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Mirror, dynamo or lens? Drama, children and social change

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This essay builds on a series of bullet points which I prepared as the basis for my contribution to the Seamus Heaney Lecture Series. I have never been comfortable with the idea of speech where this means reading out a 'finished' lecture. For me, this oral recitation of a given and closed text short circuits the essential 'liveness' of a shared public event. It asks an audience to listen to what they could read for themselves and at their leisure in some other context. It is an important feature of my own work as a drama practitioner that when people come together for the purposes of making theatre there should be some room for improvisation and dialogue, for responding to the here and now, for serendipitous happenings that could not have been planned for in advance or even repeated again. For this reason I wanted to give a 'talk' rather than a lecture.

As it was the 'unexpected' drama of the event nearly unseated me and threatened to leave me without even the small props I had prepared in order to build my talk in action. I stood at the lectern and realised with horror that the notes I had so carefully placed earlier were missing! I asked again and again where my notes were. The audience laughed imagining that this was some playful ruse. This call and no response went on for some minutes and I was in total panic now. And then a soft voice came from the audience "Oh, I think I might have taken your notes". It was Mr. Seamus Heaney himself who had just introduced the lecture without the need for any notes, but in leaving the lectern had, perhaps by force of habit, collected all the papers including my own and returned to his seat.

So this is the remains of the speech that Seamus Heaney stole from me!

In this talk I will outline a collection of metaphors in search of an idea that can express theatre's potential as a form of social pedagogy and socialisation both for young people of school age and also for its other audiences and makers. In talking of a pedagogy of theatre I will borrow from the late John McGrath's use of the term a 'learning paedia' which he succinctly distils into two main features:

Accuracy – the audience must recognise and accept the emotional and social veracity of what is happening on stage, must identify with the core situation, whatever style may be used to present it.

Relevance – the core situation must reflect the central, most profound realities of its time, must speak to its audiences about a truth that matters in their lives, whether social, moral, political, emotional or individual I (McGrath 2002, p. 138)

To these features of truthfulness and relevance he adds the core principle that theatre should use all possible means to reach every citizen and not act as 'an excluding agency, whether by the price of its tickets, the manner of its box office staff, its location or its impenetrability' (ibid. p.139).

To this idea of an inclusive 'paedia' in theatre I want to add at the outset a further pre-condition for a pro-social theatre which is captured most fully by the idea of 'ensemble' which is given fuller treatment at the close of this discussion on metaphors. For now, Mihail Stronin, dramaturge of the Maly St Petersburg Theatre, provides us with a succinct description of the ensemble as 'one body with many heads, but many heads working in the same direction'. This desire to create pro-social theatre through collaboration, co-artistry and sophisticated uses of social intelligence forms the matrix for the discussion of metaphors.

Theatre as mirror; using God's scissors

This search for a meaningful metaphor for a pedagogic theatre is of course prompted by the use of the most well known – *Mirror up to Nature* - as title for this lecture series which is also subtitled as Drama in the Modern World. The metaphor of theatre as mirror offers a particular take on the ideas of accuracy and relevance, which is that theatre 'merely' reflects ourselves to ourselves. There is a suggestion that the life likeness of a mirrored reflection is a guarantee of its accuracy, authenticity and 'naturalness'.

Speak the speech, I pray you as I pronounced it to you – trippingly on the tongue.... Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observation: that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own age, and the very body of the time his form and pressure (from: Hamlet 111/ii 1-45)

What Hamlet asks of the players is to tell his story as if it was the only story in town. It is a monologic, representative and authored account of the 'truth' of his father's death. He demands that the players adopt what would become known as a 'naturalistic' style of performance without any exaggerated or 'unreal' gestures. In Hamlet's mind the 'truth' of events will be confirmed by the 'realism' of the playing. The more life-like the actions, the more convincing the argument of his story. Hamlet imagines that by stripping away all that is artificial in the players performance they will appear to be more authentic; more true to life. And this criterion of authenticity and 'life-likeness' is still key to our aesthetic judgments of theatre.

In encouraging his actors, Hamlet makes a qualitative distinction between a 'realistic' performance for the educated courtiers and the 'dumb shows and noise' associated with the 'unskillful' and the 'groundlings'. We have here the beginnings of a tradition of a serious literary theatre, exclusive to certain classes, which distances itself both from the profane tastes and preferences of the lower orders and also from their world view. To the idea that theatrical naturalism is closer to the truth than other forms of representation is now added the political idea that the 'mirror' belongs to an educated elite with the sensibility to discern the 'accuracy' and 'relevance' in a performance of scientific verisimilitude.

The play within a play here is no mere entertainment. It is not planned as an evening's escape from the cares of office for Claudius and Gertrude – it is intended to be effective as a means of exposing their betrayal of the murdered king and so to directly bring about their downfall. So, Hamlet introduces another theme associated with the 'educated' theatre which is that it can illuminate and reveal the world and bring about a result or change in those who attend it.

This speech, with its iconic metaphor of the 'mirror unto nature', is often seen as presaging what has become the dominant genre of theatrical and dramatic representation in the West. The tradition of 'realism', which has its origins in a specific interpretation of Aristotle's concept of 'mimesis' and the close relationship between politics, philosophy and tragedy in 5th Century Athens, conflates reality with realism and realism as a style with truth. It is based in a belief that external appearances can mirror the soul. That only that which can be directly apprehended through the senses exists. There is no room in this educated sensibility for a theatre of dream worlds, ghosts, demons and other spirits. This positivist and pragmatic world view bridges the Early Modernism of Shakespeare's age with the scientific rationalism and fatalism that would shape the Modernist aesthetics and theatres of the 19th and early 20th centuries with their obsessions with forensic accuracies of setting and acting.

The Western tradition of 'realism' underpins both the canonical 'serious' theatre associated with the subsidised sector and also the daily entertainments offered on TV and film. In the case of the subsidised theatre, this realism is associated with a literary tradition of authored plays offering an authoritative and authorised interpretation of an individual world view. Just as Hamlet authors the play within a play in his own likeness. In both cases the conflation of realism with reality serves to naturalise the specifically cultural and self-interested imaginaries of certain social and cultural groups. The tradition of a subsidised theatre serving the interests of a few goes back to the Athenian tragedies which as Arnold Hauser (1999) and Augusto Boal (1998) argue were little more than apologies and propaganda for aristocratic rule. The tragedies tell the stories of princes and kings not slaves and women. The gods are to be served. The more popular but crude and distinctly un-realistic mimes and satyr plays of Athens required no subsidy; they were popular enough with the masses to be afforded. And Hamlet is of course speaking as an aristocrat planning a performance for his own class. He seeks to naturalise his own aristocratic world view and to present his perspective of the world as the only legitimate one. As if it was scientifically proven.

In popular forms of realism, the naturalising of specifically cultural and social perspectives can feed any number of phobic injustices from racism to misogyny and homophobia. To what extent are *Ballykissangel* or *Father Ted* true mirrors of the nature of the Irish, for instance? Both sacred and profane forms of drama contain the same trick which is to reassure ourselves that the order of things is as we imagine it. In both forms we continuously naturalise the politics and world view of a powerful few.

The cultural power of the 'mirror' and the naturalistic fallacy it contains – that behavioural realism is more accurate and truthful than other styles of theatre representation – spreads into the education domain as well. Drama in Education for instance, also holds to the idea that by 'living through' human experiences in a 'realistic' and 'life like' way in real time young people will discover the 'truth' of human existences which they can only imagine and never in reality know. Living through the experiences of peoples who are temporally, spatially, culturally, and socio-economically different 'as if' these experience

were actually happening here and now for the participants in a process drama is seen as being more truthful and 'life like' a learning experience than other more stylised and self-reflexive forms of theatre. In truth, whatever the appearance may be, we can only ever learn more about our own personal and collective self through imagining ourselves differently. We may develop empathy and understanding from our experiences of 'playing' others but we cannot in actuality walk in shoes other than our own. Spending four hours or more in the classroom 'building investment' and 'belief' in an imagined character and situation prior to an 'authentic' role play is in fact a mythologised dilution of the working practices of Stanislavski, Michael Chekhov and their followers who constitute the historical and contemporary face of behavioural realism in acting.

But at least Hamlet seeks a form of theatrical representation that has social agency. This is the idea that the world is changeable, not determined and that through the agency of theatre we may come to understand the power of human action in shaping destiny. As Raymond Williams (1954) commented, whilst the genre of action drama would become increasingly the domain of commercial film, the trajectory in serious theatre since Shakespeare, has been towards a theatre of social inaction and passivity. A theatre which suggests that there is nothing that can be done. That human agency is impotent in the face of a world claimed and owned by the powerful whether they be aristocrats or the educated middle classes. That the world if not determined is at least determining of human existence. This tendency towards the passive inaction of social and artistic actors, already suggested by Hamlet's inability to act to right the wrongs done to his father, finds its apogee in *Waiting for Godot* where nothing at all happens ever.

If there is nothing that can be shown to be done, the Mirror becomes a place for narcissistic gazes into the individual rather than the social psyche. A theatre of introspection, fixity and stasis rather than of action. A psychological theatre of the individual trapped in an unchangeable world, suffering an inevitable destiny beyond self control. The social self of collective public action in the *agora* that characterised the early Athenian *polis*, of renaissance England, of the other great social and revolutionary movements of the 19th century becomes in the mid/late 20th century the privatised and psychologised self haunting empty and closed rooms, literally blinded, and searching for the truth within rather than seeking it without. Until Sarah Kane so exquisitely collides the intimate with the public, the epically tragic with the banally domestic in *Blasted* in which the unavoidable ugliness of the world beyond crashes at last through the fourth wall of self-protecting and privileged illusion.

In any case the origins of the 'naturalistic' theatre lie in the origins of a representative democracy in Athens. It is not the theatre of a direct or participatory democracy. Hamlet does not design a theatrical meeting between his story and Claudius's or his mother's or any of the other multiple voices entangled in his plot. He speaks for all. Just as in our own politics, we still rely in theatre on our 'representatives' to tell the theatrical truth and make our decisions for us. We are shown the world 'as it is' rather than forging the world as we see it could be from our diverse perspectives. The technical term for the 'realist' style of acting which would become codified as a method by Stanislavski and his followers is 'representational'. Actors create a world for a distant audience as if the fictive world exists independently from the actual world of the spectator. There is no communication or communion between actors and audiences. There is no dialogue; it is monologic and monolithic. There is no interaction of ideas or posing of alternatives. The alternative mode of performance, which is closely associated with Bertolt Brecht is named 'presentational' and does make direct contact between performers and audience

and may well include interaction and banter. There is a direct correspondence between the fictive world of the stage and the actual world of the audience. This tradition belongs to the history of popular forms of entertainment and despite Hamlet's disparagements is often cited as an example of Shakespeare's plays being popular with the 'groundlings' who were seldom quiet in their gaze on the 'mirror' of theatre. It is part of my argument here that the theatre of direct democracy must be a participatory theatre which is made by all who engage with it. A theatre in which the roles of social and artistic actor are fluid and transposable. A theatre which negotiates different perspectives of the world and different possibilities for changing it. A theatre which is more like a hologram or a kaleidoscope than a finely focussed and well lit mirror.

In a recent survey final year English students at my own University were asked whether they preferred an active approach to their core Shakespeare course rather than lectures and seminars. 87% of respondents preferred lectures to a more active exploration of the plays as actors. Of these 67% disclosed a fear and in some cases 'hatred' of acting. In a theatre of mirrors we cease to see ourselves as actors in either the social and artistic spheres. Both require public action in a public engagement and for these students at least this idea of public action, acting up to make things happen is terrifying.

And of course we also need to trouble the metaphor of the mirror even further. Whose mirror is it? Who holds it up and what is their relationship to the viewer/subject? Is it a kind mirror? Does it flatter or demean the viewer? Does it tell the truth – whose truth? Does it dare to 'o'erstep the modesty of nature? Does it offer a mirror of reality or a comfortable escape in which 'temperance may give it smoothness'? These were not innocent questions for Shakespeare and the 'Kings Men' writing and performing during a period of emergent republicanism in England. The festivals of Athens, much like our own subsidised theatre depended on producers and paymasters who were more likely to patronise work which confirmed their power and naturalised their influence within a 'democratic society'. There is always a *Maecenas* – the one who pays the piper.

These questions around the ownership of the means and processes of theatrical representation and whose world view is naturalised are of course critical for our young people. We live now in a world of mirrors seemingly held up to nature. Much of what young people know about the world beyond their own immediate experience is through the representations of the mass media and the prejudices of their own communities. They need to be helped towards a more critical and challenging response to the truth of the Murdoch News and other mediated pictures of the world beyond.

In his poem *On Leaving the Theatre* Edward Bond (1978) captures these questions in these words:

*To make the play the writer used god's scissors
Whose was the pattern?
The actors rehearsed with care
Have they moulded you to their shape?
Has the lighting man blinded you?
The designer dressed your ego?*

*You cannot live on our wax fruit
Leave the theatre hungry
For change (p.5)*

What I have described here is the politics of the 'naturalistic fallacy' in theatre; the politics behind the idea that the more realistic a piece of theatre is the more truthful it is. Despite Hamlet's tutoring the play that follows will of course be artificial – it cannot be real in the sense that daily living is real, because it is a conscious and selective human reworking of reality. It is necessarily false to nature in this sense, however life-like it might appear to be. It is 'Artifice' rather than 'reality' that gives theatre its power. Theatre gives human shape and form to experience in order to hold it for a while as if it was reflected in a mirror but as an abominable imitation of humanity not as lived experience itself. This power is contained in the gap between how we experience the world and how it is mirrored to us. In the differences as much as in the similarities. The truth is neither in our own subjective experience nor in the play – it emerges through the dialectic and dialogue between.

Theatre as dynamo; man is a helper to man

*I am a playwright. I show
What I have seen. At the markets of men
I have seen how men are bought and sold. This
I, the playwright, show.*

*How they step into each other's room with plans
Or with rubber truncheons or with money
How they stand and wait on the streets
How they prepare snares for each other
Full of hope
How they make appointments
How they string each other up
How they love each other
How they defend the spoils
How they eat
That is what I show.. .
(from: The Playwright's Song Bertolt Brecht)*

This second metaphor is borrowed from Darko Suvin's paper on Brecht's aesthetics titled *The Mirror and the Dynamo* (1968). Suvin argues that the mirror metaphor is more appropriately applied to what he calls the aesthetics of 'illusionism – taking for granted that an artistic representation in some mystic ways reproduces or 'gives' man and the world'. In its place he offers a new scientific metaphor for Brecht's theatre with its origins in the idea of the promethean human potential to create and use transformative energy and action to better the world. In Brecht's take on Modernism, there is the belief that theatre and the arts can be catalytic to the wider human struggle to determine the world rather than be determined by it. Brecht assumes this action will be associated with the creation of egalitarian democracies to replace the aristocratic and totalitarian systems of governance which dominated his age and place. Indeed Brecht referred to his work as symbolic action rather than as representation. Suvin explains the metaphor thus:

*Art is not a **mirror** which reflects the truth existing outside the artist: art is not a static representation of a given Nature in order to gain the audience's empathy:*

*Brecht sees art as a **dynamo**, an artistic and scenic vision which penetrates Nature's possibilities, which finds out the 'co-variant' laws of its processes and makes it possible for critical understanding to intervene into them (Suvin 1968, p. 59)*

Brecht's idea of truthfulness is quite different to that of the search for 'authentic' appearances that characterises the theatre of mirrors. Brecht seeks illumination rather than illusion. To show how things work, to whom they belong, whose interests are served and how this might be changed. Brecht's aim was to reveal the world, to look behind the mirror, to ask questions of it, not merely to reflect a particular and naturalised illusion of it. It is a reflection *on*, not *of* nature. Suvin argues that Brecht's dramaturgy presupposed that the audience were seeing the work from the perspective of a utopian future 'an imaginary just and friendly future, where man is a helper to man'.

Brecht reclaims a theatre of action that is more concerned with the sociology of human behaviour and the dynamics of history than with the inner psychological workings of alienated individuals. One of his models was Shakespeare's Histories with their emphasis on human action and the forging of futures through human agency rather than through fate or destiny. He was drawn to the epic scale of the Histories which moved rapidly from place to place without the fussiness of 'naturalistic' sets and to the idea that seventy or more years of history could be distilled into three hours of playing.

In terms of the aesthetics of the theatre as dynamo, it is well known that Brecht insisted that the means of production were made as visible as possible to the audience and that the work was inclusive of a wide range of performance traditions associated both with the popular theatre and other entertainments associated with the working classes and also from other great 'non-realist' performance traditions including the Chinese Opera.

We shall make lively use of all means, old and new, tried and untried, deriving from art and deriving from other sources, in order to put living reality in the hands of living people in such a way that it can be mastered. (Brecht 1938, p. 189)

Rather than creating an illusion for an audience of 'peeping toms' (as Artaud (1938) once described the naturalistic theatre's patrons), Brecht kept reminding his audience that they were engaging with an 'artifice' a conscious and transparent construction of the world according to his own Marxist principles. He showed that we can bring the world closer by moving it further away – by de-familiarising it and making it strange so that it has to be consciously and cognitively re-recognised by a critical and conscious audience hungry for change. Brecht turned events on their head shattering the comfortable illusion of cause and effect which characterises the 'realist' narrative. Making his audience think about the story rather than merely hear it. If accuracy of 'realistic' detail marks the metaphor of the mirror, it is the accuracy and cognitive adequacy of the account of human history which characterises the metaphor of the dynamo. Brecht's actors were still 'representatives' but they combined the social within the artistic in their acting – the stage actor as social actor acting the part of a social actor on stage. In Brecht's world we are all social actors making our destiny as living people.

If one puts aside for a moment Brecht's unwavering faith in the scientific 'truth' of Marxism and allow for a less certain but still critical attitude both to theatre making and to the changeable world theatre represents, there are some attractions in the metaphor of the dynamo when we consider what kind of theatre young people deserve.

There is for me a welcome honesty in the dynamo metaphor – there is no attempt to create a seductive and partial ‘mirror’ of the world. There is the hope, at least, that through our own individual and collective social acting we can change the world and ourselves. There is a commitment to justice and to social responsibility and to a theatre that shows us how and why the world is often an unfair place. In its gaze from the synoptic vantage point of a utopian future it promises a glimpse of justice and authentic democracy to the young who are becoming the future. It is a theatre which demonstrates both through its treatment of the world and through its means of production that the social, educational and political structures we work within are capable of being re-imagined and transformed by creative human action. The Canadian literary theorist Northrop Frye (1963) wrote that: ‘The fundamental job of the imagination in ordinary life, then, is to produce, out of the society we have to live in, a vision of the society we want to live in’.

There is here a belief in our individual and collective capacity to act in and on the world in ways that are original and significant. This belief that we are individually and collectively able to re-make ourselves, our technologies, our cultures and common life offers young people a doctrine of hope in the hard times ahead.

At the heart of a pro-social, action based dynamo metaphor of theatre is the vibrant tension between structure (constraints) and agency (freedom to act). Being creative means acting to shape the structures that shape us; controlling and shaping nature as well as cultural institutions. Prometheus stole fire from the gods artfully, and with that fire man created warmth, shelter, technology and culture. The primal shaping structure is nature, and throughout history mankind has shown that through human action, nature can be overcome and transformed rather than merely mirrored or copied.

Theatre as lens; acting to learn, learning to act

I want to now add a third metaphor of my own crafting which is that of theatre as a lens – as a window for looking into ‘nature’, rather than as a surface that reflects it or copies it. This metaphor has its origins in a book I wrote in the 80s as a young teacher about my own first experiences in using drama in the classroom (Neelands 1984). I wanted to try and capture the relationship between drama, the curriculum and the teacher and learners. I suggested that in a conventional transmission model, what is being learnt about is only really seen by the teacher. The teacher stands between the learners and what they are learning about and decides what they should know and when and how it should be interpreted. This model is described by Basil Bernstein (1973) as a ‘collection code’, a rigid and insulated subject based curriculum which isolates the ‘legitimised’ knowledge to be acquired in the classroom from the everyday knowledges beyond the school and which is supported by the authority of the teacher as the one who knows. Bernstein described the effects thus:

Knowledge under collection is private property with its own power structure and market situation....children and pupils are early socialised into this concept of knowledge as private property. They are encouraged to work as isolated individuals with their arms around their work (p. 240)

and

The frames of the collection code, very early in the child's life, socialise him into knowledge frames which discourage connections with everyday realities (p. 242)

Here is an example which captures the difference between a theatre-as-lens approach to learning and a normative curriculum approach. A class of urban eight year olds in role as 'landscape gardeners' are asked by the teacher in role as the Head Teacher of a Special School, to create a garden for her pupils some of whom are visually impaired and some of whom use wheelchairs. The pupils are asked to use their 'expert' knowledge to design a suitable landscape for the garden and suggest appropriate planting so that all of the pupils can get enjoyment and access the garden. The Head Teacher also wants her pupils to be involved in looking after the garden.

In order for the landscape gardeners to present their plan to the Head Teacher, they must research- the needs of visually impaired and wheelchair bound children; which flowers and plants might offer textures and smells for visually impaired people; how to design the garden so that it is interesting and accessible for wheelchair users; how sounds and textures might be used; how to design and build paths and beds so that wheelchair users can do some gardening themselves.

In addition to this work, pupils will also have to consider the maths of the project - how big the space is, how big beds and other features will be, how many plants will be needed etc. They may also look in science at why plants have scents and which insects, like butterflies, might be attracted by certain plants. From a technology perspective they might also consider how to install a watering system on a timer so that the garden users don't have to struggle with hosepipes and watering cans, or they might invent their own self-watering system using collected rain water.

In fact the lens offered here is 'imagined experience' rather than an optical object or tool; learning through being in a dramatised situation and a role that requires researched and responsible action. Learning through imagined experience allows us to engage with learning, directly, physically, contextually, with real life purposes and motives. Theatre in all its forms has this capacity to engage our emotions very directly in the lives of others and in situations which are beyond our own daily experience. To feel for them and want to do something positive. Freud reminds us that- 'Art is a conventionally accepted reality in which, thanks to artistic illusion, symbols and substitutes are able to provoke real emotions'. (cited in Petocz (1999) p. 93)

This enactive and inquiry based model of learning fits well with Margaret Donaldson's argument in a chapter with the beautiful title of *The Shape of Minds to Come*

By the time they come to school, all normal children can show skill as thinkers and language users, which must compel our respect, so long as they are dealing with 'real-life' meaningful situations in which they can recognise and respond to similar purposes and intentions in others. These human intentions are the matrix in which the child's thinking is embedded. They sustain and direct his thought and speech, just as they sustain and direct the thought and speech if adults - even intellectually sophisticated adults - most of the time.

The lens metaphor of theatre is commonly associated with those forms of improvised and participatory drama which make up the 'process drama' tradition in schools. One of its leading exponents, John O'Toole and his co-author Julie Dunn describe it in these words:

In the classroom there is no outside audience. Most of the time we are improvising with the children, exploring fictional situations through various kinds of role-play, mixed with theatrical and dramatic conventions, games and exercises. We call this working in 'process drama', which is like children's play, with all the players actively involved. - (O'Toole & Dunn 2002 page 2)

This process approach to theatre making presupposes a radical shift in the relationship between theatre and its audiences. In the popular imagination, theatre is often thought of as the performance of plays by professional or amateur actors to a paying audience. It is a picture of theatre that is based on an economic agreement between the producers and the audience. The producers rehearse and develop a theatre product to the best of their abilities and when the time comes, they perform their work in exchange for the price of a ticket.

More often than not, in Western forms of theatre, the product that is exchanged is based on the work of a playwright. There is an assumption in this model of theatre that the majority of us will see rather than be in such plays. Acting, producing theatre, is seen as something only a few can achieve. There is also the assumption that the audience in this literary theatre will be silent and attentive to the work of the actors - audience responses are private rather than publicly shared as they might be in more popular forms of entertainment.

If this popular image of theatre is the dominant one in most Western societies it should be remembered that there are alternative models of community theatre and performance which may bring us closer to recognising drama-making in schools as theatre.

In local communities in my society and in many traditional societies, the arts still serve the important civic and community functions that ritual and art making once provided for us all. In the so-called golden ages of Athenian and Elizabethan drama going to the theatre was an important and integral part of the public life of the citizen. The theatre still offers communities a public forum for debating, affirming and challenging culture and community ties. In this community model, the arts are seen as important 'means' of representing and commenting on the cultural life and beliefs of the community, in turn the communal participation of the whole community in art-making strengthens their cultural bonds. Every member of the group is seen as a potential producer - a potential artist. In this model, theatre is produced on the basis of a social agreement between members of a group who come together to make something that will be of importance to them; something that will signify their lives.

This alternative social and community model of theatre shares some of the characteristics of drama in schools. A school is a community and drama is a living practice within it. The drama that young people make is often based in the concerns, needs and aspirations shared within the school community, or the community of a particular teaching group. It is often based on a social agreement that all who are present are potential producers - everyone can have a go at being actors and/or audience as the drama progresses. The coming together to make drama is also often

seen as an important means of making the teaching group more conscious of themselves as a living community.

Theatre can offer young people a mirror of who we are and who we are becoming. Theatre can be a dynamo for social change by providing the space to imagine ourselves and how we live differently. Theatre can be a lens through which young people can discover the embodied relevance of the real in the curriculum. But beyond these optic metaphors is the most important - the social metaphor of the ensemble as a model for living together in the world. Through acting together in the making of ensemble based theatre, young people are provided with what Trevor Nunn calls 'an ideal of a world I want to live in'. The ensemble provides the basis for young people to develop the complex levels of social intelligence (Gardner 1988) needed to embrace the challenges of the future, whilst also developing the social imagination required to produce collaborative social art which reflects, energises and focuses the world for young people. The social knowing which comes from acting in an ensemble mirrors Friere's concept of 'indispensable' knowledge:

The kind of knowledge that becomes solidarity, becomes a 'being with'. In that context, the future is seen, not as inexorable, but as something that is constructed by people engaged together in life, in history. It's the knowledge that sees history as possibility and not as already determined the world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming. (Friere 1998, p. 72)

Working together in the social and egalitarian conditions of the ensemble, young people have the opportunity to struggle with the demands of become a self-managing, self-governing, self-regulating social group who co-create artistically and socially. It's better to be in an ensemble than a gang. The ensemble is a bridging metaphor between the social and the artistic; between the informal uses of classroom drama and professional theatre. Michael Boyd, Artistic Director of the RSC, captures this duality in his support for ensemble based theatre:

We've never had more cause to realise the grave importance of our interdependence as humans and yet we seem ever more incapable of acting on that realisation with the same urgency that we all still give to the pursuit of self interest. Theatre does have a very important role because it is such a quintessentially collaborative art form.

The principles of the ensemble require the uncrowning of the power of the director/teacher, a mutual respect amongst the players, a shared commitment to truth, a sense of the intrinsic value of theatre making, a shared absorption in the artistic process of dialogic and social meaning making. The social experience of acting as an ensemble, making theatre that reflects and suggests how the world might become in the hope that it is not finished is of course of paramount importance to our young. We pass them the burden of the world that we have made in the hope that they will in turn have a world to pass on to their children. In this task socially made theatre will be their mirror, dynamo and lens - their tool for change.

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