

“Yes, We Fully Realize That We’re Watching a Play. We Just Don’t Realize That It’s Brecht.”: An Analysis of Brecht’s V-effect Technique Used in Thai *Likay* Theatre

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Abstract

Bertolt Brecht, a German theatre practitioner in the mid- 20th century, marked the success of his career by introducing his ‘Epic Theatre’ with the use of a dramatic technique called ‘Verfremdungseffeks’ (V-effect), or ‘alienation effect’. ‘Brechtian’ acting style, which has been developed, practiced and popularized worldwide for decades, was a reaction against the most popular forms of theatre and naturalistic acting. The highest goal for using the alienation effect (V-effect) is to make the audience always realize that they are watching a play; they will never be “taken out of themselves” or immerse themselves so completely into the illusion of the drama, that they may be distracted from the main content of the story. The expected outcome for using V-effect is that the audience can reach an intellectual level of understanding of the play. Some Brechtian techniques include ‘breaking the fourth wall’ by having actors come out of their characters and address the audience directly, having actors play multiple roles, using some symbolic ornaments to represent actual props, or using non-realistic scenic design which can be conveniently rearranged by actors in full view of the audience -- just to name a few.

Likay, though generally categorized as a low form of theatre viewed by local Thai audiences, has been one of the most popular and traditional Thai theatre forms for centuries. *Likay* includes a mixture of performance styles comprising spoken improvisation, singing, dancing and natural acting, supported by a live classical music band. Having been performed for successive generations without any background knowledge related to Brecht's V-effect or any western theatre theories, *Likay* has nonetheless strictly followed the rules of its traditional acting styles which, coincidentally, are very much similar to Brecht's V-effect. The conclusion can be drawn that even though Thai *Likay* is performed in a way as if the V-effect is fully adopted, the main difference may lie in the highest goal to be achieved by these two types of performances (Brecht's epic theatre and Thai *Likay*).

Keywords: Theatre, Drama, Performance, Comparative theatre studies, *Verfremdungseffekt*, V-effect, Epic Theatre, Brechtian dramatic techniques, *Likay* Theatre

บทคัดย่อ

เบร็ทโอล์ฟ์ เบรคซท์ นักการละครเลื่องชื่อชาวเยอรมันได้นำเสนอรูปแบบ การแสดงที่เรียกว่า 'Epic Theatre' ในช่วงกลางศตวรรษที่ 20 และนำเสนอยู่รูปแบบ การแสดงที่เรียกว่า "การทำให้แปลก" (*Verfremdungseffeks* หรือ V-effect) โดยเป็นรูปแบบการแสดงที่สร้างสรรค์ขึ้นเพื่อต่อต้านการแสดงแนวสมจริงหรือ ธรรมชาตินิยมที่เป็นที่นิยมกันทั่วไปในแวดวงการละครตะวันตก จุดประสงค์หลัก ของการ "ทำให้แปลก" นี้ ก็เพื่อให้ผู้ชมตระหนักรู้ตลอดเวลาว่ากำลังชมละคร อยู่ เพื่อที่ผู้ชมจะได้ไม่ถูกดึงเข้าไปในโลกมายาแห่งละครอย่างเต็มที่จนกระทั้ง หลงลืมใจความหลักที่ละครต้องการจะสื่อ และเพื่อที่ผู้ชมจะได้ใช้ปัญญาเพื่อ พิจารณาและทำความเข้าใจกับเนื้อหาและจุดประสงค์หลักของละครในระหว่าง

ที่ซึ่มการแสดง เทคนิคดังกล่าวประกอบไปด้วยการทำลาย “กำแพงที่สี” โดยให้ นักแสดงออกมากจากการเป็นตัวละคร การให้นักแสดงพูดกับผู้ชมได้โดยตรง การให้นักแสดงหนึ่งคนสามารถเปลี่ยนบทบาทเป็นตัวละครหลายตัว การใช้อุปกรณ์ ประกอบจากแบบแสดงสัญลักษณ์ การใช้จักที่ไม่สมจริงและสามารถปรับเปลี่ยน ได้ต่อหน้าผู้ชม เป็นต้น

ลิเกคือการแสดงพื้นบ้านยอดนิยมของไทย ที่มีส่วนประกอบที่หลากหลาย ทั้งบทพูด บทร้อง การตั้นสต การร่ายรำ โดยมีการบรรเลงตัวสัดของวงปี่พาทย์ ประกอบตลอดการแสดง การแสดงลิเกของไทยได้รับการสืบทอดมาอย่างยาวนาน ของภาคตัวราช แม้ว่าลักษณะการแสดงลิเกจะไม่ได้ความรู้สึกของเทคนิคการแสดงแบบ “ทำให้แปลก” ของแบร์โอล์ฟ เบրคช์ทหรือทฤษฎีการละครใดๆ ของโลกตะวันตก แต่กลับพบว่าลิเกของการแสดงลิเกของไทยกลับมีส่วนคล้ายคลึงกับ V-effect ของ เบรคช์ทเป็นอย่างมาก แม้ว่าจุดประสงค์หลักของการใช้เทคนิค “การทำให้แปลก” ที่พับในการแสดงลิเกไทยจะแตกต่างจากการละครในโลกตะวันตกก็ตาม บทความ ชั้นนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อจะแสดงตัวอย่างและอภิปรายโดยการใช้เทคนิค “การทำให้ แปลก” ของแบร์โอล์ฟ เบรคช์ท เป็นกรอบความคิดในการอภิปรายรูปแบบการ แสดงที่พับในการแสดงลิเกของไทย

คำสำคัญ: การละคร, การแสดง, การละครเปรี้ยบเทียบ, *Verfremdungseffekt*, V-effect, Epic Theatre, เทคนิคการแสดงแบบเบรคช์ท, การแสดงลิเก

1. Introduction

Theatrical arts in most countries of Southeast Asia – Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam are rich, ancient, and developed to a point almost beyond imagining in their diversity and liveliness. They have integrated religions, literature and dance from all around South and East Asia, and fused them with rich, indigenous performance traditions, so these countries share many theatre traits in common. (Brandon, 1999:1)

Likay (sometimes called *yike* or *yeeke*) is a popular Thai form of live theatre combining mixed elements, including spoken dialogue, improvisation, classical singing and dancing, natural acting and modern popular music supported by a live classical music band. With some Western influences, *Likay* is famous for its uniquely extravagant jeweled costumes, heavy make-up and melodramatic plot twists. (Brandon, 1999: 243) *Likay* is performed in close connection with important Thai traditional celebrations, such as Buddhist ordinations, house warmings, temple foundings, national holiday fairs and other special ceremonies. Most *Likay* troupes tour and perform wherever they are hired. They must be very flexible and adaptive when it comes to performance space and stage props. These can vary depending on situation and availability; performance may take place in enclosed theatres or at an outdoor, open-air market place equipped only with some simple scenery, such as painted drops and wings.

One key factor behind the great success of a *Likay* troupe and the glue which holds the troupe together is the leading actors, whose names are printed in mega-huge fonts along with their photos showing full *Likay* costumes, which always appear on huge billboards placed on both sides of the stage. The leading actor most often assumes the head position of the troupe and directs, controls, and simply takes care of everything in the theatre. *Likay* troupes normally operate as a family business. The most famous *Likay* troupes in Thailand today have inherited the artistic legacy from their ancestors, who were also *Likay* performers. The art has been passed on from one generation to the next. *Likay* performers, once they have their own children, will take them along everywhere the troupe performs. These children are basically raised among and grow up within the *Likay* theatre world watching their parents perform every night. When the children are around 3-4 years old, most *Likay* parents will encourage

them to take part in the performance, at first as a dancer or minor member of an ensemble with no spoken lines, just so they can get used to being under the limelight on stage. When these children reach a certain age, about 5-6 years old, they will have to begin their official training, with their own parents or the head of their troupe as their first teacher-master.

The functions of *Likay* performance have been developed over a long period of time, from a chant-like performance at the very beginning to an all inclusive stage performance today, mainly responding to the changing theatrical tastes of local Thai audiences. It is interesting to study how this Thai traditional theatre makes use of Western and more modern theatrical influences, especially concrete dramatic elements such as sound and lighting, costumes and stage techniques, while strictly maintaining the essence of its traditional functions such as traditional acting and dramatic stylization. Regarding *Likay*'s dramatic functions fit perfectly with some dramatic theories created some time ago in the West – the V-effect of Bertolt Brecht, in particular.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was a German theatre director, playwright and theorist who was known as a major reformer of several aspects of twentieth-century theatre. He created an acting process and theories of dramaturgy and performance. His theory is believed to arise from a Marxist notion. Of all Brecht's creations of theatrical strategies, the most widely known is the *Verfremdungseffekt* (henceforth referred to as the V-effect) which can broadly be translated as "Alienation-effect" or "Distantiation-effect" which, to be more comprehensive, is "an effect that makes things seem strange or different". (Allain and Harvie, 2006: 36-37)

The term refers to the use of various dramatic "distancing" devices to make things appear strange on the stage so that the audience, as Brecht demanded, would respond to what they saw on stage more critically and intellectually. In Brecht's view, not getting involved totally and emotionally with the play would help develop an audience's critical thinking, putting their focus more on the play's main message. This concept, in a similar vein, puts some impact on the actors' training strategies and actors' attitude toward the roles they play. Unique and innovative as it may seem, the V-effect, ironically, was originally inspired by oriental theatre. When Brecht visited Moscow in 1935, he had an opportunity to view Chinese theatre for the first time, performed by one of the greatest Chinese Opera actors, Mei Lan-Fang. Brecht found that traditional Chinese acting made effective use of a wide range of alienation devices. Inspired by this exclusive oriental dramatic stylization, Brecht later developed his theatrical theory and acting strategies and put them in practice in his own productions.

This study aims to identify the use of Brecht's V-effect techniques in Thai *Likay* theatre. The samples of this study are based on video recording clips of live *Likay* performances (approximately 100 clips were randomly selected), recorded by Thai audience members during the year 2013-2014. All of the clips used in this study were retrieved from YouTube with permission and consent from the clips' owners. The dramatic stylization demonstrated by *Sornram-Nampetch Likay* Troupe is the main focus, and the samples in this study are from their performances. *Sornram-Nampetch* troupe is a very well-known *Likay* troupe in Thailand today, led by two young aspiring sibling-actors: Mr. Sornram Anakelap (18 year-old leading actor of the troupe), and Miss Nampetch Anakelap (22 year-old leading actress of the troupe). Young though they may seem, they certainly are not inexperienced actors. *Sornram-Nampetch* Troupe was founded in

2003 when Sornram and Nampetch were merely child actors; they started their professional stage career and became the leading actors of their own troupe from the age of only 6 years. The troupe has earned a nationwide reputation as being among a very few all-child performing troupes in the country. Sornram and Nampetch have been performing professionally ever since. Descended from a famous *Likay* family, they have been trained and taught to strictly maintain the conventions of this performing art. However, as they are both still youthful, they have kept updated with modern and popular entertainment trends; this may be one of the key factors to have made *Sornram-Nampetch* Troupe very popular among both old and new generations of audiences. The troupe is a clear example of how modern *Likay* can preserve dramatic traditions while attempting to keep pace with the rapid change in modern dramatic forms.



Figure 1 : Sornram Anakelap and Nampetch Anakelap, famous *Likay* sibling-actors who started their professional stage careers at a very young age. The photo on the left is of the actors when they began their professional career at the age of 6-7 years, and the photo on the right shows the young actors now in their teens.

(Photos retrieved on 13 September 2014 from <http://www.thaiticketmajor.com/performance/performance-detail.php?sid=646>) and <https://www.facebook.com/sornramfanclubsns>

2. Brecht's V-effect in Commercial Thai Theatre

The V-effect, according to Brecht, can be made possible by variety of stage techniques. Even though Brecht himself never wrote nor set a clear standard guideline for the V-effect practice on stage, he examined and demonstrated the technique in many of his own stage plays. Through information gathered from his director's notes and the detailed records of his stage productions, a description of the techniques used to produce alienation effects can be drawn. Some examples of the V-effect include an actor's mime action (in one case, an actress' silent scream can represent her utmost suffering when she hears of her son's death, but she must hide her response for her own safety), the use of narrators or storytellers to interrupt an ongoing scene, the use of *Sprachgesang*, or half-spoken, half-sung text, or the technique in which actors step aside from their roles and comment on the actions of their own characters, to name but a few. (Allain and Harvie, 2006: 36-37) However, it does not mean that Brecht's plays do not arouse any emotions. On the contrary, Brecht wanted the spectators to rationalize their emotional responses and to evaluate the stage action objectively in order to ascertain the social foundation of the characters' motivations and their own reactions to these.

In Thailand, Brechtian plays and stylization were not completely foreign as his theatrical ideas had been introduced many decades ago among Thai elite theatre practitioners, specifically, those who were university scholars. However, adopting Brecht's theory into Thai theatrical practice was quite a challenge for many theatre directors. One clear example is the case of *Hamlet the Musical* by Troupe 28 in 1995. Troupe 28 or the Khana Lakhon Song Paed was founded in 1985 by a group of university intellectuals in the hope of promoting stage plays to a wider audience and setting a high standard for performing arts in modern Thai theatre. Most of

their productions were translations and adaptations of Western plays. In 1985, Troupe 28 staged its first production, translated from Brecht's *Galileo*, with great success. *Hamlet the Musical* was expected to be another successful commercial production and it actually caught the media's interest from the beginning. It was considered another "fat" production for its big investment budget of at least two million baht. The play was staged from 4-10 May 1995 at the Thailand Cultural Centre, the biggest performing-arts venue in Bangkok. It seemed a very promising project which included many talented figures in its production team including the biggest names in Thai film and television like Saranyoo Wongkrajang and Sinjai Hongthai – Thai academy award winners – in the leading roles. (Tungtang, 2011: 208-211) Although the production was very successful in terms of the box office and was recorded as one of the most successful sold-out productions in Thai theatre history, the responses from the critics were somehow mixed.

Hamlet the Musical is well remembered for its controversial 'to be or not to be' scene which gave rise to a hot debate among theatre critics about the proper extent of interpretation and acculturation. While the whole story was presented as is traditionally found in Shakespeare's original script, with the additions of songs to replace some dialogues and the deletion of some less significant scenes, the 'to be or not to be' scene was the only part of the whole play which was presented in a Brecht's V-effect style. In this scene, Sarunyoo Wongkrajang, who played Hamlet, after delivering the lines of the famous soliloquy, 'to be or not to be', suddenly came out of character to be his own self. He then directly addressed and talked to the audience mentioning some current social issues that most city dwellers in Bangkok shared and experienced in common. The director, M.L. Pandevanop Devakula, gave an interview on this particular subject explaining that he used the Brechtian technique in this important scene

on purpose. He said,

I would like to emphasize to the audience what 'to be or not to be' means in Thai society. I'm afraid that they [the audience] would be so engaged with Hamlet until they forget the main message of the story.

(Chainarongsingha, 1995: 89), [My translation]

However, the audience's response was somewhat beyond the project producers' expectation as the V-effect here turned to be an irritating surprise for some Thai audiences. Among the critics who felt strongly disappointed with the production was a well respected literary professor and theatre critic, Chetana Nagavajara. In his review article in a newspaper, Nagavajara viewed this production as an evident example of, 'a failure of Thai higher education'. Regarding the interpretation of the play, Nagavajara criticized the production team for not trying hard enough to understand the original script before applying their modern interpretation and theatrical techniques with the result that they distorted the main message of the original play and made the Thai *Hamlet* 'an orphan in terms of cultures'.

Troupe 28 did not put enough thought in deconstructing the 'to be or not to be' scene by having Hamlet complain to the audience about the traffic congestion in Bangkok. Some people told me that the 'alienation' technique by Bertolt Brecht was applied in this scene. [...] However, this 'alienation' technique cannot be applied anywhere in the play without thorough consideration. [...] I feel ashamed for myself and my German language lecturers who write a lot about Brecht and his theatrical techniques with

no one paying attention to reading them. The ones who can read textbooks in foreign language do not pay much attention to adapting the knowledge into practice. I therefore have to get back to my same old point that this is because of the failure of Thai higher education, Hamlet therefore gets stuck in a traffic jam on Ratchadaphisek road [the road where the performance venue is located].

(Nagavajara, 1995: para. 9 of 13.), [My translation]

Brecht's V-effect is still studied and practiced, yet quite limited, among university scholars. Nevertheless, for commercial theatres in Thailand, Brechtian dramatic techniques are still considered alien and not very widely-accepted here as the public audience are more familiar with naturalistic dramatic style. Perhaps, another reason lies in the fact that Thai popular audience shy away from Brecht as he is presupposed too elite for Thai popular taste.

3. Brecht's V-effect Techniques in *Likay* Performance

As the aim of the V-effect technique is to make the audience adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism to the incident on stage, many applications are designed to bring the audience's attention from the play back to the real world. Some of these applications are also found commonly practiced in Thai *Likay* theatre, yet with completely different purposes. Some of these V-effect techniques can be categorized as follows:

3.1 Fourth Wall Breaking and Voice-Switching

One of the most widely known techniques for Brecht's V-effect is fourth wall breaking. For naturalistic plays, the fourth wall always stands firmly. A typical stage set for naturalistic plays looks almost exactly like

an ordinary room with one wall (that nearest the viewer) removed – the fourth wall is the missing one; the first three are those we see. ('Studying Bertolt Brecht', universalteacher website) The invisible fourth wall is what separates the worlds of the actors and the audience from one another. Audiences in naturalistic theatre assume a position of passive observers whose role is to sit silently in the darkness and observe the ongoing happenings on the bright stage.

In *Likay* performance, the fourth wall is rejected almost completely. While watching *Likay*, the line separating the world of theatre and real lives is always blurred, or perhaps it never even really exists in the first place. Both *Likay* performers and audience members are always aware of one another's existence and keep reminding each other of that existence. Apart from that, just like Brecht's V-effect, the actors do not completely bring empathy into the characters. They are not required to study the characters they are playing, as is generally required in naturalistic acting, to a deeper level – both physically and psychologically – in order to bring the characters to life. *Likay* actors do not lose themselves thoroughly into the characters they are playing, but switch in and out of them constantly to remind the audience that what they are seeing on the stage is just acting.

For example, in the case of *Sornram-Nampetch* Troupe, it is a common practice that the actors come out of their roles and address each other by their real names (or nicknames) instead of using the characters' names. They may also mention items about their real-life personal issues or relationships with other players while performing. For instance, when Sornram is playing a love scene or a wedding scene with his real-life sister, Nampetch, he may say things like: "[it's very convenient that] we don't need to change our last name." [for, as brother and sister in real life, they already use the same last name. – Researcher's interpretation]; or

when they are in a fight scene, at which some point Sornram is slapped on the face, Sornram and Nampetch always come out of their roles, at the behest of the audience as much as themselves, to talk about their real brother-sister fighting scenarios at home. “I don’t want to be the hero [in this play] anymore if I have to be slapped on the face like this! I’m going to tell Dad!”, Sornram says on the stage and Nampetch responds, “Go ahead, tell on me! I’m Daddy’s little girl!” [Dad always takes my side anyway. – Researcher’s interpretation].

It is interesting to note here that voice switching among leading characters is commonly practiced. A voice switching technique is mostly adopted by the hero and heroine characters more than any other fixed-type characters, such as the villains and the clowns. This is because the characters of hero and heroine in Thai *Likay* are pre-stereotyped; actors and actresses who have been trained to play these protagonist characters must be specifically trained in dancing, singing and voice use. They will never change to play any other roles but maintain playing the hero and heroine until the end of their acting career. The voices of both male and female protagonists, while singing and speaking, are supposed to be soft and gentle. Both actors, required by the high-class characters they always portray, mostly render their songs and speech by speaking in the central Thai accent; on the other hand, the lower-class characters such as clowns and sometimes villains (who may be playing a forest bandit) are free to use local dialects.

From time to time in a scene, it may come to the point that the leading characters break the fourth wall by coming out of their characters to be their own selves in response to some humorous remarks abruptly made by a clown. These humorous remarks can be created from various sources, for example, some improvisational jokes in response to an

audience member's comments from the floor, or some teasing remarks from colleague actors. When these unexpected situations happen, the hero and heroine will come out of their characters most of the time, and switch their voices and accents from the protagonist's voice to their own real voice. The process of voice switching occurs very often and naturally on the stage; the actors may not even be aware they are in the process.

3.2 Use of Coded Gesture and Pantomime

Brecht mentions that Chinese acting masterfully made use of gesture. The Chinese actor achieves the V-effect by being seen to observe his own movement. (Brecht, 1964: 139) Just like Chinese opera, *Likay* also comes from the same dance-drama origin with an extensive use of gestures to represent a human's natural actions. For western spectators, the use of symbolic gestures may look strange; for a local audience, on the other hand, the use of gestures is perfectly normal and expected. *Likay* performers have to be trained to apply these conventional gestures accurately. One 'alienated' gesture movement, for example, is the sleeping position. In *Likay* performance, during a scene when a character is sleeping, instead of lying down on a bed (actually more of a bench placed at stage center) like normal people do, the actor just sits on the bench with his/her body slightly inclined, one leg underneath the body, one foot on the floor and eyes closed to represent a sleeping position.

Pantomime is also commonly practiced in *Likay* performance. As the stage settings are limited, actors have to use pantomime when depicting needed scenic devices. Carkin explained the use of pantomime in *Likay* theatre almost 30 years ago, and the practice of pantomime is still found to be an integral part of *Likay* acting today. Carkin (1984: 141) describes:

In the use of the convention whereby downstage and upstage signal exterior and interior respectively, the actor mimes opening windows, looking out, opening and closing doors, knocking at windows and doors and the like. [...] the actor develops the necessary scenic devices through his own imagination and defines them by use of pantomime.

Thai audiences are familiar with de-coding gestures and pantomime as traditional Thai theatre has stemmed from mask dance-drama which coded gesture as a central component in communication. Therefore, in *Likay* performance, the use of coded gesture and pantomime too is still a vital part to help in demystifying the message, in addition to the dialogue itself.

3.3 Use of Unrelated Songs

Focusing on music use, Brecht's V-effect has an anti-hypnotic quality and is intended to be another tool to make things strange on the stage. Music use in Brecht's plays is unlike music in other naturalistic plays which tends to be more of "a narcotic, reinforcing the stage illusion". For Brecht, songs are not used to heighten emotion at moments of climax; they serve as commentaries, generally leading to a V-effect – thus lyrics may be wry and humorous, melodies may be jazz-influenced, jerky and unromantic, and songs may satirize popular sentiment. ('Studying Bertolt Brecht', universalteacher website)

In *Likay* theatre, songs are one an inextricable component of the performance, equally significant to the dance movements and classical music band which lends support. There are, however, different types of song use in the theatre, each of which is applied to a specific situation or scene. Unlike Brecht's music, *Likay*'s music is specifically designed

and intends to heighten the emotions of each separate scene. In a sad scene, for example, the music band would strike up a well-known specific melody; traditionally used only for this emotional scene, most Thai audiences recognize the tune immediately. However, some music used in *Likay* performance is unexpected, with the choice of music obviously bearing no relation to the main story at all.

In *Likay* performance, the main song, or actually the main melody of the song, is called "Radnikleng". This is the most famous, most familiar and most compulsory melodic line for all *Likay* troupes around the country. "Radnikleng" is considered to be one of the symbols of *Likay* performance. In other words, all *Likay* actors will sing these same melodic lines, but perhaps with different lyrics. The skill of composing lyrics is one of the most cherished skills of all. Words or lyrics are pre-written as a framing device to push forward the plot of the whole story. Even though the actors are allowed to improvise freely for their speech without any pre-written dialogue, the lyrics are considered the main script of the play. It is possible that some different *Likay* troupes may base their script on the same well-known folktale stories, but their lyrics are always different as they are specifically composed by and for that particular troupe only. Nampetch Anakelab, an aspiring young *Likay* actress and a leading actress of her own troupe, shares her experience about the process when *Likay* performers rehearse a new play.

When we have a new play, all actors will have to rehearse before the real show. We will give each actor the verse (lyric) to memorize first. Then we will get together as a group to clarify the storyline and the plot. At this stage, we need to create our own dialogue, that is what we will say on the stage.

(*Sornram-Nampetch* Troupe interview, 'Web Za' Television Program)

[My Translation]

What is most interesting about composing *Likay* lyrics and how it relates to Brecht's V-effect techniques is that the real names of the leading actors constantly appear in most of the composed lyrics. The following lyric excerpt exemplifies the point mentioned. In a play entitled "Wiwa Onlaweng" [Deranged Marriage] by *Sornram-Nampetch* Troupe, Sornram Anakelap plays a character named Sontaya and Duangkao Bootjamlong, another leading actress, plays a character called Duangjai. However, in this scene, the two meet for the first time. The hero tries to woo the heroine despite the fact that their social classes are obviously far apart (the heroine is a high-class wealthy lady while the hero is just a poor man who lives in a temple as a monk's attendant); the heroine shows her disapproval for his impertinent manner and sings this following song:

Thai Lyric	English Translation of the Lyric
จนหรือมีดีหรือชั่ว ต้องโทษที่ตัวของกรรม ต้องโทษที่ตัวของกรรม	Karma destines people to be born to rags or riches.
ที่ขัดสนจนข้า มันเกิดจากกรรมทุกสิ่ง มันเกิดจากกรรมทุกสิ่ง	The ones who are born poor, had been pre-destined because of their own karma.
เราจะไม่รับปาก ในเรื่องรักกับท่าน ในเรื่องรักกับท่าน	I will not promise to begin this (love) relationship with you.
ขอกล้ออกไปนอกราชาน เดียวจะมีการยิงทึ้ง	You must get out now before you'll be shot dead.
ถ้าด่วนเก้าร้องตะโกน ศรรามต้องโดนปืนยิง	If <u>Duangkao</u> cries for help, <u>Sornram</u> will surely be shot dead!
(ริวาร์ดอัลเวง)	[Deranged Marriage]

[My Translation]

For this particular scene, when there was a change in the leading actress (Duangkao Bootjamlong left the troupe in March 2014 and was replaced by a new leading actress, Duangjarus Bootjamroon), the last line of the lyric was also replaced by using the name of the new actress instead.

Most *Likay* troupes not only perform their classical music based on the "Radnikleng" melody, but also mix the melodies with popular Thai country or even western-style pop songs to offer more variety of song choices. The use of contemporary songs in *Likay* performance can be divided into two different types: 1) songs specially composed to promote

the leading actors, 2) current popular songs with no relation to the main plot of the performing play.

For the first type, it seems to have become a common practice that there must be some special songs composed to promote the leading actors of the troupe. These songs are specifically composed to present and portray a good image of the leading actors. The names and some unique characteristics of the actors are interwoven into the lyrics and, of course, these special songs must be sung only by the leading actors whose names are mentioned in the song. Besides this, these songs may or may not have any direct relation whatsoever to the storyline. Most of the time, the song plays no significant role in driving the plot forward. The song called “*Do You Love Me (Sornram) yet?*” by *Sornram-Nampetch* Troupe is a very clear example here. The song was composed to be sung in a duet by the leading actor (Sornram) and the leading actress (Duangkao), based on the background that these young actors started their professional career when they were both at a young age and had been paired up as one of the leading couples of the troupe for almost ten years. An excerpt from the original song lyric is shown and translated as follows:

Thai Lyric	English Translation of the Lyric
ศรราม: ขอ ขอถามสักคำ ดวง เก้าคนงามรักศรรามบ้างหรือยัง	“Yes, We Fully Realize That We’re Watching a Play. We Just Don’t Realize That It’s Brecht.”: An Analysis of Brecht’s V-effect Technique Used in Thai Likay Theatre: May I just ask you one question? Does the gorgeous Duangkao love Sornram yet?

Thai Lyric	English Translation of the Lyric
ตั้งจีดแปดปีด้านหน้าเวที คู่พระคู่นาง	We have spent 7-8 years together as a couple on stage,
ตั้งแต่เล็กๆ สองเรายังเด็กชื่อเสียงไม่ดัง	since we both were young and unknown.
สรวงค์สรรสร้างให้เราโง่ดังคู่กัน	Destiny has brought us fame together.
ดวงเก้า: โถ ทำซอกบกล พ่อหน้ามด ทำเหมือนเป็นคนเคยชอบกัน	Duangkao: How strange! You, the handsome one, talk as if we were actually lovers.
ผู้ชุมชนยิงชา丫头มากมายไม่อายหรือนั่น	Don't you even feel ashamed to talk like that in front of the audience?
บุพเพน้ำพาให้เราันมากคู่กัน ก็แล้วแต่ท่าน เพราะว่าสรวงค์สร้างสมเรามา	As destiny has brought us together, so I completely rely on it (the destiny) then.

[My Translation]

The second type is the use of current popular songs with no relation to the main plot of the play. It has now become part of the routine for *Likay* actors to sing modern country or pop songs. The new songs are selected and changed frequently based mainly on the popularity in the national song charts. Country or pop songs of their choice can be sung solo or as a duet depending on the scene they are performing. As mentioned, these song choices have nothing at all to do with the main plot or emotional environment of the ongoing scene. It is very possible that the actors may be performing a sad love scene when they are still crying, and then almost abruptly, they switch their emotional mode and sing a duet of a

currently popular, joyous, fast-beat folk song whose meaning has nothing in relation to the ongoing scene. For example, in the play “*Salap Rang Sarng Rak*” (Figure Alteration Brings Love), Sornram who plays Prince Assanai is breaking up with his lover, Princess Rani (played by Duangkao), because Prince Assanai thinks that Princess Rani despises and has rejected him for his physical deformity. However, after a tearful love confession, they reconcile and reunite. The music strikes up, Sornram and Duangkao, who still have not yet wiped away the tears from their faces, start singing in a duet the most popular fast-beat country song, “*Kaw Jai Lak Bur Toe*” (Give Me Your Heart in Exchange for My Number), about a girl who falls in love at first sight with a boy and asks him to give her his love in exchange for her phone number.

Brecht's V- Effect is obviously applied here, though with no intention of making the story strange, but merely to please the audience who are tuned into local hit songs.

3.4 Audience interruption

Not only do *Likay* performers and their acting styles strengthen the impact of Brecht's V- effect, but also the audience and their theatre manner help make the V-effect highly apparent in *Likay* theatre. Unlike modern formal theatre, where the audience is expected to behave in conformity with theatre etiquette, there are no such rules in *Likay* theatre. Audience members are free to walk in and out of the venue (most of the time, it is an outdoor and open-air venue, perhaps in a market space or a temple area where a *Likay* troupe sets up their temporary stage), perhaps to buy some snacks from nearby vendors, whenever they want to during the performance. They can even chat and laugh with their friends while the actors are playing out a serious scene. They can also converse directly with the actors on stage. This is very similar to what happens in

Brecht's epic theatre when direct addresses to the audience are practiced. However, for Thai *Likay* theatre this action is not regarded as a disruption or a distraction from the play, or even 'strange' in the perception of Thai audiences.

There is a special section of an audience whose continuous support plays a very significant role in nurturing this type of popular theatre. This group of audience members has become a traditional part of commercial *Likay*. Famous *Likay* actors get individual support from "*mae yok*", a term ascribed to female fans who give flower garlands laden with money to their favorite performers. Many of these wealthy loyal fans sponsor a particular actor and perhaps the whole troupe through gifts of cars, buses, jewelry and other luxury items. (Carkin, 1984: 97) As *Likay* theatre relies very much on the support from loyal fans, performance is thus designed to simply respond to their fans' aesthetic tastes. Since it is highly improvisational, performances may alter depending upon the immediate response of audience members. Players have to be alert for the moment – both inside and outside the context of the play – and deal with both aspects of performance with agility. (Carkin, 1984: 217) The audience is made part of the performance in this way. They may interrupt the ongoing performance at anytime they like to give money garlands to the actors. They may even interrupt a serious scene, when one character is dying and other characters are shedding mournful tears, so as to call a dying character-actor to come down from the stage to get a reward from them. Audience interruption is considered a very common practice and no one actually views it as a disturbance; though in western theatre tradition, this manner could be considered very strange and rude.



Figure 2: A *mae yok* (*Likay* supporter) giving Sornram Anakelap a money garland to show her admiration to the young actor. (Photo retrieved on 13 September 2014 from <http://thaimisc.pukpik.com/freewebboard/php/vreply.php?user=natadontree&topic=11487>)

3.5 Costumes and Make-up

Another vital element and symbol of *Likay* theatre is the extravagant costumes in which, according to some *Likay* critics, 'the fantasy is to be found'. Michael Smithies (1971: 41) gives a very good description of *Likay* costumes saying that

[*Likay* costumes are] where imaginative bad taste is allowed to run riot. Never were jewels so gaudy or colours so clashing. Paste and glass ornament every possible part; the few actresses may be dressed more traditionally but with an even heavier encrustation of costume jewellery. For this reason

the phrase '*Muen Likay*' [dress like *Likay*] is used of anyone who dresses extravagantly or for any gaudy object.

Likay costumes have been developed over time. At the beginning, the costumes were very much alike – though much less refined – primarily worn by the court dance-drama actors. Today's *Likay* costumes are widely open to artistic creativity in terms of style, design and cut. However, the principle ornaments which cannot be omitted are fake jewels or crystals embroidered onto almost every part of the dress. It seems that there is no strict rule when it comes to *Likay* dressing, as long as one goal is achieved – to make the actors look as dashing as possible. Costumes have almost nothing to do with the characters being portrayed; the hero, whether he is playing poor or rich, must be wearing a full clashing-colored jewel costume. For the female actress, in a similar vein, it is not significant whether she is playing a country bumpkin girl or a princess, she will certainly be wearing a western-inspired evening dress with, preferably, a big and long balloon skirt, similar to those worn during the 17th century in the West. Both male and female actors wear jeweled bracelets, necklaces, earrings and rhinestone head ornaments. Even though *Likay* costumes may look 'alienated' from reality and unrelated whatsoever to the roles the actors are playing (especially to unfamiliar spectators), Thai audiences ignore this notion completely as long as the costumes serve as the main dramatic elements which always please their eyes.



Figure 3: Typical male and female *Likay* costumes today.

Photo retrieved on 13 September 2014, from <http://www.luktungmohlum.com/t/18636>, and <http://www.ichat.in.th/ladyduangkeaw/topic-read-id112833-page1>

Likay make-up is no less distinctive. The stage is very brightly lit and raised high above the ground; for audience members who sit in the back rows, their vision can be quite limited. *Likay* make up, therefore, must be striking and apparent enough for those who sit in the back rows to see from afar. The actors' eyes and lips are the most accentuated parts; false eyelashes, heavy mascara, highlights eye shadow, and bright red or pink lipstick are essential. *Likay* make up also has a link with the V-effect in the sense that it does not conform to any realistic image; it is not even realistic in the first place. It does not matter whether the actor is playing an old mature man or an adolescent; the make-up does not change, nor denote any age-difference in the character. In some stories, perhaps some gray hairs, white hair highlights, different hairdo or some additional pencil-drawn beard or mustard can be seen as indicators for the character's age change, but never the make-up.

3.6 Use of Stage Narrator and Simple Props

Other vital 'alienated' practices found in *Likay* dramatic convention is the role of an off-stage narrator. The use of an off-stage narrator is to fill in all the dramatic gaps on stage and provide comments on the scene being performed. The narrator also assists in getting rid of the illusion of naturalistic theatre in *Likay* performance. According to Brecht (1964: 138), given the absence of total transformation in the acting, there are other aids which may help alienate the actions and remarks of the character being portrayed; one of the techniques is transposition into the third person – in this case, the use of a narrator. Narration is usually provided throughout *Likay* performance. From the introduction of actors and characters to additional comments about the ongoing scenes, the off-stage narrator (who generally takes the role as *Toe Po* or troupe manager) relates the aspects of the story which cannot be seen on the stage and fills in the leaps of time and place. (Carkin, 1984: 203) Narration lends an alienated effect in which the audience is constantly reminded and made to be fully aware that they are viewing a play, not a true story.

Likay also makes extensive use of non-realistic but simple props to represent real objects. Props are almost unnecessary in the performance and used only when needed. Some commonly alienated props are, for example, a tied towel to represent a new-born baby (recently, replaced by a plastic baby doll), a triangle-shaped pillow to represent a separate wall or a big stone, a bench fixed center stage to represent the king's throne or a poor man's bed. Both actors and audiences seem to pay less attention to prop usage; as long as the plot can move forward, props are only used symbolically without intention or effort to make them look realistic.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

In conclusion, the extensive use of a dramatic technique called 'Verfremdungeffeks' (the V-effect) or 'alienation effect' can be found commonly and conventionally adopted in Thai *Likay* theatre. Even though Thai *Likay* is performed in a way which could be perceived as Brecht's alienation effect being fully adopted, the main difference may lie in the fact that the highest goal to be achieved by pro-Brechtian acting troupes and Thai *Likay* troupes is distinctly different. While the goal for using Brecht's alienation effect in the western theatre is to make the audience always aware that they are watching a play, and not being "taken out of themselves" and thus not being distracted from the main content of the story, Thai *Likay* aims to do otherwise.

Likay originated and has been developed from Thai classical dance-drama, which can be categorized within a group of anti-realism theatre in the first place. Realistic or naturalistic acting never existed in Thai indigenous dramatic convention. Actually, realistic acting techniques have just been introduced, practiced and blended into the classical form since the early twentieth century. The basic theatrical components of *Likay* therefore are based on non-realistic stylization; it is created and simply performs to respond directly to the aesthetic taste of a generally fun-loving local audience whose support means the survival of their profession. While in the western theatrical practice, the expected outcome in using alienation effects is that the audience can reach an intellectual level of understanding of the play, Thai *Likay* audiences mainly love and look for some simple entertaining jigs for a short escape from reality of hard life; they do not expect to be intellectualized or look for some thought-provoking inspirations by watching a play. It can be stated here that in *Likay* performance what seems like Brechtian V-effect techniques as viewed by western spectators,

are simply our Thai indigenous dramatic conventions which have been shaped, developed and directed in response to the Thai audience's aesthetic taste. Commercial *Likay* troupes by nature are improvisational and very responsive to audience's demands. Incomplete characterization of the actors and very predictable plots are not to be taken seriously as long as there is enough space provided for audience members to get close and shower their affections to their favourite actors during the performance. *Likay* actors and local audiences have been intimately familiar with this anti-realism dramatic tradition long before Brecht created the V-effect techniques.

Some Brechtian techniques including 'breaking the fourth wall' by having actors come out of their characters and addressing the audience directly, using an off-stage narrator, using some symbolic and simple props to represent actual items used in the plot, using extravagantly jewelled costumes and non-realistic make-up, just to name a few – have been extensively practiced within Thai *Likay* theatre for centuries. Basically, as the V-effect technique was originated, inspired and developed from theatrical tradition of the East, "alienation" technique therefore would work mainly for western audience who may find oriental dramatic stylization 'alien' to them; for audience in the East, on the other hand, we perhaps are already too 'alien' to be alienated in this sense.

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