

Using Brechtian Ideas and Theatrical Practices to Reconceptualize Role Distance and Facilitate Learning in Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the ideas and theatrical practices of Bertold Brecht may be applied in organizational contexts. A model is developed that builds on Brechtian conceptions of alienation and integrates organizational learning and role theories. Specifically, the model suggests that role distance may be reconceptualized as a reflective, dialectic process that builds on Brecht's ideas for alienating actors and audiences from the familiar to demonstrate the changing and changeable nature of behavior. This reflective process in turn may facilitate non-routine, role-related learning. Implications for organizational theory and practice are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore how ideas from the theater could inform organizational theory and practice. Specifically, the paper attempts to show how the ideas and theatrical practices of Bertold Brecht may be applied in organizational contexts. An exploratory model is developed that links individual learning in organizations (Argyris and Schon, 1978) to expectation enactment (Fondas and Stewart, 1994) via Brecht's ideas on alienation. It is hoped that this model may stimulate new and interesting ideas (Astley, 1985) in the field not only about how learning and role theories may be linked but also about how ideas from Brecht's epic theater may be used to build models that enrich existing organizational research and practice. Having said this, it should also be pointed out that the paper will cover a lot of ground and is designed to be more of an expose than a study demonstrating validity. The model presented is exploratory and prescriptive in nature and serves as an illustration for how Brechtian ideas may be applied to change rather than to describe existing organizational dynamics.

The point of entry for applying Brechtian ideas in this paper is the process of individual

learning in organizational contexts (Argyris and Schon, 1978). This point of entry was chosen because learning has been identified as a critical process in organizations. Specifically, it has been noted that in rapidly changing environments organizations have to learn how to learn and become, what are called, learning organizations to remain competitive (Crossan, Lane and White, 1999; Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Senge, 1990). It has also been suggested that to do this, organizations need to balance their ability to learn in routine ways, exploiting what they already know, with an ability to learn in innovative ways, exploring new ideas and questioning underlying assumptions (Appelbaum and Goransson, 1997; Crossan, Lane and White, 1999; Fiol and Lyles, 1985; March, 1991). Consequently, organizational members must also be able to balance their ability for routine or single-loop learning with a capacity for innovative or double-loop learning (Argyris and Schon, 1978). Double-loop learning has been defined as an individual's ability to surface and question the assumptions that underlie behaviors, to change these assumptions and to form new theories-in-use, or to behave differently according to new and changed assumptions (Argyris and Schon, 1978), a process that seems to be difficult for most individuals and hence organizations (Argyris, 1976).

To examine how individuals and organizations may enhance their ability to engage in double-loop learning this paper seeks to integrate ideas developed for the theater by playwright Bertold Brecht with role theoretic conceptions of behavior in organizations (Katz and Kahn, 1966; Stryker and Statham, 1985). Role theory was selected as the linking process because roles have been found to be central to understanding behavior in social systems (Welbourne, Johnson and Erez, 1998) in general and some learning processes in particular (Driver, 2002). Therefore, the notion is advanced that learning may be facilitated by embedding learning processes into role behaviors. Particularly, Brecht's ideas about alienation may be used to reconceptualize role distance (Goffman, 1961) and to develop a reflective process that enables individuals in organizations to surface, question and alter role-related choices.

The paper proceeds along the following outline. First, a review of relevant literature in the field of organizational role theory is presented. Second, prior research on role distance is discussed. Third, Brecht's ideas and theatrical practices will be described. Fourth, a model will be presented that uses Brechtian ideas and practices to integrate role and learning theory via the concept of role distance. The paper concludes with a discussion about implications for organizational research and practice.

ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE THEORY

While current research in role theory integrates both socio-structural and psychological perspectives (Fondas and Stewart, 1994; Welbourne, Johnson and Erez, 1998), at its inception role theory was grounded in a sociological perspective focusing on the effects of social structures on individuals (Stryker and Statham, 1985). As such role theory was traditionally based on the assumption that individuals conform to social pressures and adopt roles that are predetermined by the expectations of others (Biddle, 1986). An example of traditional conceptions of role theory is Katz and Kahn's classic description of role episodes as the fundamental blocks around

which all behavior in organizations is built (1966). Such conceptions of role theory have been criticized for being too deterministic and not accounting adequately for the ability of individuals to influence and change role expectations, role behaviors and by extension the social structures that surround them (Biddle, 1986; Stryker and Statham, 1985). As a result less deterministic conceptualizations of role theory have been developed. These vary along a continuum with regard to how much they focus on the individual or the social structure as the primary driver of role-related processes.

Symbolic interactionist perspectives (see for example Goffman, 1959) are situated on the opposite end of the continuum relative to structural/functional perspectives in that they suggest that social structure may have little influence on role-related processes and that individuals actively make their roles rather than take them passively (Stryker and Statham, 1985). A recent example of research situated between the two ends of the continuum is a model developed by Fondas and Stewart (1994). This model suggests that role making is a continuous process and that individuals have as much or more influence on social structures as the social structures have on them. Fondas and Stewart (1994) term this model "expectation enactment".

'Expectation enactment' refers to the impact a manager has on the expectations to which he or she will be held subsequently – impact that occurs as the result of the manager intentionally initiating opportunities to shape role expectations and as the result of automatic feedback and mutual adjustment between focal manager and role senders (Fondas and Stewart, 1994, p. 88).

From this perspective role behavior in organizations is socially constructed as focal persons and sets of role senders shape and re-shape expectations cognitively selecting and attending to some environmental cues but not others.



Figure 1: Model of Expectation Enactment (adapted from Fondas and Stewart, 1994, Figure 2, p.92)

In essence Fondas and Stewart's model (1994), as depicted in Figure 1, suggests that a focal person's enactment of expectations is bounded by various determinants like organizational influences (such as job descriptions and resource availability), characteristics of the role set (such as authority and latitude), characteristics of the focal person (such as power motivation and locus of control) and characteristics of the role set/focal person relationship (such as interpersonal interaction and attraction).

Finally, an example of the symbolic interactivist perspective is Goffman's (1959) conception of role behavior as a system of situated activities. In this system individuals enact micro performances involving actors and audiences who sustain any given performance through mutual impression management. While such conceptions of role theory have been criticized as not accounting sufficiently for the effects of social structures on individuals (Stryker and Statham, 1985), an interactionist perspective may fit better with the current Zeitgeist as modern (Western) society emphasizes individuality and encourages impulsive rather than institutional behavior (Turner, 1976).

In keeping with the current Zeitgeist, current role-theoretic research seems to place greater emphasis on emergent aspects of role episodes, that is on how roles change and how persons initiate, thrive on and cope with such change (Allen and Van De Vliert, 1982; Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Fondas and Stewart, 1994; Zurcher, 1983). More efforts are made to understand the complexities of multiple roles and the benefits of multiple role

attachments with regard to creating space in which individuality may be expressed (Goffman, 1961; Greenhaus and Beutel, 1985; Pratt and Foreman, 2000; Settles, Sellers and Damas, 2002; Sieber, 1974; Stryker and Statham, 1985; Van Sell, Brief and Schuler, 1981; Wiley, 1987; Zurcher, 1983). In the same vein, it has been suggested that an individual's ability to distance him/herself from a given role and to perform multiple roles may have various benefits such as increased life satisfaction and an increased capacity to behave in unique and creative ways (Goffman, 1961; Sieber, 1974; Turner, 1976; Zurcher, 1983).

ROLE DISTANCE

Role distance suggests that while an individual may be capable of fully embracing a role, just like an actor throws him or herself into a role to embody it completely, an individual may at any time choose to do the opposite (Goffman, 1961). At any time, an individual may engage in behaviors that express "pointed separateness between the individual and his putative role" (Goffman, 1961, p. 108) and thus express role distance. Role distance differs from the rejection of a role in that role distance can only be expressed to the extent that the individual is also capable of embracing the role. Role distance is expressed in juxtaposition to behaviors that indicate full compliance with typical expectations. For example, during a surgery the surgeon may joke about the procedure, with attending staff. Such behavior expresses role distance because it contrasts with the typical demeanor of a surgeon and with behaviors the surgeon is capable of engaging in assuming he/she has previously played this role (Goffman, 1961).

Role distance has been described as the space in which the individual can express him/herself (Goffman, 1961). This space serves various functions for the individual. For example, by not fully committing to a role the individual is less likely to be judged on its typical standards of achievement. Role distance also facilitates attachment to multiple roles in that an individual can be in one role but continue to be loyal to expecta-

tions accompanying other roles. In general, role distance indicates to others and the individual in question that the person is not defined by their role and that their real self (Turner, 1976) may not be fully captured enacting it (Goffman, 1961). Additionally, it indicates that the person has other roles and that he or she actively refuses to be fully described by the enacted role. Moreover, every individual has multiple attachments to various roles, and these attachments must be juggled continuously in a dynamic process of distancing from and embracing of roles. In that sense role distance may be critical for self-identification as the individual rejects some expectations in favor of others and through this dynamic process defines him/herself.

Building on Goffman's understanding of role distance (1961), theories of learning in organizations (Argyris and Schon, 1978) and current role theory (Fondas and Stewart, 1994), it is suggested here that role distance might also be explored as a way of facilitating double-loop learning in organizational settings. Specifically, it is proposed that individuals may use role distance purposefully to question typical role expectations. Before examining further how and why doing so might be useful it is necessary to clarify how role distance may be reconceptualized for learning purposes. To this end, we now turn to the ideas and theatrical practices of playwright Bertold Brecht.

BRECHT'S THEATER AND THEATRICAL PRACTICES

While Brecht's writings need to be understood as existing in a political context with political aims that owes much to the thinking of Karl Marx (Bentley, 1998; Weber and Heinen, 1980), it is equally important to understand them in a philosophical context (Ludwig, 1975). Brecht was disillusioned with modernist science and art (Silberman, 1993). He suggested that objective knowledge may be impossible and that language itself may be an obstacle to understanding (Ludwig, 1975). Alienation theory and the *Verfremdungs-Effekt*, for which Brecht is so well known, are the foundation of Brecht's alternate view of knowing, ex-

pressing and behaving (Ludwig, 1975). Brecht assumed that we are alienated from the world around us by the objectifying and dogmatic use of language that corresponds little to but may estrange us quite a bit from our experience of the world. Moreover, through this objectifying way of experiencing the world, we have not only lost our own intuitive way of experiencing the world but have also come to feel as if we are objects in a world we are unable to change. In a sense, the objectifying experience of reality has disempowered us from realizing that we not only can trust our own subjective experience, but more importantly that we subjectively create the reality we live in (Ludwig, 1975). Consequently, we need to recognize how alienated we have become from our subjective experience of the world. To recognize this, we, in turn need alienate ourselves from our current way of experiencing: "Alienation is nothing but a representation, that is 'making noticeable' of estrangement (translation of a Brecht quote cited in Ludwig, 1975, p. 20)." In a sense, we need to undergo a dialectic process by which we alienate ourselves from alienated experience to rediscover a more subjective and in many ways unspoiled way of experiencing.

This seems to suggest that Brecht claimed to bring us closer to truth and thereby fall back into some modernist conception of objective reality. Indeed, some have accused Brecht of doing just that in a political context when he proclaimed that communism was the only model acceptable for any society thereby proposing an alternate but equally rigid and uncritical worldview (Ludwig, 1975). The many contradictions and complexities of Brecht's writings notwithstanding, Brecht did suggest that his aim was not to replace one truth with another, but to help empower his theater audiences to see their own behaviors and the world around them as changing and therefore changeable (Ludwig, 1975).

What is critical for purposes of this paper is that everything that Brecht tried to do in the theater was aimed at alienation and that the aim of Brecht's theater was not to show truth but to empower audiences by helping them to question

truths. In response to his plays, Brecht hoped that people would say: "Things can happen this way, but they can also happen a quite different way" (Brecht quoted in Kellner, 1980). In that sense theater was ultimately a practical tool, one that derived its value from helping audiences gain a different perspective. In this way Brecht's so called epic theater is quite different from traditional theater. Traditional theater seems to be designed to create illusions into which the audience is drawn to feel like the people represented in the play (Hecht, 1970). Epic theater, in contrast, does not aim at illusion. It only recounts a story, often in a fragmented fashion, that encourages the audience to become observers and pushes it to take a critical stance toward the performance. Its aim is to provide insight into how a person is not static or unchangeable but rather is the complex and fluid "sum of attitudes or stances that show him in relationship to his environment (translated from a quote by Jennrich in Ludwig, 1975, p. 30). Epic theater embodies a dialectical perspective that shows how human beings relate to their social circumstances and how they are defined by but also define their relationships with others (Hecht, 1970).

Brecht was adamant that his theatrical practices cannot be taken out of the context of his playwriting and understood or copied as a method or style (Ludwig, 1975). It is therefore in the context of the previous remarks about Brecht's epistemological concerns that his theatrical practices are discussed here. The value of the methods Brecht employed, in terms of stage directions, principles of acting and essentials of the performance, lies in their power to alienate the theater audience from habitual ways of experiencing (Hecht, 1970).

To accomplish this, epic theater allows the audience to see at every moment all that is normally behind the scenes, such as lighting fixtures. It also reminds the audience with often strange or purposefully malfunctioning props, such as a moon dropping from the night sky with a loud bang, that it has to wake up to a theatrical performance rather than to dream away in some make-believe place (Willett, 1964). Epic theater

demands much of its actors. Brecht did not want actors to identify with their roles. Rather he wanted them to do so only during rehearsals in order to get a deeper understanding of their character. Specifically, actors must prepare for a role in three stages (Rouse, 1989). First they study the role and story with a critical stance and build their observations and knowledge to question them. They then memorize initial reactions, amazements or disagreements to their roles to preserve, what Brecht thought was, the original act of experiencing the story or the naïve experience of first exploring the roles' different positions within their social context (Willett, 1964). In the second stage of rehearsals, the actors go in the opposite direction divesting their critical perspective to practice empathy and identification with their roles. This is to enable actors to interact naturally with one another and to experience how the characters were in their own social context. Finally during the third stage of rehearsals, the actors have to do yet another about-face and step outside their characters once again. This time they are to represent how society would see their characters and, from a position of intimate knowing (after deeply identifying with their character), reconnect with the initial distance to their roles (Willett, 1964).

After completing this dialectic development from critical distance, to full identification and back again to critical distance, the actors begin working out all of the carefully choreographed 'gests' that make up the story of the play (Rouse, 1989). Each 'gest' shows the character in relation to other characters, an insight Brecht sought to deepen by asking the actors to switch roles during rehearsals (Willett, 1964). Each 'gest' at once presents and externalizes what the character is feeling or thinking. It shows the attitude that the actor has toward the role and invites the audience to critically assess the character. "In this way his [the actor's] performance becomes a discussion (about social conditions) with the audience he is addressing (Willett, 1964, p. 139).

An essential part of the discussion the actor is to engage in with the audience is the idea of 'not/but.' To continuously support the audience

in recognizing that what the character is doing is just one of many possibilities and could be changed any time – which is what the audience is to take away relative to their own behavior – the actor has to not only show what the character on stage is doing or feeling but also what he or she is not doing or feeling. He must express for example that: “He detests his children; it is not the case that he loves them (Willett, 1964, p. 137).” In practice, the actor is not acting but rather introducing options for behaving. First an option is introduced and then remarked on as an extraordinary occurrence. This alienates the audience from the first option by showing that any behavior is a choice and should not be taken for granted. Then the second option for behaving is introduced and the audience is alienated from it as well. In the end all possible behaviors are shown to be strange options. That is, it is demonstrated that it is remarkable that a person would choose to behave in one way when they could have behaved in another (Willett, 1964).

The point is that the actor has to make remarkable what we might take for granted or leave unquestioned. In one illustration of this, Brecht describes that an actor may not pay particular attention to a scene in which a girl leaves her home to take a job in a larger city. In traditional theater this may just serve as an aside to explain the following scenes. But in epic theater an actor has to pay a great deal of attention to this fact and make the audience aware that it is indeed a remarkable event. Specifically, the actor has to express in his/her ‘gest’ that the girl is leaving a family who did not object to her doing so and draw attention to the fact that the family could have tried to stop her. The actor also has to point out that the girl may not be ready for this and help the audience wonder about what she has learned from her family so far. Further, the actor needs to point out that this may or may not have to happen in all families and that members of the audience are free to do things differently. That is, every minute event in epic theater is to become an occasion for showing the ‘not/but’ and changeable nature of all behaviors (Willett, 1964).

To help actors in creating these occa-

sions, Brecht developed a variety of acting tips. On stage actors do not have to pretend that they are doing anything naturally as if the audience was invisible. Rather through their physical movements and the way they speak their parts, actors should convey to the audience that they are on a stage, moving for the benefit of and directly engaging with the audience somehow ‘reporting’ lines written by someone else in a role they are there to observe along with the spectators (Willett, 1964). Furthermore, actors have a differentiated and personal relationship to the audience in that they as well as their audience take sides as the story unfolds.

Additionally, actors have to be cognizant of the possibilities their actions create for other actors on stage. To the degree, for example, that one actor acknowledges another as being in a more powerful role, that person is allowed the possibility of having (more or less) power over the other. The actor has to be aware of this social construction of relationships and allow the audience to notice it as well. To help accomplish this, masks that stylize and estrange emotional expressions as well as symbolic and highly exaggerated physical expressions can be used (Hinck, 1966). In Brecht’s play “Tutor” for example an actor may use the way he bows to make several statements. First, in the exaggerated way in which he bows he may make a normally unnoticeable act of greeting a remarkable event. He may also use the bow to comment on the fact that he is bowing to get something from the other people on stage and that he is aware of this. Additionally, he may use the ‘gest’ of bowing to comment on the contradiction that as he looks up perhaps admiringly to the power the others hold over him, he also looks down on and perhaps despises them for exerting it (Rouse, 1989). In summary, all techniques used by the actors in epic theater are designed to alienate the audience from familiar ways of experiencing placing the actor ‘in front’ of the enacted character as someone who has something to show and someone to show it to (Hinck, 1966).

A MODEL FOR HOW BRECHTIAN IDEAS AND PRACTICES MAY BE APPLIED IN ORGANIZATIONS

We will now explore how Brecht's ideas and theatrical practices can be applied in organizational contexts. Particularly, a model will be developed illustrating how individuals in organizations can use Brechtian ideas and practices to question and change expectation enactments (Fondas and Stewart, 1994) and engage in role-related, non-routine learning. As we have seen earlier, every aspect of Brecht's plays is grounded in alienation theory and designed to show that how people think, feel and behave in their social context is always changing and changeable. If we apply this perspective to organizational role theory, particularly the concept of role distance (Goffman, 1961), then it may also be possible to alienate organizational members from the familiar and to show that how they think, feel and behave in their social context is changing and changeable. In particular Brechtian stage practices may provide a way for organizational actors to practice double-loop learning (Argyris and Schon, 1978) as part of their "expectation enactment" (Fondas and Stewart, 1994). That is, Brechtian ideas may help individuals in organizations to be more aware of and to change underlying assumptions as they reflect on the choices they make during expectation enactment.

It is important to note at this point that the learning dynamic of expectation enactment does not and perhaps should not occur continuously. That is, because not all activities in organizations can or should aim at radical change (March, 1991), individuals likewise cannot or should not question or change assumptions as part of every expectation enactment. Rather using Brechtian ideas as the basis for role-related, non-routine learning may be particularly relevant to situations and areas in which the individual and/or the organization is trying to effect some change. As organizations tend toward stability and toward actions that lessen uncertainty and ambiguity (March, 1991), it may not be desirable or realistic to expect that they would welcome or benefit from individual learning that seeks to change underly-

ing assumptions. Rather, it is suggested here that they may use and welcome such learning as they seek to adapt to changing environments and to match the complexity and variety found inside the organization with the complexity and variety found in its environment (Weick, 1995). In short, the model developed here becomes more relevant to organizational actors as the organizations they are members of seek to increase response variety.

We now begin to build this model by using Brechtian ideas to reconceptualize role distance. Role distance has been described as a means by which actors separate themselves from typical role expectations (Goffman, 1961). Role distance is expressed in behaviors that signal to the actor and others that the role that is enacted is not equivalent with the self of the actor. By building on Brechtian ideas and by conceptualizing role distance not exclusively as a way of rejecting norms or carving out a space for individuality, role distance may also become a tool for alienation in organizational contexts and provide the space in which organizational actors can reflect on and change choices they make during expectation enactment (Fondas and Stewart, 1994).

Role distance as juxtaposed to more role typical behaviors, such as role embracing or role merger [the opposite of role distance or complete identification with the role (Stryker and Statham, 1985)] may serve here as the point of departure for a dialectic learning dynamic that may occur during expectation enactment. Analog to the dialectic process by which Brechtian actors study a role that takes them from a critical stance, to complete identification, and finally to a critical stance again (Willett, 1964), individuals in organizations may practice dialectic reflection that moves them, in spiral fashion, from role distant, to role embracing, and back to role distant reflection that may facilitate role-related learning.

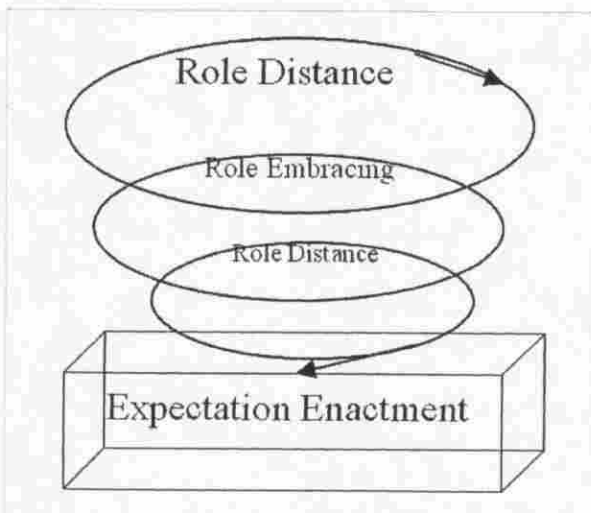


Figure 2: Role Distance as Learning Dynamic

As depicted in figure 2, the learning dynamic is envisioned here as a third dimension of expectation enactment. That is, during some but not all instances of expectation enactment, the individual may use Brechtian ideas and practices to alienate him/herself from familiar expectation enactments and thereby to make transparent and perhaps change underlying choices and assumptions, i.e. engage in double-loop learning (Argyris and Schon, 1978). When an individual practices double-loop learning he/she not only questions and changes underlying assumptions but also translates these new assumptions into theories-in-use by changing behavior (Argyris and Schon, 1978).

Double-loop learning may occur as the focal person steps back from expectation enactment to apply Brechtian ideas to his/her current organizational context. The act of stepping back in turn is a dialectic process in which the individual practices both role distance and role embracing. Role distance is not used in Goffman's sense here (1961). That is, role distance does not refer to a behavior in which the person expresses separation from his/her current role. Rather role distance refers to a reflective process in which the individual is able to create a mental space in which Brechtian ideas and practices may be applied. In other words, role distance here may be more like the critical stance that Brechtian actors practice as they study and

perform a role. Role embracing in turn is not role embracing in terms of role merger in the traditional sense (Stryker and Statham, 1985). Rather role embracing is the reflective act similar to what Brechtian actors do to completely identify with a role they study for a performance (Willett, 1964). Neither role distance nor role embracing in that sense can be seen as separate processes, since they are part of the same dialectic in which consecutive insights and experiences build on previous ones. That is why figure 2 shows the learning dynamic as a spiral, because role distant and role embracing reflections are repeated as the individual cycles from one to the other but each time the individual repeats the cycle a new perspective is attained and new learning occurs as new connections are developed at different levels of abstraction (Fiol and Lyles, 1985).

In other words, as the individual uses Brechtian techniques to reflect on his/her own role as if it were a role studied for a Brechtian play, the individual learns in a dynamic process that moves from role distance to role embracing. As the individual begins the dialectic learning process, role distance is a stance in which the individual studies his/her role as if he/she were someone else. At this point the original conception of role distance as separateness from one role caused by attachment to another role may provide a useful starting point. The person may envision him/herself in one of his/her other multiple roles, such as spouse, friend, father etc. (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000) to study his/her current role initially. Put simply the person may put him/herself in another role's shoes to reflect on choices underlying expectation enactment that the person does *not* currently make. By reflecting on his/her role from a critical distance the focal person alienates him/herself from current expectation enactment and makes transparent and remarkable the choices he or she is not making in the process. It is critical at this stage that the person do so with great awareness so that, like a Brechtian actor, he or she can become aware of and record the reactions he/she may have along the way. The person, for example, may use various reflection-for-learning techniques such as journaling (Rigano and

Edwards, 1998) and carefully record impressions as he/she reflects on current expectation enactments from the vantage point of a different role, role set and external and internal expectations. It may also be helpful for the focal person to reflect on his or her reactions in terms of whether the experienced role distance feels authentic or not. As Rottenburg explains (1994), it is possible at times for individuals to engage in a kind of illusionary role distance, whereby the actor expresses distance to a role while actually engaging in all of the behaviors associated with role conformity. In short, the focal person may use the techniques Brecht developed for actors to become more critical observers of behavior as outlined above to take a critical stance toward their own enactment of expectations.

After this initial stage of role distance, the individual moves to role embracing, in which he/she reflects on current expectation enactment from the perspective of completely identifying and empathizing with current expectations. That is, the focal person stops considering what he or she is *not* choosing to reflect on what he/she is doing. In a sense the person moves away from epic theater and toward traditional theater in which the actor completely embraces and merges with his or her role. While Brecht did not elaborate much on this stage of role preparation, it may be assumed that any and all acting techniques developed for the traditional theater may be relevant here because Brecht pointed out that in contrast to epic theater, traditional theater aimed solely at creating complete identification of actors and roles and audiences and actors in their roles (Willett, 1964). In any event, the contrast or movement is critical here. That is, that the focal person experience and become aware of the difference between complete identification or role embracing and critical appraisal that distances him/herself from currently enacted expectations. Finally, the person moves once again toward role distance, this time taking a critical perspective that is informed by the previous movements from role distant to role embracing. That is, the person goes beyond viewing current expectation enactment from another role the individual may have toward viewing current expectation enact-

ment from a perspective that recognizes the difference between role distant and role embracing and that recognizes the not/but quality of behavior. This level of role distance is similar to the perspective of the Brechtian actor who is ready to perform a role on stage. That is, this perspective is built on the awareness changing and changeable nature of behavior, i.e. the understanding that role distant as well as role embracing behaviors are possible and that it is up to the focal person to choose how to shape and enact expectations. It is in this sense that the person becomes more aware of the dynamic process of expectation enactment and the choices that underlie it. In other words, at this point the person begins to reflect on the not/but character of expectation enactments by using Brechtian acting techniques and envisioning the organizational context as a Brechtian stage replete with audience, props and actors.

It is at this stage of the dialectic that the focal person can reflect on expectation enactment as a series of Brechtian 'gests' in which he or she, like the Brechtian actor on stage, is not acting but rather introducing options for behaving. That is, the focal person may reflect on expectation enactment from the perspective of epic actors who convey to the audience that they are on a stage, moving for the benefit of and directly engaging with the audience somehow 'reporting' lines written by someone else in a role they are there to observe along with the spectators (Willett, 1964). In that sense, the focal person reflects on behavior as 'gests' that express choices in such a way that the underlying choice becomes transparent to the focal person and the role set with whom he/she enacts expectations. In summary the dialectic movement from role distant to role embracing and back to role distant may enable the focal person to reflect on expectation enactment from a Brechtian perspective and to use Brecht's techniques not only to estrange him/herself from familiar choices but also to enact this estrangement in such a way that new options for behavior become possible. In essence, dialectic reflection may allow the focal person to use alienation techniques to change some of the cognitive processes involved in the

shaping and reshaping of expectations (Fondas and Stewart, 1994).

Over time this learning dynamic may also become the basis for expectation enactment that enables focal persons to initiate and engage in role change and to use role distance to more easily hold and maneuver multiple role attachments (Allen and Van De Vliert, 1982; Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Fondas and Stewart, 1994; Zurcher, 1983). That is, as focal persons use Brechtian techniques to reflect on role distant versus role embracing expectations, they may also find themselves more ready to accept role change as they practice thinking about roles as changing and changeable from a Brechtian perspective. Moreover, they may find that the transition from one role to another or the taking on of additional roles seem easier given the reflections they have undertaken about the choices that underlie their expectation enactments. That is, role related double-loop learning may be facilitated by reflecting on role distance as a dialectic learning process that can then be translated into behavioral role distance both in Goffman's sense (1961) as expression of multiple role attachments in particular but also in Brecht's sense as expression of changing and changeable role attachments in general.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The purpose of this paper was to stimulate new and interesting ideas (Astely, 1985) in the field about how ideas from the theater may inform organizational theory and practice. Specifically, the paper attempted to show how the ideas and theatrical practices of Bertold Brecht may be applied in organizational contexts. An exploratory model was developed that links individual learning in organizations (Argyris and Schon, 1978) to expectation enactment (Fondas and Stewart, 1994) via Brecht's ideas on alienation. It is hoped that this model serves to illustrate not only how learning and role theories may be linked but also how ideas from Brecht's epic theater may be used to build models that enrich existing organizational research and practice. The contribution this paper

hopes to make is twofold. First, the paper seeks to provide future directions for expanding organizational research by building on the ideas of playwright Bertold Brecht. Second, the paper tries to provide inspiration for practical applications of Brecht's ideas in organizational contexts.

As to the first contribution, the paper sought to demonstrate how Bertold Brecht's theatrical practices, as understood in their epistemological context of alienation theory, might be integrated into organizational theory. Specifically the paper explored one model for how this might be done. It was illustrated how an important but difficult-to-practice process such as double-loop learning (Argyris, 1976) might be facilitated by using Brechtian techniques. It is hoped that the model presented in this paper provides a starting point for future research in which Brecht's ideas are integrated into organizational theorizing. Relative to role theory, Brechtian ideas may provide the basis for more prescriptive approaches. It could be examined for example how an individual's ability to distance him/herself from a given role and to perform multiple roles may be enhanced through Brechtian acting techniques as a planned intervention to increase life satisfaction or the capacity to behave in unique and creative ways (Goffman, 1961; Sieber, 1974; Turner, 1976; Zurcher, 1983).

As to organizational learning, Brechtian ideas may provide new perspectives on how learning is facilitated at the group-level. While the present paper has focused on individual learning processes, it is important to recall that learning is socially constructed and that most learning in organizations occurs in communities-of-practice (Hendry, 1996). Future research could investigate to what extent Brechtian ideas and practices could be used to facilitate higher-order learning through the introduction of narratives, dialogues and experiments that help group members surface and question the nonroutine (Hendry, 1996). In a similar vein, Brechtian ideas may offer new avenues for exploring how participatory action research (Whyte, 1991) may be facilitated not just as a first person approach, but also as second and even third person approaches (Torbert, 1991).

In terms of organizational practice, it is hoped that organizational practitioners become interested in Brecht's ideas and theatrical practices at least at the level of introducing them to stimulate a different conversation in organizations, similar to what many organizations are doing by inviting poet David Whyte as speaker and workshop facilitator (Essex and Mainemelis, 2002), but also as a potential tool for the management of change. Much of the literature on organizational change discusses how processes can be introduced that facilitate the creation of dissonance and the questioning of the status quo (Hendry, 1996). Brechtian ideas may support such processes in practice as additional tools for workplace reflection (Rigano and Edwards, 1998).

Having pointed to the contributions this paper hopes to make, it is important to highlight its limitation. The model developed here is of course prescriptive rather than descriptive aiming not at verification but rather at the creation of new and interesting ideas (Astley, 1985). It is easy to dismiss the model out of hand as lacking a basis in reality unless we remain open to a dialog that can encompass alternate modes of scientific practice. Brecht dedicated his life to demonstrating that reality is more a potential than a given and that alienating ourselves from what seems to be a 'given' may be the basis for action and alternate ways of understanding human behaviors (Ludwig, 1975). It is in that very sense that Brecht's ideas may inform scientific practice as the study not only of what is but also of what could be.

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