Stig A. Eriksson

Distancing at Close Range

Investigating the Significance of *Distancing* in Drama Education
This study suggests that the aspect of making strange in distancing is not sufficiently utilized in Drama Education. It is more than an artistic device; it is in itself a tool for understanding and learning.

“Even if the topic of distancing has been identified as a central concept in Drama Education since the late 1970s, a methodical interrogation of the concept, in what is currently understood as process drama, has not been undertaken until now and in this thesis. For this reason alone this is important work, for the author has systematically and painstakingly uncovered the key thinkers and ideas which have shaped our understandings of the term. To do this the author has comprehensively and impressively canvassed the work of leading philosophers, art and literary theorists, artists and theatre makers to present a detailed and entirely convincing account of the lineage of this notion called distancing”.

Professor Brad Haseman,
Assistant Dean (Research)
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This PDF contains the abstract and the Table of contents of the book. The full text, 317 pages in PDF-format, can be downloaded from the author’s home page:

https://drama.no/publikasjoner---publications.html

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ISBN 978-952-12-2314-3
Oy Arkmedia Ab
Vasa 2009
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In 2003 in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Eriksson was awarded the international prize Grozdanin Kikot for his contribution to the building of IDEA, and especially for his work in establishing the IDEA solidarity fund.

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Anyone making a profound study of Brueghel's pictorial contrasts must realize that he deals in contradictions. In The Fall of Icarus the catastrophe breaks into the idyll in such a way that it is clearly set apart from it and valuable insights into the idyll can be gained. He doesn’t allow the catastrophe to alter the idyll; the latter remains unaltered and survives undestroyed, merely disturbed. // The Fall of Icarus. Tiny scale of this legendary event (you have to hunt for the victim).


The painting Landscape with the Fall of Icarus (c. 1558) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder is owned by: The Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels.

Cover: Tove Ahlbäck
Abstract
The study is an investigation of distancing as an arts education concept, focussing particularly on its relevance in drama education. The study takes an interest in understanding distancing as an aesthetic principle - its ontological aspect, and its application as a poetic and didactic device in drama pedagogy - its epistemological aspect. It finds that distancing represents a significant perspective in the didactics of drama education and that distancing constitutes an important meaning making factor in drama pedagogy.

The study explores distancing in a historical and a present-day perspective. It has a particular focus on uses of distancing in the work of two leading representatives of educational drama/theatre: Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and Dorothy Heathcote (1926 - ). Examples are taken from Brecht’s learning play theory, mainly his Lehrstück: The Measures Taken (1929-30), and from Heathcote’s drama pedagogy, mainly her process drama: Teaching Political Awareness through Drama (1981-82). The study looks at relevant points of contact regarding uses of distancing in Brecht’s and Heathcote’s theory and practice. An example of distancing applied in the researcher’s own practice is also discussed in the study.

The theory base includes theory and practice reflections by Brecht and Heathcote, supplied by German learning-play theory and Nordic and Anglo-American drama education theory. The study also builds on Edward Bullough’s analysis of distance as an aesthetic principle in art (1912) – and Daphna Ben Chaim’s discussion of distance in theatre (1984). Bullough’s and Ben Chaim’s theory contribute to a generic, ontological understanding of the distance concept. The theory base for the concept of distancing also comprises formalist theory connected to Viktor Shklovsky’s estrangement concept ostranenie (1916), and epic theatre theory connected to Brecht’s estrangement concept Verfremdung (1935). Supplied with rhetoric theory these theoretical strands are applied to discuss distancing as a central topos in the didactics of process drama.

The investigation is basically a combination of compilation study and monograph. Aspects of distance/distancing are identified and analysed in an accompanying text, and through five articles published in the period 2006 – 2008, in relation to theory as well as to exemplary practice. The study is primarily hermeneutic and has been developed through a variety of research approaches. Concept analysis, comparative literature study, close reading of “text”, and analysis of practice based on notes, video transcripts or published accounts, constitute main ingredients in the research study.

It is an intention of the study to contribute to the theory of drama education, and the development of the didactics in the field. The study has been conducted in connection with Project Arts Didactics (2004 – 2008) – a research project sponsored by Bergen University College and the Research Council of Norway (FORSKPRO-ID p05000252). The study is also supported by funding from Åbo Academy University, and is a research project within Arts Education and Learning at the Faculty of Education, Åbo Academy University (Project Language and Communication in Times of Tension).

Keywords: Distancing theory, Verfremdung, ostranenie, estrangement, alienation, drama education, drama pedagogy, arts didactics, Lehrstück, process drama, Brecht, Heathcote, Shklovsky.
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