

Brecht, theatre, therapy and activism

Anna Seymour

Saturday 14th October 2023, Platt Fields Park, Manchester. A young woman cries out to the UK government and the leader of the opposition: ‘We hear the thundering silence of your complicity’. She embodies the outrage that Stephane Hessel named in his 2010 essay as his ‘strongest feeling of indignation’, namely ‘outrage over Palestine’. It is a dark time in 2023, but a bus slowly passes by the march of more than 2,000 people. The driver has one hand on the horn and the other is extended out of the window in a raised fist of solidarity. The crowd chant and cheer.

But Brecht knows that we need not only to sing in the dark times, but equally to sing about the dark times, about what has happened. In this way we can learn. As Brecht proposed from his early Lehrstück (1926-1933) to his final original play *The Days of the Commune* (1949) where the young woman given responsibility for education is exhorted to ‘Learn teacher’.

Yet learning does not occupy a neutral space. It is always structured and underpinned by ideological principles. Brecht offers methods based in Marxist ideas, ‘I wanted to take the idea that philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it and apply that to theatre’.

In this paper I will touch on four main political themes: alienation, historical materialism, dialectical process and class. With examples drawn from Brecht’s plays, poetry and theoretical writing I will interrogate and illustrate how these principles become ‘serviceable’ when making theatre and by extension can be applied to our thinking about embodied therapeutic process.

Biography

Anna Seymour is Emeritus Professor of Dramatherapy at the University of Roehampton, London and a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. She is Visiting Professor at

the University of Osijek, Croatia, and an honorary member of the Societa Professionale di Dramaterapia Italy. She is an international trainer, consultant and frequent conference presenter.

Anna has worked as a dramatherapist and clinical supervisor in the NHS, voluntary sector and private practice.

She has a background in professional theatre with and for working class communities and was associated with more than 30 shows, devising, directing and performing work. She has directed two Brecht plays and taught Brecht in the theatre departments of the universities of Birmingham and Manchester and with therapists internationally.

Former Editor of the British Association of Dramatherapists peer reviewed journal, *Dramatherapy*, she is Senior Series Editor, *Dramatherapy: approaches, relationships, critical ideas* published by Routledge/Taylor and Francis.

Recent publications and conference presentations

Seymour, A. (2023). Keynote speaker: **Where do you stand?’ Thoughts on art as a tool of transformation**, Art teaching and supporting, Maria Grzegorzewska University, Warsaw (November)

Mowers, D., Seymour, A. and Wood, L. (2023). **The co-active model of therapeutic theatre**, British Association of Dramatherapists Conference (September)

Seymour, A. (2023). Invited public lecture: **Theatre therapy, Activism: the role of theatre and therapy in individual and collective liberatory struggles, drama for life**, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (June)

Seymour, A. (2022). Keynote Speaker: **Being with change**, Key Changes Music Therapy Conference, Winchester, UK (November)



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Milward, H. Seymour, A (2023) **Dramatherapy and learning disabilities**, London:
Routledge/Taylor and Francis