do. Theatre/drama forms are only possible through the examination of people and their behaviours held in moments of time but that magical time - dramatic time. Such a time enables us time to look deeply at our own motivations, investments, life models and the deepest values we hold.

Time to perceive.

Time to reflect.

Yet, strangely in every second, we know we are involved, witnessing or experiencing a fiction. There are of course, in fictional time, no real fallouts. However that's not say there is no disturbance.

Tony Harrison's incredibly deeply uneasy play, *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchos*, capture deep and twisted elements of institutionalized racism, British Colonialism, abuse of intellectual prowess exposing how class divisions keep people in poverty of both minds and hearts.

His play within a play from the Greek past resonates with our own culture in the very now of time. But of course, it is the job of theatre and drama to disturb, to waken the human spirit, slaying the 'golden intellectual calf' at least for a short while, so our humanity can be provoked, yet again, ensuring we are catapulted into our inner core of emotional and intellectual selves. In such a place, our very life core values are set trembling, allowing us to self scrutinize who we are.

And if we don't have the art forms of theatre and drama?

Edward Bond contends that without drama 'we die'. In other words our civilization is in jeopardy without it, as we would have to live our lives without any deep emotionally charged foundations. Life and events erode us in that cosmological concept- 'entropy'. This the natural law of the universe that requires everything to return to its original state.

There is much to explore in this concept of course especially if we apply it metaphorically to our amazing human race.....Perhaps this great playwright is alluding to his concept of a 'site'. A fictional 'mind-place' site, where our own humanity is laid bare before us, so that we can be in touch beyond the intellect and perceive what is happening between people both universally and in the fictional context? Brecht's ideal location for his 'lesson' perhaps though both Brook and Bond have their own take on the German maestro.

Goodness knows we need their theatre/drama at the moment. Migration, war, revenge killings, deep religious intolerances, unemployment, ever longer life spans. All these challenges to humanity. Without a means to struggle intellectually and emotionally, understand and pacify such events, as is possible in theatre/drama, as well as deeply care about our own human fellow travellers, how can we invent behaviours to cope? Without this capacity, we will indeed die, and not just metaphorically.

Impacts of a theatre/drama rich education

The recent world-wide impact of the image and real life drama, associated with a poor drowned 5 year old Syrian boy on the shores of a Greek island, sparked our humanity, for we could all see in our imaginations, the 'site' in front of us. The broken father, the distraught mother, the awfulness of the Greek official gently handling the body of child. Tears of grief well up in us all who witness from afar and at the framed distance of observers so close to the living tragedy. But this time, the impacts had real fallout. This was no theatre/drama imaginings, no willing suspension of disbelief.

But, how did we learn how to emotionally perceive the awfulness and let it touch our deepest levels of humanity? I would argue passionately that without acts of the imagination to work on, our intellects, alone, could have told us, dispassionately, this is *'not my problem, and anyway it will be solved by others'*. Such a fellow traveler, for me, as a human would be in terrible emotional ignorance.

It is in the dramatic arts that we nurture and stimulate the imagination and develop the capacity to foresee implication by daring to be challenged as well as daring to challenge. In the art forms of drama/theatre depicted events are constructed in the now moment of time, as we imagine ourselves in a fictional context to apply make believe, either in public domains with others, or in the privacy of our own dramatic imaginations.

Drama/theatre is essential to seeing life through others eyes by imaging and taking the place for ourselves placing us in their position where, as Brook's

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is impossible.

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