

PLAYING WITH BRECHT

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The experimentation developed during the twenties and thirties by Brecht has been researched in the seventies in Germany by Reiner Steinweg who was a visiting professor at the *Theater Department* of the *University of São Paulo* and finds a great interest also in Brazil.

My pedagogical practice at the University of São Paulo goes out from the *grandmother of improvisational theatre*, Viola Spolin. Spolin (Spolin, 1963) originally establishes a difference between **dramatic play** and **game**. The most important difference lies in the relation to the body. The pure fantasy, that is still characteristic in **dramatic play** is substituted in the learning process with the **Theater Game** and its conscious physical

representation. Here I must introduce the principle of **physicalization** (Spolin, 1963) that addresses an irreflected imitation - a mere copy.

The origin of **Spolin's** concept goes back to Stanislawski (Stanislawski, 1961) who spent the last years of his life dedicating to the theory of **physical actions**. The concept of **physical action** was also considered by Brecht as the most important contribution of Stanislawski for a new theater. Spolin, a Russian immigrant in the USA brought important contributions for a productive applicability of many stanislawskian concepts.

In my approach to the **Theater Game** (Koudela, 1984) I propose that the method is not an approach to the art of acting or directing. The Brazilian approach to the **Theatre Game** was developed as a learning method, to be practiced by children, young people and community theater.

THEATER GAME AS A CONSTRUCTION GAME

The piagetian concept (Piaget, 1932) of **construction games** does not classify these games as a category in the genetic evolution of the child. Piaget defines the **construction games** as instruments that develop human creativity - towards an aesthetic education and artistic praxis.

The child's expressiveness is a sensible manifestation of egocentric symbolic intelligence. The **copernic revolution** that goes on as the child transcends the egocentric conception of the world by the ego decentralized conception. Intelligence growing initiates at this point of the evolution of the process of thought reversibility. This principle of reversibility will operate the internal transformation of the child's symbol notion. Integrated with thought or abstract thinking the egocentric assimilation that still characterizes **symbolic play** is substituted by creative imagination.

Establishing a co-relation with piagetian thinking, the greatest contribution of Vigotsky (Vigotsky, 1978) lies in giving emergency to processes that are embryonary present but that are not still consolidated. The **zone of proximal development** is stimulated by **symbolic plays**

(dramatic play), by the **rule games** and by **construction games**.

In Vigotsky's perspective, the Theater **Game** is a **construction game** where the consciousness of the **magic if** is gradually developed, towards the articulation of the theater artistic language.

During educational intervention of the **Theater Game** teacher is most important as he/she will challenge the learning process of reconstruction of meaning. The **zone of proximal development** changes radically the concept of evaluation. The evaluation proposals of the **Theater Game** teacher are no more retrospective (what the pupil can do by himself) and become prospective (what the pupil will be able to be). Evaluation then will begin to be propulsive in the learning process.

The **zone of proximal development** as an evaluation principle promotes, with particular success, the construction of artistic forms. In the **Theater Game**, in the process of aesthetic form construction, the child establishes with his peers a working relation where creative imagination - the **symbolic play** - is combined

with the practice and consciousness of the game's rule that interferes in the collective artistic act. The **Theater Game** passes necessarily through the establishment of group agreement, by rules that are accepted between game partners.

DAS THEATERSPIEL

As is pointed out by Benjamin (Benjamin, 1981), the simplest approach to the *Epic Theatre* can be achieved going out from the concept of **Theaterspiel**. The examination of the **Theaterspiel** in Brecht suggests simultaneously new questions. Does the Theater Game achieve learning/teaching objectives that are specific, that belong to theater and can only be learnt in this artistic language?

In contemporary amateur theater (of workers, students and children) the liberation of the exercising hypnosis obligation can be felt in a special positive manner. It becomes possible to establish frontiers between the play of amateurs and professional actors, without quitting basic functions of the theater (Brecht, 1967).

Theater, as a distinct public manifestation form, has its own **Gestus** that can be declared (or hidden) through the confession of theater as theater. The hypnotic fields of the old theater of illusion suggest that, by the opening of the curtain, a real world of actions and passions will appear.

The capacity of complete transformation is known as characteristic of the actor's talent. If it fails, everything will be lost. It fails when children play theater and with amateur actors. Something artificial will be present in their play. The difference between theater and reality appears in a form that hurts aesthetic appraisal (Brecht, 1967).

The nature of **Gestus** is dialectic exactly because it is, simultaneously, a symbol and a physical action. That confers the status of **Gestische Sprache** (gesture language). In his poem **Theater of Aldays** (Brecht, 1967) he narrates how this process of practical thinking is organized. In the **Streetscene** (Brecht, 1967) the consequences of the theater of aldays are proposed as

proceedings for *Epic Theater*. The **Streetscene** has model character. For Brecht there is no elementary difference between **Artistic Epic Theater** and **Natural Epic Theater**.

Theater becomes the place of the philosopher (in the sense given by Brecht who studied the Chinese and Japanese culture) who reflects about historical processes in the search for action. The **Gestus** concept acts exactly on this nevralgic point or in this tension area between historical and aesthetic states. The duty of pedagogical work, in Brecht's view, is to have in mind the concrete and the abstract, in the forms of gestures that have to be operated dialectically.

Generally one attributes different significant to the **Gestus** concept in Brecht which accentuate their formal or sociologic character in spite of his origin, that is physical. The risk of these definitions is to lose the body. The gesture is of dialectic nature because it is simultaneously symbol and action (Benjamin, 1981).

THE COLLECTIVE ARTISTIC ACT

Marxist analysis in the fifties and seventies have always described the **Lehrstück** as a one way street or as a false way. In the consensus of specialists the **Lehrstück** belonged to a transition period in the thinking of Brecht that was followed, at the end of the thirties, by the mature period of *Epic Theater*. Generally the **Lehrstück** has been studied superficially, going out from artistic and political points of view held **a priori** that did not allow the access to his poetics.

As Brecht used for the first time the world **Lehrstück**, in 1929, staging **Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis**, he had created not only a dramatic typology that has different character from the **Episches Schaustück** (Epic Show Play) but had also created a kind of theater that is different from the staging in the theater edification where the theater director searches the construction of the *Epic or Dialectic Theater*, words that Brecht liked to use to define his aesthetic of theater.

In the public demonstrations with the **Lehrstück** he experienced, Brecht is not searching the show, the communication between stage and audience. *The Lehrstück*

teaches when we act in it. As a principle, there is no necessity for an audience, although it may be used (Koudela 1990).

While the privileged stage of the **Episches Schautstück** (Epic Show Play) is the **Schauspielhaus** (Showhouse, house where one shows the play), the **Lehrstück** seeks for alternative stages. The **Kollektiver Kunstakt** (collective artistic act) deals with the passive attitude of the spectator, of the consumer of art through the **Apparat** that I translate, updating, for media.

If art loses its authenticity, its aura, in a socialist society of the future, following the marxist thinking of Brecht, there should be a negation of the negation, which is realized as an act, provoking the instauration of a political ritual. The staging of this theater is conditioned by the participation of the spectator in the theater act. ***I consider necessary, for the realization of the artistic act, the active intervention of the receptor in the work of art.***

The pure theory of the **Lehrstück** does not exist anymore ... and certainly has never existed ... it is the

will of searching sensorio-physical perception to bear with the process of estrangement of gestures and attitudes what makes the brechtian pedagogic proposal singular and revolutionary again.

TEXT AND PLAY

In *TEXTO E JOGO* (Koudela, 1996), I describe my practice with Theater & Education at the **Theater Department** of the **University of São Paulo**.

The pedagogical reading of Brecht's proposal for a **Handlungsmuster** (*a model for action*) in the didactic process with the **Lehrstück** (*Learning Play*) is the basic structure for the proposals I want to expose now on a theoretical level.

Brechts Learning Play is a dramatic form written for young people and children. The sub-titles of these plays are for example **Play about dialectics for children**, in *Horacius and Curiacius* or **School Opera**, in *The Yes Sayer* and *The Not Sayer*.

The schematic structure of this dramatic typology promotes the insertion of the receptors' own contents who becomes the author/actor of the *Learning Play*.

...exactly the most arid form, the learning play creates the most emotional effects.

and

... as I did not know what to do with the old theater of identification, not even with the best will, I created the learning play (Brecht, 1967).

The dramatic structure of the **Lehrstück** permits to cut the written text with scissors. The epic character of this dramatics proposes fragmentation and rupture with linearity, through dialectic discourse, that permits the selection of parts and the work in little units. Sometimes the dramatic text can be constituted by some lines only.

In my approach the **Theater Games** helped me to introduce the sensory-physical level of the learning in the process. This way, the problematization of the text

begins by the **physicalization** (Spolin, 1963) of gestures and attitudes.

The relationship between the improvisational theater and the fixed *model for action* (poetic text) creates the semiotic process of construction of meanings through the language of poetry and gestures.

The **Kollektiver Kunstakt** (*collective artistic act*) that the **poiesis** with Brecht's model promotes, lies in the observation of the players daily life. The gesture has a beginning, a middle and an end that can be fixed. The gesture can be imitated (represented) and reconstructed (repeated). The gesture can be held in memory.

The **Stückeschreiber** (play writer) proposes two didactic instruments:

- the model for action - poetic text
- estrangement - poiesis

At the same time that the model for action is object of critical imitation in the play situation, it constitutes the unification principle of the pedagogical

process, creating liberty and diversity of responses, through the **Historisierung** (historicization), the contextualising of the model. The play writer proposes the investigation of the relationship of men between men. In this process exactly that which is usual, belonging to the daily life, must be handled as historical.

... to estrange means historicization, represent processes and people as historical, transitional (Brecht, 1967).

Representation of past events become conscious for what they are: restricted to time and transition. As they are shown, the relationship of men between men become changeable. The same way what happened in the past must be shown as transitory, present must be historicized as well. This makes the spectator gain distance from his time, seeing it with the regard of the future generation.

The didactic instruments proposed by Brecht - *model for action* and *estrangement* seek for the objective of an aesthetic-political education.

The aesthetic character of the experiment with the **Lehrstück** is a pre- supposed for the consecution of the objectives of the learning / teaching process. In opposition to an identification process (role-playing) the objective of the learning/teaching is to join the description of daily life to the evocation of history.

The *estrangement*, understood as a didactic-pedagogical proceeding, searches knowledge by the aesthetic form of the poetic text.

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