

DOROTHY HEATHCOTE

Interviewed by

DAVID DAVIS

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D.D. Many teachers the world over know of your work through Betty Jane Wagner's book Drama as a Learning Medium and the film Three Looms Waiting. It's such a well-made 'inspirational' film that it serves as a first-class vehicle to 'sell' drama in education, if that's the right word. However, your teaching would appear to have changed radically over the last ten years or so, at least to the observer who compares your teaching in Three Looms Waiting with the NATD video, for example, where you work on the 'watershed theme', and the purpose of this interview is to try to give people some measure of the changes you've made, if you agree you've made any, in your teaching. My role will be to ask naive questions, if I may, to try to focus on any changes of emphasis in your work, and perhaps I can start by asking some questions from the viewpoint of someone, a young teacher, who has been inspired by Three Looms Waiting, and has just seen the NATD video, and who feels very disappointed, having expected 'gut-level drama' and now isn't sure if what she's seen is drama at all. Perhaps I can ask the questions she asks you in an imagined conversation with you after the session?

D.H. Yes, that's a good idea.

D.D. She might want to say to you: "That didn't seem to be drama at all, Dorothy."

D.H. Well, I think first you've got to realise that Three Looms Waiting is a 50 minute movie from 82 hours of film. If you saw all that film and got the process which you have in the 'watershed' video, you would have seen the same things but the movie shows very little of that.

D.D. Not to be put off, she might answer: "The children hardly moved, they just stood around and occasionally made marks on papers."

D.H. Yes, yes, and I suppose I'd have to say to her, "Well, let's watch this together and I'll stop it every time I think they moved in their heads into a position of now-time. The moment they begin to move in what looks more like drama, it will be because there has been a journey of the mind that has moved them from looking at something that 'over there, that's an interesting notion' to 'this matters a bit more', to 'we've got some common images, we've got a common background and we're beginning to find we can't resist living there'. So I could show you, or her, if we could look together, every step from 'over-there' thinking to 'now-I-am-engaged' thinking, and I could show you every word that is about 'we', and I could show you every adaption of my mind to agree to every input they gave me.

D.D. What she wants to come in with is: "The children didn't seem to have any 'gut-level' experiencing. No strong feelings of any sort, in fact"

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That's what she's spent her time trying to promote since she saw your film.

D.H. Of course, yes, I have every sympathy with her doomed considerations.

I always knew, without realising it, that if you have to deal with a situation, at the point of dealing with it you don't reflect on it. My first question to students when I was 19 was a reflective one, and in a way I ask the same question all the time. So I always did ask a reflective question, but now I'm surer about how to move in the mind, so that when the 'moving within the action', as you might say, does occur, it's greatly filled with 'that from which to draw'. I believe in what Douglas Barnes says — if you want children to make an arrival in their understanding, you've got to have a journey — and I don't think the action journey creates the kind of arrival I want. What you'd have to take on faith and what that young lady would have to take on faith is that I have always understood this.

I don't know who said it, and I can't do it as elegantly as the original — "At the time of enormous action" — let's get this right — "At the time of an amazing experience, perception takes the place of imagination."

D.D. *I think the quotation is, "In the face of an extraordinary happening, perception takes the place of imagination."*

D.H. That's right, and I want perception.

D.D. *When I first heard you use this quotation, a couple of years ago, what I understood it to mean for you was that if you have an extraordinary living through experience, the reflective mode cannot be there because you are over-awed by the strength of the actuality, the direct perception. If you go to see an accident by the roadside, the accident flows into you and the reflective mode is cut out.*

D.H. But I don't think that's the moment that gives you the **perception**; that's the moment that gives you the **experience**. If you take perception to mean the action of handling the situation, that is not what I'm meaning by it; I'm seeing it as a **moment of realisation** rather than a moment of action. I see it as being: — as this is happening, I'm actually dealing with it and I'm **seeing** what I want to deal with. It seems to me that immediately after that, if any meaning can happen at all, the perception at that point then creates imagination after itself.

I'll take a very crude situation. When we were robbed here, I wasn't at home and therefore don't know who was in the house at all and it has never bothered me who they were. I just think: — now, where did they stand? how did they look? what were they doing? I've got all this imagination, and then I get filled with horror because I have a feeling my

daughter, Marianne, interrupted them. "Thank God they ran out of the back as she came in at the front." My imagination about that horrifies me, about what might have happened to her. She'd got a free period, you see, and she'd come home early and I think by the way the house was left that she walked in on them.

Now you see, she came in on **the moment of perception**. She described to me exactly what she did. Now her's never has been imaginative. She refuses to accept there was anything extraordinary about what she did. She walked in, she walked past the dining room table and said to herself, "May's left that table in a mess," and then she saw the drawers open and she said, "We've been robbed," and she walked straight back to the phone and telephoned the police, who said, "Get out of the house," and she was so insulted by the way she was being talked to — the policewoman said to her, "Don't argue with me, get out of the house." Now, it seems to me my imagination can function on that because I wasn't there and it fills me with horror, but the moment that Marianne dealt with it, her's was to do with the perception of that situation that she was not going to tolerate. She was never afraid and that sort of explains to me the difference.

D.D. *I think I did get it right. It seems to me the importance of that quotation for you in relation to drama was that if you do 'living-through, gut-level' drama you cut out the imaginative mode, the reflective mode, because you're just dominated by an actuality.*

D.H. You are dominated in drama, not in life, by the need to have an expression of that which you are supposed to be understanding. That's quite different from when you walk in on the real thing in your life, so the child... Look, I watched some children yesterday in a mosque, not in a real mosque, and they were supposed to be living in Java, and it was a serious Oxfam piece of work.

The children were rice gathering and they were trying to become Javanese peasants, and they were working as well as they could. They were a nice, good natured class, top juniors, intelligent, good social health and they were carrying obediently, because that was the task set them — to carry rice to places within the mosque because there was to be a 10% amount of rice to be placed at the service of their Festival, as they had always done. So you've got this amazing cultural thing of acceptance — this is our mosque which we know like the back of our hands, and so on. So, they've got all that which in an anthropologist's account would come out as thick description. So when a man took rice in his hands in Java, if an anthropologist were seeing it he could describe about 20 layers of significance when that man puts his hand in a rice bag. So here are

these children doing this and they have before them a very carefully constructed image, which they've been discussing, of the way the hands work within the prayer, that first they are raised, and then they are placed together, and then, I can't remember exactly, and then there is the down and the up and the head sideways. The children knew that and they cared about it. They cared about it because it was an interesting lesson for them. But the struggle to carry all that through the expression of their bodies was too much.

So you end up with, "I'll bustle along looking like I'm carrying rice and then I'll go to the mosque, and then I'll put my arms up and I'll clap and then I can't help but feel an idiot, so I giggle a bit." They don't mean to, knowing that this is somebody's Faith they're dealing with, but they can't handle it because they are not living the life they understand. Marianne was when she interrupted the robbers and went to phone the police. Those children were asked to live forward in their Java culture because the Oxfam material was of very great significance, especially with regard to how help can sometimes hurt, which is what Oxfam was trying to help them to understand. **The children couldn't perceive anything, because their energetic thought and their good nature was entirely taken up with behaving not being. Marianne was being and dealing with.** The loss was important, she was angry. She didn't have to simulate anything, she didn't have to demonstrate anything. She just was, but they had been asked to — I mean this what drama is about — they had been asked to set aside their own thick culture, and place themselves in another culture that demands the expression of equal thickness. How can they?

Now if you go back, if our young teacher will go back to my 'watershed' video, what was I doing except **building the possibility of thickness?** "My eyes know these hills, they are already familiar — so that if a teacher says, 'See yonder, see yonder,' the image I've spent an hour in has a chance to be, there behind my eyes in the distance." That's where my energy as a teacher goes — in building the possibility of thickness. It has always gone there — because if you say, "You're captain of a ship, what would you look for in your men?", as I did many years ago, it's only another landscape.

Of course I am increasingly angry, not at people not understanding, because it is so bloody complicated. I'm not angry that teachers have problems in learning to study this, because how the heck do you teach it yet? Maybe we have to do anthropology courses with drama teachers. Well, I think that is true. But I am angry that the children, to whom it is made to occur, think they have been doing drama! I am angry because I don't know what to say to them, without destroying what they've done. I don't want to do that. I don't know how to say, "Give it more time

before you decide this is drama." But I can't say that because it's been their drama lesson of the week.

D.D. *Our young teacher comes in at this point, and starts asking you: "Dorothy, it takes so long to prepare, do you ever get to the play?"*

D.H. I would say **you are always in the play whenever the mind's image begins to affect how you're feeling about what's going on here.** And that needn't be 'the drama bit', you might just be enjoying it, and it is filled with what the Hopi Indians call 'a round of expectancy'. This is going to be about something that matters. "So you see, **to me the play is not the action, the play is when we're starting to have that point of view, that frame of mind, that starts to find it important.**" So I watch for where it begins inside the children. I think you can see it by the way they write their names on the paper in the 'watershed' video.

I can give you an example from this week. I walk into a class and the teacher says, "We've got a mining village here," and the children are in their normal classroom. They're getting on together nicely and producing what I would call kitchen sink arguments about, 'eat your corn flakes' and 'shut up' and 'do this' and 'do that'. It's fine, they're thoroughly enjoying themselves, and they run through what you might call their scene; and their scene is really that they're just having a breakfast. In their minds they've got a feeling they're a mining family but they can't express that yet, because in fact these children are not now living in such families as those of 50 years ago. And they say, "we don't know what to do next". So I say, "Do you know the interesting thing about your breakfast was, I thought: well who am I that I could see in every house like that? And I thought: is there a clock in your village?" They looked at one another, because there isn't, they'd moved it, they'd pulled it down and they've made concrete, Woolworth's, and that. They say, "No, I don't think so," so I say, "Well, if I had been a clock, I thought my face could see all your breakfast tables because you all mentioned the time and I find myself thinking, if I were a clock, I'd be pleased everybody looked at me for the time, and I'd be real glad I could see in your kitchens," and they went, "Whoo, nice," you know. So I said, "Come over by the blackboard and we'll see the angle the clock sees." So I drew a round face on the blackboard. Now this is what I'm talking about, how to make it be **about** something.

I draw the clock and that's the only contribution I made, and it's just like the mountains on the paper in the watershed video. I can't put the hands over my (the clock's) face because I don't know what time it is. I don't see my time. We had this long discussion about what is the optimum time for breakfast and they go between 6 in the morning, 4 in

the morning, miners don't do this, yes, yes, they do, and it comes out 8 o'clock, when middle school children get up and go to school, so we get a sense of where we are. So 8 o'clock gets put on the clock and they elaborated place. The name of the first road was Pit Road, and then the pit wheel came in, then we got a Victorian town hall, which I have nothing to do with. All I kept saying was, "Put it in." And there's an archway, "Put it in." And there's an 'our house' — he drew a thing like something out of the Russian Empire, you know, but it was in that pit village, so it sticks there. And there's other little houses, there's leeks growing, and they build this whole image, and then I say, "Well, where is the clock?"

Now it took 20 minutes to put the village on that board. They said "Stand on Mr Korbick's desk," so I stand on Mr Korbick's desk and they look up and I say, "When the time says '8' on the hands of the clock, what sees the clock?" and they began.

So you see, they've had their hour's lesson and they're going, "Are you coming back? Can we go on with it? I've just thought, it could be all stables at the back there," and the teacher says, "What the hell have you done?" and I say, "I just drew a clock."

But, actually, what you've done, of course, is **you've created a thing that helped it matter**, so, instead of just doing breakfast, they know breakfast is in the round of expectancy, because they are referring to the clock. Nobody knows what sense the clock is about, it's just that we are watched by the clock and we watch the clock, that's the only difference I can see that's happened.

D.D. *To use a phrase I know you've used often in recent years, would you be working there at the 'bonding' of the people in that community?*

D.H. No. I haven't got anywhere near there. They can only work at their bonding, I'm not going to interfere with these families. But I have given them a chance to get at bonding. I say, "What does the clock see? You can stop whenever you want to see what the clock sees and the clock will tell you." So, of course, they are in charge of when they stop, and they say, "Stop, what does the clock see?" The clock can only say what an unfeeling object can say, which can give them very rich theatre feedback — like, "the clock sees one who sits tall and proud" — because you can upgrade all the kids, and the fact that they hadn't said anything or paid attention yet much to anybody else doesn't matter, it looks like he's tall and proud. The thing has a chance to become about bonding, because you said, "One who sits as though he were tall and proud." Now, when we stop, I say, "I don't know whether you were tall and proud, but if you were, maybe other people would know about that and there must be a reason why that tall, proud person, if you were, was having his breakfast

there with his white beard" — because they'd said a white beard. I can't explain it firmly enough that **what looks like interference with their play is interference with how the structure can be shown to them**. Their play must go the way they are emotionally ready for it to go. What I don't let them have a hand in is the deep structure of it, that's about the possibility of bonding. Some children I talk about it with, I mean, I actually said, "Every family is like all bondings, aren't they? — who's thinking this about who?" (Because they start with thinking not feeling.)" And in the long run, everybody knows where they all belong, and who they belong to, and why they want to stay that way and so on." So in that sense, one is de-mystified and the clock can see that, though it cannot understand it.

D.D. *At this point, the young teacher has been dying to get in.*

D.H. You must get that young teacher to interrupt me.

D.D. *She's sort of, she's almost been working out a quotation. In her teaching she works by this quotation, because this is the most important thing that she feel she's supposed to be doing in her teaching, and she doesn't see you doing this at all, so she wants to ask you about it and she says to you: "Listening to your description of the 'clock' lesson and so on, isn't it important in educational drama to build belief and live through a moment of heightened significance when the art form has focused meaning through a symbolisation process?"*

D.H. I'm afraid I don't know what she's on about.

D.D. *She says she got it from Betty J. Wagner's book.*

D.H. I didn't write that and, no disrespect to BJ, I've never bothered to read it.

D.D. *But this teacher has read it as an exposition of your work and in the foreword you give your blessing to it.*

D.H. Of course, because I give my blessing to BJ.

D.D. *So people take it as that's what it's about.*

D.H. Yes, that's right.

D.D. *So, she's working in this way.*

D.H. BJ said it. If you say it again to me, I'll try and unwrite it!

D.D. *I'm not sure if anybody said it! But it's the sort of formulation that might be created somewhere if you amalgamated the things that have been said about you. This is her creed: 'Isn't it important in educational drama to build the belief and live through a moment of heightened significance where the art form has focused meaning through a symbolisation process?'*

D.H. Yes, and I would agree with her. Yes, it is. And I would say there's

nothing I've said that isn't about that, but moments of significance don't come like, you know, blasts from Heaven, or the Angel Gabriel. They come from a slow build-up, like dust in a sunbeam. You've got to **build them** and they don't arrive at you in a sudden clap of thunder like, "I've just had a moment of significance!"

D.D. In *Three Looms Waiting* what the young teacher saw and what she could recognise were the keys that symbolised all the meanings of that play. She could see dramatic action clearly focused: "Hans, where are the keys?" There's the living through moment that you no longer seem to have now and it no longer seems to 'look like a play'.

D.H. "Hans, where are the keys?" was built from two days of relating with that boy. That boy has sat as a prisoner of war for a day. He's composed letters from home that he'll give to somebody else; he'll receive somebody else's. He wasn't even a German Officer until that morning, and the reason he knows how to be a German Officer is, he spent a whole day **not** being a German Officer and having empty tin plates put down — not being treated in the drama as an object but discussing how he believes the German Officer would treat him as an object and the having done to him what he said. So, when we came to need a German Officer that boy said, "I think I know what he'd do," and so they set up the stool pigeon. So it's the 'prisonership' of it, that has not been built up through a 'drama prisonership', it's been built up through three minutes saying, "I don't know where I sit in a hut like this. Tell you what, let's see if we can get a sense of...let's try just all standing in our own doorway and thinking 'I'm going to pick that spot', and we'll see why you pick it." So if you film 'I'm going to pick that spot', it wouldn't look like drama, it would look like Dorothy Heathcote talking to some lads, and then you'd have about three seconds when they stand in doorways, and decide on picking a spot and that would look like the drama. Then we'd stop again and say, "I've just realised I've picked my spot and I don't know the fellow on my left. So I'll tell you what, I'll sit here in the middle and you look at me as if you've never seen me before." So you see, we get all that chat, then we get two minutes and it 'looks good':— Mrs Heathcote saying, "What does a soldier think?" and the boy says it, because the structure is so that he cannot fail, because he knows the end in view, the **realm of expectancy**. He doesn't know **how** it will come out but he can foresee it **will** come out, because the realm of expectancy at that moment is, "I only need talk for as long as I want." And all that you see is there, so your young teacher is asking for something I can't show her.

D.D. It sounds like your answer to her is effectively that your work

hasn't changed qualitatively at all, it's just deepened. You've gone on deepening.

D.H. Well, I think it's got more stubborn, let's put it that way. I don't think it's any deeper, because deepness is according to how you can strike chords in your pupils; their's is the depth, mine is just more, I think maybe more expressed.

D.D. I was thinking of just asking a question myself. What I noticed in your work was that maybe 10 years ago when I've seen you teaching, you were continually saying, "Don't destroy your work. Don't laugh," and you seem to be recognising now that there were too many stages being jumped. You've got to work more slowly to give more chance to build on this, so all the devices you've invented and been working at are to enable them to begin to build significance...

D.H. But you see, you'd still say directly, "Why are you destroying your work?" I'm more able, I suppose, to choose the moment more subtly when to say that. I say it much more directly now than I ever did, but I'm more clever at avoiding them laughing. Alongside this of course goes a very important factor — that I am too old, no, old isn't the word, I don't mean I'm too old. The condition I'm in with myself at this point is that I know it's not for me now to move into the area that I think if I were starting again, knowing something of what I know, I would move much more towards:— what we might call the politics of social living. So of course, because I'm aware of that, I am pushing like I know the end is soon, that somehow into each situation I do with children I have a sense of urgency that an awareness of the value of Doris Lessing's '**substance of we feeling**' is so fundamental, it **has** to be got in if possible. It's not going to be me that carries that forward, and I would dearly like it to be carried forward, because I think if we do have an art form that is concerned with bondings, and if we have an art form with all the amazing range from Java puppets to Bayreuth opera forms, with all that it does seem a shame that it stays a 'little play making'. Because, I've always been looking at the community sense, although of course, I didn't know to call it that. So "If you were captain of a ship, what qualities would you look for in men?" is a question about anthropology and community. You see, I don't really care much about the individual psychological aspects of drama. In the form of schooling we have, I think bonding is a much more important thing to pay attention to. Not because I neglect the child as a person, because I do protect individual children all the time, but my big concern is to protect them into a sense of social considerations. So, I really do look forward. If I could be a fly on the wall for the next 50 years, to see in fact how social uses of drama would develop.

D.D. *So it sounds as if you would say that people who are seeing something very different in your work now, are not understanding what they're seeing; that you've really continued working at the same avenue; there's not a difference in quality, there's not a shift?*

D.H. No. I think the difference is in how I can explain it and the stubbornness in sticking to it. But **why** are you saying people **SEE** my work's any different?

D.D. *Because new things seem to have come in like depictions, use of diagrams, the stress on image-making. You used to stand up and quickly take on a role and do the image-making through the role, or have teachers in role working with you, and so on.*

D.H. Yes, well, I'd go along with that in that it would **appear** to be different. It's just that in my mind I'm in the same place. My mind processes seem to be going on just like they always did, you see, but can explain some bits more. I believe what I said when I did that paper about Gavin — which may seem rather harsh in some ways but it is actually a eulogy — I do generally burrow about like a mole in a hole, stumbling upon realizations. I do genuinely feel I lack the capacity to intellectually take the overview. I genuinely do not have it and I don't want it. I mean, I feel I'd be a better teacher of my students if I had it but I don't want to drop what I do have, because I think what I have is a very important thing to work from. But the other you see I can't do, so when I do discover something I naturally then try and use it but I don't always explain it very well.

D.D. *It would be like the artist trying to be an art critic?*

D.H. Yes, that's right, but I do get mad with myself...

D.D. *Dorothy, so far you've given your response to my attempts to represent how teachers commonly see your work as having changed. Now, I'd like, at the risk of 'making you mad', to ask: what do **you** see as the major developments in your ways of using drama with children?*

D.H. I think one of the most important things was the discovery, the conscious discovery that **episodes** are what I've always wanted to get, and now I can name it like that, it's given me a more film-like technique of throwing order about, a very supreme confidence in destroying the natural literary order of events, and hurling them about almost like a washing machine, knowing they can start **anywhere**. Seven years ago when I drew a diagram on a blackboard, I first came onto that thing of: "If I was there at the event, and I tell of it, how does it happen to me now? What would the drama be if I were in the telling of it?" That first hesitant diagram has of course come out as 34 conventions now. Yes, that was a very major shift for me — in points of starting.

Another one was the awareness that **sequencing** is desperately important in terms of building up to a 'thick' sense. It was a long time ago, where a group of young children in Australia wanted to be afraid. They were guarding against Grendel coming. And I realise then suddenly that fear has many components — not that there are many expressions of fear. Fear is built up inch by inch.

Now the pleasure for me is helping children build it inch by inch. Now, if anybody asks me — "Why should you make children go for that 'thick description'?" I haven't got an answer, a logical answer, except: **if theatre is anything to anybody, it is thick description, and if theatre is to be used for perception, perception will only come through thick description, this laid upon that, provided that slow incrementing of one experience on another is filled with — filled with joy.**

Of course I'm the first to admit I might be living in a fool's paradise, thinking children do get that kind of pleasure in working with me. I could be quite wrong and yet I don't think I am — they don't have to like me to enjoy the drama, I'm not talking about liking me. If you can get that first enchantment — because I think kids have a way of spotting the right things that are happening.

I've got a teacher doing a Ph.D. at the moment, who is talking to children after they've been doing drama. She'll take about half a dozen children, and it's amazing how accurate they are at perceiving the moments of a situation, for example, I was in a junior school — I'd been going in regularly, and I'm not doing the teaching. All I do is occasionally come in as a visiting abbot, because the great Bible has to be got to Rome.

One boy was selected by the class teacher as someone who hardly spoke during drama sessions. She wasn't even sure if he would talk to my researcher. Each time I go in the boy is one of the people I work with. He looks after the monastery's swans, and collects their feathers for the pens, you see. It's amazing how perceptive that lad is.

Being a visiting abbot, I'm naturally nervous of swans and don't know much. He and I walk out of the school and onto a tatty bit of grass outside, where there's this fine array of swans. Now I didn't invent any of those swans. All I did was say the first day, "Tell me, my son, is the book really going as well as it appears to be?" He looked at me and he said, "Well the swans are giving enough feathers." "Good, good. And the feathers are of fine quality?" "Yes." Then he gives me all this information he's got about making quill pens. And I ask, "Is yonder swan well?" And gradually we stop all this I'm-giving-you-some-historical-information-bit and he begins to say things like, "That one's called Princess, and this one over here I have a bit of trouble with." So gradually he's got this great

swannery, through five minutes each time, when we take our little walk round this tatty bit of grass!

When he talks to the research student he makes it very clear that what matters to him about the monastery is his swannery. And yet his sense of what's going on in the monastery as a whole is very clear. He'll say, "When Brother Yeovil had that problem with the horse's hoof..." and he hasn't been anywhere near that thing that's been going on with the horse. Or, "There was a terrible do today." And the boy's apparently paid no attention! **He's been apparently not doing drama, sat in a corner sharpening feathers up. But if your young teacher (or anyone else) finds him to be a 'non-participant' she'd be bloody wrong! Because behind his eyes there's Jarrow monastery!** Whether it's historically accurate or not I don't know because I've never said to him, "Draw me your monastery, draw me your swannery," because I know that would destroy it. I'd never ask. You don't need to ask the swanherd to draw his swans, because he knows, "That one's Princess."

Last time I asked, "Is Princess well?" "She's got a mate," he said. And a bit later, "She'll be laying her eggs soon. That's the nest over there." We're actually looking at the school's pig bins, but he sees Princess and I see Princess. That's what I'm after!

D.D. *It sounded there like you were talking about 'mantle of the expert'. That surely has been an important development in your work?*

D.H. Yes, mantle of the expert of course simply bears out in a conscious way my inclination as a teacher to be in that situation where the class and I are colleagues — to be in that marvellous world where everyone cares about what they are doing, and they like each other. That's the dream of all teachers, isn't it? And occasionally they get it, they have it. It's very skilful. I can't teach it very well yet. In action I never make mistakes on it, but in teaching about it I take for granted knowledge I haven't realised I've got. **Children in mantle of the expert must never actually do the job that will show them they're not expert.** That's why I'll never ask him to draw 'Princess'. If you're working in the drama with leather, you never actually take a piece of leather and put a stitch in it with a real needle. As soon as they are given the tools their expertise goes and they become amateurs, so you won't get that amazing maturation.

D.D. *An important feature of mantle of the expert is the energising of learning that comes from reversing the usual situation in schools whereby children know nothing and teachers tell them. Here, suddenly the teacher is saying, "Tell me about these swans..."*

D.H. Yes, yes, but the teacher in mantle of the expert isn't only doing that. The teacher is also giving information through the way he asks the

question. If I say to our little swanherd, as I did, "I find as an emissary of the Pope there are so many things I don't understand, for example, there must be males and females here. And surely your eyes an at a glance see this even at dusk?" And I offer this complicated thing, and he says, "Yeah. That's the females, you can always tell the females." "Ah, I see now, you can always tell the females." And at this point he realises he doesn't know how to explain it, he doesn't know why, so I'm saying, "Ah, you can always tell the females! I knew you would. I said to myself, as a swanherd..." and I'm filling this gap. Then he says, "The females are always sitting down." "Of course!" "They sit on the eggs." And that's enough for now.

Now, you see, at that stage, I touch him on the shoulder and say, "I wonder if you can tell the difference between males and females? How did these swanherds know? And he says, "I don't know, miss." So I say, "I'm going to look it up, are you?" And he says, "Aye." And he does.

Next time, he doesn't talk about males and females. He says, "Will you come down? I've got something to show you." So I go down, and he says, "You see them over there — they're a bit brownish." And I say, "Yes, I didn't know some of your swans were brown, I didn't notice." He said, "Those are the bigger cygnets." "Ah, the almost grown-up cygnets." "Yes," he said, "they'll be white next year."

D.D. *It blossoms, doesn't it?*

D.H. Oh, it's marvellous. He described to the student doing the questioning how he was felled by a swan once after the Abbot had visited. He'd been a bit careless because he'd been pondering on this book and he'd been felled by a swan. It didn't really hurt him, but the shame of it, that he, the swanherd... Now the kid is **eight years old!** So that really is what I'm after.

D.D. *Earlier you were using the term 'episodes'. That sounds Brechtian.*

D.H. I've always liked the notion of Brecht — I've never read him and I've never seen him, not in what I'd call a real Brechtian production — but always, even as a kid, I liked the notion of "that which shall stand for this" — not the book that looks like the book, but this that shall stand for it. I love that. I get great pleasure out of it, because I play, you know, I think that is **deep play** — that I can see what I'm making it out of. I love that.

I want children to see what they're doing. So you see, our little swanherd, I can touch him on the shoulder and say, speaking as Dorothy Heathcote, "You are a remarkable swanherd."

You know, you talk about Brecht being episodic, but Shakespeare is. All the time you have a minute episode which fulfils itself and the next

episode then begins. Hamlet has to drag Polonius' body out and chuck it — wherever he puts it — and has to tell somebody in another episode, when it's appropriate, two weeks later or whenever, 'cos it's smelling. **The theatre has to be in episodic form** — the theatre is not narrative. All dramatic art is episodic, so you **have to work that way with children**.

And as soon as I got the realisation of that, and started this whirling about process of 'washing-machine', it allowed me to boldly deal with the episode and cut out all this living forward at 'life-rate'. That's the one phrase I've written I'm ashamed of. What I was trying to say then with 'life-rate' is not what I understand 'life-rate' to be now. 'Life-rate' reads wrong because it suggests time sequence. Of course I didn't mean time sequence when I wrote it, but I didn't know how to say it. I've always known you didn't live at life-rate. If you look at B.J. Wagner's account of the ship, 'The Dreamer' — she goes into that I think quite a bit — it's there, 11, 12, 13 years ago: 'The Dreamer' was not lived at life-rate. It was all episodic.

And the conventions of course have had to come about, because it is the convention that makes each episode possible to be, to create experience in the way that is needed for it to be understood. **So you need your convention so that children can understand the experience.**

D.D. *Another shift in your work seems to be that now you are always looking for a distancing mode...*

D.H. Yes, but some distancing modes look more Brechtian than others. When I walk with my little swanherd you'd say there was no distancing mode, because I'm an abbot talking to a swanherd, and it looks like we're both in the play. **But the abbot IS the distancing mode.** It is the abbot's ability to not know that creates the swanherd's possibilities of knowing, so I am the distancing mode there. **So conventions are every kind of encounter including that very naturalistic one.**

One of the marvels of conventions is the range of learning possibility it offers children, because each linguistic form used or demanded offers another kind of experience. If I say to my little swanherd, "These swans, they have been here before the monastery?" "Oh, there have been swans here for years and years. There were swans here before any stones were built." And he's there, you see, with that anecdotal sense, telling me about the swans. But if I switch to, "Does the swan see the stones?"

Now I reckon that's why I'm paid. To do that, and not throw the kid.

D.D. *Can I just try to sum it up? My starting point was really when you said to me a few months ago, "I've not changed." Looking through other people's eyes I could see you doing very different sort of work. It seems to me that your work has developed, perhaps not in terms of what you've*

been searching for, but in ways you've found of doing it.

D.H. Yes, that's fair enough.

D.D. *It seems that you've moved from the 'living through' to distancing as a way of bringing in both sides of the brain at once and interweaving them — because if you do just the 'living through' you get too much feeling and not enough thinking...*

D.H. **But I still must insist that you must not say that the work I did before was 'living through'.** On the old films you only see those points that look like that.

D.D. *So the children's experience in working with you still has the same quality and bounds?*

D.H. I think probably now the difference would be that I slow down more and offer a greater variety of ways of experiencing. That's where I have developed.

D.D. *The experience I had in a recent piece of drama work you led — about the witches — you remember when we looked down and we thought we were going to look at ourselves, and you switched it so that we were the people responsible for ourselves, looking at ourselves. Now that give me an experience of cool detachment and intense emotion, and it seems to me that's what you work for.*

D.H. Yes, yes, you're right. And now I'm cleverer at doing that.

D.D. *It seems to me that the fundamental thesis informing your work is that somewhere in human history we're divorced thinking and feeling, these left and right sides of the brain and you're trying to lace them back together again. Would you say that's the centre of what you do?*

D.H. Yes, I think you're quite right. It has always been there, but I haven't always known it. Now, of course, **what I still don't know is what I still have to find out.** That just about sums me up, I think.

One of the statements I find myself making all the time to myself as a planner — whether in the two seconds I've got to get 'clock-face' or in planning where I've got five hours to prepare — I keep saying: **"Remember not to forget what you've forgotten you know."** And I say it to teachers when they're trying to get their sequencing right. Most teaching is based on "I've forgotten to remember what I've forgotten I know, when I try to help children know something." That I think is a real, important centre for me. So for example, here am I sewing this, and part of me's saying: "You shouldn't put Victorian oiled silk with nylon green." In order to say that, what the hell have I forgotten I know? What a wealth of knowledge — that comes from sheep, and this comes from oil, and this comes from silkworms. And I've forgotten I know it. So you see we teach

on hollows! We just say "This is nylon, this is wool, this is silk."

It's that perception that stays innocent — the perception that can unknow without discarding the knowledge. So I can't describe the clock-face to the children, because it must be their clock-face. What I have to remember is not to forget all the aspects of 'clockness' that I must not push down their throats, which, if I forget to remember it, I will, I'll start explaining the thing.

I don't know how you'll ever get an article out of all that...

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