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Brechtian Methodology in Wise's *The Sound of Music*: Insights into Theatre in Education

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Abstract

Methods are problem solving devices for the benefit of education in society. When a method assumes regimental fixations, society suffers hackneyed bouts of limitation and contention necessitating flux. This paper examines issues of regimentalism as they affect society in Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*, and the staccato notes of change inevitably mobilizing a Brechtian methodological reading amplifying social change, in a Theatre in Education performance. Bertolt Brecht (1898-1965), accomplished German director, playwright and theorist, mobilized theatre for social change by setting up Marxist dialectics in pursuit of retrenchment of total empathy; giving free reign to critical consciousness in theatrical productions. This paper has investigated analytically, the representations of this Brechtian methodology in *The Sound of Music* with the manifest result that the experiment in the movie has produced a healthier and better organized society than the German regimental machine.

Key Words: Education, Theatre in Education, Brecht, Alienation Effect, Social Change, Family, Critical, Learning and Socialization

Introduction

A peculiar feature of Theatre in Education is that its definition is inconclusive (Jackson, 1993, p. 15). However, most of the tenable definitions adopt theatre as an applied discipline, articulating in theatrical terms experimental approaches at the service of education, aimed at deriving solutions to the problems of society. Often times, Theatre in Education (TIE) functions as a game changing experiment with a focus on correcting and changing identifiable group, cultural and social traditions which continue to pose threats to individuals in the group.

The word 'change' assumes function here as a cutting edge. This paper focuses on a Brechtian reading of the educational method deployed in Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*. It is instructive to observe that change is the heartbeat of the entire movie. Here is a movie whose strength is built on the visionary search for change in the family as a social unit. The principle of family is a pattern in *The Sound of Music* which recurs from the Abbey to the Von Trapp family and winds up making a profound statement concerning the Nazi invasion threat on Salsburg Austria as a nation about 1964.

Theoretical Framework on Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* as an Acting Method which Aids Social Change

Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* is actually a German expression denoting his 'Alienation's Effect'. It refers to a peculiar and innovative acting/production style with an experimental methodology whereby, the actor succeeds in detaching himself from the character portrayed, thus, forcing the spectator 'to look at the play's situations from such angle that they necessarily became subject to his criticism' (Brecht, 1983, p.85). That which matters in this methodology distances full scale rehearsals and learning of the text by heart in pursuit of the experience of the reality portrayed, via conscious critical participation of the audience in the situation represented. It entails a retrenchment of total empathy in favour of engendering a reflective reading of the situation so experienced in the consciousness of the spectator. By this ingenious initiative, Brecht activated a model for an epic theatre characterized by clarity of description and reporting which also disposed choruses and projections serving the purpose of passing commentaries on the social realistic situations represented in theatre production. In essence, Brecht's 'Alienation Effect' disposes organized thrust at social change. This commitment places Brechtian methodology as a tool at the service of Theatre in Education.

In the wisdom of Victory Dienne (2012, p.15), education remains an invaluable "vehicle through which other socially desired attributes like material possessions, prestige, power and wealth can be achieved." This opinion acknowledges the social function of education which avails socialization by involvement in the "acquisition of knowledge and the learning skills" (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000, p. 690). All oversights of the facts that learning which involves social transactions of sorts, often also mobilizes social cohesion and advancement even in the era of change remain condemnable. It is also expedient at this juncture, to concede the view that as a faculty, education lays emphasis on methodology/practices which combine to mobilize the effect of social change (Nwogu and Wechie, 2011, p.102). The commitment to social change common both to education and Brechtian methodology is instructive here.

Often severally regarded as 'alienation' or 'estrangement' (Brecht, 1998, p. 224) effect, Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* disposes very peculiar methodological innovations to theatre practice which, drive social change for ideological purposes. The utilitarian sensibility of this method commends the reasonable end of social change. The contemplation of the ambience of utilitarian purpose, also mobilizes a driving force for social change. As a method, this particular protocol is achieved by innovative thinking outside the box of tradition. The same protocol laid the foundation for Marxist ideology, and mobilized Brecht's preoccupation with his alienation or estrangement effect.

The details of this method specify rational departures from traditional practices in order to engender critical consciousness which queries the specific structural strategies of traditional theatres. This method initiates critical reflections on the philosophy and objectives of traditional Dramatic Theatre as practiced in Classical Greece, as opposed to Brecht's Epic Theatre of estrangement effects. The end of Brecht's method is actually to cause shifts of accent from Dramatic Theatre which mobilizes new strategies of critical reflection in The

Epic Theatre. Whereas Classical Greek Aristotelian theory lays emphasis on plot as the soul of drama, Brecht is saying that the alternative to plot for the mobilization of critical consciousness is narrative. For Brecht, narrative encourages minimal empathy. Minimal empathy estranges the audience from the dramatic situation, making it possible for the audience to reflect on that situation critically. The latter method drives social change to the extent that learning entails cognitive exercise and process. In the parlance of education, learning is a change in behaviour based on experience; but rest is an informed change of activity in order to enhance cognition. Brecht's methodology enjoys the unique advantage of being a change of activity which precipitates rest from the conventional theatre method. It is a deliverance from the traditional strategic plot statusquo of Conventional Dramatic Theatre. In relation to Brechtian methodology, cognitive participation is a change of activity which holds promise of better learning (Brecht 1998). Brechtian methodology avails a related facility of rest from the traditional statusquo of Dramatic Theatre. The engagement of a new and fresh activity, mobilizes fresh motivation for achievement. Beyond this advantage of rest, Brechtian methodology activates a shift from the statusquo in order to achieve better results for society and humanity. Brecht (1983, p.91) refreshed this understanding in his paper on "The Street Scene (A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre)" when he surmises that:

One essential element of the street scene lies in the natural attitude adopted by the demonstrator, which is two-fold; he is always taking two situations into account. He behaves naturally as a demonstrator, and he lets the subject of the demonstrator behave naturally too. He never forgets, nor does he allow it to be forgotten, that he is not the subject but the demonstrator.

The point made here lays emphasis on the acting technique of the demonstrator, who draws the line between the role and himself and assumes an objective distance from the role or the subject of the demonstrator. The result therefore is that by this acting style, there is a noticeable shift from the total empathy of plot in Dramatic Theatre to the estrangement of the demonstrator from the role, in the narrative of Epic Theatre. An illustration to drive home this point can be drawn from the scenario of a Medical Student who, goes around bribing his lecturers to pass exams, instead of reading his books. To activate a cognitive learning process in the audience, a demonstrator in the mode of Brechtian estrangement, can introduce thought provoking narratives, which suggest that when the Medical student graduates; his very first patient may be his own father. The handicap of this fictional Medical student is that he has learnt nothing. He has failed to apply reason and has set no store for learning. Certainly, this Medical student fails to appreciate education as a cognitive learning curve, which informs changes in behaviour. For him educational certificate is a new ticket. The other strategies deployed by Brecht in his methodology for breaking the yoke of empathy include deployments of choruses, presentational style, use of placards, discordant moves and activities, and the use of film strips. Based on the foregoing, one can now take a critical look at Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music* as a demonstration of Brechtian methodology.

Synopsis of "The Sound of Music"

The movie begins as Maria, a young lady at the Abbey has become a serious source of concern for the nuns. She fails to blend in with the regimental life there – that life is unnatural. Sister Bernice reports to the Reverend Mother that Maria has left the Abbey again. They discuss Maria's future at the abbey, and Maria is sent as a Governess to look after Captain von Trapp's children, a task which many Governesses have failed to succeed at. Maria arrives the Captain's house to meet another regimental family life. Through love and friendship, she wins the hearts of the Captain's children, and that of the Captain. The Captain,

who is about getting married to the Baroness, calls off his engagement with her and marries Maria. Through the help of Maria, the Von Trapp family wins the first prize and highest honour in Austria at the Salzburg festival. The movie resolves as the Captain escapes with Maria and his children from the oppressive German regimental machine.

The Old Austrian Social Statusquo in Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*

Austria has been an integral part of Germany since 1939. If this assertion is anything to go by, it means that the heartbeat of social life in Austria is regimental. In Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music* two basic social family units represent the foregoing claims. The family units are narratively interwoven to include the Nuns in the Abbey under the watch of the Reverend Mother and the Captain von Trapp's family set up before the advent of Maria as Governess. There is a meeting point between both families. The members are not individuals; they are like robotic programmes, executing the biddings of their puppet masters. They do not have individual identities. The Nuns are ascetic and more spiritually inclined than natural. On the other hand, Captain von Trapp and his children are regimental prototypes, isolated from society. Both families are predictable and constitute social misfits. The two families mentioned here represent the society in a German setting, particularly before the advent of Maria. The two families are characterized by rigid and fixated behavioural patterns. They are fixated and do not give room to exceptions. When group patterns and influences become fixations, they mobilize conflicts with individual exceptions, precipitating restive situations in society. Maria happens to be the beacon of individuality and social change in Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*. As a demonstrator in the movie, Maria is the natural anchor which changes the function of plot to narrative. She is a narrative link between the Abbey and the Von Trapp home. In both settings, we see wilfulness and an aggressive nature in Maria. She is remarkable as a game changer, both in the Abbey and in the Von Trapp home.

Methodology in *The Sound of Music*

Whereas Aristotle (1974, p.17) regarded character as an imaginary person (lost in empathic function) as subsidiary to action in a conventional drama, Brecht upholds preference to a demonstrator over character because the former is a functional, inquisitive and rational communicator (Brecht, 1983, p.91) who patronized awareness and change in the audience. The functional disposition of a Brechtian demonstrator ensures a departure/ alienation from empathy which consolidates cognitive learning. In a related vein, music can be deployed among other possibilities to function for instructional, communicative and revolutionary purposes. Titus and Titus (2014, p.224), Komolafe (2012, p.161) and Osofisan (1991, p. v) have argued severally that music can be put to functional use for various forms of awareness campaigns in communication, organizational identity signatures and revolutionary anthems respectively. All the above examples of functional demonstrations pursue change. They are also in tandem with Brechtian technique.

Episodic Counterpoints of Narrative in Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*

A major feature of Brechtian drama is its episodic narrative disposition which Aristotle criticizes. An attentive reception of Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music* reveals episodic counterpoints of narrative. The need arises here to mention some episodic instances in the movie:

a.) It is difficult to pinpoint the beginning of this movie. There is a noticeable detachment in the narrative reading regarding the progression from the narrative in the Abbey and the transition to Captain von Trapp's house. As Maria leaves the Abbey, she breaks into songs implicating the fact that she is going in pursuit of a brand-new assignment, a completely new

narrative direction, and she is determined to overcome her fears. It is therefore difficult to lay specific claims to the beginning of this movie, and yet Maria remains the connection between the Abbey and the Von Trapp home. Maria is akin to the long-suffering way-faring pivotal demonstrator in Brecht's *Mother Courage*. It is in Captain von Trapp's house that she begins to exhibit demonstrations. She is as creative as she is resourceful in her pursuit of impacting change in the social psyche of the children of the Captain.

b.) The business of narrative as an estrangement effect in the movie, takes a new direction as Captain von Trapp returns with his fiancée and friend, Herr Detweiler only to be greeted with songs flowing with the winds from the branches of trees, on which the Von Trapp children were. At first those songs simply waft through the air, to the utter consternation of Captain von Trapp and his friends. This latter situation ushers in the middle of the play. In the middle, there is a total shift in focus, resulting in Maria's strategic moves to change the status quo of the Von Trapp home. Maria leaves the Von Trapp family when she notices that the Captain was becoming emotionally involved with her. This is a distraction, from her original aim of changing the status quo and she needed to run away. Her running away is an estrangement. Unlike the heroine in *Mother Courage* however, Maria needed to be reassured by the Reverend Mother of the Abbey. It does seem that the intervention of the Reverend Mother at this juncture, provides the rationale for Maria to go back to her assignment. She is further motivated by the fact that the Captain's children come to look for her at the Abbey. These latter developments record uneasy yoking of two different families. Filmic narrative makes the foregoing possible. Narrative adopts historical discretions for realistic functions. As soon as Maria returns to the Captain's house, the Baroness had to go. Furthermore, Herr Detweiler recommends that the Captain's children enter the Salzburg music festival. In due course, Captain Von Trapp marries Maria. The Captain and Maria are still in their honeymoon phase when the German government calls Captain von Trapp back into military service. He chooses to escape with his family, fleeing from the German regimental life he has become free of. This too is another form of estrangement and counterpoint to the end of the play.

The Demonstrator in Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*

Setting Apart from Dramatic Characterization

In this section, the searchlight is on the difference between empathic dramatic characterization and the Brechtian demonstrator as an instrumental principle of alienation/estrangement. Aristotle's reception of character is that of an imaginary person/agent of action created by a playwright to perform a role in a dramatic work, which, assumes empathic engagement with the audience in a manner and function identified by Coleridge (1974, p.588) as the suspension of disbelief. Concerning character, Aristotle (1974, p.10) asserts his position as "that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents." Thus, given the latter, we understand that conventional theatre and drama indulges empathy. Brecht on his own part does not adopt the Aristotelian reception of 'character' with its attendant acceptance of deception in the name of empathy. On the contrary, Brecht enunciates change in the principle of the demonstrator as an instrument of alienation, as a functional catalytic agent of rational/critical disposition in order to achieve alienation or *verfremdungseffekt* in the audience. There is therefore the implication of cognitive transfer in the Brechtian principle of alienation.

In Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*, the demonstrator is Maria. There is a sense in which it can be inferred that Unachukwu and Ebenebe (1997, p.113) enlarged their apprehensions of cognitive development to approximate the general background reach of a Brechtian demonstrator when they say: "When we look at cognitive development broadly, it refers to

the processes by which knowledge is acquired. These processes include perceiving, learning, thinking, concept formation and problem solving”.

In the light of the above, a close look at Maria in the function of demonstrator in Robert Wise’s *The Sound of Music* opens up vistas of apprehensions, relevant to human cognitive development. Maria’s reception and perception of life and being naturally assumes a double check of sorts. There is always an alternative life, situation and direction. This nuance of alternatives in the personality of Maria can be described as a natural disposition to “Plan B”, as an alternative. In the Abbey, Maria found an alternative approach to life, on the hills. Maria’s natural disposition towards her role as a demonstrator is obvious during her stay in the Abbey. She breaks into soulful sopranos on the open hills to which she expresses her love. The following lyrical composition instances the above claim thus:

I go to the hills when my heart is lonely
I know I will hear what I have heard before
My heart will be blessed with the sound of music

(Wise, 1965).



Plate 1: Maria out on the hills singing

Source: *The Sound of Music*, 1965

Based on the above, it is apparent that Maria’s love for nature is a veritable alienation/estrangement from the grip of Christian fundamentalism and traditional German regimentalism. As a demonstrator, Maria is all by herself on the hills, a mobile exhibition/agit prop, protesting the relegation (if not outright retrenchment) of the passionate expression of nature, freedom, justice, humanity and individuality, by the strangulating restrictions in the Abbey. Maria disposes the foregoing inclination naturally and effortlessly. She is engaged in reflections on the hills to the chagrin of Reverend Mother and other nuns who express deep concerns about Maria’s uncompromising distractions/romance with the hills.



Plate 2: The Reverend Mother and other nuns expressing concerns over Maria's attitude at the Abbey

Source: *The Sound of Music*, 1965

As an individual, Maria is rationally disposed and sensitive to analytic details as they appertain to the environment around her. While singing on the hills, she waxes lyrics which interrogate natural processes concerning the interactions of creation. Thus, as a person, Maria is at once attentive, rational, humanistic, resilient and combative. She has no patience for injustice. Suffice to mention here that the emphasis on the demonstrator focuses on the latter (i.e., demonstrator) as a functional departure from the empathic commitment of role play. There is a fine sense in which it can be said that Maria distinguishes herself as a demonstrator in Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*. As governess to the Von Trapp children, she has multiple functions relevant to Children's Theatre in Education. She is a teacher, a guardian, a confidante, a mentor, a companion, and a minder. In a different social context from the foregoing, this time in the Von Trapp home, Maria presents another example of an alternative approach to life in her ability to change the regimental life she meets. This inclination of an alternate life is Maria's cognitive mechanism unfolding as a process which winds up in learning transfer. Having applied it in the Abbey, it is not difficult to recall that experience in the Von Trapp family home.

Dimensions of the Demonstrator in Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*

The demonstrator in this movie assumes very pragmatic and dynamic functions. These functions are integrative and constitute a process. A close look at the movie reveals a subtle interaction of integrative parts of the process. These parts may be identified as dimensions of attention and perception in the movie. There are two major dimensions of the operations of the demonstrator in Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*. These dimensions include:

- a. Systemic appraisal operations for critical attention
- b. Exhibition processes for cognitive development

a. Systemic Appraisal Operations for Critical Attention

Based on her painstaking analytic appraisal of the problem in the Von Trapp home, Maria is able to read the ideological and political matrices of the family. The fact that she deploys social learning theory is apparent in *The Sound of Music*. Long before the mention of Bandura, Aristotle (1974, p.33) recognized the view that imitation is not just innate in man; it is also a learning process which drives behavioural change in the society. It is a learning

process that combines instruction and individual observation of peers and relations in the society. Maria's readings of trending issues in the Von Trapp home when she arrives can be broken down as follows:

- i. The intimidating, awesome edifice of the von Trapp home makes a statement of class
- ii. The absence of a mother-figure in the von Trapp home
- iii. The fact that Captain von Trapp is military personnel
- iv. The fact that his job often takes him away from home for long periods
- v. The fact that the absence of a mother has given rise to stunted and fixated developments of the children
- vi. The fact that the stunted development of the children presents sufficient challenge to warrant the need to engage governesses
- vii. The fact that the children have aborted the efforts of eleven Governesses before Maria's arrival
- viii. The fact that there are generational gaps between Captain von Trapp and his children
- ix. The fact that some of the children are mischief makers
- x. The fact that the individualities and emotions of the children are suppressed etc.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis in this movie is a function of systemic appraisals of the Von Trapp home by the demonstrator. As far as diagnosis is concerned, Maria is attentive to execute a cognitive reading of the system, which makes it possible for her to discern/diagnose the problem. Instances of the foregoing include her attention as she enters into the Von Trapp's family house. Here, she disposes a lot of curiosity and observation until Captain von Trapp himself accosts her. Subsequently, she watches and absorbs the shock of the harm done the children when Captain von Trapp summons them with blasts of the whistle and they file out matching like robots.



Plate 3: Maria observing attentively at her first entrance into the Captain's house

Source: *The Sound of Music*, 1965

In the light of the above readings, Maria decides to win the trust and confidence of the Von Trapp children first.

Diplomacy

Like diagnosis, diplomacy is also a function of systemic appraisals. As far as diplomacy goes, the strategies vary from gentle presentations to the abrasive if not abrupt reactions in order to correct situations. Maria refuses to report to Captain von Trapp, the children’s unfriendly attitude towards her. Some of those unfriendly attitudes include the fact that one of the children put a toad in Maria’s pocket, and another placed a sharp object on Maria’s seat at the dining table. Unsuspecting, she sits down on the chair, gets hurt but does not want to discuss the problem with their father. Instead she protects them in order to win their trust and friendship. This must have been the reason why other governesses failed and left. It is noteworthy at this juncture that Maria’s restraints and reserves towards the children are tactical and thought provoking. The term tactical is used purposively because Maria sort at first to win the trust and friendship of the children. On the other hand, the natural inclination on the part of the audience, pursuant to the contemplation of Maria’s tactics in relation to the children, remains thought provoking, with an intent to analyse Maria’s purpose.



Plate 4: Maria is scared as the toad jumps out of her pocket

Source: *The Sound of Music*, 1965



Plate 5: The sharp object placed on Maria’s seat by the Von Trapp children

Source: *The Sound of Music*, 1965

The second level of Maria’s diplomacy is hard, this time, towards Captain Von Trapp. She warns him that it is unacceptable to her to be summoned by the whistle. She informs him that

whistles are for animals, not humans. Captain Von Trapp is shocked and confused by Maria's reaction. He has not seen anybody challenge his authority. In the movie, he asks Maria if she was that troublesome at the Abbey. Maria replies "Oh much more Sir", the Captain responds with a "Hmmm" (Wise, 1965), giving in to Maria's position. He is about to leave when Maria blows the whistle on him, he turns and she tells him she doesn't know his signal. The Captain responds by telling her to call him by the title of Captain. By this, Maria is able to strengthen her position that whistles shouldn't be used in the training of children. Maria uses her role as demonstrator to interrogate and expose the weaknesses of the German regimental system. By this initiative, Maria consolidates the cognitive process that allows for critical thinking and learning transfer.

As a demonstrator, Maria's natural disposition is transferred to the children of the Captain. With time, they become more natural, unafraid to speak their minds and ask questions to allow for better understanding. Through the elements of sincerity and absorption, and as a loving ally, the children are more relaxed around Maria and listen to her when she speaks.



Plate 6: The Captain summons his children and they stand as though they are in the military

Source: *The Sound of Music*, 1965



Plate 7: The Captain blowing a whistle to his children

Source: *The Sound of Music*, 1965

Exhibition Processes for Cognitive Development

Maria's activities in the Abbey come to a head when the Reverend Mother and the Nuns reach the understanding that she (Maria) is a misfit in the Abbey. To help Maria decide if she really likes the life in the Abbey or the life outside the Abbey, the Reverend Mother in her humanistic nature, gives Maria a chance to realize her destiny by sending her as Governess to the family of Captain von Trapp. Soon after her arrival at the Von Trapp home, and having done a distance in systemic appraisals of her environment, Maria in her capacity as a demonstrator, swings into action. She decides to change the matrix of the Von Trapp home.



Plate 8: The vonTrapp children wearing the clothes made from the window drapes

Source: *The Sound of Music*, 1965

Maria goes on to make colourful clothes from window drapes for the children, in order to deliver them from the regimental lack lustre uniform in which they filed out like soldiers to meet her. In executing the foregoing, she ignores the warning of the house keeper, that Captain von Trapp would not be happy with her actions.

Exhibition as Picnic Exposures

Similar to Brecht's idea of the street scene, in sequence eight of the movie, Maria takes the children to the city and buys them fruits. They go to the seaside, board a train and finally settle on the field. Maria exposes the children thus, knowing the effectiveness of games in making children relax and learn while playing. The children are happy and wish they have that kind of outing every day. She also introduces them to songs which are narratives in themselves with moral lessons that the children would learn from. Maria, as the demonstrator is able to lead the Captain and his children through psychological journeys meant to deliver them from their rigid and fixated behavioural patterns in order to activate a cognitive learning process in them.

Using Songs as Instructional Tool

Maria takes the children through a number of songs. Here she uses songs as an instructional tool. She begins with the rudiments of ABC before launching into full blown songs. The solfa notations are tied to ideas the children can relate with all woven into a song. This way the children can learn through the songs, details of the alphabet, association of nominal uses of

language with objects and comprehension skills. In the movie, Maria begins with the first song:

When you read you begin with A-B-C
 When you sing you begin with Do Re Mi (thrice)
 The first three notes just happen to be Do Re Mi (twice)
 Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti Do
 (Wise, 1965)

Then she launches into a full-blown song; in conscious intent to expose the children to the first phase in the teaching and learning of comprehension skills which is story-telling. It is the technicality of the method that is striking here. In order to teach them alphabet, she uses songs in a way which enhances learning by associating each letter of the alphabet with an idea or story. A concrete example is the following:

Doe, a deer, a female deer
 Ray, a drop of golden sun
 Me, a name I call myself
 Far, a long, long way to run
 Sew, a needle pulling thread
 La, a note to follow sew
 Tea, a drink with jam and bread
 That will bring us back to doe
 Ohohoh!
 (Wise, 1965)

Using Songs to Create Fun for Revolutionary Purposes

Maria also uses songs and dance as means to pursue change in the lives of the children of the Captain. She teaches them a song to sing for the Baroness. Captain Von Trapp hears them singing and is startled that his children can sing. The Captain listens as his children sing:

My heart wants to sing
 Every song it hears
 Every song that it hears
 My heart wants to beat
 Like the wings of the birds that rise
 From the lake to the trees
 To the trees my heart wants to sigh
 Like the chime that flies
 From a church on a breeze
 To laugh like a brook
 When it trips and falls over in its way
 To sing through the night
 Like a lark who is learning to pray
 I go to the hills when my heart is lonely
 I know I will hear what I have heard before
 My heart will be blessed with the sound of music
 And I'll sing once more
 (Wise, 1965)

He later joins them as they sing for the Baroness and then he tells Maria, that she was right when she said he doesn't know his children. She tells him that there is still time and they want

to be so close to him. The Captain tells Maria that she brought music into his house and that he wants her to stay.



Plate 9: Captain Von Trapp listens as his children sing to the Baroness

Source: *The Sound of Music*, 1965

She teaches them dance, which climaxes as Maria and Captain von Trapp dance. In the process, the Captain falls helplessly in love. His fiancée had to leave because of this intimidation. She takes them to a competition and the children win.



Plate 10: Maria teaching the Captain's children an Austrian folk dance

Source: *The Sound of Music*, 1965

Maria takes the children away from the regimental building of their father to the life outside, this is a deviation from the conventional approach to theatre, to make them understand that they are rational beings and that each of them should exercise individual discretion, where necessary. They can have fun if they so desire.

The voice over filmic approach is deployed when Captain von Trapp's attention while on the homeward journey with the Baroness, is arrested by the voices of his children singing on the trees. He is appreciative of the songs, but does not know that the voices have anything to do with his children. It is obvious here that the social restrictions characterizing the behaviours of the Von Trapp children from the beginning have been corrected.

Indices of Change in the von Trapp Family Home

a. *Socialization*

In the words of Haralambos and Holborn (2004), “The process by which individuals learn the culture of the society is known as socialization. Primary socialization, probably the most important aspect of the socialization process takes place during infancy usually within the family” (p. ix). It is apparent that an indubitable measure of socialization takes place in the Von Trapp home because of Maria’s sojourn there, in the capacity of Governess. Maria avails that home the rallying front of motherhood which had been hitherto absent. This missing link in the family is the touch of motherhood. In agreement with Haralambos and Holborn above, it is obvious that the context of family is awakened with the advent of Maria in the von Trapp home. Usually, the context of socialization in the family hinges around the mother figure. She is at once, a parent, a care-giving source of nurture, a friend, a confidant/playmate, a model and trainer rolled into one. She spends more time with the children than their father. There is no gainsaying the fact that Maria’s advent in the von Trapp home awakens in the children and their father a sense of group belonging; awakens in the children a certain sense of interactive spirit harnessing conviviality and inevitable socialization. The children come alive, blending naturally with each other, their father and the society at large, under Maria’s motherly watch. Maria’s success is so outstanding that, whereas she was employed as Governess, she becomes a wife. Maria succeeds where eleven previous Governesses failed. She is so impressive in her performance that when she flees back to the Abbey, the children miss her enough to warrant them going back to look for her.

b. *Communication*

The context of communication remains sine-qua non requirement for optimum blending both in the family and in the society. It is distressing to contemplate the harm done the psyches of the children in the Von Trapp home before the advent of Maria there. Under Maria’s watch, the children learn the rudiments of language, social communication games and skills. By reason of association with Maria, each child acquires the requisite personality presence and confidence required to hold his/her own in society. The gaps between the children and their father are automatically bridged because Maria created a forum in song and dance sessions, to facilitate optimum bonding. The movie is loaded with instances of non-verbal and extra-verbal communication codes. In Robert Wise’s *The Sound of Music*, communication assumes a functional role as paradigm of transformation. To buttress this foregoing point, it is worthy of note that, such instructional operations manifest in theatrical and musical dimensions in this movie, go a long way to engineer the changes in the society of the movie.

c. *Theatre-in-education as a functional agent of transformation*

It is evident in the movie that, theatre-in-education is a game changing experiment which focuses on correcting identifiable group, cultural and societal trends constituting threats to individuals and families. The footprints of theatre-in-education in this movie starts with the spectacular melodious lessons featuring the tonic solfa and by extension alphabet and words; songs telling stories of the cultural environment in Salzburg and their love for opera. Theatre-in-education consolidates socialization through clearly articulated rehearsals in songs and dances in Robert Wise’s *The Sound of Music*. So much has been said of the dance sessions between Maria and the children which end up, arresting the attention and submission of

Captain von Trapp himself, to the chagrin of on-lookers including the Baroness herself. It is not stated in this movie, but the coherence of theatrical practice on the part of Maria is anything but amateurish. Furthermore, this remarkable coherence in the logic of production also suggests that Maria may have prepared lesson plans.

Theatre-in-education tracks transformations from psycho-social fixations to social integration and mobilization in *The Sound of Music*. The transformation of the Von Trapp children from the strangleholds of anti-social isolations and apathy to the embracing arms of conviviality and social integration stand out. In this movie, social integration is a formidable link harnessing cohesive interplay among the children; between the children and Maria, and between Maria and the children on one hand, and Captain von Trapp on the other. Finally, the Captain von Trapp family is redefined and mobilized.

Conclusion

A point of conclusion to this paper emphasizes the position that the play way method is a Brechtian process as adopted by Maria, and that creative drama, refers to the skills mobilized by Maria in the Von Trapp children, in pursuit of social change. Most of those skills facilitate cognitive development in the Von Trapp children. They learnt ABC and progressed from ABC to tonic solfa and lyrical compositions, while rounding up as the pistons of change in the social system. Creative drama is manifested in this movie at levels of fashion designing, music, dance, speech, poise, and confidence.

It is instructive to note here that at no point in the course of the narrative in *The Sound of Music* did Maria allow emotions to becloud her vision and reason. Thus, Maria can be seen as a composite personality in this movie. She is a teacher, a friend of the children, a seeker of justice in society, a powerful agent of social change and a formidable demonstrator in Children's Theatre -in- Education in specific terms, and Theatre in Education, in general terms, for the good of society. In terms of personality traits as an agent, Maria is focused, truthful, realistic, sensitive, perceptive and doggedly stubborn (resilient enough to defend her rational positions). As a humanist, Maria is committed to the dignity of man. As a social critic and legislator, Maria wields legislative mace at the same time as she defends justice. Above all, Maria is very natural in her inclinations. She is a very peculiar individual member of her society in the movie.

The mobilization of a Brechtian reading of this movie, is not without justification. The functions of the Brechtian reading deployed here are the utilitarian goals of education and socialization as well as the awakening of a rational disposition to think (critically) outside the box. It is this kind of motivation, mobilized by Maria in Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music* that leads to social change in the entire movie. It is equally instructive to note here that, the paradigm shift of society is recorded in this movie at the level of family. Narrative remains the anchor of the entire unfolding integrative processes. All through the movie, Maria is particularly conscious of her focus as a demonstrator. Her positions are altered by reason alone. When she retreats from the Von Trapp home back to the Abbey, she goes to re-fire; she goes to listen to reason. Curiously enough, the Reverend Mother in the Abbey is also disposed to nature and to change. She is the voice of reason there. Alienation's effect is at work, even in the Abbey.

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