Boal, Theatre in Education and the Promotion of Fundamental British Values

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Abstract

This paper offers a critical analysis of the imposition of Fundamental British Values (FBVs) in schools and nurseries as part of Prevent, the UK's counter-terrorism strategy, and compares the rationale of this policy with the motivation for Theatre in Education (TIE). This paper argues that the 'values' promoted through education under Prevent bear a troubling resemblance to the pattern of fascist propaganda critiqued by Adorno. In response to the UK's counter-terrorism strategy, this paper asks if it is possible for TIE in England today to be informed by Boal's Poetics of the Oppressed, which are underpinned by Brecht's Marxist Poetics. Discussion takes place in three parts: Part I examines policy on FBVs, asking if we are experiencing a return to Idealism. Part II develops this analysis by comparing Idealist Poetics and Marxist Poetics, asking what kind of theatre for young audiences is being funded in England today, and why. Part III completes the analysis by looking at Boal's Poetics of the Oppressed, asking if his method is feasible in England today. This paper concludes that theatre that is designed to raise our critical consciousness is not always welcome, as it places demands on us to imagine a different society, when we are in fact heavily invested in the status quo.

Introduction

In 2010, the UK government implemented a deficit reduction policy more commonly known as the austerity agenda (GOV.UK, 2013), leading to a sharp decline in the provision of drama, dance, art and technology in state schools across England (Warwick Commission, 2015). Austerity in education has gone hand-in-glove with fear of Islamic terrorism and hostility towards immigrants: in 2013, vans toured London emblazed with the message 'In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest' (Champion, 2013), and since 2014, English schools and child-care providers have been obliged to promote fundamental British values (FBVs) of as part of the UK's counter-terrorism strategy (Starkey, 2018). The government defines FBVs as 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect' (DfE, 2011:14). It claims that 'Extremism is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values' (HM Government, 2011:107), and that 'Terrorist groups often draw on extremist ideas developed by extremist organisations' (DfE, 2015:5). Home Office data indicate that in 2017, 67% of individuals arrested in the UK for terrorism offences were British nationals (Allen & Dempsey, 2018:16); a proportion that has risen sharply since 2001/02, when the figure was just 29% (ibid). In addition, the Home Office reports that 'The majority (90%) of prisoners in custody for terrorism related offences on 31 March 2017 declared themselves as Muslim. Nine prisoners (5%) were of a Christian denomination' (Allen & Dempsey, 2018: 24). These findings make it reasonable to assume that the UK government's counter-terrorism strategy for English schools is a response to the purported threat posed by Muslim immigrants and their descendants living in England as British nationals. The Home Office's hostility towards immigrants has been described as 'almost reminiscent of Nazi Germany' (Lord Kerslake in Perkins & Quinn, 2018), and in this paper I will

argue that the 'values' promoted in English schools and nurseries as part of the UK's counter-terrorism strategy bear a troubling resemblance to the pattern of fascist propaganda critiqued by Theodor Adorno (1978).

Although a number of teachers and academics have railed against the imposition of FBVs (see for example, Busher et al, 2017; Bowie, 2017; Bryan, 2017) some theatre groups, operating under conditions of austerity, have attempted to attract school audiences through story telling activities aligned with government policy on terrorism. For example, one theatre claims to have designed a show for primary school pupils that supports the teaching of FBVs (Queen's Theatre, 2018), while another says that its shows enable children to 'discover the true value of what it means to be British' (Konflux Theatre in Education, 2018). Such practice stands in stark contrast to the early days of Theatre in Education (TIE).[i] Roger Wooster (2016: 58) notes that in 1976-1977 there was 'a flurry of TIE performance-based projects dealing with fascism'. These projects used the horror of Nazis Germany to prompt reflection on the contemporary treatment of immigrants in England, not by celebrating 'Britishness', but by exposing how 'businesses colluded with Nazism, how state apparatus was used to oppress and terrorize and how propaganda was used to mislead the ignorant' (Wooster, 2016: 58).

This paper responds to the government's counter-terrorism strategy by asking if it is possible for TIE in England today to be animated by Augusto Boal's (2000: 122) 'poetics of the oppressed', which aim to raise critical consciousness in a manner reminiscent of 1970s' TIE. Boal's (2000: 95) methodology is based on Brecht's Marxist Poetics, which assert that the human being is 'alterable' and 'in process', rather than Idealist Poetics, which assert that the human being 'is something given, fixed, inalterable'. In the words of Boal (in conversation with Driskell, 1975:72), Brecht was 'a great influence because he taught us that our

obligation as artists was to shed light on reality, not only to reflect and to interpret reality, but to try to change it'. Discussion of the feasibility of employing Boal's method in England today takes place in three parts: Part I examines policy on the promotion of Fundamental British Values (FBVs), asking if we are experiencing a return to idealism; Part II develops this analysis by looking at the difference between Idealist Poetics and Marxist Poetics, asking what kind of theatre for young audiences is being funded in England today, and why; Part III completes the analysis by looking at Boal's (2000) Poetics of the Oppressed, asking if his method is feasible in England now, or ever. This paper concludes that theatre that is designed to raise our critical consciousness is not always welcome, as it places demands on us to imagine a different society, when we are in fact 'invested in the status quo' (Conrad, 2010:9).

Part I: Fundamental British Values (FBVs) and the triumph of idealism

The immediate impetus for the promotion of FBVs can be traced back to 2010, when German Chancellor Angela Merkel gave a speech to her Christian Democratic Union party in which she declared that multiculturalism had 'utterly failed' in Germany (Merkel, 2010). In February 2011, UK Prime Minister David Cameron gave a speech in Munich in which he echoed his host's sentiments, saying 'Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives' (Cameron, 2011). In this speech, Cameron praises what he calls 'muscular liberalism' saying:

> A passively tolerant society says to its citizens, as long as you obey the law we will just leave you alone. It stands neutral between different values. But I believe a genuinely liberal country does much more; it believes in certain values and actively promotes them. Freedom of speech, freedom of worship, democracy, the rule of law, equal rights regardless of race, sex or sexuality. It says to its citizens, this is what defines us as a society: to belong here is to believe in these things. Now, each

of us in our own countries, I believe, must be unambiguous and hard-nosed about this defence of our liberty. (Cameron, 2011)

In June 2011, Cameron unveiled the UK's 'defence of our liberty' in an updated version of Prevent, the counter-terrorism programme established by the previous administration. The new *Prevent Strategy* (HM Government, 2011) makes direct reference to Cameron's Munich speech and defines extremism as opposition to his account of 'muscular liberalism':

Extremism is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas. (HM Government, 2011:107)

The following month, the Department for Education published *Teachers' Standards* (DfE, 2011) to replace previous standards for qualified teacher status and codes of practice. This document informs teachers that they must uphold public trust in the profession by, amongst other things, 'not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs' (DfE, 2011:14). In 2014, this injunction was replaced by a more robust message. In *Promoting Fundamental British Values* (DfE, 2014), the Department for Education makes it clear that FBVs are non-negotiable, saying, 'It is expected that pupils should understand that while different people may hold different views about what is 'right' and 'wrong', all people living in England are subject to its law' (DfE, 2014:4).

The following year, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 introduced the Prevent duty, requiring schools and childcare providers to have 'due regard to the

need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (DfE, 2015). (Although not discussed in this paper, it should be noted that equivalent duties were placed on universities and colleges.) The Department for Education states that educators might 'build pupils' resilience to radicalisation by promoting fundamental British values and enabling them to challenge extremist views' (DfE, 2015:5). The feasibility of challenging 'extremist views' in pre-school settings prompted the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) to issue the following advice to its members:

> Now don't panic, nobody expects us to have graduated with a law degree, a politics degree, a history degree or even a theology degree. And we already have the knowledge and resources we need to be able to successfully demonstrate to Ofsted that we've got these Fundamental British Values covered. (PACEY, 2015)

The jocular reassurance offered by PACEY does not alter reality: under the Prevent duty, schools and childcare providers that are unable to satisfy the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) that they are upholding their responsibility to promote FBVs will be subject to 'intervention' or 'termination of funding' (Bryan, 2017:1).

In 2017, the head of Ofsted, HM Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman, vowed that her inspectors would not be satisfied with 'superficial passive displays' of FBVs or 'tick box exercises', saying '"We've all seen it: the Union Jack in the corridor, the pictures of the Queen"'(Spielman in Yorke, 2017). Instead, she said, her inspectors will employ their 'judgement' (ibid) to evaluate the sincerity of a school's compliance with the Prevent duty. Educators are not, however, told how to deliver FBVs, and Spielman's condemnation of 'superficial' (ibid) engagement with the Prevent duty fails to acknowledge the difficulty of translating Cameron's (2011) ideas about 'muscular liberalism' into practice. Indeed, Spielman's

implied expectation that children should engage in philosophical debate about the tension between 'Individual Liberty' and the 'Rule of Law', rather than simply pin a Union Jack to the wall, is seemingly impossible for pre-schoolers, hence PACEY's (2015) advice to childcare providers not to 'panic' over their Prevent duty.

Teachers and trainee teachers have expressed concern over the assumption that particular values are "British" (see for example, Elton-Chalcraft et al, 2017; Farrell, 2016; Jerome & Clemitshaw, 2012), with some preferring to describe them as 'universal values' (Busher et al, 2017: 28). Clearly, the ideas that constitute FBVs operate globally, and "Britishness" cannot be based on the *lived experience* of 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect' (DfE, 2011:14), as these experiences are neither ubiquitous in the UK nor exclusive to this nation. Nevertheless, we might note Jan Germen Janmaat's (2018: 1) finding that, prior to their implementation, levels of support for FBVs among 23 year olds were 'already very high' and did 'not differ between the White British majority and various minority ethnic groups'. The risks associated with the political indulgence of British exceptionalism are well documented (see for example Keller, 2018; Worth, 2016; Gifford, 2010), and we might therefore question the wisdom of identifying universal human values as "British". Writing in 1951, Adorno attempts to elucidate the rationale of political messages that appeal to individuals' 'strong narcissistic impulses' (Adorno, 1978: 126), such as the belief that they possess certain positive traits that set them apart from others. Drawing on Freud's theory about the formation of mass identity, Adorno argues that the far-right does not attempt to unite people 'through the rational statement of rational aims' (Adorno, 1978: 118), but instead strives to forge a synthetic 'bond' (ibid: 121) by appealing to the public's beliefs about who constitutes the 'beloved in-group' and who constitutes the 'rejected out-group' (ibid: 128). If, as Janmaat's (2018) study suggests, the British public already believes that Britain

cherishes such things as individual liberty, then the task of defining the 'beloved in-group' (Adorno, 1978: 128) as subscribers to this belief is relatively easy.

The theory that FBVs conform to the template of fascist propaganda identified by Adorno is lent weight by Mary Healy's (2016: 2) analysis of the conceptual basis of FVBs, which she identifies as 'belonging and loyalty'. For Healy, FBVs rest on the flawed premise that our loyalties are always singular, when in fact we may have 'multiple senses of belonging' (Healy, 2016: 9), and she argues that their promotion risks marginalising anyone who does not appear to be exclusively British:

> …the underlying assumption seems to be that some minority groups are 'troublesome' and need to be integrated into a set of national values to achieve some form of social cohesion. In other words, the majority's '*perceived* belonging' of the minority already excludes them from belonging *here*'. (Healy, 2016: 9 italics in original)

According to Healy (2016: 10), 'a thickly conceived (and enforced) shared identity' can be 'used as a tool of internal oppression' (ibid) against naysayers, and from her analysis we may surmise that the promotion of FBVs risks entrenching the prejudicial beliefs of the 'beloved in-group' (Adorno, 1978: 128), which Adorno identifies as foundational to the formation of the fascist 'bond' (ibid: 121).

In 2015, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) and the National Union of Teachers (NUT) voiced concern over the impact of FBVs on the breadth of classroom debate, with the ATL going as far as to label them 'ill-considered, ill-defined and counterproductive' (ATL in Richardson, 2015:42). Nevertheless, in their study of schools and colleges' compliance with Prevent, Busher et al

(2017:65) found that 'few respondents had questioned the legitimacy of the Prevent duty, and that fewer still had sought in some way to oppose or actively criticise it'. This finding suggests that some educators are unfazed by the task allotted them by government and do not endorse the views of their trade unions. This supposition is, however, rendered problematic by Adorno's theory that, under the conditions of fascism, in-group membership criteria are 'applied even more mercilessly than was the concept of heresy during the Middle Ages' (Adorno, 1978:129). As noted by Busher et al (2017:7), compliance with Prevent is 'a legal duty, closely monitored in Ofsted inspections'. Given Ofsted's determination to stamp out superficial support for FBVs (Yorke, 2017), only the most reckless educator would openly question their lucidity and risk being categorised as a dreaded member of the 'rejected out-group' (Adorno, 1978: 128).

The return of idealism

Because FBVs are based on beliefs about "Britishness" rather than material reality (i.e. the total and exclusive experience of these values by people living in the UK), their promotion sits within the idealist tradition. To explore what is meant by this, it is helpful to consider Boal's (2000) account of the difference between Brecht and Hegel:

> …Hegel insists on a fundamental point which will mark a radical difference between his view and that of the Marxist poetics of Brecht: "the event [writes Hegel] does not appear to proceed from external conditions, but rather from personal volition and character…" (Boal (2000: 88)

For the neo-Hegelian philosopher, Giovanni Gentile (1925), the 'personal volition and character' from which events proceed are bound up with the nation state, which he humanises as the 'fatherland' in his *Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals*:

> This fatherland is the rechristening of those traditions and institutions that, amidst the perennial renewal of traditions, remain constant features of civilization. It also prompts the subordination of all that is particular and inferior to that which is universal and superior. It is the respect of law and discipline; it is freedom to be conquered through the law by renouncing all that comes from individual choice and irrational, wasteful desires. (Gentile, 1925)

Under the Prevent duty, we are perhaps perilously close to meeting Gentile's demand to surrender our 'individual choice' and 'wasteful desires' in order to conform to Cameron's ideal of "Britishness". Heather Jane Smith (2013: 443) cautions that, 'If teachers are instructed not to undermine fundamental British values in their teaching, then they may feel justified in their quest for the development of Britishness in pupils, and in assuming that some are in deficit for not embodying Britishness enough'. The belief that individuals may be *choosing* to be deficient in Britishness due to the exercise of their 'individual choice' and 'wasteful desires' perhaps explains the impatience with Islam identified by Tufyal Choudhury and Helen Fenwick (2011) in their report on the impact of counter-terrorism measures on Muslim communities. Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 gives police officers the right to 'stop, question, search and if necessary detain people entering or leaving the UK' (NPCC, 2000). Choudhury and Fenwick state that, under Schedule 7, 'Individuals report being asked the number of times a day they pray, the names of mosques they attend, their understanding of the term jihad, their knowledge of Muslim community groups and organisations' (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011: vii). It seems that, for some police officers, the number of times per day a Muslim man or woman prays is a proxy for the amount of wasteful (i.e. non-British) desires that he or she holds.

It is, perhaps, curious that neoliberal governance has spawned policy on the promotion of FBVs when such policy is antithetical to the vision of its founders (for an account of this vision, see Ward, 2017). The early architects of

neoliberalism wished to thwart both the idealist ambitions of fascism and materialist ambitions of communism: the twin pillars of totalitarian authority in Europe in the wake of the First World War (Ward, 2017). In *The Road to Serfdom*, published in 1944, Friedrich von Hayek berated social planning and set out his vision of society freed from totalitarianism through the introduction of the "ethically neutral" principle of the market mechanism. Hayek has been described as the 'father of neoliberalism' (Boneau, 2004) and it is difficult to overestimate the global impact of his economic and social theory (Caldwell, 2004). In the UK, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously tossed a copy of Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* onto a table and declared '*This* is what we believe' (Marquand, 2014: 106 italics in original), and since Thatcher's election in 1979 the UK has remained wedded to Hayek's vision of the free market society (Ward, 2017). For Hayek, totalitarianism is antithetical to individualism, which he defines as 'respect for the individual man…and the belief that it is desirable that men should develop their own individual gifts and bents' (Hayek, 2007: 68). In theory, then, neoliberal education policy should promote neither idealist nor materialist ideas about the self and society, yet as we have seen, the UK government is attempting to foster a 'shared identity' (Healy, 2016: 10) through the promotion of FBVs, which is out of kilter with Hayek's recommendation for minimal government and maximum individualism.

The tenacity of idealism under neoliberal governance is explained in part by its proximity to the ideology of the global market. In their blistering critique of neoliberal geopolitics, Susan Roberts, Anna Secor and Matthew Sparke (2004:888) argue that the neoliberal word vision conceals longstanding, imperialist economic exploitation 'beneath Panglossian talk of global integration and (what are thereby constructed as) its delinquent others'. These 'delinquent others' are countries that have not embraced globalisation and consequently export 'pain' to neoliberal territories such as the UK in the form of terrorism,

drugs, disease and instability (Roberts el al, 2004:892). Neoliberalism has unleashed upon the world a new amalgamation of corporate and military interests, focused on 'the effective processing of risk' to minimise contagion (Barnett in Roberts et al, 2004:889). In so doing, neoliberal policy is constructing a transnational fatherland under an 'American systems administrator' (Roberts et al, 2004:894). As in the fascist ideology of Gentile (1925), this fatherland subordinates 'all that is particular and inferior to that which is universal and superior'. Seen in this light, the promotion of FBVs is simply a local example of the international endeavour to control 'risk' by conditioning citizens to reject the pain caused by 'delinquent others' (Roberts el al, 2004:892), and to this we might add the UK's scandalous deportation of the Windrush generation (Lusher, 2018). The UK is by no means alone in this endeavour. If we look at the first half of 2018, we might pick the following examples of "risk aversion": Merkel's open-door asylum policy was challenged by Germany's Interior Minister, Horst Seehofer, and when Merkel addressed parliament asking for a multilateral response to the migration crisis she was heckled by delegates of the right-wing populist party, *Alternative für Deutschland* (Rankin & Oltermann, 2018); Giuseppe Conte led a right-wing coalition to victory in Italy and used his maiden speech as Prime Minister to call for a review of the distribution of asylum seekers in the EU (Agence France-Presse, 2018); when critics of the USA's migrant separation policy compared the caging of children and babies to the Nazi holocaust, they were bizarrely corrected by the Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, who pointed out that the Nazis 'were keeping the Jews from leaving the country' rather than entering it (Sessions in Freeman, 2018).

The UK government's desire to create a 'beloved in-group' (Adorno, 1978:128) of citizens is no doubt disturbing, but analysis of the political rationale for neo-nationalism is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, Part II explores Marxist

(materialist) and idealist theatre for young audiences in England, asking what is being funded, and why.

Part II: Marxist Poetics and Idealist Poetics: what is being funded, and why?

In *Theater of the Oppressed,* Boal (2000:95) provides a useful summary of Bertolt Brecht's critique of 'Idealist Poetics' and 'Marxist Poetics'. According to Brecht, Idealist Poetics assume that 'Thought determines being', while Marxist Poetics claim that 'Social being determines thought' (Brecht in Boal, 2000:95). Theatre that employs the idealist 'conflict of free wills' (Brecht in Boal, 2000:95) as the basis of action thus stands in opposition to Marxist theatre, in which 'Contradictions of economic, social, or political forces impel the dramatic action' (ibid). In 1965, the Belgrade Theatre launched a city-wide experiment in partnership with Coventry City Council, England. Belgrade's innovative use of 'theatrical performance and drama workshops to explore issues of moral, social and cultural significance' (Belgrade Theatre Coventry, 2015) came to be known as Theatre in Education (TIE). According to Wooster (2016:29), the early pioneers of TIE were influenced by the 'political attitudes, the dialectics, the performance and production tropes' of Brecht's Marxist Poetics, and in so doing took his work to the 'next stage' (ibid) by uniting its social and educational function. The desire to channel Marxist Poetics appeared to waver in the 1980s, however, when two distinct strands of TIE emerged in England: the 'issue-based approach' and the 'materialist approach' (Dobson, 2016:91). To illustrate the difference between these approaches, Warwick Dobson (2016) uses the example of race relations. The idealist, issue-based approach considers pupils' subjective beliefs about race. It concerns itself with morals and values, asking 'How might we be more accepting of racial diversity?' The materialist approach considers 'objective existence beyond the individual' (Priestly, 1998:78). It concerns itself with how capitalism obscures the difference between the 'appearance and essence of phenomena' (Dobson, 2016:91), asking 'Who *benefits* from racial prejudice?'

The drift away from Marxist Poetics was, according to Wooster (2016), exacerbated by the Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988, which introduced the neoliberal market mechanism into schools. Under neoliberalism, theatre for young audiences that appealed to the ideological devotions of funding councils and local authority budget holders would no longer be *imposed* on schools. Instead, schools would be free to decide what type of theatre is *worth paying for* based on their *own preferences*. The value of drama is quantified through box-office receipts, and irrelevant theatre will die: a triumph of freedom over tyranny. In reality, of course, the dictates of the National Curriculum have ensured that schools "shop" for theatre projects that satisfy government imposed curricular demands, making a mockery of the ideal of market neutrality. During the 1990s, issue-based TIE was able find a place in this "market" by alleviating teachers of the need to grapple with complex issues such as drug abuse, thereby enabling schools to meet National Curriculum requirements for Personal, Social and Health Education (Wooster, 2016). Meanwhile, TIE companies wedded to a materialist perspective were starved of financial support from Art Councils and local education authorities, not because they were Marxist, but because they failed to support the new culture of performativity (Wooster, 2016).

The significance of the loss of materialist TIE is apparent if we consider the current promotion of FBVs: while issue-based TIE is likely to ask important questions about our views on 'individual liberty and mutual respect' (DfE, 2011: 14), materialist TIE is likely to ask more politically challenging questions about why we are promoting FBVs and who benefits from their promotion. In reality, however, TIE is unlikely to be doing either: under the government's austerity programme, TIE companies are experiencing 'death by a thousand cuts' (Wooster, 2016: 255). Belgrade Theatre Trust (Coventry) Ltd is currently funded by Arts Council England as part of its National Portfolio Organisation (ACE,

2018), yet local education authority cuts mean that the theatre that created TIE cannot produce a show to take into schools (Reid, 2014).

It appears that the government's austerity programme has undermined the operation of TIE across England, and indeed the cuts have been swingeing: in 2015, local authority funding of theatre was 50% lower than before the credit crunch (ACE, 2016: 11), and the Theatres at Risk Register (2018) has identified 35 theatres currently at risk of closure for a variety of reasons including 'Capital or revenue concerns'. Arts Council England (ACE, 2016) is, however, continuing to fund Theatre for Children, which is perhaps significant: firstly, it indicates that money *is* available for theatre under austerity; secondly, it suggests that money is being invested in a particular type of theatre, discussed below.

Matthew Reason (2010:5) argues that while TIE's function is pedagogic, Theatre for Children does not have education as its 'primary function'. Instead, Theatre for Children is 'closer to adult theatre, closer to all theatre and art', and is therefore more preoccupied with the 'aesthetic quality' of live performance (Reason, 2010:14). To help define this quality, Reason refers to Philip Pullman's defence of theatre. According to Pullman (2004, in Reason, 2010:15), it is not possible for a stage backdrop to imitate the real world, and our 'imaginative joining-in' is therefore necessary to enable the drama to take life in the soul of the spectator. For Pullman, the exercise of this capacity to suspend disbelief is as vital to children as 'the need to run about in the fresh air' (in Reason, 2010:15). For Reason, theatre that stimulates the imagination helps cultivate children's ability to make moral judgements, and he argues that ambition in Theatre for Children 'relates to making the audience work, making them contribute their imagination to a production and through doing so making them think and feel' (Reason, 2010:39). To underscore his claim that Theatre for Children has a moral purpose, Reason cites Jeanne Klein's theory that 'the hallmark of aesthetic

experience lies in spectators' recognition and articulation of metaphoric and moral applications of a play's themes to self and society' (Klein, 2005: 50, in Reason, 2010:102).

Klein's theory calls to mind Sigmund Freud's (1960) famous essay, 'Psychopathic Characters on the Stage', in which he argues that through the process of identification with the hero the spectator is able to bring to consciousness his repressed feelings and fears. In *The Uses of Enchantment*, psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim (1991:6) applies Freud's theory to fairy tales (a popular resource for Theatre for Children), claiming that they deal with 'universal human problems' that 'preoccupy the child's mind'. According to Bettelheim (1991:6), these stories speak to the child's 'budding ego and encourage its development, while at the same time relieving preconscious and unconscious pressures'. When considering how psychoanalytic theory relates to theatre for children, we might note that Bettelheim and Freud are comfortable with what Boal (2000:142) describes as 'spectator-theater' (discussed later), as their concept of catharsis is far removed from the Aristotelean position rejected by Boal. For Bettelheim and Freud, catharsis is a process of psychic release rather than socialisation, making Boal's (2000) concerns about social justice somewhat redundant for theatre practitioners inspired by psychoanalytic theory. If we return to Brecht's analysis in Boal (2000: 95), we can see that theatre that 'arouses feelings' and provides 'Experience' in the manner described above conforms to the dramatic form of Idealist Poetics.

It seems, then, that while much TIE work today leans towards Idealism, Theatre for Children is funded by government because it emphatically complements their idealist outlook.

Part III: Boal's Poetics of the Oppressed: are they feasible in England today, or ever?

Chris Vine (2013:64) acknowledges that Boal provided 'the most coherent theory of the relationship between the actor and the audience (including a view of the social responsibility of the artist) to be propounded since Brecht'. By the early 1980s, British TIE was incorporating Boal's methodology in its practice, and it is therefore necessary to offer a brief account of Boal's objectives, and crucially the limitations of his approach, to understand TIE's current predicament.

It has long been established that capitalism is condemned by socialists as a system that both exploits workers and isolates them through its doctrine of individualism (Keat, 1981). Russell Keat notes that in opposition to this individualism, socialists have presented an 'ideal of community' based on non-privatised, reciprocal interaction (Keat, 1981:127), which we might contrast with the synthetic bond of fascism. Key to the realisation of this socialist ideal is workers' recognition of their own subjugation, and to this end 'critical consciousness' was developed in Brazil during the 1960s by Paulo Freire as a methodology of emancipation, which he defines as the 'awakening of critical awareness' (Freire, 2013:15). Freire's theory that critical awareness is a prerequisite for social justice attracted the attention of the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal. Inspired by Freire's (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* in 1974 Boal presented his own *Theater of the Oppressed* (Boal, 2000) as a tool for praxis. According to Boal (2000:121), the theatre is a universally accessible language that 'can be placed at the service of the oppressed'. Boal's (2000:122) method, which he describes as the 'poetics of the oppressed', positions people not as mere spectators or even actors but as *agents for change*. Ordinary men and women assume the role of the characters in the play, change the dramatic action and experiment with solutions. Boal (2000:142) describes this activity as 'rehearsal-theater, and not spectacle-theater' in recognition of the fact that 'oppressed classes do not know yet what their world

will be like' (ibid). According to Boal, Ancient Greek tragedy hoped to stimulate the audience's desire to obey the law and thus avoid the hero's fate, whereas his 'rehearsal-theater' (Boal, 2000:142) is intended to *change* the law. For Boal, action begets action, and participation in the theatre of the oppressed is not simply an opportunity for creative expression, but a 'rehearsal for revolution' (Boal, 2000:122). Having made their revolution on stage, he says, participants may seek 'fulfilment through real action' (Boal, 2000:142).

The idea that Boal's Poetics of the Oppressed might inspire workers to reject capitalist relations is, however, rendered problematic by Herbert Marcuse's (1978:151) observation that workers 'do not crave a new order but a larger share in the prevailing one'. Far from overthrowing the capitalist system, he says, workers are likely to use whatever resources are available to drive a better bargain for themselves under present social arrangements, and thus manipulate rather than challenge the conditions of social injustice (Barak, 2016). The nature of conservative thought was elucidated long ago by Edmund Burke (1790), who argued that tyranny is best averted through adherence to tradition, and it is clear from Keat's (1981) more recent analysis that capitalism, and in particular the market society based on Hayek's version of Burkean philosophy (Raeder, 1997), is deeply conservative. The difficulty of overturning conservative thought in capitalist societies is explained in part by the theory of recuperation (Plant, 2002), which holds that in capitalist societies, today's critical consciousness-raising activity is tomorrow's commodity. A striking example of this phenomenon is Banksy's once subversive graffiti art, which is now available as home décor and pet products (see for example www.thebanksyshop.co.uk). The slogan, 'If graffiti changed anything, it would be illegal' is intriguing not because it is true but because of what it tells us about capitalism: it accommodates and thereby cancels social change, including our interest in critical consciousness. Recuperation is

possible, it seems, because individuals desire the continuation of capitalism: people *want* to buy plant pots decorated with images of nullified social protest.

Fear over the recuperation of critical consciousness in capitalist societies is based, of course, on the assumption that there is something there to recuperate. Brecht, whose theory helped inform Boal's (2000) *Theater of the Oppressed*, acknowledged the difficulty of raising his audience's critical awareness. In his play, *Mother Courage and her Children*, written in 1939, Brecht prompts us to consider how human goodness is sacrificed to 'the exigencies of economic subsistence in the world' (Woodland, 1972:128). To Brecht's dismay, rather than condemning the play's eponymous hero for compliance with the war machine, his audience *identified* with Mother Courage. Brecht undertook 'constant revisions and re-workings' (Woodland, 1972:125) to minimise this empathetic response, yet under the direction of Jonathan Kent, Mother Courage went on to attain the 'archetypal status of Survivor' (Wolf, 1995) in a celebrated performance at the Royal National Theatre in 1995. As one critic put it, by abandoning Brecht's instructions and stage directions, Kent found 'humanity in the play, rather than mere dialectic' (Spencer, 2009). This determination to resist the awakening of critical consciousness and to dismiss the injunction to do otherwise as 'mere dialectic' is consistent with Marcuse's (1978:154) theory of the 'rationality of submission'. According to this theory, the complexity of modern bureaucratic and technological societies makes it impossible for an individual to pursue his/her self-interest without the employment of 'dependable reaction patterns' to systems beyond the individual's comprehension or control (Marcuse, 1978:150). For Brecht (1974), theatre is a means to *disrupt* these reaction patterns in order to recognise and challenge structural oppression. Writing in 1927, Brecht identifies his work as part and parcel of the shrugging off of capitalism's stranglehold on the public's imagination. He states, 'the *radical transformation of the theatre* can't be the result of some artistic whim. It

has simply to correspond to the whole radical transformation of the mentality of our time' (Brecht, 1974:23, italics in original). As we have seen, this radical transformation is neither easy nor durable: long after Brecht's death, audiences are still inclined to employ familiar (and for Brecht, inappropriate) patterns of response to characters such as Mother Courage.

Conclusion

Today, despite the problems of recuperation and resistance mentioned above, Brecht's legacy may be observed internationally in theatre for young audiences employing Boal's method. In *Youth and Theatre of the Oppressed,* editors Peter Duffy and Elinor Vettraino (2010: xii) express hope that their book will 'start a dialogue about the intersection of TO [Theatre of the Oppressed] and youth'; something that Boal himself was keen to promote. During an interview with Peter Duffy, Boal claimed that children are often unable to understand the word 'oppression' and may find it difficult to engage with abstract concepts such as prejudice (Boal in Duffy, 2010:257-258). Instead of talking with children about oppression, Boal prefers to ask 'What are the moments of uneasiness for them?' (Boal in Duffy, 2010:258). According to Boal, TO addresses uneasiness by saying to children, 'Look, this is the way it has been up until now. How would you like it to be from now on?' (Boal in Duffy, 2010:259). It seems, then, that Boal's child-friendly approach safeguards TO from the kind of wilful disengagement displayed by theatre critics and audiences of Brecht, who are it seems determined to dismiss questions about the direction of our lives as 'mere dialectic' (Spencer, 2009). Sadly, however, US professor of drama and theatre education, Diane Conrad (2010), offers the following reflection on the difficulty of eliciting change through the application of Boal's poetics:

> I think that TO is only possible if the oppressors have admitted to their role and are
>
> looking for change. All too often those in positions of power (all of us, to some

extent) are so invested in the status quo that, though we might give lip service to the idea of change, we're really not ready for the kind of change that is needed to make a difference. (Conrad, 2010:9-10).

This 'investment in the status quo' is part and parcel of the 'rationality of submission' identified by Marcuse (1978:154). Unable to fathom the complexity of the technological age in which we live, we cling to dependable reaction patterns to social phenomena, even when they include pernicious traditions such as racism and misogyny. Of course, Theatre in Education and Theatre of the Oppressed offer us hope of social transformation by explicitly challenging such traditions, yet this is not the kind of theatre that is being funded in England today, making such work difficult to stage.

I began this paper by asking, in light of the Prevent duty, if it is possible for TIE in England today to be animated by Boal's (2000:122) 'poetics of the oppressed'. However much we might want the answer to be 'yes', analysis of FBVs indicates that English education policy is promoting idealism in opposition to the Marxism that informs Boal's method, making England infertile ground for his poetics. The government's austerity programme has starved TIE of resources, yet protected funding for theatre that panders to individuals' 'dependable reaction patterns' (Marcuse, 1978:150) by privileging 'Experience' over 'Vision of the world' (Brecht in Boal, 2000:95). The lack of public outrage over government support for Idealist Poetics is, perhaps, to be expected. As Brecht found to his dismay (Woodland, 1972), it is simply easier to allow oneself to be swept along by sentiment than to truly engage one's critical faculties. Under idealism, the beliefs we hold today, however narrow, become the compass directing us to our future lives, and the tendency for parochialism is exacerbated by political discourses that tell us to fear and reject 'delinquent others' (Roberts el al, 2004:892). By pandering to the public's beliefs about who constitutes the 'beloved in-group' and

who constitutes the 'rejected out-group' (Adorno, 1978: 128), policy on FBVs is guiding us towards the lazy acceptance of society as it is, rather than consideration of society as it might be, to the dismay of Muslims who have been positioned as a 'suspect community' in our insular narrative of British identity (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011:10). Busher et al (2017) express surprise over the lack of serious protest over the mandatory promotion of FBVs in our education system, but compliance is perhaps to be expected: as noted by Conrad (2010: 10), in the broadest terms what we have today is what we want, as 'we're not really ready for the kind of change that is needed to make a difference'. Roberts et al's (2004) analysis of neoliberal geopolitics reveals what is at stake if we fail to challenge idealist beliefs, yet this paper concludes that theatre for young audiences inspired by Marxist Poetics, if any such theatre remains in England today, is sounding an alarm that is neither heard, nor welcome.

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Notes

[i] TIE is a process whereby professional actors employ interactive theatre/drama practices to engage children in their own learning about social issues such as racism and homophobia.