



## ARTICLE

### Conventions as mediation for creative interaction between contemporary theatre art and applied practices of theatre

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## **Conventions as mediation for creative interaction between contemporary theatre art and applied practices of theatre**

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### **Abstract**

This essay explores the potential mutual influences between educational/applied theatre and contemporary theatre in terms of convention, questioning the current disconnection between them in reality. The first part reexamines the concept of convention and the importance of the conventions approach as a mindset. It introduces Burns' sociological exploration of theatricality by analyzing conventions in social life and theatre, subsequently modifying it with Brecht's analysis of apparatus and re-functionalization. This expanded framework provides insights into the development of contemporary theatre, extending beyond the original scope of Burns' theory. The second part offers a reconstructive analysis of the development of contemporary experimental theatre in terms of convention, categorizing the new theatrical conventions developed through these contemporary experiments into six dimensions—immediacy, reflexivity, hybridity, deconstruction, reality, participation—distinct from the dramatic conventions currently used in educational/applied theatre. The author demonstrates that contemporary theatre can benefit from educational/applied theatres' conventions in the categories of 'reality' and 'participation', while educational/applied theatre can also learn from contemporary theatre in the other four categories of conventions.

**Keywords:** sociology of convention, educational theatre, applied theatre, Brecht, postdramatic theatre

## Introduction

Educational/applied theatres emerged from, or in parallel with, alternative theatre movement, drawing upon existing theatre traditions to develop their conventions. Despite this original relationship between theatre art and educational/applied theatres, they have developed separately afterwards. The conventions used in educational/applied theatres nowadays still adhere to those drawn from the traditional theatre model, often disconnected from the new conventions developed in contemporary theatre. This essay explores whether educational and applied theatres can adopt conventions from contemporary theatre since the 1970s, and conversely, whether contemporary theatre can benefit from the practices developed in educational/applied theatres over the past few decades.

To address these questions, this essay first re-examines the concept of convention to understand the transformative power of theatre and hence also the effects of educational/applied theatre in terms of convention. This analysis clarifies why adopting a convention-based mindset is useful in the practices of educational/applied theatres. Subsequently, the essay analyzes the development of contemporary theatre and the new conventions it has generated from the perspective of convention to explore how these questions can be answered through a proposed new categorization of conventions based on this essay's findings.

### **'Convention' in educational theatre/applied theatre and related debate**

In the field of drama-in-education and educational theatre, 'convention' is a well-known concept, although not all practitioners think and act in terms of 'convention'. For those who use this concept, conventions guide facilitation strategies to create experiential process for specific effects in response to various practical settings.

Dorothy Heathcote, the pioneer who first employed this concept within drama-in-education, considers conventions as means to frame participation (Heathcote, 2015/1980, p.76). According to Heathcote, conventions help to "make classes feel involved with the immediate time of the action, and in touch with the human person" (ibid.) by creating "the presence of 'others'" (Heathcote, 2015/2010, p.121). Through conventions, students can explore "many dimensions of events using 'drama eyes' and 'implication' to deepen the work" (op.cit., p.124). Moreover, convention "can be used to enable children to become involved in drama experiences of many types" (Heathcote, 2015/1980, p.75) and to "protect" the participants working in fictional medium "in subtle kinds of role" (Heathcote, 2015/2012, p.135). Heathcote identified 33 such conventions.

After Heathcote, the three editions of the book of Neelands and Goode (1990, 2000, 2015) have contributed significantly to spreading the use of this term worldwide, albeit with some changes in its meaning. For Neelands and Goode, conventions are "interactive forms of interchange, even fusion, of the roles of spectator and actor" (p.4), and serve as "indicators of the way in which *time*, *space* and *presence* can interact and be imaginatively shaped to create different kinds of meaning in theatre" (p.3, italics in the original text). The list of conventions selected in the book "*are mainly concerned with the process of theatre as a means of developing understanding about both human experience and theatre itself*" (p.4, italics in the original text).

Neelands and Goode's concept of convention shares similarities with Heathcote's approach in engaging participants in the drama world. However, while Heathcote's method centers heavily on character/role/role-play, making it more anthropocentric, Neelands and Goode adopt a more theatrical approach, offering a broader range of experiences beyond character mediation. As Heathcote said, "[a]ll the conventions function as 'other', but in relation to people" (Heathcote, 2015/1980, p.75). Of the 33 conventions listed by Heathcote (op.cit., pp.75-76), only one (the twenty-first) seems to directly focus on event. Yet, according to the example given, even this involves a person's voice representing the collective voice of the community/institution. In contrast, Neelands and Goode's conventions encompass roles, plots/events, and situation/environment/world, highlighting different dimensions or modes of the fictional/dramatic reality, exemplified in four categories: context-building, narrative, poetic and reflective action (Neelands and Goode, 1990, 2000, 2015). Under this framework, most of Heathcote's 33 conventions might fall into the narrative category. However, they can still generate context-building, poetic and reflective functions under a facilitator's guiding questions. The effects are not solely or directly determined by the convention itself but by how they are facilitated and the timing and combination in which they are used. Conventions are not machines operating under a linear cause-effect logic.

Despite the conceptual differences, the concept of convention in both approaches implies a close relationship between theatre/drama and life, and between theatre and drama-in-education/educational theatre. Historically, conventions used in drama-in-education/educational theatre were drawn or transformed from theatre, taken as both a social-cultural practice rooted in our innate capacities/tendencies as humans, and a sophisticated, specialized art form transformed from such practice. Some practitioners find it helpful to construct their sessions using dramatic conventions as basic references, even if they do not necessarily use the same set of conventions proposed by Heathcote or Neelands. For more experienced practitioners, it means more fundamentally a way of thinking, while the lists of conventions summarized by Heathcote or Neelands provide basic templates or building blocks for less experienced practitioners to rely on and play with. Neelands and Goode's book (1990, 2000, 2015) is sometimes considered "the widest selling drama education book internationally" (Davis, 2014, p.36), and the influence of 'conventions approach' has become significant in the field. According to some recent studies (Cziboly, Lyngstad and Zheng, 2021, 2022), "[t]he conventions approach is probably among the most successful methodologies, if not *the* most successful, in terms of international expansion and influence" (Cziboly, Lyngstad and Zheng, 2022, p.106).

However, there are also critiques to conventional approaches, especially regarding the potential danger of its (over-)simplification and instrumentalism (Bethlenfalvy, 2020; Cziboly, Lyngstad and Zheng, 2021; Davis, 2014). Additionally, other practitioners do not explicitly consider themselves thinking specifically about conventions in their practices. In some books by other pioneers or well-known practitioners in the field (e.g., O'Toole, 2003; O'Neill 1995; Taylor and Warner, 2006), the word 'convention' is sometimes mentioned but not highlighted as a key concept. Nonetheless, some may argue that a mindset in terms of 'convention' is evident when these practitioners talk about how they construct a session. Other

practitioners prefer the word 'strategies' rather than 'conventions' (e.g., *Bowell and Heap, 2013*), and some use both or use them interchangeably (e.g., *Baldwin and Galazka, 2021*).

Outside of school settings, other applied theatre practitioners mention 'convention' much less frequently. When it is mentioned, it sometimes carries a negative connotation. However, in practice, applied theatre practitioners also construct experiential process with 'strategies', 'exercises', or 'games', as building blocks, many of which are substantially similar to those 'conventions' used in drama-in-education. *Boal (2000)* offered a more complex and sophisticated view on this topic: As he described, traditional theatre conventions "persisted as mechanical, aesthetic limitations on creative freedom" (p.144)". However, on his way of searching, he also acknowledged, "[w]e could not accept the existing conventions, but it was not yet possible for us to offer new system of conventions" (*ibid.*). For him, "[t]he convention is a created habit: it is neither good nor bad in itself. We should not, for example, categorise as good or bad conventions of traditional naturalistic theatre" (p.145). He also stated, "[t]he creation of new rules and conventions in theatre, within a structure remaining unaltered, allows the spectators to know at every performance, the possibilities of the game" (p.155).

Nevertheless, there is generally a lack of research about 'convention' in both educational theatre and applied theatre—not only about the uses of different conventions but also the mindset of thinking in terms of conventions. As *Heathcote* said, convention was "the least used and understood" (*Heathcote, 2015/2010, p.124*) when people practiced her *Mantle of Expert* method. For some practitioners, conventions are simply strategies for facilitation, and many are mainly interested in collecting more strategies for their toolbox. However, understanding these strategies or conventions is the real key. Even *Neelands* himself emphasizes that conventions are only "the palette of colours" (*Cziboly, Lyngstad and Zheng, 2022, p.101*), which do not make a picture by themselves—the key is "how you then put the brush in and make the picture" (*ibid.*). This act of organizing requires deep understanding. Many questions around conventions are to be explored and clarified. For example: Is there any significant difference if practitioners think in terms of conventions instead of strategies? Are there different categories of conventions? Do they interconnect with each other to form a system? Why are they effective for facilitating an experiential process that can bring various effects and changes? What principles guide how they are combined to form an experiential sequence? These questions are important for understanding conventions in educational/applied theatre.

From the perspective of this essay, the most urgent question is not which specific conventions practitioners use, but rather understanding and examining conventions as an approach and a way of thinking. Therefore, we should first ask:

1. What do we mean by 'convention' and the 'convention approach' in the context of educational/applied theatre?
2. Why do we explicitly or thematically talk about convention and/or think in terms of 'convention' in the context of theatre and educational/applied theatre, and in life?
3. Why can 'convention' be taken as a key to explicate the relationship and interaction between theatre and life, which underpins the possibility of educational/applied theatre?

## **A preliminary overview on convention in daily life, social sciences, and arts**

To answer these three questions, it is helpful to first examine how convention manifests in daily life, social sciences, and arts. In our daily experience, convention, as something that guides and regulates our action, interaction, and communication, usually operates implicitly, unconsciously, or naturally, without drawing our attention. It is internalized in us and becomes a sense that enables us to participate in social life in relation to others. We become aware of the existence and effect of convention when it is emphasized for certain reasons, or when it is violated, with or without reasons. We expect ourselves and others to act and express ourselves according to certain shared, commonly agreed conventions so that we can mutually make sense of our actions and speech. Although we can break certain convention in certain situation, it is hard to imagine breaking all conventions—it will probably be a state of madness, a state in which it is even hard to understand ourselves if we do so. Convention is a condition for us to understand society, social life and our own self.

Therefore, it is not surprising that since the emergence of social sciences in the late-nineteenth century, sociologists and linguists have looked into conventions as clues to understand the operation of society and the relationship between individuals and the social system. For example, in the early twentieth century, Weber (1968) studied convention in developing his interpretive sociology, exploring the relationship between voluntary action and conformity, and the sociological forces behind such conformity. Around the same time, Saussure (1986), a linguist and pioneer of structuralism, proposed his approach to study language as sign system, highlighting the arbitrariness in the relationship between signifier and the signified. This arbitrary relationship is maintained by convention, considered as a collective influence beyond any individuals. Half a century later, Lewis (1969) published his influential work analyzing convention in relation to human coordination using theories of game from a philosophical perspective. Gilbert (1989) later proposed revisions to Lewis's theory to eliminate its inherent individualism, fully exploring the influence of collectivity and the nature of social life, though the basic direction of Lewis's theory remains influential. Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1991) in sociology explore the complex, microscopic process of interpersonal interactions that are not only guided by, but also maintain, certain orders that may be called conventions.

In arts, including theatre, conventions also exist. These artistic conventions share similarities with, but also differ from, social conventions experienced in daily life and studied by social scientists. Unlike social conventions, the conventions in arts, including theatre, do not—at least not directly—regulate how we live. It seems that even without knowledge of or adherence to artistic conventions, individuals can still navigate life smoothly and make sense of their surroundings and the actions and words of others. Therefore, artistic conventions do not appear to be a necessity for social life.

The aforementioned theories and approaches in sociology, philosophy and linguistics that study the influences of collectivity on individuals seem insufficient to explain the unique nature of art conventions, and their subtle relationship to life. Goffmann (1959) is often credited with bringing theatre closer to sociology through his dramaturgical analysis, which uses theatre as an analogy to study the structure and dynamics of everyday face-to-face social interaction. However, it is important to note that Goffman

employs theatre merely as an analogy. His dramaturgical sociology does not provide a sociological analysis to theatre; rather, he borrows ideas from theatre to elucidate social life.

Among all art forms, drama/theatre holds the trickiest relationship with life. The primary materials or contents of drama/theatre are our actions and interactions in social life, which are guided and regulated by conventions. Therefore, the conventions in daily life are also present in manifold ways in drama and on stage. Theatre-makers use these conventions not only as material/content but also as prototypes from which conventions of drama/theatre are developed or modified. In other words, the conventions of social life influence both the contents and conventions (forms) of drama/theatre. Conversely, when theatre was still a major mass medium, it could also affect real lives not only by its contents but also through its conventions, because people's lives, as well as their conceptions about life, were represented in drama/theatre via both its contents and conventions. Sadly, that is also why many regimes throughout the human histories have tended to control or censor theatre. Thus, while the conventions in life and those of drama/theatre are distinct, they closely influence each other, forming a loop of mutual influences. If this is the case, then the structural similarities between social life and drama/theatre are not just a "mere analogy", as Goffmann (1959, p.254) suggested, but are sociologically actual. There is something theatrical in the sociological and something sociological in the theatrical.

### **Burns' sociological analysis of convention in the theatre and social life**

Although the enigma remains, it has become clearer that convention can be a clue to capture this complex interrelationship. This is exactly what Elizabeth Burns addresses in her seminal book *Theatricality: A study of convention in the theatre and social life* (1972), where she systematically combines three approaches: history of the drama and the theatre, the 'Chicago school' micro-sociology, and French sociology of theatre exemplified by the works of Gurvitch and Duvignaud. This combination aims to understand both social life and theatre performance, as well as their interrelationship—"the double relationship between the theatre and social life, 'the theatricality' itself" (p.3)—in terms of convention:

"It is through the analysis of conventions to which actions conform inside and outside the theatre, in drama and in everyday life, that I hope to be able to express the nature of 'theatricality' inherent, to vary degrees, in all human action." (Burns, 1972, p.3)

From a sociological perspective, conventions are considered as what connect different parties within the entire ecology of the theatre world (i.e., actors, audience, critics and others involved in the theatre-making) on the one hand, and what connect theatre performances and the society in which they are produced on the other hand, besides connecting people and coordinating their activities within a society.

Burns uses the concept "theatricality" to summarize all these conventions: Both social life and theatre performance possess theatricality, a deeper structure or underlying mechanism that manifests and operates in both social life and theatre performance via their conventions. Burns even considers such structure as 'mode of perception' (p.13) that guides social participation and social understanding (p.14). Therefore, it is not something originally belonging to the theatre and then used as an analogy to describe



social life—it is what both of them share. Although not primarily associated with the theatre, Burns still calls it 'theatricality' because, interestingly, we have better opportunities to become conscious of the theatricality of both theatre and social life when we observe or experience lives performed in the theatre, while we often fail to recognize and understand our own theatricality in real life. This is Burns' unique insight: theatre can disclose the deeper structure ('theatricality') that enables both theatre and social life, and the conventions in both domains can be taken as clues to uncover this structure. This key insight of Burns is often overlooked and should not be confused with Goffmann's theory and other theories that take theatre only as an analogy/metaphor.

As Burns illustrates in the second chapter of her book, our social action has both an instrumental dimension and a symbolic/expressive dimension. In theatre, the symbolic/expressive dimension can be highlighted as the urgencies of real life are temporarily suspended. Because of this, theatre can expose and explicate the theatricality (or theatrical conventions) of the action presented and represented on stage as composition with specific framing and patterning (Burns, 1972, pp.12-13, 32-33). Acting in theatre can also explicate three levels of reality—the pretended, the alternative and the overriding reality (ibid., p.16)—and plays can disclose the multiplicity of possible realities that can be experienced or even actualized when such framing and patterning are altered. Alternatives of living become imaginable and understandable. The audience can realize that it is essentially a matter of shifting consciousness and making choices when they act. Through the experience of such explications, the audience can recognize similar operations in their daily lives, learning to perceive social life in this manner even after leaving theatre. This analysis details the 'double relationship' (ibid., p.3), the dialectical loop between life and theatre mentioned earlier.

For even deeper understanding about such dialectics, it is crucial to note that Burns identify two types of convention in her analysis: rhetorical convention and authenticating convention. The former helps to define a play as a play or a performance as performance and establishes the type of play/performance. Thus, it sets up the actor-audience relationship, including both the creation of the theatrical situation and certain aspects of acting. The latter, authenticating convention, makes the actions and relationships on stage believable as references to real life or possibilities of life, encompassing playwrighting structure and some aspects of acting. In other words, **rhetorical conventions can be understood as presentational conventions while the authenticating conventions as representational conventions. For Burns, these two types of convention always work together.** Both the construction of roles and acting fall into both types of conventions, emphasizing the complementary and dialectic relationship between presentation and representation.

Therefore, Burns not only highlights the status and nature of convention as a key to understand both theatre and social life but also illustrates the educational or transformative dimension of theatre for changes in people and in real life, in terms of convention (theatricality that both theatre and life share). People can learn how to analyze life and imagine possibilities of life with the help of their experiences in theatre. Theatre offers analytical frameworks and directions of imagination to experience and re-experience life. **Therefore, theatre with its conventions has potentials in opposite directions: it can enrich people, but also control/condition people.** At the end of her book, Burns says:



“The dangers of ‘theatricality’, as it is perceived, lie only in rigidity or repetitiveness. There is often a sameness of view—an inability to generate or recognize new aspects of composition. Social behaviour can seem to be made up of empty rituals if we refuse to contribute the novelty of our own experiences—merely accepting the ‘world-pictures’ handed down to us through socialisation. Conventions, whether rhetorical or authenticating, role playing and composition of action as plot and themes all depend upon the consensual and generative relationships of individuals in different social milieux. From a ‘theatrical’ viewpoint they are the paradigmatic grammar of the principles of thought and feeling that underlie social action.” (Burns, 1972, pp.232-233)

Therefore, although Burns’ theory emphasizes the existence of a deeper, enabling structure shared by social life and theatre, it does not assert that such a structure is unchanging or unchangeable. Clarifying the coexistence of opposite possibilities regarding the dialectics between theatre and life makes it evident that how theatre is used, and how we utilize our experiences acquired in or through theatre, is educationally and social-politically crucial. Burns’ analysis of this double relationship between life and theatre **also helps explain why educational/applied theatre can effectively facilitate different kinds of transformations by drawing on conventions from theatre.**

### **Brecht on apparatus and theatre as cultural apparatus**

Burns’ work can elucidate Bertolt Brecht’s theories, while Brecht’s concepts can enrich Burns’ framework. By incorporating Brecht’s concept of ‘apparatus’ and ‘re-functionalization’, Burns’ theory can be modified to understand the development of contemporary experimental theatre, even if Burns’ analysis originally stopped before the emerging of these theatre experiments. This modified framework can illustrate how new conventions of contemporary theatre can benefit educational/applied theatre while the conventions of the latter can also contribute to the ongoing evolution of the former.

First, Burns analysis can also be seen as a detailed sociological elaboration and explanation of Brecht’s ‘de-familiarization’ (*Verfremdung*)—what it means and how it is possible—and his view on the dialectics between society and life, mediated by theatre as a cultural apparatus. As many contemporary studies of Brecht (e.g., Barnet, 2014; Wright, 2016; Mumford, 2008; Wekwerth, 2012) have pointed out, neither ‘alienation’ nor ‘distancing’ accurately translates Brecht’s concept of *Verfremdung*. However, in the field of drama in education, educational theatre, or applied theatre, this mistake remains prevalent, alongside other misunderstanding about Brecht—like considering Brecht’s vision of theatre as only rational and reflective.

Conversely, Brecht’s theory can also enhance Burns’ analysis. While Burns’ work largely follows the direction of Weber’s interpretive sociology, Brecht’s examination of the dialectics between apparatus and humans adds a dimension of critical sociology to what Burns has demonstrated. Burns’ concept of ‘convention’ can also be interpreted in terms of Brecht’s notion of ‘apparatus’.

From Brecht’s perspective, for all kinds of reasons, humans often tend to forget an important fact: the human world is *made*, instead of just being there—we live through *making* and within a *made* environment. The key term here is ‘making/made’. This perspective makes visible the presence and influence of tools, designs, conditions, or more generally, *apparatus*, as Brecht understood it, making

us aware of their status and significance. Even language, with the whole related custom and institution, which enables this communication between this essay and its readers, are all apparatus.

Following Brecht's line of thought, apparatus encompasses the whole infrastructure and the totality of means and relationships of production. This includes tools, forms and channels of expression, institution, organization, etc.. Production/making is not limited to the production/making of things, but includes actualizations of ideas and other symbolic contents (Mueller, 2006). Brecht adopted this analytical perspective even before encountering Marxist theories, as evidenced by his early writings, especially those critiquing existing cultural institutions, like opera, theatre, the press, etc., and those discussing new distribution/communication technologies, like radio and film (Brecht, 2000, pp.41-46). In other words, apparatus is the media/mediation through which things can happen or be created/actualized. The apparatus can affect, or even determine, what can *exist* and can be *expressed*, as well as how things *exist* and are *expressed*, in our lives and the human world. This has both ontological and epistemological implications.

The apparatus and the things happen or created through them are *historically specific* and *materially based*. Apparatus also functions as the mediation between materiality and ideas/contents/meanings, contributing to and also conditioning the forms through which they are presented or brought into presence. This is Brecht's own historical materialism, prior to and independent from Marxism. Therefore, it is not entirely fair to interpret Brecht only through Marxism. Ideas and experiences are materially and historically conditioned, and changes can occur first at the level of apparatus as the mediator.

Therefore, awareness and attention to the act of making and the apparatus can provide a fuller picture of the world and our lives. It also allows us to contemplate and explore how the world and our lives can be different—or even fundamentally different. Without reflective and critical awareness of the apparatus and its effects, there can only be renovation but not true innovation (Brecht, 2018, p.61)—differences may manifest as variation but not revolution. When people lack awareness of the apparatus, the result would be, as Brecht said, “they hold the opinion that they own an apparatus that actually owns them” and “they defend an apparatus over which they no longer have any control—which is no longer, as they believe, a means for the producers, but has turned into a means directed against the producers, in other words, against their own production” (Brecht, 2018, p.61). Therefore, whether there is reflective and critical awareness of the apparatus determines whether humans have control over their apparatus and acts of making/production, or whether the latter controls the humans without their awareness of being controlled and conditioned. To be (aware) or not to be, that is the question.

Brecht's observation and insight into this paradoxical phenomenon bring us to the core of his artistic and social-political practices: *dialectics*. The dialectic between humans and their apparatus is multi-layered: First, the human world is artificial, but this does not imply anthropocentrism. We make things by means of apparatuses and we make apparatuses through apparatuses. As we use them, we are also dependent on them. This 'contradiction' forms the first layer of the dialectical relationship. Our dependence on the apparatuses limits us or even molds us according to their constraints. Therefore, even if we create and use apparatuses, they can largely or even totally control, condition and construct

us if we are unaware of their effects on us and do not actively reflect on and refresh how we have been using and can use them. This represents the second layer of the dialectical relationship. However, even when the apparatuses controls us and our lives, they still need us in some ways to keep them functioning and to maintain their effects and dominance. The dominant/dominator is also dependent on the dominated, and the asymmetry of domination can shift and interchange from one pole to another. This represents the third layer of the dialectical relationship.

The situation is further complicated at the social level. Brecht also observes that, in a hegemonic society, the apparatus “is determined by existing society, and only assimilates whatever keeps it going in this society.” (Brecht, 2018, p.61), and “[s]ociety uses such apparatuses to assimilate whatever it needs to reproduce itself. Consequently, the only ‘innovations’ that can get through are those that lead to the renovation—but not transformation—of existing society, regardless of whether this form of society is good or bad.” (Brecht, 2018, p.62) This represents another layer of the dialectics between humans and apparatus, wherein society that reproduces itself also comes into play, often unconsciously to the people involved. **To change the society and their lives in the direction of liberation and humanization, this situation and the mechanism of reproduction of a hegemonic society are what should be disclosed and disrupted.** Brecht considers learning as a critical sociological activity that grasps the multi-layered dialectical interactions between our social lives and the apparatus, as well as the dialectics between humans and society. This is the precondition to make changes for both society and ourselves.

To disclose such a situation and respond to the mechanism revealed by this critical sociological awareness and learning, Brecht highlights the necessity of ‘re-functionalization’ (Brecht, 2000, p.42) of apparatus. The re-functionalization of theatre as a cultural apparatus is key. Theatre and arts in general, as means of production, are apparatuses to produce experiences, meanings and their bearers. How arts (not limited to theatre, including radio play, poetry, etc.) can be refunctionalized to intervene in the multi-layered dialectics between humans and apparatus, or the dialectical triad of agency—apparatus—affection of human existence, can be considered as a core question of Brecht’s life-long exploration and experimentation. Brecht’s learning play (*Lehrstück*), a participatory version prior to his epic theatre model, proposes the re-functionalization of theatre to create active spectator, or spect-actor, as practitioners and scholars would now say, following Boal.

Brecht’s dialectical analysis in terms of apparatus is relevant to our earlier discussion in manifold senses:

1. Burns’ ‘convention’ can be understood as cultural apparatus in Brecht’s sense, and it is important to see this dimension in the conventions of both social life and the theatre. This can add another critical layer to Burn’s theory.
2. Although Burn’s analysis already demonstrates the importance of modifying theatre conventions and their uses for sociological learning and social-political liberation, Brecht’s concept of ‘re-functionalization’ and his idea of ‘learning play’ makes it even clearer and more specific that a revolution of theatre convention towards more active spectatorship is necessary.

Therefore, besides representational and presentational conventions, a new category of convention – participatory conventions — needs to be invented and developed.

3. Burns' analysis of 'convention' and 'theatricality' helps clarify what Brecht's 'de-familiarization' (*Verfremdung*) could mean, how it is possible, and its sociological explanation. This helps clear prevailing misunderstandings around Brecht, which have been obstacles to understanding the relationship between Brecht and contemporary educational/applied theatre practices.
4. Combining the theories of Burns and Brecht clarifies why the concept of 'convention' and 'convention approach', as a way of thinking, are useful and important for practitioners of educational/applied theatre. They elucidate the complex and subtle dialectical relationship between the theatrical and the sociological, between theatre and life, and how they influence each other. This is key to understand the possibilities of using drama/theatre as pedagogy and social intervention.

### **Transition: contemporary theatre art vs educational theatre/applied theatre?**

Burns' and Brecht's theories have elucidated that conventions are deep structures where influences between apparently separated fields of life can happen. They also highlight that such influences may transpire before we become consciously aware of them.

Theatre develops its conventions by drawing from life, while historically, educational/applied theatres initially developed their conventions by drawing from both theatre and life. However, in recent decades, as educational/applied theatres have evolved, contemporary theatre in the arts has advanced independently, leading to minimal interaction/communication between the two fields. Sociologically, despite their common origins, once certain practices established themselves as distinct fields with unique identities and societal functions, they began to operate with relative independence, focusing on their specific emphasis and interest for substance and their own ways of obtaining social resources. As they have evolved, each has developed its own set of conventions, especially at the conscious level.

Given the apparent and functional independence between contemporary theatre and educational/applied theatre practices since the late-1970s, the following questions arise:

1. Can the practical experiences, with their evolved conventions, of educational/applied theatres influence back contemporary theatre in the arts within the realm of convention?
2. Can the new experimental aesthetics and conventions of contemporary theatre still impact educational/applied theatres? Or, is it still possible for educational/applied theatres to draw conventions from contemporary theatre art, given that the latter has diverged significantly from traditional theatre centered on the fictional world of drama?

These questions are not purely theoretical. In practice, there is a general tendency among artistic theatre practitioners to see applied practices of theatre as irrelevant or secondary in terms of aesthetics and professionalism. It is even not uncommon that many artistic theatre practitioners are unaware of the existence of such applied practices. Conversely, from the perspective of educational/applied theatre practitioners, the experimental aesthetics of theatre art since the 1960s/70s have moved so far towards

a total break, subversion, and/or deconstruction of traditional theatre model centered around fictional dramatic narratives. Consequently, these approaches are often perceived as overly formalistic, vague, and detached from being useful for any concrete pedagogical or social-political purposes. This essay still temporarily call them as two different fields, reflecting the sociological and professional reality. However, it also aims to demonstrate the numerous possibilities and benefits for these two fields to converge and cooperate.

Although this separation—or even opposition—between the two fields can be partially explained sociologically in terms of professional ecology and differing social functions, fundamental questions remain regarding their operative principles, particularly within educational/applied theatre practices. Emerging from postwar anti-conservative social-political atmosphere, progressive education movement, and the ‘alternative theatre’ movement since the 1960s (Criag, 1980; Nicholson, 2017; Wooster, 2016), theatre-in-education, drama-in-education and other communal, social-political, or therapeutic practices utilizing drama/theatre—commonly termed ‘applied theatres’ nowadays—are revolutionary and non-traditional in their forms of practice within the theatre world. These ‘applied’ practices are all participatory, often incorporating interactive and improvisational elements, setting them much ahead of many contemporary artistic theatres that retain passive audience roles. **However, regarding their ways of presenting and representing content, such practices are usually more conservative than their artistic experimental counterparts.** Almost as a well-known fact, these practices **mostly rely on the participants joining in a fictional world of drama as a major part of the experiential process**, although certain reflective parts and the in-and-out dynamics are also essential, in order to achieve their practical functions (Bolton and Heathcote, 1999; O’Toole 2003; Neelands and Goode, 2015). For educational, socio-political, or therapeutic applied theatre practices (O’Neill, 1995; Jennings 1998; Boal 2000; Pendzik, 2008), the fictional dramatic world remains a major pillar, or the main axis, in the process, which **contrasts sharply with contemporary theatre experiments that intentionally seek to downplay, deconstruct, or replace this focus** (Lehmann, 2006).

This is **a conflict at the level of fundamental convention**. So long as educational/applied theatre practices still rely on metaxis or going in-and-out to the fictional world as their only or major mechanism to produce the intended effects, the contemporary experimental development in the theatre art and their conventions would still appear to be useless or irrelevant to the educators, activists, or therapists using theatre in their practices. Some educational theatre practitioners like Davis (2014) has expressed explicitly that he cannot see the educational relevance of such contemporary theatre innovations:

“This cannot be directly related back to life in the society...It is private and works in an individual rather than a social way. It works for a shock response but one that cannot easily be related to the everyday life of the ‘audience’. Drama needs to be able to involve us in such a way that we meet ourselves giving us the possibility of reworking the ideology that has entered us: the possibility of glimpsing how society has corrupted us. This is the *metaxis* effect that Bolton seeks to evoke through students *being* in drama and Bond seeks to effect in the audience through the drama structures he employs.” (Davis, 2014, pp.42-43).

However, there are also some researcher-practitioners (Gregorzewski, 2022; Fogt and Fogh, 2015) who have already started to explore, experiment and propose ways to put drama-in-education and contemporary theatre as 'postdramatic theatre' together. From the viewpoint of this essay, this is a meaningful direction to explore for educational/applied theatre in general, and these studies signal a new beginning. This essay proposes, exploration in this direction can benefit from **investigating analytically deeper into the characteristics of the major tendencies in the latest development of contemporary theatre art in the last few decades from the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the concept of convention articulated via Burns and Brecht is key to this analysis.** After this, the question of **how the evolved conventions in the theatre art field and in the educational/applied theatre field can mutually benefit each other in different ways** can be further clarified. These can also help to ask better questions regarding how these two fields can develop together or even converge once again.

### **Seeing the experiments of contemporary theatre from the perspective of convention**

This section reconstructs the development of contemporary experimental theatre mainly in the Western context over the past century in terms of convention. It traces especially the evolution of theatre conventions and social conventions since the late-twentieth century, an area not covered by Burns' sociological analysis of convention in social life and theatre. Despite going beyond the original scope of Burn's study, it can become applicable to analyze these developments when Burns' convention theory is enriched by Brecht's conception of apparatus and re-functionalization. Both contemporary theatre art and educational/applied theatre can be considered as continuous attempts to re-functionalize theatre conventions closely connected to our deeper structure.

Contemporary theatres in the art field often leave a striking impression of being spectacular, often filled with multi-media technologies. At times, paradoxically, these productions can simultaneously embody two extremes: they are saturated with multimodal sensory stimuli while also being highly abstract, conceptual, formalistic, or self-referential. This duality can make it unfriendly for the audience to follow and make sense of the performances. Encountering these works, some may feel dizzy or empty, but what they usually cannot find is a simple story driven solely by dialogue. Instead, these works often appear as encrypted puzzles to be decrypted.

These impressions have become trademark-like artistic conventions, despite remaining quite elusive to many. Merely identifying and listing out such characteristics falls short of providing an understanding. Without a deeper understanding, it becomes even more challenging to grasp how these theatres and their conventions can offer inspiration and support to applied theatres. It is imperative to reconstruct their development within their originating context. Subsequently, analyzing this development as a response to such context is essential to appreciate how these spectacles transcend mere commercial gimmicks or ostentatious gestures.

For the reconstruction work in this essay, the seminal work of Lehmann (2006) serves as a point of departure. However, given its German publication in 1999, it does not cover the rich development in



the last two decades. Therefore, frameworks by Cascetta (2020) and Lavender (2016) are also vital references. Additionally, this essay considers Pavis's analysis of contemporary *mise-en-scène* (1992, 2013) and theories on contemporary directing by Innes and Shevtsova (2013) and Boenisch (2015). Historical works from Ficher-Lichte (2001, 2002) and Boenisch (2023) offer macroscopic insights. These theoretical and macroscopic frameworks are cross-checked and complemented by historical case studies from Aronson (2014), Sparks and Brady (2014), Carlson (2009), Duggan and Ukaegbu (2013), Hartl (2021), Saunders (2015) and Tomlin (2015), providing localized perspectives on contemporary theatre in the U.S., France, Germany, and the U.K.

Despite differences in nuances and angles, most of these works share, first of all, a common observation: the development of *mise-en-scène* and the corresponding rise significance of directing, as a background, beginning in the late-nineteenth century in Europe. Theatrical dimensions have not only become important but have also increasingly gained focus when considering aesthetic achievements. The “languages of the stage” (Pavis, 1982), or the totality of stage presentation, have come to be considered as having semiotic autonomy and artistic status independent of drama, dialogue, or the story. Parallel to the implosion of drama as a form under the social experiences of modernization, as noted by Szondi (1987) and exemplified in Beckett's plays, theatricality, stage images, or the event of performance, began to replace drama as the new center since the 1960s. Despite diversity in actualization and rationale, this shift became a newly accepted convention among artists and new audiences. The characteristics of being spectacular and involving multimedia technologies, developed even further up to the present day, are to be understood within this shift in aesthetics and semiotics. The following is a visual summary of this shift:

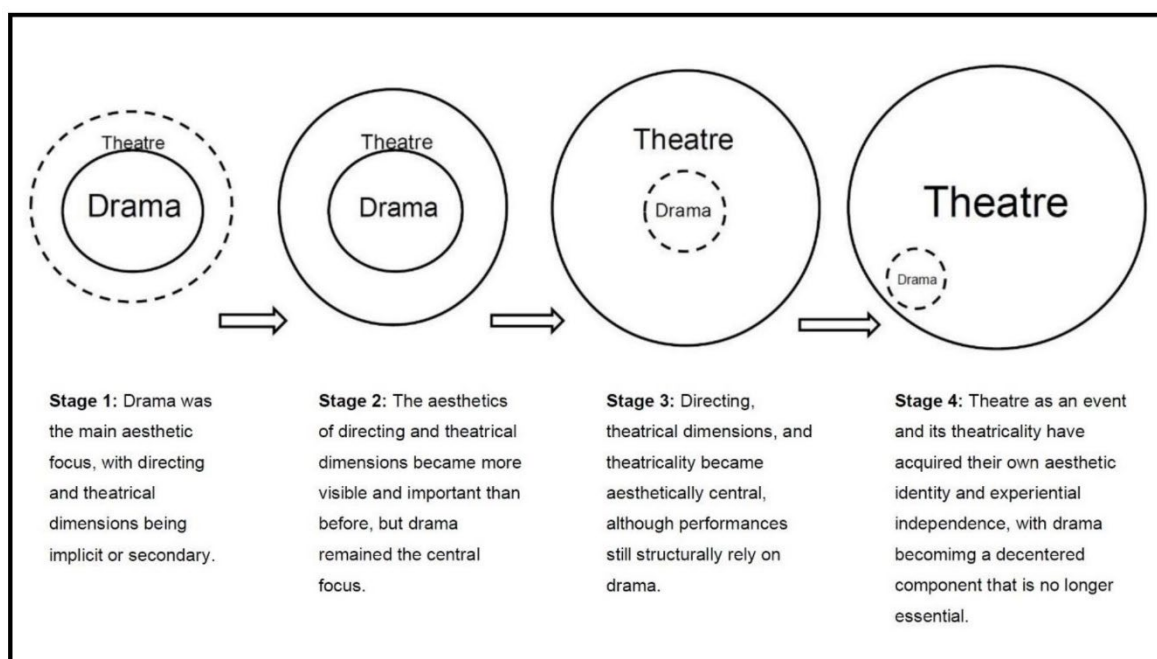


Figure 1: The historical shift happening in the development of contemporary theatre until drama and text are decentered



## **Constant self-questioning and self-overcoming of contemporary theatre conventions in relation to the socio-political-cultural realities**

But how can all these shifts and evolution in aesthetics be understood in terms of the refunctionalization of convention and theatricality as deep structures common to both social life and theatre art, based on the theories of Burns and Brecht? In short, how does such aesthetics evolution relate to the historical reality? The development of experimental theatres since the latter half of the twentieth century represents a process of reflexive struggle with theatre conventions and social conventions in response to our changing mode of perception and being. Like educational/applied theatres, these aesthetic experiments have been responsive to the context in the social reality. In addition to the complex and winding social-political journey worldwide, with multiple radical changes and manifold instabilities in the last century, the advancement of technologies—including those for production and representation—has been another influential force in the development of contemporary theatre art struggling with its conventions in relation to the shifting social conventions. With the advent of radio, TV, film, digital media and the internet, theatre has ceased to be the major mass media. These technological breakthroughs have not only marginalized theatre, but also fundamentally altered the mode and structure of perception and communication in people's social lives. (Lehmann, 2006, pp.16-18, 175-187) In response to such situation, theatre needed to search for a new position and new function for itself, lest it became merely one unpopular option of commercial entertainment among many within the cultural industry.

This situation forced experimental theatre practitioners to reflect upon what is unique to theatre as an art form and to explore the kind of revolution needed to transcend the conventions of traditional dramatic theatre (i.e., theatre centered around a fictional narrative of drama), which appeared outdated or inadequate in capturing the general public's lived-experiences in the new era. In terms of convention and Burns' cultural-sociological theory, social conventions have been changing so rapidly and radically that the old theatre conventions can no longer echo, enlighten or at least explicate or explore them effectively. The creative dialectic between the two has been lost.

To renew theatre conventions, experimentalists often sought inspirations from new movements in other art forms. Meanwhile, progressive artists from other fields entered the realm of theatre and performance to overcome the limitations in their original domains. This resulted in a blending of conventions and a co-evolution of media, driven by a dual intention to catch up with the experiences of changing social situations and to overcome traditional conventions, which had strong inertia but were losing effectiveness. To align theatre conventions with new social experiences and conventions, artists attempted to modify the traditional art conventions, e.g., making non-linear and multiple narratives and mixing different media and types of discourses.

A more fundamental challenge was to renew forms and conventions while overcoming the deep-rooted control of old ones. Major attempts included strategies that went beyond simply doing something different or opposite to the conventions. These strategies focused on disclosing and disrupting conventions themselves. Notable approaches included: **1)** playing with/around or intentionally misusing conventions (often in interesting ways) to destabilize them and undermine their assumed authority, **2)**

overusing conventions until they break down by themselves; and **3**) identifying inherent contradictory elements within conventions and extremizing these polarities until they collapse. These are evident in many approaches termed 'postmodern' (Pavis, 2016; Auslander, 1997; Foster, 1983; Lavender 2016; Bertens and Natoli, 2002).

Another approach involved strategies like **1**) highlighting presentational conventions while decentering and downplaying representational conventions, focusing on the power of presentation itself as an effective totality and an impactful event (like a ceremony or ritual), or **2**) presenting representational conventions or even presentational conventions itself as the content of presentation, thereby disturbing the operation of both representation and presentation. In both cases, theatricality is highlighted. These strategies are evident in many experiments now referred to as 'postdramatic' (Lehmann, 2006; Sidiropoulou, 2023).

Once the act and convention of presentation were highlighted, and once presentation itself became the event to be emphasized or the focal point of the encounter, theatre artists began to pay more attention to presence, performance, or liveness, as well as *the immediately preceivable materiality* of the performance, the stage event, theatrical means, or the *mise en scène*. More importance was placed on *perception in the event/encounter* prior to any imagination, interpretation, or understanding emerging from it. Consequently, there was also a tendency to return to the primacy of body/corporeality and the immediacy of the affective dimension of our existence, contrasting with the multi-layered, complex operations of mediation that increasingly featured our contemporary lived-experience. The reality of presentation, rather than the presentation of reality, was highlighted and intensified. Theatre became a 'theatre situation' (Lehmann 2006, p.17, 114) or 'theatrical reality (*das TheatReale*)' (Lehmann, 2006, p.163). The experience of theatre as an event was emphasized (Lehmann, 2006, pp.104-109; Fisher-Lichte 2014; Lavender 2016).

In this sense, theatre can be independent from drama, having its own status and unique impacts. Drama is not necessarily rejected but is *decentered* and no longer essential. These shifts in focus brought theatre closer to the conventions of poetry and prose, or even ceremony or festival, moving further away from story/narrative. The diverse modalities in theatre were de-hierarchized, leading to the formation of new aesthetics, poetics, and corresponding conventions.

However, these breakthroughs began to lose their critical power when they sometimes turned into models to be reproduced. As these explorations continued in experimental theatres and some started to become new conventions—or even part of major conventions—not only in the field of alternative theatres but also partially in the field of mainstream theatre, they were absorbed, institutionalized and domesticated in the art industry, cultural business or academic discourse. They became new paradigms or fashions. Some practitioners and audiences started to get bored with them and consider these once-innovative approaches as empty formalism, often accompanied by a hidden mentality of escapism or an apolitical stance of cynicism (Pavis, 2016; Auslander, 1997; Foster, 1985), as exemplified in the aforementioned critique of Davis (2014) from the perspective of educational theatre.

Correspondingly, since the 1990s, there has been a growing concern and a yearning for *reality*, questioning how to reintroduce *reality* into theatre. This has led to explorations termed ‘theatre of the real’ (Martin, 2013; Lavender 2016; Garde and Mumford 2016; Pavis, 2016), ‘reality theatre’ (Mumford, 2013), or new realism (Boenisch and Ostermeier, 2016; Carson, 2021). These explorations focus on how theatre can engage with reality—e.g., by “recycling reality for the stage” (Martin, 2013, p.4) or incorporating “real people” (i.e., non-actors) in performance (Garde and Mumford, 2016)—and on how reality can (or cannot fully) appear in theatre through representation and presentation. They also question what/which reality theatre should/can address. These inquiries tackle the problems and possibilities of theatre “to ‘get real’, to access ‘the real thing,’ to represent reality, and to be part of the circulation of ideas about our personal, social, and political lives” (Martin, 2013, p.4). The term ‘authenticity’ is sometimes used interchangeably with ‘reality’ in these discussions (Schulze, 2017). New conventions like documentary theatre, verbatim theatre, etc., have emerged in this context. This trend mirrors our contemporary lived-experience, where our social life and social reality have become highly theatricalized and mediatized under the influences of media, business and politics, causing much confusion and puzzlement regarding the real, its presentation and its representation (Lehmann 2006; Martin 2013).

The drive to reconnect with reality has also heightened interest in *participation*, recognizing that the presence, life experiences and actions of the spectators are integral to reality, and that the spectators, as the main actors in reality, can extend the effects of theatre beyond theatre if they act to make further changes in real life. This has led to the emergence of interactive theatre, participatory theatre (European Theatre Convention, 2020), theatres of engagement (Lavender, 2016), and nomadic theatre (Nibbelink, 2019). Immersive theatre (Frieze, 2016; Warren, 2017; Jarvis, 2019; Webb ,2023; Bucknall, 2023) is an eye-catching development in this direction. Interestingly, these pursuits resonate with earlier experiments of Brecht’s learning play and Moreno’s theatre of spontaneity (including both psychodrama and sociodrama), almost a century ago, as well as the rise of educational/applied theatre in recent decades.

However, it is worth noting that participatory theatre does not necessarily imply theatre of the real. For example, many immersive theatres, despite being site-specific, operate within fictional worlds. Nonetheless, many latest experiments aim to integrate both *reality* and *participation*, exploring how to reconnect reality with theatre (or bring theatre to reality) while also making theatre participatory. These experiments strive to avoid reverting to traditional dramatic conventions by adapting strategies that play with conventions and its status, and re-organize the relationship between presentation and representation. (Alston, 2016; Dinesh, 2018; Nibbelink, 2019).

An overview of this reconstructed evolution reveals that contemporary theatre, as an aesthetic convention, is generally a self-conscious convention that constantly questions itself and attempts to overcome its limitations. This self-awareness of its limitations and artificiality marks a historical breakthrough as conventions in both the artistic and social domains were previously either hidden/implicit or presented as *the* reality or *the* metaphysically absolute rules/standards/orders. Many aesthetic strategies in contemporary theatre, which may appear strange, complex, or abstract, are

efforts to explicate conventions as mere conventions and to grapple with the tendency of conventions to recede into the background, regaining their all-encompassing power when they are invisible. They expose their own limitations to liberate themselves from such limitations, and they actively limit themselves to counteract the effects of such limitedness. In this sense, contemporary theatre fully embodies Brecht's idea of re-functionalizing cultural apparatus, despite not all practitioners identifying themselves as 'Brechtian'. Such re-functionalization is inevitable for achieving liberation and autonomy because conventions, as Burns disclosed, are not merely superficial dressing but deep structures of our existence.

This historical reconstruction shows how aesthetics responded to reality, essentially by exploring new theatrical conventions that could keep pace with, interrogate, or negotiate with rapidly changing social conventions and corresponding life experiences. It also helps to identify key questions and major areas of development in aesthetic strategies accordingly. Specifically, based on this reconstruction of the evolution of experimental theatre in terms of convention, this essay summarizes six interrelated dimensions of the new aesthetic conventions according to the major features and questions from contemporary theatre art:

1. *Immediacy* as an event/encounter
2. *Reflexivity* of mediations (modes of presentation and representation)
3. *Hybridity* within and among discourses, narratives and/or media
4. *Deconstruction* of discourses and sign system
5. *Reality* of the content about and/or contact with the real world/lives
6. *Participation* of spectator/spect-actor

Just as Neelands and Goode (1990, 2005, 2015) made important efforts to categorize conventions that construct a process of dramatic experience into four categories—context-building, narrative, poetic and reflective—these six dimensions of contemporary theatre art also attempt to categorize different types of conventions within the contemporary theatre aesthetics. Such typology can facilitate an examination of the mutual influences between contemporary theatre art and educational/applied theatre. Each dimension addresses key areas of concern:

1. How is the theatrical situation set up and what kind of event/encounter can happen therein to create certain direct impacts or contacts?
2. How can the modes of presentation and representation manifest as modes, so there are two levels of experience between experiencing the modes and experiencing through the modes?
3. How can the experiential contents (not limited to story or dramatic plots/circumstances) and their modes of presentation and of representation be put together using principles of collage (co-exist without synthesis) or montage (jump) to preserve and highlight the plurality and heterogeneity of these materials?
4. How can the control of the language and knowledge, which are internalized in us or imposed on us, be identified and mitigated, although they remain unavoidable in the experiential process?

5. How can the work/event/ experiential process relate to the real world and our real live?
6. How is the relationship between the work/event/experiential process and spectators/spec-actors/participants managed?

If the conventions summed up and organized by Neelands and Goode, as well as those by Heathcote, are the conventions for constructing the dramatic process or the experience of living through drama, and hence can be considered as '*dramatic* conventions', then these six categories of new conventions can be called '*theatrical* conventions', echoing the vision of contemporary theatre that emphasizes theatre over drama and decenters drama as one among many other components that contribute to the eventful experience or experiential process.

### **Possibilities of mutual influences between contemporary theatre and educational/applied theatre**

After reconstructing the development of contemporary experimental theatre and categorizing six aesthetic conventions according to six major dimensions of exploration and innovation, it is time to revisit the two central questions regarding the potential mutual influences or collaboration between contemporary art and educational/applied theatre. Although they have evolved separately since the late-1970s, each developing its own explicit and implicit conventions, the two central questions are:

1. Can contemporary theatre art benefit from the conventions of educational theatre/applied theatre and the practical principles underlying these conventions?
2. Can educational/applied theatre benefit from the conventions of contemporary theatre art and the practical principles underlying these conventions?

Here, the focus is on convention rather than style, as convention pertains to the underlying structure that guides and regulates the actions, perceptions, and communications of individuals (including practitioners/makers and participants/receivers).

Concerning the first question, identifying the recent trend in contemporary theatre toward theatre of the real and participatory theatre since the 1990s, in response to the perceived limitations of postmodern and postdramatic theatre, clarifies that contemporary theatre can benefit from the practical experiences and well-developed conventions of educational/applied theatre. Educational/applied theatre has inherently embodied the principles of theatre of the real and participatory theatre since its inception, predating the rise of awareness in contemporary theatre art of this direction:

1. Regarding participation, different modes of educational/applied theatre have developed rich conventions (and diverse strategies for using such conventions) to facilitate various participants in entering and experiencing processes mediated by drama/theatre.
2. Regarding reality, these forms effectively draw material from real lives into dramatic and theatrical experiences, and then transform these experiences back into something relevant to real lives.
3. Furthermore, participation and reality connect in these practices because the reality of participants' lives comes into the session through their engagement and association.

For example, drama therapists and psychodramatists generally pay close attention to using different activities and various ways to set up the session's situation and atmosphere, assisting the participants in reaching certain state and building group connections and ethos. This occurs not only before but throughout the entire experiential process mediated by drama/theatre. Managing participants' states and handling group processes step-by-step are both preconditions for and integral parts of the experiential process, contributing to both the participants' involvement and the coming-in of their lives' reality. Similarly, in Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, the educational effects are achieved not only through Image Theatre or Forum Theatre as the "main dishes" but also through all aspects and nuances operating under the principles of the Aesthetics of the Oppressed. This includes managing transitional moments between the activities and inviting life experiences into the process, which are crucial for the experiential process's effectiveness. Besides many strategies to merge real life material and the imaginative/symbolic process, experienced drama-in-education practitioners also have such sense of facilitating participants' states, managing group processes too, although these aspects are less verbalized in the discussions of convention in this sub-field.

Both practitioners and participants in these modes of practices share a sense of such structures and strategies of facilitation, which function like conventions, even if they are not always conceptualized as such within these fields. Thus, contemporary theatre can learn from educational/applied theatre, particularly in the last two of the six categories of convention: reality and participation.

Admittedly, more work is needed to articulate and explicate these conventions of reality and participation, which are widely shared by many educational/applied theatre practitioners. The lists of conventions provided by Heathcote or Neelands and Goode are far from complete regarding the categories they cover. New categories are to be added to organize these conventions when the implicit ones are brought to a consciousness level. These conventions remaining unarticulated may contribute to why some people cannot see how educational/applied theatre can be relevant to contemporary theatre.

In short, the rich array of implicit and explicit conventions derived from practical experiences in different educational/applied theatre can directly inspire contemporary theatre exploring in the direction of theatre of the real and participatory theatre. Even works in contemporary theatre that are seemingly non-participatory or have a low level of audience participation can benefit from these conventions to enhance their structure of the experiential process for the audience's internal participation. One might even envision how Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) or the Wooster Group's *Brace Up!* (2003) could be adjusted by considering the audience's experiential process and modes of participation through the lens and practical wisdom of educational/applied theatres. This could make such works more accessible to a wider audience while adding further layers of meanings.

Concerning the second question, while the potential contributions of educational/applied theatre to contemporary theatre arts have become much clearer, imagining the reverse—contemporary theatre arts contributing to educational/applied theatre—may be more challenging. As previously analyzed, educational/applied theatre is radically progressive as a form of theatre practice, being participatory or

interactive, but it is also constrained by the traditional form of fictional dramatic theatre, which is essentially logocentric and representational. This is because metaxis and going in-and-out the fictional drama are central to the effectiveness of existing modes of educational/applied theatre. If such dependence on or dominance of the traditional dramatic model persists, the developments in contemporary theatre, especially in the first four dimensions, may seem irrelevant or even counterproductive to educational/applied theatre.

But what if the traditional dramatic model is not the only paradigm? What if the experiential process does not necessarily require a fictional drama/story as its backbone? What if alternative models exist where the core mechanism of effects differs from metaxis? In current practices, even when fictional drama is not the backbone throughout the process – as in process drama — the “main dish” of a session still often adheres to the dramatic theatre paradigm, with other activities serving only as warm-ups or follow-ups. What if the “main dish” could be something else, such as ritual, exhibition or poem? What if there is no “main dish”, but the entire process is an accumulative flow of eventful experience? What if a session of educational/applied theatre could have non-linear and illogical structure, akin to a show created by Robert Lepage or Pina Bausch?

If these possibilities are viable, then the first four of the six categories of conventions from contemporary theatre art could prove highly beneficial and inspiring for educational/applied theatre. The conventions of postmodern and postdramatic theatre can expand the possibilities of educational/applied theatre once ‘theatre’ is decoupled from ‘drama’, and become a source of effects in and of itself. Just as the components of drama and fictional story are not necessarily rejected but only decentered in postmodern and postdramatic theatre, the dramatic model of educational/applied theatre can be retained but reframed within a more flexible aesthetics. This framework would feature organizing principles that allow for a greater variety of combinations and layers.

This theoretical vision, based on the above analysis, remains to be explored in practice. The author has experimented with integrating contemporary theatre conventions into educational/applied theatre practices, and vice versa. These trials are detailed in one of the feature articles by the same author in this special issue.

## **Conclusion**

As analyzed in this essay, contemporary theatre art and educational/applied theatre appear to be converging, with numerous possibilities of mutual influences and cross-referencing between their conventions, provided the underlying principles are considered. The current separation between the two fields might be only historical and sociological, stemming from professional ecology rather than fundamental differences.

In short, historically, contemporary experimental theatre and educational/applied theatre emerged from similar roots. The existing separation and mutual indifference between the two fields may be attributed to a misunderstanding of the development of contemporary theatre as purely or primarily an artistic matter, overlooking its on-going struggles in response to changing social situations. However, by



disclosing convention as deep structure (Burns) and apparatus (Brecht), taking it as a main thread, and recognizing the possibility of the dialectical re-functionalization of convention as apparatus (Burns and Brecht) for liberation and humanization, it is possible, on the one hand, to establish a theoretical ground for the possibility of educational/applied theatre. On the other hand, this helps us to recognize contemporary theatre's development in relation to changes in social conditions, and allows us to appreciate the achievements of this new aesthetics and the innovations therein as critical responses to such social changes. On this ground, we can also identify possible points of intersection and collaboration/convergence between the two fields.

To summarize the main findings:

1. Convention is to be understood sociologically via the dialectics between social life and theatre, based on the theory of Burns and Brecht.
2. Such sociological understanding of convention can help to understand the transformative power of educational/applied theatre, in relation to theatre and social life.
3. Such understanding can also clarify the significance of conventions approach as a way of thinking for practitioners of theatre art and educational/applied theatre.
4. An analysis in terms of convention and its re-functionalization can clarify how contemporary experimental theatre developed in response to the crisis of disconnection between the conventions of theatre and those of social life.
5. New conventions developed in contemporary theatre can be categorized into six dimensions—immediacy, reflexivity, hybridity, deconstruction, reality, and participation.
6. Contemporary theatre can benefit from educational/applied theatres particularly in the categories of reality and participation.
7. Educational/applied theatres can be enriched by the other four categories of conventions from contemporary theatre (immediacy, reflexivity, hybridity, deconstruction) if it moves beyond the traditional dramatic theatre model reliant on fictional drama and metaxis.
8. A new horizon of 'theatrical conventions' are to be further explored and re-organized when existing 'dramatic conventions' are decentered but not excluded.
9. There is a need for further works in articulating and re-organizing the conventions of both contemporary theatre and educational/applied theatre.

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