Symbols and Power in Theatre of the Oppressed

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KEYWORDS

Aesthetics - political aspects; Boal, Augusto; Communications theory; Cultural activism; Drama - Social aspects; Drama in education; Lansdale, Edward; Human behaviour; Persuasive communication; Performing arts - philosophy; Symbolism in art; Power - Philosophy; Theatre - Brazil; Theatre - Political aspects; Theatre - Philosophy; Theatre - Therapy; Theatre and society; Theatre of the Oppressed; Theatre studies; Performance studies

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ABSTRACT

Augusto Boal developed Theatre of the Oppressed as a way of using the symbolic language of the dramatic arts in the examination of power relations in both the personal and social contexts. Boal understood that symbolic realities directly influence empirical reality and that drama, as an art form that employs the narrative and the event, serves as a powerful interface between symbols and actuality. In the dramatic process, the creation and the environment from which it emerges are inevitably transformed in the process of enactment. These transformations manifest in the context of power relations - in the context of the receptor’s ability to make decisions and to engage in actions, and the communicator’s ability to influence the receptor’s opinions and behaviour. This thesis will examine two different practices in which symbolic realities have been utilised in the context of human relations of power. Primarily, this thesis examines the theory and practice of Theatre of the Oppressed as it has developed. Additionally, Theatre of the Oppressed will be examined in comparison with another body of theory and practice - one grounded in the martial and political fields. The similarities and differences between the two practices will be used as a way of elaborating upon the objectives and methods of Theatre of the Oppressed, and as a way of examining the overall practice of ‘cultural activism’. This thesis will look at the work of Augusto Boal from 1965 to 1998, and the body of his work known as Theatre of the Oppressed. Also examined will be the work of Edward Geary Lansdale from 1950 to 1983, chiefly his work in the Philippines and Vietnam. One is a theatre worker, a writer, director, theorist and politician. The other retired as a major general in the US Air Force, a renowned intelligence operative and expert. This thesis will argue that they are working in the same field, albeit at different points in spectrums of material resources and ideology. They are both cultural activists. This thesis will examine the way these two practitioners have used the narrative and the event, the myth and the ritual, to colour the canvas of cultures. Cultural activism is the orchestration of narratives and events. Cultural activists work with the symbolic in order to influence the actual.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYMBOLS AND POWER</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTORS AND AUDIENCES</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION OF BIAS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of the Thesis</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGIES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image Theatre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRINCIPLES</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRACTICE</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVALUATION</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansdale’s Vampires</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum Theatre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRINCIPLES</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRACTICE</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVALUATION</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansdale’s G-5 Playlets</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introspective Techniques</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRINCIPLES</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRACTICE</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVALUATION</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansdale’s Black Boycotts</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative Theatre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRINCIPLES</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRACTICE</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVALUATION</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invisible Theatre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFICULT EXAMPLES</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions of Aesthetics</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions of Ethics</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique of a Difficult Example</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansdale’s Simple Deceptions</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A DOCUMENTARY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Como Querem Beber Agua</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICS</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEATRE</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOLUTIONS</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUESTIONS</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELEVISION</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEGISLATIVE</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLACKS</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN CLOSING</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Videorecording (Duration: 53 minutes)

Como Querem Beber Agua
Augusto Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro
A documentary by Ronaldo Morelos

Writer, director and camera: Ronaldo Morelos
Online editors: Rennie Smits, Jason Whiting & Angie Leprou
Post-production: QUT Educational Television Facility
Associate producer: Rod Wissler - Centre for Innovation in the Arts
Producer: Ronaldo Morelos

Produced with the support of the Academy of the Arts at the Queensland University of Technology, and the Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, the Australian Government’s arts funding and advisory body.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher degree institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made.

Signed        Ronaldo Morelos
Date           October 1999
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project owes its existence to the continuous support of Brad Haseman, who has encouraged the work from its conception. A debt of gratitude is also owed to Eugene van Erven, for his support and guidance over many years of collaboration. The contributions of Paul Makeham, Rod Wissler and Rob Care-Wickham have also been greatly appreciated - especially in the bringing to life of Como Querem Beber Agua, the video documentary that supplements the text of this work. A general expression of gratitude is also due to Queensland University of Technology’s Academy of the Arts, Centre for Innovation in the Arts, Educational Television Facility and Kelvin Grove Library for the support that has been given to this project. A note of thanks is offered to the staff of the State Library of Victoria for all their assistance. The initial fieldwork for this project was made possible by the financial support of the Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, the Australian Government’s arts funding and advisory body. The valuable support of Fiona Wiseman, Madeleine Blackwell, Norma Joseph and Lotar Kienzle during the fieldwork stage were saving graces that are most deeply appreciated. The support and contribution of the artists whose works are documented herein make up the core of this project; without which there would be nothing to write about. In particular, a deep-felt gratitude is offered to Claudete Felix, Liko Turle, and the past and current members of the Centro de Teatro do Oprimido of Rio de Janeiro; Rui Frati and the members of the Centre du Théâtre de l’Oprimé of Paris; and Alvin Tan of The Necessary Stage in Singapore. Finally for Augusto Boal - whose support for this project, whose own work which is its inspiration, and whose continuing dedication to a noble vision has given this project a reason for being - a most heart-felt thanks.
Chapter 1
Introduction

SYMBOLS AND POWER

Fashion magazine Harper’s Bazaar and Mode (May 1998) reported on a chic new place called Pharmacy that opened in London’s Notting Hill Gate. It had been designed by Damien Hirst (described as “the über-lord of the Young British Art Scene”). A concept cocktail bar and restaurant, much effort and artistry went towards making it look just like a pharmacy. So much so that locals sometimes wander in with prescriptions to fill. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain considered legal action, claiming that it would be illegal for anyone other than a registered pharmacy to use that name.¹ One reality colliding with another.

Fiction and reality. Facts. Real. True or false. Truth. Notions and measures descending from religion and science, that we sometimes (if not often) have to tenuously hold onto in order to hang on to reality - the concrete or consensus reality; that which is real and that which is not. Eventually we realise that no matter how hard we try, as Chris Brooks believes, we cannot ‘tell the truth’ about the world because there is ultimately too much of it to encompass linguistically - the reality that we perceive has no necessary a priori order.² Fiction is a reality! Augusto Boal declared in one interview we held in Rio de Janeiro in 1994, in his office at the Municipal Chamber of the city of Rio de Janeiro.³ As he sat in his elected seat of Legislator (Vereador) during the Brazilian presidential campaign, that was the reality! Everything is real! Some realities we create, construct consciously or unconsciously. These are the realities that become our abstractions, our

symbolic realities; fiction, narratives, myths, fears, preconceptions. What Walter Lippmann called our pseudo-environment⁴. And then there’s the kind of chaotic consensus reality - the one that actually occurs, the actuality. Terence Deacon notes that we compose narratives in order to make sense of our experiences in actuality, to reveal our imagined worlds, and to organise our lives - in this way we live our lives in a shared ‘virtual’ world.⁵ Umberto Eco suggests that the “so-called actual world is the world to which we refer - rightly or wrongly - as the world described by the Encyclopedia Britannica or Time magazine”, a world that “we know through a multitude of world pictures or stated descriptions”.⁶

Boal, in actuality, was in office as a Municipal Legislator from 1992 to 1996. When he was elected he took his theatre group with him, that was both actual and symbolic. For the first time a man of the theatre entered political office with his own theatre company. Being a ‘man of the theatre’, Boal wasn’t going to give up his theatre work for a term in public office. So he sought ways of using theatre as part of his office. Thus the Gabinete of Augusto Boal became known to the people of Rio de Janeiro. He used theatre in the streets, in the shanty communities (favelas), in halls, in churches and in the Municipal Chamber of Rio’s Legislative Council (Câmara dos Vereadores). He used the Forum Theatre system extensively in this line of work. He built up a healthy network of Theatre of the Oppressed nucleus groups around the city. He developed a use for theatre that he called Legislative Theatre. He sat through a lot of good and bad theatre at the Municipal Chambers, getting involved in much drama (both symbolic and actual) along the way.

Boal is a cultural activist. This thesis will look at the role of the cultural activist in society. Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed will be the major focus

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³ Boal, interview with author - August 1994: Appendix A, line 73.
of this examination. As a comparison and counterpoint to this body of work, the work of another cultural activist - Edward Geary Lansdale will also be surveyed. Lansdale is a renowned intelligence operative and expert. He retired in 1963 as a major general in the United States Air Force, continuing to serve his country’s interests perhaps until he died in 1987. His most notable work, and the body of psychological operations work that this thesis will focus on, was the work he carried out in the Philippines and Vietnam between 1950 and the early 1960s; work that earned him the reputation of “king-maker”, of the highest accord in intelligence circles. By comparing the works of Boal and Lansdale, this thesis will take account of the commonalities and differences in the respective practices in order to capture a broader view of the practice of cultural activism and the spectrum in which it operates. This thesis will reflect on the ways in which Boal and Lansdale, in their respective ways, utilise myth and ritual, the narrative and the event - the script. The concern of this thesis is both the techniques and the intentions - the effect that each sets out to make upon those who encounter the constructed symbolic.

Carl Jung describes symbols as terms or names or pictures that might be familiar in daily life but are loaded with specific connotations in addition to their conventional or obvious meanings. Symbols represent social conventions, tacit agreements or explicit codes which establish relationships that link one object to another - thus an object can come to symbolise a social agreement or a set of ideas. A symbol is a concrete indication of abstract values; it is complex and aesthetic. Whereas symbols point to a complex series of personal and social associations, their contents are both emotional and cognitive. Symbols can be described as conventional and specific signifiers that evoke “a special form of fantasy” and that stand for something that may or may not have an actual existence. Jung believed that symbols are “always more than we can understand at first sight”; they promise more

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6 The Limits of Interpretation - Umberto Eco 1990 (Indiana University, Bloomington) p. 67.
8 Deacon 1997, p. 71.
10 Firth 1973, p. 75; Boesch 1991, p.85.
11 “Fantasy and Symbol as Dimensions of Reality" George Devereux 1979, Fantasy and Symbol:
than they reveal.\textsuperscript{12} In effect, symbols facilitate a form of understanding that is independent of reason, i.e. intuitive. Immanuel Kant observed that “human understanding cannot avoid the necessity of drawing a distinction between the possibility and the actuality of things”. As human beings we are able to imagine objects that do not actually exist; we give it a place in our thoughts as a possible object.\textsuperscript{13} In this way symbols act upon material reality - through intuitive processes.

For Jung there are distinctions between “natural symbols” - archetypal motifs and unconscious contents of the psyche that can be traced back to archaic roots - and “cultural symbols” - collective representations that function as positive and negative prejudices. By ‘prejudice’ Jung refers to a symbol’s capacity to evoke a deep emotional response in some individuals.\textsuperscript{14} Symbols can appear in any number of manifestations; as thoughts and feelings, as acts and situations, or as patterns.\textsuperscript{15} A symbol generates resonance in inner worlds by touching the private reservoirs of dreams, artistic imaginations and psychological symptoms; and in outer worlds by becoming a motivational force for public action.\textsuperscript{16} Whilst a symbol - particularly a public one - is capable of motivating action, when a ‘symbol’ is equated to ‘fiction’, it is with the expectation that the symbol will not generate action, although it might generate some feeling from it - feeling and action are separable in considering the effect of a symbol.\textsuperscript{17}

The function of symbols is to articulate and present concepts; a symbol is understood when the receiver conceives the idea it presents.\textsuperscript{18} The

\textsuperscript{14} Jung 1964, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{15} Jung 1977, p. 211.
\textsuperscript{17} Firth 1973, p. 76.
difference between a symbol and other representational signifiers, such as a sign, rests in the complexity of its associative function. Jung observes that signs only denote the objects to which they are attached. Boesch suggests that the denotation of a sign is of a specific content and of a purely mental object; whereas a symbol will evoke emotion and a private connotation as it motivates action. Deacon argues that no particular objects are intrinsically signs or symbols; they are interpreted to be so depending upon the response that is produced. The receiver’s mental response to a signal can be described as a ‘perceptual categorization’; while the response to a symbol can be seen as a ‘conceptual categorization’. Neuroscientist Gerald Edelman describes perceptual categorization as the selective discrimination of an object or event from other objects or events for adaptive purposes. They are non-conscious processes that can be carried out by paired mental (synaptic) associations - they are simple, sensorial, direct and even automatic effects. Edelman describes conceptual categorizations as working from within the brain - wherein a perceptual categorization is processed with an activated memory in complex networks of mental (synaptic) associations. However, these processes only mark the beginning of a basic ‘primary consciousness’ - which allows an animal existence.

The next step, which human beings are successfully undertaking, is the development of a ‘symbolic memory’ - a memory for symbols and their associated meanings. This threshold marks the development of a ‘higher-order consciousness’ - which allows an existence with a constructed socially based selfhood, a model of the world in terms of the past and the future, and a direct awareness. Deacon believes that the human being’s entry into this ‘virtual world’ of symbols has been facilitated by the evolution of language, not merely as a mode of communication but also as an outward expression of

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19 Jung 1964, p. 20.
a mode of thought - which is symbolic representation. Jung believes that “in former times men did not reflect upon their symbols; they lived them and were unconsciously animated by their meaning.” The role of symbols is to give meaning to human life; as important constituents of human mental make-up and as vital forces in the building up of human society. Firth describes symbols as “stores of meaning in communication” - of both public and private meanings - as such they are cultural assets.

Meanings do not stand in isolation to other meanings, Langer argues that a symbol’s ‘associated meanings’ serve to expand the symbol, and where associated meanings are not readily evoked the symbol is not enhanced. Turner discusses the levels of meaning through which symbols can be viewed - its interpretational meaning or how it is explained, its operational meaning or how it is used, and its positional meaning or how it relates to other symbols in a totality. Kant suggests that intuitive perceptions can be absorbed from a symbol as it resonates indirect presentations of concepts; meaning is brought about by a process of analogy. A symbol presents a concept, that is intuitively perceived with its embedded “rule of reflection” - the set of associations that it is able to activate. A symbol’s rule of reflection defines the range of its resonance - the scope of meaning that it is able to evoke.

The social setting of a symbol is indispensable, as ethnologist Bronislaw Malinowski proposed, because the elements of symbolism are maintained and transmitted by the social group. Each individual is trained and developed in the knowledge of technique and understanding of symbols - the appreciation of values - by their social group.

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23 Deacon 1997, p. 22.
28 Kant 1952, Pt. 1 - Section 59, pp. 222-223.
discussed the human need to engage in ‘symbolic work’ in order to produce and reproduce individual identities, to locate those identities in larger wholes, and to affirm the powers of the self and the ways that it can participate in the cultural world. This symbolic work is comprised of the basic elements of language, of the presence and activity of the human body and of the element of drama - as in the performative elements - as practices and symbolic resources; as well as, and most importantly, of symbolic creativity - as in the practice of the production of new meanings. These elements together operate in a transitive fashion - in symbolic work, operants expect to be able to apply power to the world in order to change it, however minutely.30 This effect can be described as a process of ‘empowerment’ - the reinforcement of the expectation that individual effort and power, which may or may not act in concert with others, can influence the social environment. Conversely, the receiver of a communicated symbol can be subjected to a form of control, as Firth describes, wherein a symbol is utilised or capable of being manipulated by the person wishing to influence the behaviour of others. In such instances, symbols operate in power relations; the emphasis is on the control of external behaviour through the use of symbols.31

Whatever the intention, the effect of symbols upon human beings can only be examined in its results. Turner notes that it is “possible, and indeed necessary, to analyze symbols in a context of observed emotions.”32 Therefore it can be said that symbols, as a parallel reality to the empirical one, shape us as individuals and as a society - it is also how we as individuals in society shape our world. This shaping occurs through a process of mimesis.

At its simplest terms, mimesis is a process of imitation, representation or expression. Mimesis describes the process which allows the possibility to produce a symbolic world, as well as the process by which the symbolic world influences empirical reality. In mimesis is found the power to represent

31 Firth 1973, p. 84.
the self and others, and to interpret the world.\textsuperscript{33} Mimesis is an interplay of cognition and action; it is a symbolic system operating through a communication medium, its relevance is not restricted to the aesthetic because its effects reach out into the social world to take root in individual behaviour.\textsuperscript{34}

Mimesis is a process in which the symbolic reality comes into contact with actual reality. In such a process, realities impact upon one another. This thesis is concerned with the dynamic of the symbolic reality impacting upon actuality. This thesis argues that as individuals, as a society and as a culture we are affected, propelled, as a result of the impact of the symbolic and the actual, towards growth or decay, life or death. We are either empowered or disempowered. Howard Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, in \textit{Power and Society}, spoke of power in the political context, a useful starting point for this thesis. “Power is participation in the making of decisions”, and “the political process is the shaping, distribution and exercise of power.”\textsuperscript{35} In \textit{The Sociological Imagination}, Wright Mills observed that power is concerned with whatever decisions human beings make about the arrangements under which they live and the events that make up the history of their period. As decisions are made, the problem of who is involved in making them is the basic problem of power - therefore power is also concerned with the management and manipulation of the consent of others.\textsuperscript{36} The spectrum in which cultural activism functions is concerned with relationships of power, with extremities inhabited by life and death. This thesis is concerned with the ways that mimesis is utilised in, or occurs within, the works of Augusto Boal and Edward Lansdale - two practitioners of cultural activism. In their work, they use myths and rituals to impact upon actuality, in both individual and social scales. Our symbols, our stereotypes, embody our strengths and vulnerabilities in the realm of narratives and events - our stories. This thesis

\textsuperscript{34} Gebauer & Wulf 1992, p. 309.
\textsuperscript{35} Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry - Harold Lasswell & Abraham Kaplan 1950 (Yale University, New Haven) p. 75.
\textsuperscript{36} The Sociological Imagination - C. Wright Mills 1959 (Oxford University Press, New York) p. 40.
looks at the ways in which Boal and Lansdale have worked with narratives and events in their respective practices, the intentions that drive their work and some of the effects of their respective practices.

Ernest Boesch wrote in *Symbolic Action Theory and Cultural Psychology* that “we operate on two levels of reality: the praxic - concrete levels of our external experiences and actions, and the level of representations, imaginations and reflections”. The concrete and the representative realities are closely intertwined. Imagination could not exist without the experience of the concrete reality, and vice versa.\(^\text{37}\) In a study of the significance of the human body in the field of medicine, Katharine Young notes that “when we become aware of our own materiality, what we are aware of is not the body as an object but the corporeality of the self” - we are present in our own flesh. This presence is invoked as identity - as a discourse of the self, with the body as both the source and the site. An identity is a story - the body gives rise to narratives, and stories give rise to the body - but that identity is not the totality of the person who possesses it.\(^\text{38}\) Purely abstract and purely concrete phenomena may be possible, but there are more often than not interplays and doublings of the symbolic and the actual. The human body is, at the basic level and prior to all meaning, actuality. If a body is inert, if all major organs cease to function, if there are no longer any signs of consciousness, then perhaps that body is lifeless. However, if a body is alive and exercising consciousness then it is able to participate in the symbolic realm. The body attains identity, the sense of “I am” which forms and resides in the symbolic. Culture is symbolic, and it generates events and artefacts in actuality. Our actions may be actual, but they originate from the symbolic reality. Our actions can also resonate and exert influence in the symbolic reality. The symbolic is our way of making meaning out of the base and animal actuality. It is our set of representations. It is where knowledge is formed and developed. It is also the realm of opinions and beliefs, that which guide our

\(^{37}\) Boesch 1991, p. 103.

decisions and actions; we believe, we act. Opinions and beliefs are the shapes and colours that the cultural activist seeks out, works with, and strives to influence. By influencing opinions and beliefs, the cultural activist influences actions. This is the mimetic effect.

On the 30th of October in 1938, Orson Welles and the “Mercury Theater on the Air” broadcasted on CBS Radio a dramatisation of “War of the Worlds” by H.G. Wells. It played to an audience of between 6 to 12 million. Of that number, around 1.7 million or 28% - according to surveys by the American Institute of Public Opinion, C.E. Hooper Inc., and CBS - thought that they were listening to news broadcasts of actual events, i.e. an actual major disaster unfolding. A study of the event was carried out by the Office of Radio Research at Princeton University, and subsequently published in “The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic”. The research found that ‘critical ability’ - that is, the capacity to evaluate stimulus in such a way as to be able to understand its inherent characteristics in order to evaluate it and act appropriately - was the most important factor in distinguishing those who panicked from those who did not. Critical ability and its opposite, susceptibility, can be seen to be located on a continuum upon which mimetic and persuasive processes work. The continuum upon which these two qualities of communication reception is located will be of major concern to this thesis.

ACTORS AND AUDIENCES

In Origins of the Sacred, Dudley Young saw symbols as representing “the relatively unknown, absent or invisible thing... metaphors”. In

Ariadne’s Clue, Anthony Stephens saw symbolic value in images or things acquired “through the meanings and emotions it evokes in us”\textsuperscript{41} In Public Opinion, Walter Lippmann suggests that symbols “are often so useful and so mysteriously powerful that the word itself exhales a magical glamour” and that “it is tempting to treat them as if they possessed independent energy”.\textsuperscript{42} The realm of the symbolic is the workplace of the cultural activist. At various times the concerns might be artistic, economic, political, philosophical or martial to different degrees. These concerns are addressed and make their impact felt in the world of the symbolic. These concerns reflect the intentions of the cultural activist and their work. Lasswell and Kaplan further suggest that “symbols are among the perspectives and instrumentalities of power”.\textsuperscript{43} Walter Lippmann and Howard Lasswell are of particular interest to this thesis. Their respective works have been greatly influential in the field of mass communications theory and practice in the United States, and therefore would have been influential in the work and thinking of Edward Lansdale.

Lansdale was a specialist in the field of psychological operations (psyops) and psychological warfare (psywar). The US Army defines psychological operations as “political, military, economic and ideological actions planned and conducted to create in enemy, hostile, neutral or friendly foreign groups the emotions, attitudes, or behavior favorable to the accomplishment of US policies and objectives”.\textsuperscript{44} From a background in visual arts and advertising, Lansdale entered active military service as an officer during World War II with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The Encyclopedia of US Foreign Relations describes him as a “legendary CIA agent who masterminded counterinsurgency programs in the Philippines, Vietnam and Cuba”.\textsuperscript{45} Lansdale’s professional background exposed him to the

\textsuperscript{42} Lippmann 1922, p. 220.
\textsuperscript{43} Lasswell & Kaplan 1950, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{44} A Psychological Operations Bibliography - Carl Berger & Howard Reese 1960 (US Dept. of the Army, Special Operations Research Office) p. 2.
commercial practices of advertising, market research and public relations. This was at a time when industry, science and the military systematically worked to develop rationalised techniques of persuasion. His later work would see the utilisation of these techniques in political communication and advisory. No doubt he would have benefited from the studies carried out, by the US Army and psychologists such as Carl Hovland, on ‘persuasive communication’ immediately after World War II. This thesis will examine some of the work Lansdale carried out as station chief in Manila for the Office of Policy Coordination (then a highly secretive wing of the newly established Central Intelligence Agency) between 1950 and 1954, and as head of the Saigon Military Mission between 1954 and 1957.

Boal is a man of the theatre, a dramatist - a writer, director, theorist and politician who first came to notice as artistic director of the Arena Theatre of São Paulo between 1956 and 1971. But the work that most concerns this thesis is the body of work that Boal applied himself to after he left Brazil as an exile in 1971. His book, first published in Spanish in 1974 as Teatro del Oprimido y Otras Poéticas Políticas, brought about a body of work that came to be known as Theatre of the Oppressed. This is the body of work that is the major concern of this thesis. The label, Theatre of the Oppressed, encompasses the theatrical and dramatic techniques collected and developed by Boal up until the publication of his book Rainbow of Desire in 1995. In particular, this thesis will examine various practices and traditions of Theatre of the Oppressed such as Forum Theatre, Invisible Theatre and Legislative Theatre.

The purpose of comparing the works of Boal and Lansdale is to look at the commonalities and differences between these two practitioners and their bodies of work. It would be simple to suggest that the difference between Boal and Lansdale in the areas of politics and ideology is one of ‘left and

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right’. But that is not the point of this thesis. Rather, it is concerned with the intentions and dimensions of the work. It is also concerned with the ways in which symbolic realms are utilised by both Boal and Lansdale; the ways in which both use and develop cultural elements in a spectrum of power. Politics is cultural, but arguably, culture is not always political. Boal and Lansdale practise both political and cultural acts. Both Boal and Lansdale study power in their respective works. The objectives embodied in the work will differ greatly, as will their effects on their respective audiences. The range of objectives and effects represent various points in a spectrum of growth and decay. This thesis will regard the work of both Boal and Lansdale as forms of ‘persuasive communication’ that utilise and explore in different ways the dynamics of choice and coercion.

Persuasive communication can take the forms of interpersonal, educational, parental, religious or political influence. The process of influence can be driven by what are judged to be benign or malign intentions, in accordance with the values of those in judgement. The ‘audience’ is not a passive entity receiving messages with a blank mental state. Mass communications practitioners understood that many levels of response must be passed in order to go from a communicated message to a successful persuasion. In addition, factors such as the receiver’s level of involvement with the communication, motivation and ability to process the communicated message have all been found to contribute to the process of influencing opinion and behaviour. In particular, a process known as ‘cognitive dissonance’ has been shown to be pivotal in effecting attitudinal and behavioural influence. Cognitive dissonance describes a dynamic in which one belief (that may be contained in a communication) discordantly or

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51 Perloff 1993, pp. 118-133.
uncomfortably impacts upon another belief (that may be held by the receiver of the communication). This dynamic leads the receiver to either adapt one belief (perhaps the held belief), or a set of beliefs, or the value of such beliefs, or one’s behaviour - in an effort to reduce the discordance or discomfort brought upon by dissonance.\textsuperscript{52} These are just some of the factors that persuasive communications research has identified as mediating communication and behaviour.

Persuasive communication can be viewed as a symbolic activity whose purpose is to effect the internalisation or acceptance of cognitive states or patterns of overt behaviour through the exchange of messages - its effects are produced by symbols.\textsuperscript{53} Persuasive communications seek to influence attitudes, as a major factor which determines behaviour. Attitudes are evaluations of objects - persons, entities or ideas - they are based on feelings or emotions and they have a directive influence upon social behaviour. Attitudes are learnt in the course of socialisation - through conditioning, through exposure to novel stimuli, and through the emulation of the behaviour of influential others. Once they are shaped and formed, attitudes are enduring.\textsuperscript{54} Jung came to believe that human action was, for a long time, motivated by unconscious factors. But eventually the human had to awake, “he began to reflect upon the causes that had moved him; and it took him a very long time indeed to arrive at the preposterous idea that he must have moved himself - his mind being unable to identify any other motivating force than his own.”\textsuperscript{55} Other factors work to determine social behaviour. Habits, which are behaviour patterns that have become routine. Values, which are ideals and supreme goals. Beliefs, which are cognitions, knowledge and information about objects or actions. And opinions, which are simple cognitive judgements, less influential and less grounded than attitudes.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{52} Perloff 1993, pp. 220-222 and 245-248.
\textsuperscript{53} Smith 1982, pp. 5-7.
\textsuperscript{54} Perloff 1993, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{55} Jung 1964, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{56} Perloff 1993, pp. 29-30.
In the realm of public and civic discourse, persuasion is integral to the processes of creating and contesting meanings and norms, of making decisions, of resolving conflicts, of mobilising collective actions, and of respecting differences. Complete consensus is an ideal that is rarely, if ever, achieved and can never be presumed.\(^5^7\) At its best, public persuasion should be rational, transparent and accountable. Outcomes should be brought about by full and free participation, and the force of the superior argument. In actuality, these conditions are more often supplanted by the work of communication specialists.\(^5^8\) Thus it accounts that social influence, in the practice of persuasive communication, occurs in a continuum of choice and coercion - and the differences are sometimes subtle.\(^5^9\) Subjectively, the differences are clear enough - choice involves a private acceptance or internalisation of an advocated position; whereas coercion acknowledges a discrepancy between public behaviour and private position. The difference lies in the perception of free will - its presence or absence in the acceptance or rejection of symbolic appeals.\(^6^0\)

Symbols are often invoked within the context of ritualised activity. Rituals are symbolic modes of communication, a way of communicating a message in a formal way.\(^6^1\) Rituals are symbolic actions, through analogies they make references to desired goals.\(^6^2\) A ritual is composed of prescribed formal behaviour, and its units of specific structure are its symbols.\(^6^3\) Rituals are processes in which symbols are shared - through which private symbols can become public symbols, and public symbols can be assimilated by individuals.\(^6^4\)

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\(^5^7\) Mayhew 1997, p. 5.
\(^5^8\) Mayhew 1997, pp. 13-14.
\(^6^4\) Boesch 1991, p. 86.
Symbols, through the narrative and the event, cannot cause effects out of nothing, out of absolutely neutral consciousness. Symbols can only bring about an effect where a pre-existent potential already resides. Symbols can only trigger off potentialities of action. An ultra-violent film will not by itself cause an individual that views it to engage in a similar violent act. But it may trigger off a desire to engage in a violent act, a desire that would have been accumulating over an extended period of time independent of the said film. It may also provide an individual desiring to perform a violent act with a visualised guide or plan for the execution of such an act. In this sense the film would be an encouragement of or inspiration for the act, though it may not have had the intention to be so. Lippmann refers to potentialities in general as “stereotypes”. He suggests that what we accept “as true, as good, as evil, as desirable, is not eternally fixed”. These are determined by stereotypes that we acquire from earlier experiences and carry with us as we develop later ones. Boal and Lansdale work closely with these potentialities or stereotypes. They work with what individuals are habituated to think or do. Human beings make conscious and unconscious choices, being influenced in the process by a variety of values. Lasswell and Kaplan speak of value as “a desired event - a goal event” which human beings adopt. Malinowski saw the basis of symbols in the recognition of value, driven at the most fundamental levels by physiological urges such as hunger and sex, as well as the desire for personal comfort and security. For this the symbol required precision in its associations of values, in order to satisfy the appropriate bodily need. Through this conditioning, the human organism acquires the ability to transform a physiological drive into a cultural value - a process governed not by nature but by culture. Symbols embody values, which can be positive or negative - empowering or disempowering. By facilitating individual experience in a social reality, symbols function to provide an ‘experienced universalism’, as Willis puts it, and a ‘grounded aesthetic’ that is able to produce new meanings.

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65 Lippmann 1922, p. 166.
66 Lasswell & Kaplan 1950, p. 16.
67 Malinowski 1939, pp. 955-956.
and understandings as the basis for growth and adaptation.\textsuperscript{68} That is, they can influence our stereotypes or potentialities, our decision making faculties, towards growth or decay. Both Boal and Lansdale work with the objective of influencing the actions of their respective audiences. This is a major commonality. Values embodied in symbols are carried over into decisions and actions, through which they are expressed as significance. The significance can resonate individually as well as socially, therefore generating further symbolic meaning. A symbol cannot act independent of human consciousness but symbols can act upon actuality through human action. Symbols can also be weakened or strengthened by a decision or an action. The works of Boal and Lansdale embody differing values and objectives. This is a major differentiation. In one sense this thesis is a study of the dynamics of choice and coercion, in which the interplay of the symbolic and the actual can be viewed.

\textbf{DECLARATION OF BIAS}

This thesis is primarily concerned with the uses and development of a body of work that has come to be known as Theatre of the Oppressed, and the developing practice of its founder and primary proponent Augusto Boal. The comparison of the works of Boal and Lansdale is intended as a frame in which to discuss the artistic, organisational and orientational qualities of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed. In comparing the two bodies of work, this thesis will explore the elements that they have in common as well as what makes them different, particularly in their respective uses of the symbolic realm in the study of power. This thesis is intended to be primarily of use to the student or practitioner of Theatre of the Oppressed and of the dramatic arts in general. It does not attempt to break any new ground in the field of psychological operations or persuasive communications, nor does it attempt to make any substantial contribution to these fields, of which the contents used herein have been drawn from open source material. The author, as a

\textsuperscript{68} Willis 1990, pp. 23-24.
theatre practitioner whose initial introduction to theatre work was a variant of Boal’s methodologies through the work of artists from the Philippine Educational Theatre Association, can only claim a grounding in the dramatic arts as well as a sympathy with the visions and goals of Theatre of the Oppressed. As such, the author’s bias is hereby declared.

Structure of the Thesis

When Boal’s seminal work “Theatre of the Oppressed” was published in 1974, it marked a watershed in the considerations of the relationships between theatre and activism. Arguing that “all theatre is necessarily political”, Boal set out to describe the intentions behind the uses of particular forms of dramatic and theatrical practices. He reflected on various systems of coercion embedded in certain forms and practices of symbolic play. He describes a body of practice that he had developed, initially with Arena Theatre of São Paulo and later in a national literacy campaign in Peru, which elaborates what he terms a “poetics of the oppressed” drawing inspiration from Paulo Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (first published in 1970). The influence of Boal’s practice can be seen in the fields of drama, therapy and politics. His practice is studied and emulated somewhere on every continent on the globe. In particular, the practices of Forum Theatre and Invisible Theatre have become popular working models of theatrical systems that redefine the nature of the theatrical event, in an age that craves for “interactivity”. However, this growth in popularity inevitably raises important questions regarding the practice, its applications and intentions. This thesis is concerned with the consideration of these questions and issues.

Theatre of the Oppressed denotes a set of theatrical techniques, games and exercises that serve to facilitate the examination of relationships of power and exploitation between individuals within social groups. This set of group processes aims to function as a shared language amongst its participants. A
language with a vocabulary consisting of elements of theatrical and dramatic practice, visual and oral text illustrated through observed performative human physicality and interactions. In particular, the term Theatre of the Oppressed refers to a set of systems developed and described by Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974), *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992) and *Rainbow of Desire* (1995). Naturally, variations of these processes will occur and are encouraged by Boal himself. However this thesis, in discussing Theatre of the Oppressed, will limit itself to practice which recognises, as its source or blueprint, the work of Boal and the systems of Theatre of the Oppressed. Although it is vitally important to recognise the intention or approach with which these processes are applied, this issue cannot be considered without recourse to speculation, testimony or hearsay. Therefore these issues will be dealt with as such, in the words of practitioners, commentators and Boal himself. As a qualitative study, it relies on the reporting of states and events, and cannot resort to quantitative evidence.

To begin to examine Theatre of the Oppressed, Chapter 2 will look at the various systems and strategies that currently make up the practice. We examine five of these that have emerged over time as fundamental strategies of the practice, with exception of the last system which represents the most recent developments of Boal’s work. Image Theatre is often seen as the most basic building block of Theatre of the Oppressed - a physicality-based visual form that serves to warm up participants to a group theatre-making process whilst providing a firm focus on the pictures being created. These pictures often lead to more developed narrative forms such as Forum Theatre. To many practitioners of Theatre of the Oppressed, Forum Theatre is perhaps seen as the most applicable system as it brings to the fore a key element of the practice. This is the element of the designation of the spect-actor - an audience that holds the option to intervene in the dramatic action of the performance in order to attempt to alter the outcome of the symbolic play. This sense of applicability has become further enhanced as the attractiveness of “interactive” forms increase in the arts and media in general. Other

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69 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. ix.
techniques, those belonging to the “Rainbow of Desire” and “Cop in the Head” systems, comprise the section which explores the psychotherapeutic applications of the work. These techniques were developed by Boal, during his exile in Western Europe in the late 1970s, when he found that many of the techniques he had used in Latin America did not provoke the resonances that he had come to expect. In particular, the Introspective Techniques came as a result of a re-examination of the notion of “oppression”. The fifth system - Legislative Theatre - grew out of an opportunity that Boal took when he was able to return to his native Brazil in the late 1980s. In 1992 he stood for and was elected into the Municipal Legislative Council of the city of Rio de Janeiro as a delegate of the Workers’ Party of Brazil. In office he launched into projects which utilised Theatre of the Oppressed techniques in his tasks as Legislator. The system he developed would be termed Legislative Theatre and enabled Boal to meld his commitments to theatrical and political endeavours in a way that had not been possible for him until then. It gave him an opportunity to practise theatre as politics in a totally overt and open fashion.

Following in Chapter 3, a form known as Invisible Theatre is examined. This technique is, arguably, the most problematic one of the Theatre of the Oppressed arsenal. It is seen to be problematic because of the questions that its practice tends to raise regarding the ethical concerns of its applications, given its inherent potency. In Invisible Theatre the separation between the performer and the observer is removed. Moreover, in this system, the observer may not be aware that what they experience is a theatrical event. The aim of the performers is to disguise the theatrical reality as actual reality in order to provoke responses from those who witness the performance. This section of the thesis will examine the workings of Invisible Theatre as well as some of its intentions, its effects and the nature of its application.

Chapter 4 consists of a documentary on video which results from a six-month research and documentation project of Boal’s work in Rio de Janeiro
and Paris. The documentary, entitled *Como Querem Beber Agua: Augusto Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro* is a record of the work conducted by Boal and his team of cultural animateurs from the Centro de Teatro do Oprimido in Rio de Janeiro, particularly during the 1994 Brazilian presidential elections. It has been produced as an aid to the study of Theatre of the Oppressed in practice, with commentaries from Boal, two of his collaborators (Claudete Felix and Liko Turle) and the author. In the context of this thesis, the documentary is a case study of the practice as well as of the work and words of Boal himself.

Chapter 5 draws on Boal’s own words to analyse Theatre of the Oppressed in the contexts of dramatic arts, therapy and politics. The first part of this section looks at Theatre of the Oppressed as an art form and the ways that Boal has elaborated and discussed it as a theatrical activity. Key aspects of Theatre of the Oppressed practice are examined in relation to accepted notions of the dramatic form. The second part deals with Theatre of the Oppressed as a psychotherapeutic practice. By looking at Boal’s claims about the effect of Theatre of the Oppressed upon the participant, the thinking and the dynamic behind the processes are examined. The third part views Theatre of the Oppressed as a political practice. Boal’s belief that “all theatre is political” translates into a body of work that was greatly influenced by the socio-political turmoil that engulfed Brazil from the coup d’état of 1964, and was subsequently shaped through his exile in 1971 and by his intimate views and experiences of life at that time in Argentina, Peru, Portugal and France. This section looks at the ways in which Boal participated in the political realm through and with his theatre work.

At various points in these examinations, examples of Lansdale’s psychological operations work will be brought into the discussion as a counterpoint to the work of Boal. These examples are discussed in their own right, particularly in the ways that they utilise symbolic forms. Their elements, dynamics, intentions and effects will be regarded in order to discuss
commonalities and differentiations with Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. This thesis will approach these considerations in the context of creating a comparison of two related traditions; two forms of cultural activism.
Symbols can be utilised as instruments in a multitude of ways. Firth suggests that symbols can be applied as instruments of expression, communication, knowledge and control. As a few examples, artists might use symbols as potent instruments of expression, educators might use symbols as instruments of communication and knowledge, and propagandists would use symbols as instruments of control. By focusing the attention upon specific concepts, symbols transform or condition the intellectual and emotional framework - the basis upon which intended behaviour proceeds.1 Jung refers to an archetypal mode of functioning, which is a dynamic mode - the assimilation of an archetype will modify the personality.2 Such is the mimetic process at work, as Gebauer and Wulf describe, wherein an object or event is isolated from its usual context to produce a perspective of reception that differs from the way in which it was previously perceived and within a specific world - the process of aestheticisation.3

When Willis spoke of a grounded aesthetic, it was in reference to a creative element in a process wherein meanings are attributed to symbols, and where symbols are selected and recomposed in order to resonate further particularised meanings. This symbolic work sought to influence the force and expression of other human beings, by processing meanings and by elevating the dramaturgy and poetics of everyday existence to the realms of timelessness and universality.4 What is described is an artistic practice that is evolving and relating to its artists and audiences. Langer describes art as “the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling.” The artistic symbol is engaged

1 Firth 1973, pp. 76-91.
2 Jung 1977, p. 259.
4 Willis 1990, pp. 10, 21-23.
in the negotiation of insight, rather than references to convention - the artistic symbol motivates and dictates convention. Art does not express actual feeling, but the ideas of feeling - forms are abstracted in order to be made apparent and to act as symbols expressive of human feeling - art is totally expressive and totally symbolic.5

**Image Theatre**

**PRINCIPLES**

The practice of Theatre of the Oppressed can be said to have its foundation in a system of games and exercises that is known in the practice as Image Theatre. Image Theatre is the first step into the language and dramaturgy of the Theatre of the Oppressed. In the first stages of a workshop in the Theatre of the Oppressed style, the emphasis is on the examination, in action, of the synchronous ways in which humans as social and cultural beings transmit and receive messages - the interactions that can only occur when human beings share the same time and place. The work focuses on the heightening of the awareness of sensory and communicative processes. The stage that usually follows introduces techniques to visually and physically compose, communicate and examine the situations of the participants, particularly aspects of life that address the question of ‘that which we are oppressed by’ or, as Boal puts it, aspects of life that help “to make concrete some of the fears that we have”. This stage utilises the techniques that make up the Image Theatre ‘proper’. From essential images to more sophisticated ones, the explorations start with the simple and progressively become more complicated. Boal insists that “the method always starts with the knowledge of our physical selves; then the physical game becomes intellectual because we have to play with the world”.6

Langer observes that “the basic symbols of human thought are images”. Basic images operate at a low level of symbolisation where characteristically human mentality begins - symbols for the conception of experience. The use of the human body in Image Theatre, both by the participant and as an element of its poetics, posits the individual in the place of one who is physically committing to the socialising process of theatre and drama. Philip Auslander comments that in Boal’s work “everything begins with image, and the image is made up of human bodies.” The body is located as the “primary locus of the ideological inscriptions and oppressions” which Boal sets out to address through theatre. Firth notes that as a symbolic instrument, we can use our own bodies as a means of communication in order to indicate by bodily action or reference a more abstract idea. Turner observed that the body is regarded as a symbolic template for the communication of particular knowledge. In Theatre of the Oppressed, the human body in communication with other human bodies, within the socialising context of theatre, enters into a discourse of power relationships and human interaction. This physicalisation of the work, as facilitated by techniques of Image Theatre, serves two fundamental functions. Firstly, to engage the participant, the spect-actor, on the level of physicality, soliciting a primarily physical commitment as the basis for a dialogue with others. Secondly, to frame the theatricalisation in a visual vocabulary provided by the human form in negotiation and communication with others. As images are created with human bodies, mimetic references are created, as Gebauer and Wulf noted, and these references produce relationships between events and objects on the sensuous surface of appearances. Mimesis results in intensified amounts of aesthetic interactions between the images and the world - in generalisable forms of ‘vital experience’.

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7 Langer 1953, p. 376.
Entering a dialogue of symbols with a high potential for volatility, the focus on bodies constructing pictures serves to locate the emphasis on action. In this way, participants engage in dialogue through the physical and the visual. The essential framework of Image Theatre rests on the construction of images of the “problem” or the “oppression” suffered. This requires concretisation in order to be made visual. The constructed images become performances of symbolic acts that may be basic or complex but always possessed of symbolic significance of one kind or another, capable of eliciting emotions as well as expressing and mobilising desire.12

**PRACTICE**

It would be inaccurate to presume or claim that any component of the poetics of the Theatre of the Oppressed was totally invented by or originated from the imagination of Boal. His penchant for collecting and adapting exercises and games from a myriad of sources has driven the development of the various systems of Theatre of the Oppressed practice. In the case of Image Theatre, there are many parallels in the broader world of theatre work. Writing of Boal’s influence on theatre-in-education in Britain, Steve Ball observes that Image Theatre uses the conventions of physicality in much the same manner as many other visual theatre techniques. “Boal’s use of the term ‘Image Theatre’ has for example been varyingly described as tableau, freeze frame, still image or depiction.”13

The power of Image Theatre, and its parallel forms, lies in the power of the picture and in the non-dependence on verbalisation. The symbols invoked are, from the outset, visual images. The dialogue of symbols occurs though a physical and visual vocabulary. Practitioners speak of the image’s ability to outmanoeuvre the intellect’s tendency to expurgate messages. Tom

12 Firth 1973, p. 79; Turner 1967, p. 54; Devereux 1979, p. 20.
13 “The Influence of Boal on Theatre in Education in Britain” Steve Ball: Contemporary Theatre Review 3 (1) 1995, pp. 79-86.
Magill describes a process of encouraging participants to “make meaning without using words - to free their bodies and their imaginations.” Chrissie Poulter writes of the image’s ability to “by-pass words and avoid the problems of verbal debate. ...not to avoid debate but rather to prepare for it”. The dialogue of symbols must be negotiated in a physical and visual reading, and therefore are less abstract or hypothetical than verbalisations can be. “The ubiquitous ‘you’re wrong there... it’s not like that...’ tends not to be heard.” Poulter recognises the greater likelihood of participants being able to accept an image as something that is coming from a fellow participant; belonging to the person as “its creator in the moment of its creation and therefore ‘true’ for that person if not anyone else”. By this process, what was in the first instance the ‘property’ of an individual becomes socialised. The symbol can be recognised and taken on as an experience that is common to others who witness it. “Anyone can express resonances that the image holds for them and they do so without fear that such expression will be taken as a challenge to the originator.” The image of the originator’s reality takes on a life of its own, striking different chords and resonances (different symbols) for different people. Jung observed that “a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning.” In this way, a symbol will resonate. One example of an Image Theatre piece is documented in the video component of this thesis, as performed by the Centro de Teatro do Oprimido of Rio de Janeiro. The “Children of Candelária” was a performance that marked the anniversary of the shooting and death of a number of ‘children of the streets’ outside an ageing cathedral in the centre of the city. The resonance of this symbolic act was magnified even more by the fact that the act of remembrance occurred where the actual original tragic

16 Jung 1964, p. 55.
17 SEE Video documentary component "Como Querem Beber Agua", also Chapter 4.
event took place, and by the immediacy of the event to the various members of the collected audience.

**EVALUATION**

Very often, a group beginning to work with Image Theatre must find (and is usually encouraged by the facilitator to do so) means other than the verbal in order to negotiate the messages they wish to construct. It can be argued that the use of Image Theatre tends to go against the intellectualisation of a theme or problem or oppression; perhaps even counter to the process of a truly rational analysis. It requires the embracing of a language, or a mode of communication that some participants might have a lack of expressibility with. The static nature of an image could be seen to lead the dialogue or discussion to a level of simplification that is not necessarily productive; instead of creating a more efficient mode of discussion, it privileges individuals who possess a proficiency and expressibility with physical language. However, it can just as easily be argued, as Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman (1990) and Fisher (1986) have, that those who have been unable to sufficiently express their situation through verbal language find the opportunity to do so in Image Theatre work.\(^\text{18}\)

As a tool for creating theatre and drama, Image Theatre has its value in not only providing a frame in which to physicalise a problem, oppression or situation but also in beginning to find the physicality for the characters within the situations. As a playwright experimenting with techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed as a tool for script development, Mary Ann Hushlak found particular worth in the process in the way that the physicalisation of the imagination allows the image of the situation to be made visible. As a practitioner of the dramatic arts she found this process to be a cogent way of uncovering and deepening the dramatic character. Working with images increases the necessity to be driven by the processes of revelation rather than

\(^{18}\) “Theatre of the Oppressed Workshops with Women: An interview with Augusto Boal” Jan Cohen-Cruz & Mady Schutzman: The Drama Review 34(3) T127 Fall 1990, 66-76; and “Learning to Act: Women’s
interpretation. “In Boal’s work, we look to see. We observe, and by observing closely, we uncover and reveal.” She concludes that the strength of Boal’s work is in recognising that images, through the symbols that we work with, get closer to our true feelings, especially our subconscious feelings. The process of ‘thinking with our hands’ or ‘thinking with our bodies’ allows us to “short-circuit the censorship of the brain.”

In Image Theatre, the dialogue of symbols demands a simplicity and clarity in order to harness the power of the representational realm. The narrative and the event reveals itself through what is seen in the symbolic play. The symbols are grounded in a corporeal and visual form. Lasswell and Kaplan spoke of “acts” as being the fundamental units of the political process. Image Theatre provides a system with which to examine singular acts physically and visually. Stereotypes of characters and situations become the starting points for discussions. The stereotypes themselves are not the main object of the examination. The values represented by the various stereotypes are of the utmost concern. Stereotypes are stocks of the trade for both Boal and Lansdale. Langer believes that a symbol must, to begin with, emphasise a pure semblance of life before the initial abstractions can be made. Then it is possible to manipulate the concepts that are created, to produce other expressive forms that reveal new meanings. Furthermore, Boesch notes that a receiver will not regard an object symbolically if it is ordinary and familiar - the object must possess some unusual and irrational qualities before it can become symbolic. Turner suggests that a symbol is something that can connect the unknown with the known. The power of mimesis is in the images it evokes, as Gebauer and Wulf note, and mimesis is an aspect of a non-empirical order of knowledge - an aspect that includes

21 Langer 1953, p. 128.
22 Boesch 1991, p. 82.
illusion, simulation, fiction, and deception. The creation of belief, as opposed to the suspension of disbelief, greatly relies on the factor of ‘source credibility’. The trustworthiness of the source, as judged by the receiver of the message, is determined by the audience’s perceptions of the source’s intentions. Trustworthiness, expertise, similarity and attractiveness of the communicator are all taken into consideration when a receiver regards a communication. Lansdale makes imaginative use of the factor of source credibility in the following example. Perhaps he had in mind what his contemporary Hovland noted, that the use of highly respected persons or organisations as endorsers or conveyors of communication will greatly enhance the persuasive power of a communication. Whereas in Image Theatre, the practical exploration seeks out the source of a problem, whether it be an oppressive individual or social structure or a fatal flaw in the subject, in a belligerent context the practical exploration will cover a different territory. In such a context the objective might be to urge the audience to accept the symbol of the fatal flaw from a credible source and to identify with that flaw; to discourage the audience in the power process. As Lansdale also understood, the symbol is the instrument of the power process. The degree to which the symbol resonates in actuality indicates the relative strength of the symbol - the accessibility of the symbol. An effective symbol will resonate as a subsequent narrative in the symbolic reality of its receptor. As Eco writes, “texts... are used as stimuli to produce other texts”.

Lansdale's Vampires

In the years following the end of World War II in the Philippines, the local government was confronted with the task of demobilising and disarming a number of guerrilla armies that had arisen and grown as a result

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26 Hovland 1953, p. 19.
27 Eco 1990, p. 61.
of the Japanese occupation and their subsequent expulsion by the armed forces of the United States. These guerrilla armies were spread throughout the islands of the Philippines. One of these groups was the ‘Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon’ (People’s Army Against the Japanese), also known as the Hukbalahap or Huks. This army had refused to disband and disarm, and instead waged a campaign of insurrection against what it saw to be a corrupt oligarchic administration that was supported and controlled by United States interests. They had managed to garner extensive support in both rural and urban centres. By 1950 they were waging a substantially intense military and political campaign against the local government.

Being a martial practice, not all psychological operations work will shy away from the use of violence. More specifically, the practice of psychological warfare incorporates elements of organised violence associated with conventional warfare. Lansdale relates one particular operation in the Philippines that drew upon the dread evoked by the popular belief in fearsome witches called ‘aswang’. The aswang is believed to be capable of taking on the forms of animals such as dogs or birds, and attacks its victims by waylaying them at night in isolated places in the hills and countrysides. They are said to bite their victims and then feed on their bodies after killing them.\(^{28}\) In a rural town where the Huks enjoyed some level of local support and a safe haven in the surrounding hills from where they would descend at night in order to engage in agitprop and military operations in the town and local areas, an Army combat psywar squad was brought in to do its work. They began by planting stories among town residents of an aswang that lived on the hill where the Huks were based. Rumours were spread in markets, barber shops and other public places. The story only given in bits and pieces, allowing listeners to put the parts together. The information was said to have come from a well-known and highly respected soothsayer from a nearby area. The soothsayer was supposed to have said that this aswang was particularly looking for victims who had ‘evil in their hearts’. Two nights

\(^{28}\) Cebuano Sorcery: Malign Magic in the Philippines - Richard Lieban 1967

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after the stories had been planted, enough time for the word to circulate among Huk sympathisers in the township and make its way up to the rebel base in the hills, the Army psywar squad set up an ambush along a hillside trail that was frequented by the Huk unit. As a Huk patrol made their way along the trail, the ambushers silently snatched the last man in the patrol, undetected by the rest of the unit in the darkness. After killing the man, they punctured his neck with two holes along the jugular vein in vampire-fashion. They held the body up by the heels, draining all of the blood out, and placed the unfortunate corpse back on the trail. When the Huk patrol returned to look for the missing man, they found the bloodless corpse of their comrade with two marks on his neck. Without any need to discuss what had happened, the members of the patrol would have easily come to the very same conclusion, the only evidence required being the lifeless bloodless body that they had found. They would have also come to the conclusion that each one of them would be vulnerable to the same fate if they chose to remain in that area. No dialectic materialist argument would have sufficed to assure them at that point that there was no malignant supernatural force threatening them there and then. The very next day, the entire Huk unit moved out of that area.29 Lansdale saw this operation as a way of challenging what was previously the Huks’ supremacy of the night. By effectively evoking the powerful and compelling symbol of the aswang, the darkness of the hills at night, that once was shelter to the Huk, was transformed into an unfamiliar, threatening and eerie environment. The symbol and the fear that was planted could not be rationalised in the circumstances. The mystique was complete and possessed an overwhelming power which took away the individual and group sense of power that they previously had in possessing a safe haven in those hills. As a symbol, the hills that had previously given them strength had been turned against them.

29 Lansdale 1972, pp. 72-73; Edward Lansdale, The Unquiet American - Cecil Currey 1988

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The preceding act can easily be described as an act of terrorism. The term ‘terrorism’ is used here not so much as a judgement of ethics as an evaluation of an intention and its effects. Terrorism has been described as the use or threat of violence against victims of symbolic significance in order to generate fear by such use of symbolism - a method of combat that uses symbolic victims as instrumental targets. These are classic and extreme examples of ‘fear-appeal’ communications - messages that are intended to evoke cognitive dissonance and arouse fear in individuals in order to persuade them to accept the message recommendations. These messages have the effect of producing, in the receiver, an emotional response - a motivation to control the fear in the self - and a cognitive response - a motivation to control the danger to the self. Fear-appeal communications are distinct examples of ‘negative models’ - mimetic processes that have the effect of weakening its receivers. A fear-appeal communication relies greatly on the recipient’s level of susceptibility. This determines the receiver’s vulnerability to the negative model. Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed also confronts negative models, however these models are collectively processed in order to distil some intelligence, some analysis from them. In this way they become empowering rather than depleting. Confrontation with a powerful symbol which disempowers, works its effect on the premise of ignorance. It is reliant on the receptor accepting or internalising the symbol without question, analysis or reflection; without adequate intelligence to contextualise it in a way that is not weakening. Boal sets out to develop the critical ability of those that he works with. This highlights a significant difference in focus between the works of Boal and Lansdale - the different qualities of susceptibility and critical ability which their cultural practices activate in their respective audiences.

(Houghton Mifflin, Boston) p. 103.


31 Perloff 1993, pp. 161-163.

Forum Theatre

**PRINCIPLES**

SCENE: A couple are at home engaged in conversation. Suddenly a discussion over a mundane matter gets heated and turns into an argument. It appears that one partner is about to become violent and cause serious harm to the other; it is a critical moment.

From an audience that watches the scene, someone yells “Stop!” then rises and enters the world of the couple. They take the place of the partner that was about to suffer the violence. They take the scene back to an earlier moment, and from then on they attempt to change the situation, to prevent the harm from being done. There is no guarantee that they will be successful, but they must try. This is Forum Theatre, or at least an example of it.

In essence, the principle of Forum Theatre is the presentation of a situation that is undesirable, a symbol that should be avoided if it were possible, and an audience group undertaking to find alternatives and offering proposals for change in the situation presented. Therefore it is essential that the situation presented in a Forum Theatre piece, or ‘model’ as it is known, be able to engage its audience in a way that a desire for change in the situation is awakened and heightened. For this reason, it seems to work most effectively when the model presents a protagonistic character, with whom the audience members would identify, and for whom the spectator would cross the boundary of the fourth wall, to become a spect-actor. It would be on behalf of the protagonist that the spect-actor would be called upon to act. The Forum Theatre model presents a concretisation of a problem or an oppression and the spect-actor steps forward to demonstrate an idea in action. A Forum Theatre model usually develops from the preparatory techniques of Image Theatre, and as the latter rely on the knowledge of the
physical self, so the spect-actor enters the model beginning with their own knowledge of their own physical self, as they place their own body in the image. As the image is no longer static, intellectual and emotional factors come into play as the spect-actor’s physicalisation, placed within a socialised context, explores strategies and resources in a dialogue with the environment of the model.

At this stage it might be prudent to return to the initial example of Forum Theatre. It is not uncommon in the creation of Forum Theatre and other Theatre of the Oppressed pieces that the examination of an oppression becomes an examination of aggression. Indeed some situations in both life and theatre where aggression occurs can only be navigated by retreat, avoidance or greater aggression. It is important to remember that the Theatre of the Oppressed is an interrogation of oppression, implying the possibility for some form of dialogue. When dialogue ceases to be possible then different forms of action might be required. It is therefore important for a Forum Theatre model to present a situation that will facilitate the exploration of the cross-roads rather than the dead-ends of human existence.

Boal describes the ‘invention’ of Forum Theatre as one moment during a Simultaneous Playwriting performance when a spectator entered the scene after repeated attempts to describe a proposal for action through words failed to get the action she was after. This was in Peru in 1973 when Boal was working in a major literacy campaign, the Operación Alfabetización Integral (ALFIN). Simultaneous Playwriting was a form he had developed to use in the campaign. An audience group would verbally suggest ways in which a story unfolds and a group of actors would perform it. The incident that created Forum Theatre represented a point of critical mass in Boal’s work. “During the years we did Simultaneous Playwriting we kept the power ourselves. We said, ‘We are going to do what you want’ but always we did it, not them. So unconsciously, perhaps I had some resistance... Unconsciously I

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33 The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy; Augusto Boal, trans. Adrian Jackson
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was saying, ‘You are going to say what you want but I am going to do it my own way’.”

More than merely being an artistic shift of emphasis, there was a shift in the power structure of theatre performance that Boal considers of great significance. “For me in a democracy everyone speaks. Forum Theatre is democratic. It can be used as all other forms of theatre against its own basic philosophy, but everyone can say, ‘Stop, I want to have my say.’ That’s democratic, that’s freedom, and that’s what I fight for.” In his work with ALFIN in Peru, Forum Theatre found a ready context for application. He began to work on various forms of Forum Theatre. He sought to encourage the spect-actors that he worked with to fully assume their function of protagonist. Boal uses the symbol of the ‘protagonist’ as a motif that is transferable from symbols to actuality. Its intention was to activate. “We thought that the people would have a role to play in the near future.”

It is important for Boal that Forum Theatre not only sets out to correct any ‘fatal flaws’ that a tragic protagonist might possess, but also orientates towards future action as the spect-actor makes a commitment to change a situation within the fiction of the symbolic play. “I am preparing myself to do it in reality as well. I come face to face with reality (fictitiously). I become acquainted with the difficulties which I will meet later - fear of unemployment, my fellow workers’ arguments, etc. - and if I manage to overcome all these things in Forum Theatre, I will be better qualified to overcome them in reality when the situation arises.” Boal believes that Forum Theatre should produce “a stimulant for our desire to change the world.”

Forum Theatre elicits the audience’s active participation. The value of active participation, as in a dramatic context, has been found to be in the way

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34 “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An interview with Augusto Boal” Michael Taussig & Richard Schechner The Drama Review 34(3) T127 Fall 1990, pp. 50-65.
37 Ibid., p. 28.
that it facilitates socialisation and acculturation of individuals in the face of social role expectations. Hovland found that elements such as overt verbalisations, the playing of roles and improvised restatements in communicative activity have greatly increased changes in beliefs, preferences, values and attitudes as the communicated messages are perceived, interpreted, assimilated and reinforced.\textsuperscript{38} Active participation creates a direct behavioural experience which tends to produce attitudes and beliefs that are far more accessible from memory, as Fazio found, than attitudes and beliefs that are based on indirect experience.\textsuperscript{39} Active participation can also produce an ‘inoculation effect’ whereby a participant can be introduced to a particular attitude or event symbolically, in such a way that provides the participant with a defence mechanism that can be activated in the event of a future encounter with the same or similar attitude or event.\textsuperscript{40}

**PRACTICE**

Forum Theatre is currently practised by many groups and individual practitioners around the world. Of the various techniques that Boal has developed, it is perhaps the most widely used. From student groups in Manila to a theatre company in Singapore, groups in Bengal, in Burkina Faso, in Paris, in London, in New York and in Rio de Janeiro, the technique has found use in many different contexts. Some of these groups travelled to Brazil in 1993 to take part in a Festival of Theatre of the Oppressed, where Forum Theatre was the language in common amongst dozens of practitioners from around the globe. Forum Theatre models address issues of family, violence, gender relations, race relations, childhood, political and economic matters. The concerns of the protagonists of the models are not necessarily fully shared by all spect-actors. A model that looks at the situation of black people might see some white people intervening in the action as a

\textsuperscript{38} Hovland 1953, pp. 216-233.


\textsuperscript{40} For more on "Inoculation Theory" see Perloff 1993, pp. 110-113 & Hovland 1953, pp. 105-111.
black person within the situation, or men intervening in the action to take the place of a woman protagonist as a woman. This dynamic can create its own set of problems, and there is much uncertainty amongst facilitators as to the most appropriate ways of dealing with the question as it arises. Boal prefers to put it to the audience themselves, the congregation of spect-actors, as to how such dilemmas are to be handled. Each audience group decides on the question for each Forum. One key element of the Forum is the role known as the “Joker” which is the facilitator of the Forum. It falls upon the Joker to negotiate such conditions with each particular audience group and each particular Forum. A Forum might also be done in order to prepare for an upcoming action, “where what’s important is not the theatrical event - not to show something to an audience - but to prepare for a real action a particular group is going to do”. In addition, a conventional piece of theatre might be adapted and performed as a Forum, as Boal had done with Brecht’s “The Jewish Wife” in France. At times a Forum audience group might come to conclusions that would seem totally undesirable to the practitioners who present it, as were the cases in one Forum facilitated by Boal in the United States where a community opted for a napalm factory rather than economic loss, and one other in Portugal where another community chose to support a refinery that was causing lung cancer rather than lose jobs.

When Boal returned to Brazil in 1985, Forum Theatre became an even more important segment of his work. When he first started working for the Workers’ Party of Brazil, he had used the medium of Forum Theatre to elicit suggestions, from members of the public, on how their presidential candidate (a man known as Lula) could better work for them. “We did Forum Theatre, inventing situations where the protagonist was Lula. We would go to a square and an actor would play Lula and the spectators were invited to

41 “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An interview with Augusto Boal” Taussig & Schechner 1990.
42 Ibid.
43 Boal 1992, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, p. 28.
replace Lula and show what they would do in his place.”

This initial involvement with the Workers’ Party would develop into a more comprehensive experiment involving the use of Forum Theatre as a tool for consulting the electorate in Rio de Janeiro. In 1992, when municipal elections were called for the city’s legislative chamber, Boal ran as a candidate for the Workers’ Party and was subsequently elected into office. An essential part of his strategy would be to create a city-wide network of groups that utilised Forum Theatre in a consultative project. This would become the basis of a further development of his work that he would call ‘Legislative Theatre’ which would be used to discuss principal problems of various communities around the city, with a view towards obtaining recommendations for amendments to existing municipal laws or criteria for new laws to be tabled by Boal in his capacity as municipal legislator, or vereador.

As Forum Theatre becomes a more recognised and popular form, it was perhaps inevitable that its use would encounter resistance from arts and education bureaucracies which, as is the case in many industrially developed ‘liberal’ societies, provide public funding for the arts. In the United Kingdom practitioners have been continuously frustrated by arts funding authorities, in what is already a highly competitive funding climate, leading Andy Hickson to wonder, “Why are they so afraid of what Forum Theatre might uncover? Is it giving people too much power? Is the establishment frightened that people might find out that they want something else? Are these barriers to Forum Theatre politically based? Is it an attempt to carry on the individualistic myth? …Is Forum Theatre political?” Hickson believes that Forum Theatre is political in the sense that it gives people a ‘voice’.

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In Singapore, government and media pressure was placed on a theatre company that had practised and popularised Forum Theatre, under the threat of withdrawn funding and ostracization. Alvin Tan was artistic director of The Necessary Stage, a Singaporean theatre company that produced successful seasons of two Forum Theatre plays, “Male Chauvinist Pig” and “Mixed Blessings” in 1993. The plays dealt with gender and race issues. Tan recalls that the performances were particularly successful in the eagerness of spectators to replace the protagonists of the plays. The company was happy until they realised that they had become the focus of some hostile media and government attention. Although the company’s supporters rallied, The Necessary Stage was eventually forced to abandon Forum Theatre as a way of working. The message from their critics was quite clear. “Forum Theatre was seen as subversive and a journalist wrote an article alleging that we were Marxists because we attended a Boal workshop at the Brecht Forum which is situated at the New York Marxist School. The form is now proscribed in Singapore. Anyone who wants to stage Forum Theatre has to put a S$10,000 deposit. The concern is that there is no script and thus no control. The event can be exploited by those who do not mean well and thus hijacked and turned into a riot.”

EVALUATION

Boal considers the function of Forum Theatre to be clearly more than the examination of past events, albeit with a view towards preventing the recurrence of such events. To Boal the orientation of Forum Theatre is undoubtedly to the future. “I want people to tell me what should I do, not what should I have done, but what can I do now. What can I do now? That’s what I’m concerned about. The Theatre of the Oppressed is not the theatre, the witness, of the past. It is the invention of the future.” At the same time

47 Alvin Tan (Artistic Director) The Necessary Stage, Singapore. Correspondence with author, 1996. SEE Appendix E.
the objective of Forum Theatre is not the exhibition of solutions for problems that may be encountered in the future. Indeed, many Forums end in unresolved states as the desire to find solutions takes hold of an audience group’s focus. Boal believes that even if a Forum does reach a solution, “it may be good for the person who has proposed it, or good within the confines of the debate, but not necessarily useful or applicable for all the participants in the Forum.”49 The search for that ‘perfect solution’ has often been found to be a frustrating venture for Forum audiences. “We never try to find which solution proposed is the ‘correct’ one. I am against dogmas. I am for people becoming more conscious of the other person’s possibilities. What fascinates me about Forum is the transitive character of its pedagogy.”50 The lack of resolution in a Forum can, arguably, create more confusion than clarity and run counter to the processes of ‘raising consciousness’ that many practitioners believe to be an inherent function of these techniques. In response Boal argues, “Some people use this phrase ‘raise consciousness’ to mean you have to grab people by the hair and insist that they look at the ‘truth’. I am against that. All the participants in a Forum session learn something, become aware of some problems that they did not consider before, because a standard model is challenged and the idea that there are alternatives is clearly demonstrated.”51

By highlighting alternatives within particular situations, Forum Theatre does have the effect of enhancing a ‘consciousness’ of action. When Edelman talks about the development of conscious behaviour in human beings, he talks about the early stages of this development being characterised by a learning process based on the organisation of, what he refers to as, ‘scenes’ - spatiotemporally ordered sets of categorisations of familiar and non-familiar events. As one scene is organised, understood and categorised, new

50 “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An interview with Augusto Boal” Taussig & Schechner 1990.
51 Ibid.
experience that is encountered can be related to already processed scenes that are stored in memory. The scenes themselves are ordered according to the value systems of the individual as this is shaped by ongoing learning processes. This becomes the basis of symbolic memory, which in its most developed form manifests as an ordered language, capable of generating new forms of symbolic memory. Upon this capability rests the development of a higher-order consciousness that enables human beings to function beyond the possibilities of an animal existence that is based on primary consciousness alone. A higher-order consciousness is an ability to process conceptual-symbolic models, not just ongoing perceptual experience. This ability to apprehend experience symbolically - beyond the perceptual and sensorial level of the present - allows the individual to experience beyond “the bondage of an immediate time frame or ongoing events occurring in real time.” It allows the individual the ability to model the past, present, future, the self and the world. With this ability comes the capacity to make explicit comparisons, to weigh outcomes and to organise plans - capacities that have enormous adaptive value. Consciousness of action, as Boesch observes, allows an awareness of goals, procedures and specific situational qualities. In this way symbols, by concretely embodying meanings and invoking adaptive potential, can raise levels of consciousness and create possibilities for practical action. Gebauer and Wulf suggested that the sense of the world is revealed to the individual by way of that individual’s adaptation to the world. The individual takes adaptive action with the influence of mimetic references, this is how a great deal of education is accomplished - perceptual abilities and motor skills are formed by means of mimetic processes.

Nevertheless, the challenge of arriving at satisfactory resolutions in the dramatic symbolic world poses central questions in the practice of Forum Theatre. These difficulties undeniably cause feelings of disappointment, and

sometimes rage, in audience-members when important questions are asked and left without satisfactory answers. At the 1993 Festival of Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro, many of these difficulties presented themselves recurrently. Paul Heritage writes that although “the starting point of Forum still has to be the theatricality of the model; by this means the audience is engaged and brought into the debate”, it was apparent in the practice that “too frequently, there is a reduction of Boal’s methodology to the point where Forum becomes little more than simulated role-play.” Another key point was the respect for what Alistair Campbell described as “the central tenet of Forum that one must really be able to identify with the protagonist before one can replace them in a way that isn’t patronising or just plain silly.” This highlights the need for participants and facilitators “to be clear whether we are risking something real of ourselves and investing that part of us that is oppressed, before we can make theatre that tells the truth.” A central issue raised in this concern is the perception of a communicated message’s source, in both the scripted performance and in the spect-actor interventions. The credibility of the scripted performance as a source is judged according to the perceived level of expertise of the scriptwriters with the area of lifestyle and experience in portrayal, rather than a credibility determined by an artistic agenda - however much the scripts might originate from the experiences of participants as developed in workshops. Similarly, the credibility of the spect-actor intervention is judged according to the perceived level of expertise of the spect-actor in the area of lifestyle and experience being portrayed. Sets of attitudes are activated in the observer audience, as both performance and spect-actor come to be evaluated as sources of information and influence. Other factors that are considered in evaluating credibility include factors of similarity (identity and background) and trustworthiness (apparent intentions) of both the performance’s agents and the spect-actors. There can also be problems with what is seen to be the ‘activist’ nature of Forum

Theatre. Ball believes that by concentrating on responsibility and action, Forum Theatre ignores the processes of distancing and reflection. “Most Forum Theatre exercises rely on practical conflict situations which do not always provide opportunities for examining the processes of distancing and reflection.” However, he does concede that since we are dealing with theatre, being concerned with commonalities and universals, responsibility and action seem appropriate as themes. Magill considers Forum Theatre’s value to be in its capacity to allow participants to deal “with pertinent questions that were relevant in their own lives but ...doing so at one remove by allowing them to intervene on behalf of [an] ‘invented’ character.” He observes that this distance, this theatricality, was crucial for the participants’ experience of the Forum. “It allowed them to make comparisons with themselves and their situations ...with the invented character’s”. He believes that Forum Theatre gives spect-actors the benefit of “time to reflect on their own circumstances and then to make comparisons and therefore - choices.” He concludes that this process places the participants “in a state of such knowledge that they have the power to make certain limited choices.” It is perhaps important to remember that participants in the Forum are co-explorers in the process rather than recipients of bestowed knowledge, as Lyn Ferrand recounts, “discussion is the catalyst that will incite a group of spect-actors to play the Forum ‘game’ and not the prospect of finding solutions.”

For Boal, the idea of Forum Theatre is to break and to destroy stereotypes by discovering what it is that is behind the stereotype, “the mechanisms of ritualizations” - the habituated act. The Forum relies on the spect-actors recognising the symbols of the fatal flaw that the Forum

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57 “The Influence of Boal on Theatre in Education in Britain” Steve Ball 1995.
60 “In his own words: An interview with Augusto Boal about Theatre of the Oppressed * Douglas Paterson & Mark Weinberg 1996 (High Performance, Omaha) http://www.artswire.org/highperf/HPhome.html.
stereotypes often enact. Boal reasons that to ‘recognise’ is not enough. In the cathartic effect, the spectators experience is limited to recognition. Willis suggests that in order to understand the cultural world and our relationship to it, it is necessary to be not merely in that world, but to change that cultural world, however minutely. In this way the received natural and social world is made specific and made human. Boal sets up the situation where the spectator is urged, is encouraged, to recognise and to object to the fatal flaw. In The Phantom Public, Lippmann understood that this threshold was critical to any political process. “Only when somebody objects does the public know there is a problem; when nobody any longer objects there is a solution.” The absence of objections does not always signify lasting changes. But if changes are to be brought about with the active participation of an audience, as is the object of Forum Theatre, then objections are the very elements that will drive those changes. Active participation involves its audience. Active participation has enormous operational value as an instrument of persuasion and social influence. But active participation can only be effective if it is elicited in a context which audiences will deem credible. Turner suggests that for a particular symbol to adequately convey meaning, it is necessary to take into consideration its range of relevance - its ‘action-field’ context. Symbols, by aesthetic and operational means, function to provide a framework for organising experience and as a way of understanding the world of human relations. A Forum Theatre performance might symbolise a social situation or condition that can be seen to require some form of change - the influences that might bring about the required change are explored through active participation. The performance and the active participation of its audience serve the symbolic function of illustrating options and actions. Firth observes that symbols function to give scope for imaginative development, to provide disguise for painful impact, and to facilitate social interaction and cooperation. The dramatic form can be most effective at this because it deals

61 Willis 1990, p. 22.
63 Turner 1967, p. 45.
64 Firth 1973, p. 90 & 428.
with human relations in an illustrative manner. Through the vividness of dramatisation, the communicated symbols come to function as evidence - as a form of case history. Had Lansdale known of a dramatic technique such as Forum Theatre the following example would perhaps be told differently.

**Lansdale’s G-5 Playlets**

In 1954 Lansdale arrived in Vietnam to take up his post as head of the Saigon Military Mission. As he examined the problems that plagued the South Vietnamese armed forces in its campaign against the Vietminh, he concluded that he could be of greatest assistance by focusing his efforts on the ways in which the government handled its relationship with the local civilian population. Working with South Vietnamese military intelligence, he eventually applied himself to the setting up of a school for military psywar training in Saigon. In sketching out the curriculum for the school he established, as a top priority, courses that addressed the necessity to “improve the relationships between the troops and the people.”

As a result of these courses, a series of ‘playlets’ were devised as a way of educating South Vietnamese troops on the intricacies of troop and civilian relations. The task of developing the playlets and indoctrinating troops fell upon the psywar officers and men of the G-5 section of the South Vietnamese Army, the 5th Bureau - the propaganda and information organisation. The playlets were written and performed by G-5 teams to troop audiences, for whom attendance was compulsory. Each playlet was a dramatised field situation that presented examples of ‘good and bad’ troop behaviour in dealing with civilians. Each example of behaviour was associated with particular consequences. The characters of the playlets consisted of a Good Soldier, a Bad Soldier, and the Villagers. One playlet presents a situation where the Good Soldier would buy a chicken from the Villagers, and the Bad Soldier

65 In the Midst of Wars: An American’s Mission to Southeast Asia - Edward Lansdale 1972

NOTE CONTINUES NEXT PAGE
would take a chicken without paying for it as the Villagers protest. After the Soldiers leave, the Villagers would talk about the two Soldiers, speaking in friendly terms about the Good Soldier’s unit. The Villagers go on to help local guerrillas carry out an attack on another unit, the Bad Soldier’s unit, without hesitation. Another playlet presents a group of Villagers who speak the words of current Vietminh propaganda against the Saigon government. The Good Soldier responds, in a rational tone, with a strong and effective argument, while an ill-tempered Bad Soldier arrogantly tells the Villagers to shut up. A dozen of these playlets were taken around to troops, presented and performed on the back of trucks.66 These examples demonstrate instances where the practice of psychological operations falls squarely within the bounds of theatrical tradition. The aims of the performances are clearly stated - to educate, to indoctrinate. The symbols of Good and Bad behaviour are therein placed on trial to be judged, as either desirable or undesirable, by the Villagers and the audience. The messages have been kept basic, rejecting any tendencies towards ambiguity, and clear; the message that certain forms of behaviour will be counterproductive and, in the long run, dangerous. The choices presented are not to be made on the basis of any moral or philosophical considerations, the issue is one of self-preservation. The symbol of Good behaviour represents survival at the most basic level. The symbol of Bad behaviour represents self-destruction. The Villagers are joined by the audience as the choice-makers of the exercise, to support or undermine the Soldiers; to emulate the Good behaviour or to perish. In this sense, the symbols presented are undoubtedly coercive; the choices offered being so obvious as to be non-existent. After all, the process of indoctrination demands a concentrated application of symbols that must be inserted into the relevant centres of consciousness while the attention frame of the audience is focused. By invoking the theatrical tradition, the promise of entertainment implicit in the theatrical experience functions as the ‘thin edge of the wedge’ that captures the attention frame of the audience in order to introduce the desired symbols into individual and group consciousness. In this sense,
theatre itself functions as a symbol that elicits a particular quality of attention, distinguishable from other types of attention such as that elicited by conversation or lecture forms. However, in practice the operation was not a success. Although the G-5 section had a staff of artists and writers, a radio unit broadcasting daily programs to the troops, major printing facilities, and a whole host of sophisticated psywar equipment at its disposal, it was not able to prevent hungry and ill-paid troops from stealing chickens, pigs and rice during military operations. Without “some new direction from the top and more adequate provisions for the troops”, G-5 was fighting a losing battle.67

As a device that enables the communication of abstractions, symbols have great instrumental worth, as Firth notes. Symbols are regarded emotionally and intellectually as values. In social and political processes symbols can express, among other forms, elite values or protest values or interest-group values. A symbol can also be used as a reference or support if a particular value is called into question. A symbol serves as a repository of values, which may be invoked but not regulated by those who utilise it - as such it has a life of its own. A symbol can be invoked as a justification or rationalisation, citing the Bible or the Koran or the memory of a dead parent in a communication can be a powerful influence on someone’s behaviour.68 Perloff discusses a theory of ‘reasoned action’ which holds that people engage in conscious deliberation when considering action, weighing the costs and benefits of particular actions and considering how important others will view a particular behaviour.69 Both Boal’s Forum Theatre and Lansdale’s G-5 Playlets seek to activate the faculty of reasoned action. Both utilise a dynamic that is referred to in communications theory as ‘modeling’. The theory of modeling describes a process by which attitudes and behaviours are learnt by the observation of live or symbolic models. This theory stipulates that for the

67 Ibid., pp. 137-139.
68 Firth 1973, pp. 76-84.
69 Perloff 1993, p. 95.
effect to occur, the receiver must symbolically encode and retain the modeled behaviour - this could then be followed by the receiver’s reproduction of the modeled behaviour.\footnote{Perloff 1993, pp. 71-72.} This is clearly a mimetic effect. Mimesis supplies a practical knowledge, a model of behaviour that is seemingly immediate, an interpretation on a situation, and suggested ways to react - it does this by means of new interpretations of already existing worlds. Through mimesis, elements of the empirical world are processed, reshaped, generalised, removed from the concrete situation, and made reproducible.\footnote{Gebauer & Wulf 1992, pp. 316 & 319.}

**Introspective Techniques**

**PRINCIPLES**

Boal believes that all forms of theatre can encourage either health or disease in its receptor; it is either therapeutic or damaging. He believes that the dichotomy that results from the viewing of a reality inside another reality provokes a reaction in the spectator that moves them towards either pole of the spectrum of growth and decay. He believes that the viewing of a play can make one better, healthier or wiser; or the opposite, it can do harm.\footnote{Boal, interview with author - Rio de Janeiro, August 1994: Appendix A, lines 57-61.} Where the two contradictory realities (the depicted and the actual) meet is where Boal believes that “the dichotomic and ‘dichotomising’ properties of the aesthetic space take root and exercise their powers.”\footnote{The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy; Augusto Boal, trans. Adrian Jackson 1995 (London & New York, Routledge) p. 24.} In this space the process of ‘osmosis’ - the propagation of ideas, values, tastes and attitudes - occurs. “Osmosis happens through repression and seduction. Also by repulsion, hate, fear, violence, constraint or, on the contrary, by attraction, love, desire, promises, dependency, etc.”\footnote{“The Cop in the Head: Three Hypotheses” Augusto Boal, trans. Susana Epstein: The Drama Review 34(3) T127 Fall 1990, pp. 35-42.} He also believes that not all
therapy is theatrical. He notes for example that “psychoanalysis is based on the fact that there is one person trying to listen to the words that were not spoken. The psychoanalyst, he does not pay so much attention to what is being said, but he pays attention to the unspoken words, to what has not been said.” The apparent is not the matter of importance, there is presumption of concealment on the part of the receptor. “They even hide the psychotherapist, the patient should not see the psychotherapist. He’s hidden behind the patient, and so there are some forms of therapy which are not theatrical.” To Boal, therapy is an aspect of theatre as much as politics is.

Peter Elsass, in comparing the functions and effects of psychotherapy and theatre registers the “apparent similarity between the work of actors and psychotherapists, both of whom share the aim of creating new insights or making implicit knowledge explicit for the audience or patients.” He finds a commonality in theatre and therapy in that in both traditions practitioners are working with ‘the other’ using themselves as the instrument. Boal believes that there is a fluidity to the designations of performer and viewer. “Actor and spectator can be two different people; they can also coincide in the same person.” When the actor takes on the character, they establish a binary relationship with that character, they are the character and the actor playing the character at the same time. A person in real life or an actor in rehearsal working towards a character might live a scene, an event, at the first encounter as a genuine experience. Subsequently, either as therapy or theatre in front of colleagues or members of an audience, the actor relives the scene as a re-experience. In the first instance the actor makes a solitary discovery, in the second instance the actor makes a revelation as part of a dialogue. In the case of theatrical psychotherapies the crucial element is not the performance but the process; “the effects of the dichotomy which the

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aesthetic space brings to bear on that body and on the consciousness of the protagonist, who becomes, on stage, subject and object” - conscious of oneself and one’s action. The protagonist acts and observes oneself in action.79 What is also important in theatrical therapies is not simply “our potential ability to see the individual in action, here and now, in act and word,” but rather the “mechanism of transformation of the protagonist.”80 In psychological terms, that mechanism would very likely be found in an attitudinal stance taken by the protagonist.

Attitudes are constructs based on associative learning. Fazio found that the strength of an attitude varies according to the strength of the association between the object and its evaluation. Associative strength can determine the accessibility of the attitude from memory, and this in turn determines the likelihood of an attitude being activated automatically upon an individual’s encountering of an object. An attitude that is evoked automatically upon encountering an object has a greater likelihood of guiding the individual’s behaviour towards the object, and the attitude is also more likely to have a greater resistance to counter-influence - the attitude is more entrenched. The activation of some attitudes can therefore appear to be both spontaneous and inescapable - resulting in the ‘chronic accessibility’ of an attitude.81 When the chronic accessibility of an attitude combines with social pressures, a condition of mental strain can develop. Firth points out that there is the possibility of alleviating this strain by determining the locations of the social pressure and investigating the alternatives that might exist, so that the individual can make other behavioural choices. In this way, the private symbolism of the individual is brought into a dialogue with comparable symbolic terms in order to explore alternative attitudes and behaviours.82 This is a process of

78 Ibid., p. 25.
80 Ibid., p. 27.
82 Firth 1973, p. 224.
becoming ‘conscious of being conscious’ - a higher-order consciousness. Edelman believes that this capacity is acquired when systems of memory are related to a conceptual representation of a ‘true’ self or a social self acting upon an environment, and vice versa. A conceptual model of selfhood and a model of the past is required in order to organise and to move beyond the processes of primary consciousness. This occurs through symbolic means, by means of comparisons and gratifications during social interaction and learning.83 Langer holds that we use symbols to articulate ideas that we wish to think about, and that we require adequate symbolism in order to think about an idea. In this way, we create a system of symbols - making one thing or realm of things convey the meaning of something else.84 We acquire the symbolic concept of selfhood in early childhood; then we learn about our social environment by attributing symbolic significance to daily experience - by drawing meaning from experiences as they relate to the self. Jung argues that because symbols are charged with emotion, they become dynamic and consequences flow from them. They become “pieces of life” - images connected to living individuals by the “bridge of emotions”. On their own they mean little, but when they relate to the individual they are all-important.85 Turner observed that symbols give an outward and visible form to an inward and conceptual process.86

Boal considers that a “process is therapeutic when it allows - and encourages - the patient to choose from several alternatives to the situation in which he finds himself, the situation which causes him unwanted suffering or unhappiness. ...since all therapy, before proposing the exercise of a choice, must consist of an inventory of possible alternatives.”87 Taking theatre as an instrument applicable to therapeutic ends and means, Boal identifies three essential attributes that make up the knowledge-enhancing power of the dramatic art:

84 Langer 1953, p. 28.
85 Jung 1964, pp. 96 & 98.
86 Turner 1967, p. 96.
the plasticity which allows and induces the unfettered exercise of memory and imagination, the free play of past and future; the division or doubling of self which occurs in the subject who comes on stage, the fruit of the dichotomic and ‘dichotomising’ character of the ‘platform’ [that is theatre], which allows - and enables - self-observation; the telemicroscopic property which magnifies everything and makes everything present, allowing us to see things which, without it, in smaller or more distant form, would escape our gaze.  

These qualities makes the dramatic art one of the most effective languages for exploring and navigating the symbolic realm. “These properties are aesthetic, that is to say, related to the senses. Knowledge is acquired here via the senses and not solely via the mind.” He believes that as the protagonist perceives their actions and their words through their own senses, they acquire knowledge about themselves. “This process of knowledge, this specific artistic therapy, is constituted not only of ideas but also of emotions and sensations.”

This is the base upon which Boal builds the set of techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed that have come to be known initially as the “Cop in the Head” and later as the “Rainbow of Desire” sets. Compared to the preceding sets of techniques that Boal practised before his exile to Europe, the Cop in the Head and Rainbow of Desire processes are the more introspective examinations of individualised social conditions. These techniques bring the Theatre of the Oppressed work closer to psychotherapeutic concerns; comparable to the techniques of Psychodrama and Dramatherapy. At the same time, the individualised situations being examined by Boal’s techniques could often be related to the social conditionings that occur in the social environment. Boal’s Introspective Techniques distinguish themselves from both Psychodrama and Dramatherapy in the practice of placing the subject of

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87 Ibid., p. 25.
88 Ibid., p. 28.
89 Ibid., p. 28.
the drama ‘at one remove’ from the experience. Theatre of the Oppressed techniques involve ‘actors’ that play ‘characters’ and not purely participants playing themselves. Campbell observes that the Theatre of the Oppressed “moves the group into a commonality of experience which, whilst acknowledging and celebrating every individual contribution, makes possible a generalisation from the individual which keeps everything one safe step removed from the purely personal.” He believes it is that “one safe step” that differentiates therapy or role-play and the territory called theatre. In order to maintain this distance, and in order to locate the practice in territory that deals with socialised situations rather than purely individualised or psychological conditions, Boal is convinced that it is necessary for all singular elements of individual discourses to become symbolic and, therefore, lose their exclusivity. “In this shift from the particular event to its social context, we abandon psychotherapy for theatre.” In this way the techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed remain grounded in theatre rather than psychotherapeutic practice. It is a theatre practice that utilises its therapeutic potential, not psychotherapy that utilises theatricality.

**PRACTICE**

When Boal started working in Europe in the late 1970s he encountered a necessity for change in his own definition of the word ‘oppression’. The techniques he used had previously uncovered such concerns among its participants as police brutality, blatant corruption or class victimisation. He was finding a different set of concerns being brought to the surface; situations such as isolation, incommunicability and emptiness. His initial reaction was “Where are the cops?!” and soon realised that the apparent absence of external oppressors necessitated a shift in the focus of the techniques he used. Paulo Freire observed that “Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the

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world and fleeing from it.”\textsuperscript{93} Boal set about to find ways of facing the spectre of imploded despair as Theatre of the Oppressed became much more psychological.\textsuperscript{94} As earlier Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, particularly Forum Theatre, sought ways of changing an undesirable situation, so must the Introspective Techniques search for ways of altering the seemingly individualised situations of Western European participants in Theatre of the Oppressed work. The need was for processes wherein, as Freire puts it, individuals “who were submerged in reality, merely feeling their needs, emerge from reality and perceive the causes of their needs.”\textsuperscript{95}

In Paris, between 1978 and 1981 Boal ran a series of workshops with a group of practitioners who later went on to form the Centre du Théâtre de l’Opprimé. These workshops, with a continuity and time structure that is not generally possible in Theatre of the Oppressed work situations, allowed Boal to develop a set of techniques that became the Cop in the Head systems.\textsuperscript{96} “I started from the following hypothesis: the cops are in our heads, but their headquarters and barracks must be on the outside. The task was to discover how these ‘cops’ got into our heads, and to invent ways of dislodging them.”\textsuperscript{97} The games and exercises of the introspective set focus much more on individual experience and propensities, the exploration of desires and limitations. These techniques are best described in his book \textit{Rainbow of Desire} (Routledge 1995).

\textbf{EVALUATION}

Upon his return to Brazil in the 1980s, Boal made use of these techniques with people whom he had believed would never propose to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{92} "Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An interview with Augusto Boal" Taussig & Schechner 1990.
  \item \textsuperscript{93} Pedagogy of the Oppressed; Paulo Freire, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos 1972 (London, Penguin) p. 64.
  \item \textsuperscript{94} "Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An interview with Augusto Boal" Taussig & Schechner 1990.
  \item \textsuperscript{95} Freire 1972, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, p. 88.
  \item \textsuperscript{96} "Theatre of the Oppressed Workshops with Women: An interview with Augusto Boal “ Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman 1990, p. 8; The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy - Boal; Notes by Cohen-Cruz and Schechner, The Drama Review 34(3) T127 Fall 1990, pp. 26-27.
\end{itemize}
engage in such psychotherapeutic work. “But if I proposed it they discovered that they had these problems too. They don’t usually deal with them because the police, money and boss problems are worse.”\textsuperscript{98} It has long been wondered whether a way of utilising and creating theatre that has grown out of a particular social, economic and political situation can successfully translate to a different social, economic and political situation. What is referred to in this is the difference between a so-called ‘Third World’ (developing nations and societies) context and a ‘First World’ (industrially advanced nations and societies) context that would colour the particular way of working. Although the simplicity of a First World and Third World dichotomy would not serve the present study, it is used here to refer to the range of societal focus that artistic and cultural practice can readily relate to. With Boal’s work this dilemma is contained in the distinction between the work that is seen to be ‘appropriate’ in the industrially developed countries of Western Europe and North America, and the work popularised in South Asia, Africa and Latin America. Mady Schutzman writes of the problem inherent in transposing a Third World “aesthetic of resistance” to a First World “aesthetic of self-help”\textsuperscript{99} that is apparent in the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed. But for those practitioners in the First World who are drawn to Theatre of the Oppressed by its commitment to and potential for change on a societal level, and who might not possess much, if any, training in the field of psychotherapy, the prospect of working with such issues carries some apprehension. Ferrand reports of the realisation that work requiring the release of such strong emotions, such powerful personal symbols, had its dangers. “We were not therapists, nor did we want the work to become Psychodrama.”\textsuperscript{100} Campbell warns of “the spectre of dreary role play exercises ...the kind of drama therapy which leaves us sobbing in the foetal position after a day of hellish

\textsuperscript{98} “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An interview with Augusto Boal” Taussig & Schechner 1990.
\textsuperscript{99} “Activism, Therapy, or Nostalgia: Theatre of the Oppressed in NYC” - Mady Schutzman: The Drama Review 34(3) T127 Fall 1990, pp. 77-83.
\textsuperscript{100} “Forum Theatre with Carers: The Use of Forum Theatre in Specific Community Settings” Ferrand 1995.
re-enactments of life in the nuclear family,”¹⁰¹ that even experienced participants face. He writes of workshops in the UK “when the distinction between developing theatre work (which is therapeutic) has toppled into unstructured therapy itself, leaving theatre workers and drama therapists alike dangerously opened up and by no means empowered to carry on the work” and suggests that “the sessions felt dangerous because so much of our oppression as Europeans is internalised: it was never quite clear whether in developing a model from someone’s personal experience we were working towards the empowerment of the group to use the work with groups who are objectively oppressed, or whether the session had been hijacked by an individual who ought properly to be sorting out their personal problems elsewhere.” In many instances, practitioners would have to consider whether the work they were doing was theatre or therapy.¹⁰²

Boal believes that the undesirability of drawing too close a comparison between the Introspective Techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed and forms of psychotherapy is in the promotion of a tendency, as with some of the feared examples above, for the workshop to be seen as a venue for purging. That is, the participant comes to the work in order to do in the workshop what they wish to avoid doing in actual life. The workshop becomes a venue for a form of catharsis that leads to inaction. Boal proposes that Theatre of the Oppressed requires the process of catharsis. But the cathartic process must be of a particular kind. “Not the catharsis of the dynamic factor but the catharsis of the blockage. I want to purge myself of what blocks me ...I favor the dynamization of people - making people do. I don’t want people to use theatre as a way of not doing in real life.”¹⁰³ Dynamisation is a completion of the mimetic process. By apprehending the ‘sensuous aspects of appearances’, mimesis turns a merely possible world into an immediate one. Gebauer & Wulf noted that this process of dynamisation produces a ‘living memory’

¹⁰³ “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An interview with Augusto Boal” Taussig & Schechner 1990.
which finds its place in the flow of time through presence and reproducibility. Mimetic processes inherent in aesthetic experience produce an encounter with a world through sense perception. This makes it possible for the subjective experience of the outer and inner world to enter into an exchange.104

The dynamisation process in the spectrum of power leads to either strength or weakness, growth or decay. Boal seeks to promote, through work in the symbolic, what he sees to be health for those that he works with. He uses dramatic processes as a way of examining choices that individuals are facing in their reality, and coercive factors that influence their decisions and actions. In this way he seeks the development of critical ability in his audience. In the context of Boal’s Introspective Techniques, a dynamisation might allow a participant to symbolically experience a situation or an attitude in a manner that allows for self-observation; the actions of the self and factors of influence can be viewed ‘at one remove’. Turner believed that symbols are essentially involved in social processes, they become factors in social action, and they become associated with human interests, purposes, ends and means. A symbol must be considered to be a dynamic entity in the appropriate context of action.105 Firth added that because symbols relate to the interests and aims of groups and individuals, and become factors when decisions are taken, their effects upon organisational behaviour are most noteworthy. The instrumental nature of the symbol becomes apparent with political and religious symbols - they evoke powerful emotions of identification with a group, they are used as rallying points for group action, and they become convenient objects of hate or devotion. The process of dynamisation can highlight differences in values, which might necessitate a stance that is oppositional to other existing power structures. Divergent symbolic attributions become expressions of divisions of organisational kinds -

becoming concerned with struggles for power.\textsuperscript{106} Gebauer and Wulf discussed a process described as ‘social mimesis’ whereby rivalries arise between individuals and groups sharing the same goals of action. When equivalent desires, assessments, aspirations and perceptual modes possessed by individuals or groups combine with a sharp sense of self-delimitation in relation to others, a competitive nature arises. The competitor can be seen to impede the realisation of a goal; while the desirability of the object is intensified - the object is lent value by competition. This mimetic conflict, which originates from the symbolic realm, contains the seeds of violence. However much it might be a product of a social construct, mimesis extends beyond the realm of aesthetics and becomes effective as a social force.\textsuperscript{107} In the context of belligerence, the symbols that guide the decisions and actions of individuals and groups must be manipulated with clear objectives. The effects upon the target, are to some degree, part of the ‘script’ of the psychological operation. Lippmann wrote, “it is clear that under certain conditions men respond as powerfully to fictions as they do to realities, and that in many cases they help to create the very fictions to which they respond.”\textsuperscript{108} Lansdale’s use of dynamisation processes were placed in a broader social process characterised by contestation; where the gaining of the ‘upper hand’ attains great importance. In this case, the audience’s critical ability is an impedance; susceptibility is the faculty that must be developed. Lansdale understood that actions in the power process are guided by a very small number of key symbols.

**Lansdale’s Black Boycotts**

In 1951 Lansdale could see that the Huks had developed a particularly successful recruitment strategy based on the argument that the government’s corruption had extended to a steadfast and unfair control of the electoral

\textsuperscript{106} Firth 1973, pp. 74, 77 & 240.  
\textsuperscript{107} Gebauer & Wulf 1992, pp. 318-319.
processes, and that there would be no possibility of any votes reforming the social ills suffered by those who were not part of the ruling elite. This particular strategy was encapsulated in the then popular rallying slogan “Bullets Not Ballots!” and was not being effectively countered by the campaigns of the government. A national election was to be held in that year and Lansdale organised a campaign to address the Huk strategy. Through his network of prominent local reformists - “a group of public-spirited citizens” - he facilitated and encouraged the formation of a national non-government organisation called NAMFREL, the National Movement for Free Elections. This organisation dedicated itself to monitoring the electoral process and discouraging the vote-rigging practices that had been prevalent in previous elections. Through his network in the local military hierarchy he organised the deployment of Philippine Army troops to safeguard the NAMFREL monitors and the electoral venues from armed attacks and intimidation. Through operatives of the local Military Intelligence Service that had infiltrated a Huk agitprop cell in Manila he orchestrated an artful deception “to introduce some propaganda material into the cell’s communications which, hopefully, the members then would adopt and use as their own”. Lansdale wrote and faked a strongly worded Huk directive calling on all Huk adherents to stage a “Boycott the Election!” campaign. The document cited the arguments that were to be used, including the electoral frauds of the past and the certainty that the 1951 elections would be no different. The directive was typed on a typewriter and on paper that had been captured from Huk units, it included Huk authenticating identification and was secretly fed into the Huks’ propaganda channels by way of the Manila agitprop cell. The initial result was that the Manila cell was rebuked by the Huk command for taking independent propaganda actions. But then in the following days the idea caught on as the Huk Politburo and then the entire

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109 Lansdale 1972, p. 90.
Huk apparatus, encouraged by other government assets within it, took up the slogan of “Boycott the Election!” and carried out a vigorous campaign which used the arguments that Lansdale had provided them. When election day came, Lansdale was delivered the propaganda ammunition that he had sought. Lansdale’s operation was largely effective in preventing the large-scale manipulation of the electoral process that had been all too evident in previous elections. The election results reflected popular sentiments of the day, and election violence had been minimised by the presence of Army troops. Citing the “huge turnout of voters and the clear evidence of honest ballots”, government forces and the press with the support of NAMFREL were able to call attention to the Huk campaign and their sympathisers, “how wrong had been their predictions about the election... ballots, not bullets, were what counted”. The success of Lansdale’s operation was further evidenced by an increase in the number of Huk defections and reports of reduced morale among its ranks following the 1951 elections. This operation was designed to falsify the Huk assertion of “Bullets Not Ballots!” and to demonstrate that the Huks were not as in touch with popular sentiment as they claimed. The operation had the effect of isolating its target from its base of support and demoralising its constituents. Interestingly, a very similar scenario took place in the 1986 presidential election with the electoral defeat of Ferdinand Marcos and the ascension of Corazon Aquino to the presidency. The very prominent participation of the military hierarchy in the transition of power and the election boycott campaign of the radical left sector, led by a popular political organisation called ‘Bayan’ and which included the support of the rebel New People’s Army, suggests a resonance that is difficult to ignore. Particularly since the 1986 scenario had the same effect upon the radical left sector that the 1951 operation had upon the Huks. As it turns out, after a disreputable election result in favour of Marcos in 1984, Lansdale asked a “Lansdalian” intelligence operative named F. Andy Messing,  

112 Lansdale 1972, p. 93.  
113 An account of this event, which includes an account of the participation of the Philippine Educational Theatre Association’s artists in the events surrounding it, can be found in pp. 45-55 of “The Playful Revolution: NOTE CONTINUES NEXT PAGE
Jr., to go to the Philippines in 1985 to “take a look” on his behalf, giving him a list of names to contact. In this way he was reactivating his old network. Messing returned to the US and told Lansdale that Aquino should head the government; Lansdale agreed. And so he, Messing and others lobbied the US Congress and worked with the National Security Council to actualise his proposal to support Aquino, as a symbol of clean government and reform. By 1986, Marcos was gone and Aquino was President of the Philippines. By then Lansdale had well and truly retired from active service and was convalescing at his home in Virginia, although he still received phone calls from the curious asking him what he was doing working back in the Philippines. It would be most tempting to draw the conclusion that the 1986 scenario was both a compliment to and a regurgitation of Lansdale’s work in 1951. If that was the case, then this instance would demonstrate the way in which the tradition of psychological operations utilises scripts much in the same manner that a theatre company might remount a successful production or symbolic play.

Lansdale empowered one section of his audience by setting up NAMFREL. In the parlance of political campaign management, NAMFREL was a ‘grassroots organisation from above’, funded and organised as it was by Lansdale’s OPC operations. However, the sensibility of the organisation soon took hold, it became an instrument and a symbol of ‘just and fair’ elections, empowering a wide range of citizenry against corruption. Lansdale induced his Huk targets to assert what had been said in the bogus communication as if it was their own opinion. His targets were induced into active participation, to play a specified role; a role provided for them by what they believed was a highly credible source, a set of beliefs and opinions.

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114 Currey 1988, pp. 347.
115 Mayhew 1997, p. 211.
advocated by a communication which they internalised and accepted as their own. Fazio noted that attitudes that have a strong association are highly functional. “They free the individual from the processing required for reflective thought about his or her evaluation of the object... the individual is freed from much of the effort of having to engage in deliberate reasoning processes before behaving toward the object in question.” As an instrument, it can be used to “guide the individual’s behavior in a highly automatic manner.”

Legislative Theatre

**PRINCIPLES**

When Boal ran for a seat in the Legislative Chamber of the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1992, a network of Forum Theatre groups was formed in and around the city to canvass contributions from the electorate for legislative answers to the range of problems faced by different community groups. “The idea is to make a Forum that asks whether we can transform the situation by only our means within the existing law or if another law is needed to make the situation better.” Upon his election into office, this network remained and continued to develop their function. Over a year into his term of office, there were more than ten ‘nuclei’ groups using Forum Theatre to address community problems. “What I’m trying to do with Legislative Theatre is to do a theatre which is political, theatre as politics. We try to change society not by the usual means of politicians which is only by talking, but by acting.” Boal had chosen to concentrate the work of his legislative mandate on the development of Legislative Theatre. However,

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120 Boal 1993, “Vamos Botar a Boca no Trombone: Coragem de Ser Feliz” Pamphlet.
with the organisation of the Festival of Theatre of the Oppressed in 1993 and
the national election campaign in 1994 that development had to be in fits and
starts. Nevertheless, some progress was evident by 1994; one
recommendation from the programme (legislating design requirements for
phone boxes to allow for the visually-impaired) had made it to the statute
books and others (such as one on the rights of pregnant women in factories)
were under consideration.\footnote{122} He had placed much hope and energy into the
formation and development of Theatre of the Oppressed nuclei around the
city “that have been and have to be channels, permanent channels, of
communication with my mandate and the fabrication of laws here, the
making of laws here.” Political struggle is something that Boal is not
unfamiliar with, but this form of political-theatrical work is certainly breaking
new ground. “I can never forget that it’s the first time that, not only, a man
of the theatre enters the Legislative power, but I enter with my whole
company. It’s the first time that a theatrical company takes the power. It’s a
small power, but it is power.”\footnote{123} The aim of Boal’s mandate was “to bring
theatre back into the centre of political action - the centre of decisions - by
making theatre as politics rather than merely making political theatre.”\footnote{124}
Boal would use theatre as a direct medium to political symbols of the day - as
a link to the legislative body of a society.

Turner suggested that symbols can be viewed according to their
sensory properties and ideological properties. In the sensory pole, symbols
are viewed as natural and physiological processes that can be related to the
outward form of the symbol. These symbols can be expected to arouse
feelings and desires. In the ideological pole, symbols make references to
elements of the moral and social order, to principles and types of social
organisation, to norms and values that guide and control individuals as
members of social groupings. Some of these symbols can embody values that

\footnote{124} Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to Make Politics; Augusto Boal, trans. Adrian Jackson 1998
(London & New York, Routledge) .
would be regarded as ends in themselves - these are known as ‘dominant’ symbols.\textsuperscript{125} Mills observes that authority is often justified by dominant symbols, such as a god or the ‘vote of the majority’ or the ‘will of the people’ or the ‘divine right of kings’ - symbols that legitimate. When they are internalised, they become the reasons and motives which guide individuals into social roles and legitimise the enactment of such roles. They can become the basis for adherence or opposition to a structure of power.\textsuperscript{126} In this context, an attempt to translate a private symbolism, such as an individual’s idealism, into the public symbolism of a political power structure would, as Firth suggests, very likely strain the social body. It will require organisation and mobilisation of resources, and a confrontation with existing social and political structures. It will require the engagement with the basis of the power that gives significance to the symbols. The political community to which a symbol might refer, and whose authority the symbol might legitimise, is ultimately grounded in a group of people.\textsuperscript{127}

\textbf{PRACTICE}

Although Boal is possibly the first elected legislator to openly use theatre as an instrument of his mandate, it is possible to find precedents to this form of lobbying and formulation of policy. One such example occurred in 1985 in the state of Karnataka in India. Sneha Sadan, a group of 10 children who had worked as child labourers in factories, directed by Shashidhara Adappa of the Media Exploration for Social and Cultural Advancement (MESCA) in Bangalore presented a play entitled “Buds That Never Bloom” and a draft bill entitled the “Child Labour (Employment Regulation, Education, Training and Development) Bill 1985” to Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde of the Karnataka Government. The campaign was intended to ban child labour in hazardous industries in the short term and all forms of child labour in the long term. Eugène van Erven notes that the

\textsuperscript{125} Turner 1967, pp. 20 & 28.
\textsuperscript{126} Mills 1959, pp. 36-37.
\textsuperscript{127} Firth 1973, pp. 240 & 404.
effects and achievements of MESCA’s child labour play were extraordinary. “It was the first time in Indian history that a volunteer group pushed for new legislation and got it passed.” Boal’s systematisation of this process, and utilisation of the consultative element tested the wider scale possibilities that such a form offers.

As a member of Boal’s legislative and theatrical staff, Claudete Felix faced the responsibilities and realities of implementing their Legislative Theatre programme on the ground. She saw her tasks as being to go out into the communities and, through the theatre work, discuss the problems in that community. “To discuss what was good, what could be made better through the laws. We would bring these recommendations back to our office, then we would go and formulate the laws into official form as amendments. And we also would create new laws.” In these processes the questioning and discussion soon brings about a realisation that these community gatherings have a certain level of power to recommend changes. “People would realise that they are able to ‘create a law’, to discuss a law. They could consider why these laws exist.” Often, the discovery of the existence of these laws would lead to the question of whose or what interests the various laws would serve!

By 1996 there were 19 Theatre of the Oppressed nucleus groups, set up by Boal’s mandate, that were in existence in Rio de Janeiro. These were the channels by which Boal consulted the people of the city, and by which he had developed the Legislative Theatre project. By the end of his term in office, he had managed to become personally responsible for the promulgation of 13 Municipal laws, as well as participating in collective efforts to put around 30 other laws into operation. The law which he considered to be his most

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significant achievement was entitled “Laws of Protection of Witnesses of Crimes: Amendment to the Constitution of the City 43/95 to allow the promulgation of Law 1245/95”. By this legislation he had, in effect, created a comprehensive witness protection programme for the judicial system of Rio de Janeiro. Similar to programmes in many countries used to protect prosecution witnesses against major organised crime, it includes change of identity, relocation and re-employment facilities. It sought to address a fear that the Legislative Theatre project had recurrently encountered in examinations of the problems of the people of the city - the awesome level of violent crime. It is intended to encourage witnesses who would have all too easily fallen prey to threats or actual elimination by the well-armed criminals of Rio de Janeiro.130

EVALUATION

The practice of Legislative Theatre is very much in its infancy. Boal’s term of office expired at the end of 1996 and he was not re-elected for a second term. We can only speculate on how far the project could have gone had Boal been given more time in public office; or whether his future practice will be able to build upon the work he had done as an elected Legislator, as he hopes to do.131 Boal’s idea of what Legislative Theatre is, or should be, has had to adapt to the realities of practice; in particular to the limitations involved in being a Legislator who consults many of the dispossessed and disenfranchised of the city, among others. Regardless of how good Boal’s initial idea was, the experience of implementation proves what is possible in practice.132 One other reality that had to be faced with this work is that although it might be possible to formulate and legislate the most equitable, responsible and humane of laws, it will be a completely different matter when it comes to implementing and, where necessary, enforcing such laws.

131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
This was especially the case with the newly created witness protection programme. Particularly in a place like Rio de Janeiro, where corruption on many levels is firmly entrenched.

Each time Boal presented a legislative proposal to the Municipal Chamber, he was presenting a symbol of ‘the way it should be’ according to his beliefs and the aspirations of his constituency - at least those who participated in the Legislative Theatre projects. Each legislation seeks to effect an adaptive act upon the social world of its creators. Gebauer and Wulf note that mimetic processes suggest the simultaneous existence of versions of the same world. Each possible existence contains a form of knowledge and understanding that holds creative qualities. When a mimetic world comes to embody greater meaning than an empirical reality - such as when an image of ‘the way it should be’ gains greater value than ‘the way it is’ in actuality - then the power of symbols is intensified. The symbols embody a kind of higher reality. In such cases the mimetic effect enters into the sphere of practical action. Boal’s witness protection programme legislation grew out of fears expressed by citizens while participating in Legislative Theatre projects. These fears were the impetus for the formulation of a legislative proposal which became the witness protection programme - a symbol of civilization in the face of uncontrolled violence. Symbols can become models of behaviour, enactments of power, or the definition of reality. A political authority can construct narratives that can come to define ‘the reality’; in this way politics is aestheticised. Mimetic processes impact upon the empirical world by way of its nature as a constructed world.133

133 Gebauer & Wulf 1992, pp. 18, 318-319.
Chapter 3
Invisible Theatre
DIFFICULT EXAMPLES

Theatre’s ability to represent and demonstrate human actions and conditions is, arguably, one reason why the practice of performative storytelling has been such a valued activity for as long as it has. Another reason might be the realisation that by the theatrical event’s placement of those who perform and those who observe within the same physical space, in sensorial proximity to each other, a narrative or event can be evoked and shared in a process of communal focusing that is uncommon, or out of the ordinary, in human daily experience. The value of the practice is measurable by the quantity and quality of attention that the observer might pay to the performer and performance. But when “daily” life offers a situation that creates these same effects and more, in the possibility and option of direct involvement in the narrative or the event, conventions of theatricality are severely challenged.

SCENE: A man stands in a supermarket checkout queue. His shopping cart contains only food items - bread, milk, margarine and eggs. When his turn at the cash register comes and before the cashier starts registering the prices of the goods, the man tells the attendant that he has no money to pay for his shopping. He goes on to say that although he has been looking for a job he has not been able to get work. The cashier replies that this is not her problem and that her job is to charge customers for what they wish to buy. The man says that he could have tried to steal the food, but instead his wish was to pay for it. Although he had no money he did want to pay for his shopping - by working for the supermarket. By exchanging his labour for goods.1

NOTE CONTINUES NEXT PAGE
It could easily be a narrative belonging to a film or stage play, a convenient expositional scene that could lead to comedy or social comment. The ploy itself is not new. The visual gag, of the restaurant diners who help themselves to a satisfying meal in one scene then find themselves scrubbing away surrounded by massive piles of dishes and cutleries in the very next scene, probably goes back to the silent movie era. There is one subtle difference between the former scene and the classic joke scene, one of intention. The visual gag usually relies on the instant that the diners realise that they have no money to pay for their meal, thus the humour lies in the foolishness of the characters. It is less humorous when a shopper carries out what would most likely be a premeditated action. One other, less subtle, difference - the joke occurs in a fictionalised reality, whilst the supermarket scene described above occurred in an actual supermarket in Liege, Belgium in October 1978.2

Needless to say the shopper’s action provoked a strong reaction from the supermarket managers, employees and other shoppers; it was intended to. More importantly it was meant to provoke a discussion and this it did also. The discussions covered the economy and unemployment, the legitimacy and justifications for the shopper’s action. Eventually the police arrived at the management’s call and the man was taken to the police station, amidst protests from concerned customers. The entire incident was secretly recorded by a Flemish television crew.

It is an example of Invisible Theatre as practised by Augusto Boal. In all, twelve actors performed this scene in Liege. All of them played the role of shoppers and they joined other “actual” shoppers around the scene. Boal describes Invisible Theatre thus:

... the presentation of a scene in an environment other than the theatre, before people who are not spectators. The place can be a restaurant, a

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2 Ibid.
sidewalk, a market, a train, a line of people, etc. The people who witness the scene are those who are there by chance. During the spectacle, these people must not have the slightest idea that it is a “spectacle,” for this would make them “spectators.”

Although essentially an action that occurs in actual reality, Boal maintains that Invisible Theatre is theatre. It must have a text with a scripted score, which will inevitably be modified, according to the circumstances, to suit the intervention of the spect-actors. Invisible Theatre calls for the detailed preparation of a skit with a complete text or a simple script; and it is necessary to rehearse the scene sufficiently so that the actors are able to incorporate into their acting and their actions the intervention of the spectators. During the rehearsal it is also necessary to include every imaginable intervention from the spectators; these possibilities forming a kind of optional text. In Invisible Theatre, the actors must perform just like real actors; that is, they must live. In addition Boal insists that it is critical that the actors in Invisible Theatre do not reveal themselves to be actors during the performance. “On this rests the invisible nature of this form of theatre. And it is precisely this invisible quality that will make the spectator act freely and fully, as if he were living a real situation - and, after all, it is a real situation!” The realness of this theatre necessitates taking the performance to its non-expectant audience. Invisible Theatre erupts in a location chosen as a place where the public congregates. All the people who are near become involved in the eruption and the effects of it last long after the skit has ended. To Boal, what this theatre addresses is an element worthy of the utmost consideration. “The chosen subject must be an issue of burning importance, something known to be a matter of profound and genuine concern for the future spect-actors.” The basis of Invisible Theatre is a constructed small play, with actors performing parts as if they were playing

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5 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 144.
7 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 147.
8 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 144.
in a traditional theatre, for a traditional audience. However, the Invisible Theatre play is performed in a place which is not a theatre and for an audience which is not an audience. “In the course of our European experiences, we did shows in the Paris Mètro, in ferryboats, in the restaurants and streets of Stockholm, and even on a stage, in a theatre where a conference was taking place.”  

In analysing Invisible Theatre, Martin Maria Kohtes considers two key points in the form’s capacity “to affect the individual and hence incite social change”. Firstly, Invisible Theatre creates a situation that brings a particular political critique or social crisis to a point where it becomes undeniable for the onlookers. Symbols such as unemployment or food shortages are exhibited in a sharp and striking manner in order to stimulate reflection in onlookers and public discussion. Secondly, onlookers are urged to participate, the performance seeks their activation. Audience participation implies the opportunity to practise as well as to anticipate the liberation that must be worked towards. This active participation of the onlooker, which turns the spectator into the spect-actor, differentiates Invisible Theatre from many other forms of theatre which seek to address social concerns and questions in ways that empower the disempowered. Boal clearly distinguishes between Invisible Theatre and other forms which takes the performance into actual reality:

It is necessary to emphasize that the Invisible Theatre is not the same thing as a “happening” or the so-called “guerrilla theatre.” In the latter we are clearly talking about “theatre,” and therefore the wall that separates actors from spectators immediately arises, reducing the spectator to impotence... In the Invisible Theatre the theatrical rituals are abolished; only the theatre exists, without its old, worn out patterns. The theatrical energy is completely liberated, and the impact produced by this free theatre is much more powerful and longer lasting.

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11 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p.147.
In this way, Boal aims to facilitate the transition of the symbolic to the actual by releasing the constructed reality of symbols, loaded with dramatic intention, completely out into the actual reality.

Boal sees the question of legality as being central in the very act of staging an Invisible Theatre performance. In a form of performance where the risk of arrest remains a consideration, the theatre’s relationship to the law of the land cannot help but be foregrounded. Boal insists that Invisible Theatre never places itself in an illegal position because it does not intend to violate the law. Instead it intends to question the legitimacy of laws, which he believes is a very different matter altogether. In the case of the supermarket scene in Liege he explains that “if we wanted to break the law, it would have been very easy for us to plan a scene that would have distracted people in the supermarket so we could steal anything we wanted.” Adding that this would then become just another part of everyday life, one which many stores routinely take into account by adding a ‘shoplifting premium’ on to their prices in order to cover their losses. But the scene in Liege sought to challenge the symbol of legitimate exchange to which the supermarket and the market economies subscribe. This challenge to the notion of legitimacy is a crucial element of the underlying rationale for the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed. In Liege, the scene is carefully structured so that the shopper does not actually break any laws; all he does is propose a form of exchange that the supermarket does not allow for. By offering to directly barter labour for goods, he is proposing to bypass the cash economy system to which the supermarket is fixed. To the supermarket management this was, at the very least, unexpected and, most likely, a totally unacceptable and intimidatingly extraordinary proposal. The performance was driven by a need to question the legitimacy of man-made laws. “Because laws can be written by anybody, I can make my own laws too. Laws are only promulgated, however, by those

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13 Ibid.
who have the power to make them. Every dictatorship is eager to legalize the illegal act that brought them to power.” Boal suggests that a law promulgated by the military, without due democratic process, has no validity - that no law can be valid until it has the support of the people to which that law will apply.\textsuperscript{14} Boal believes that:

Most oppression exists legally. In many countries women cannot vote yet. In many countries, they are underpaid. ...And everything is being done in the name of the law. However, a law which is imposed on half of humankind cannot be legitimate since it does not have the consensus of its victims, that is, women. ...This is precisely the importance of the Invisible Theatre (and of other Theatre of the Oppressed techniques): the difference between the concepts of legality and legitimacy.\textsuperscript{15}

By involving other shoppers of the non-actor variety, in the Liege supermarket debate that followed the initial provocation, Boal demonstrates a process for activating the onlooker - the spectator of the theatre. This has been a goal shared by many theatre workers who have seen theatre as a means to encourage analysis and action amongst its audience. Marc Estrin, who had been doing similar work to Boal in the United States, reflected the sentiment when he wrote that “One of our major concerns is in shifting the burden of the performance to the ‘spectators’, providing them with a chance to examine their own acts instead of the acts of others.”\textsuperscript{16} That this goal is achieved by making the onlooker believe that what they are witnessing is actual reality rather than a fictional representation presents some difficulties. These difficulties are primarily in the argument that the Invisible Theatre is based on an act of deception of an audience on the part of the performers. Boal contends that Invisible Theatre does, indeed, offer scenes of fiction. “But without the mitigating effects of the rites of conventional theatre, this fiction becomes reality. Invisible Theatre is not realism; it is reality.”\textsuperscript{17} He insists that “One should never explain to the public that Invisible Theatre is theatre, lest it

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
lose its impact.”18 This and other aesthetic and ethical issues that arise from the performance of Invisible Theatre will be examined later in this section.

Background

Boal makes no claim to having invented Invisible Theatre. He contends that rudimentary forms of Invisible Theatre, or partial Invisible Theatre techniques have always existed. Pointing out that in espionage, for instance, spies use techniques such as camouflage, interpretation of roles, and simulated realities - which are all Invisible Theatre techniques. “Even in the supermarkets, where we regularly play Invisible Theatre, there are ‘invisible police’ that is, women and men who complement the closed circuit TV’s function of discouraging and detecting shoplifting.”19 It is interesting to note that in perhaps all these examples, the covert performance of simulated realities is a strategic response to a problematic situation or condition. Similarly Boal’s work seems to evolve out of difficult conditions. The various manifestations of Theatre of the Oppressed have developed in response to concrete and particular political situations. “When in 1971 the dictatorship in Brazil made it impossible for the people to present popular theatre, we started to work on Newspaper Theatre techniques, which were forms of theatre easily realisable by the people, so that they would be able to produce their own theatre. In Argentina before the 1973 elections, when the level of repression eased (without completely disappearing), we started doing Invisible Theatre in trains and restaurants, in queues for shops, in markets.”20 Kohtes has drawn parallels with the social conditions present during the growth of similar theatrical initiatives, comparing Boal’s work to forms of Guerrilla Theatre practised in the USA in the 1960s and looking to Berlin in the 1930s at the work done by Arbeiter Theater Bund after it had been banned by

17 Boal 1992, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, p. 15.
18 Ibid., p. 16.
20 Boal 1992, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, p. 29.
the Weimar Republic. He notes that in the USA in the late sixties several troupes within the Guerrilla Theatre movement of the time had already adopted this kind of theatrical infiltration as part of their cultural offensive. He posits the notion that the appearance of this technique corresponds with certain political conditions; more precisely, it seems to reflect the shock of a sudden loss (or the realisation of this loss) of formerly enjoyed liberties. He believes that it is this shock which unites German workers desperately agitating against the rise of fascism with the Guerrilla Theatre activists expressing their disillusionment with American democracy in the face of the Vietnam War, and with Boal as he began to implement Invisible Theatre in his Argentinean exile after being imprisoned and tortured by the Brazilian military regime. Boal, says Kohtes, in the broader frame of Theatre of the Oppressed treats the theatre as a rehearsal space for social behaviour wherein participation on the stage prepares the spect-actor for emancipation in life.21 In the case of Invisible Theatre the stage is more of an abstract than a concrete factor.

To Boal, theatre is a way of showing our lives and showing our reality. In the process of creating theatre, we take from the normal day reality and we create a new reality. We see a reality inside another reality. For Boal, fiction is a reality. Fiction does not exist because everything is reality. Fiction is a reality that we create; one that is different to the reality we experience in actuality. We create another reality. He believes that a spectator of the fictional reality can be affected in either one of two ways. When you see a symbolic play, you can become better than before, healthier than before, wiser than before; or the opposite, you can become more stupid and it can do harm to you. He proposes that it is inevitable that a piece of theatre will provoke a reaction in the spectator, and the spectator is going to be influenced either towards disease or towards health, towards growth or decay.22 When the spectator is able to enter into this second reality, the created reality which is the fiction, the potential to consciously make use of

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this fiction for the betterment of the spectator is increased. This ability to work with a constructed theatrical reality is a key element that Theatre of the Oppressed seeks to develop in the participant, the spect-actor:

The oppressed person lives a reality of oppression; he has to learn to make an image of that oppression. That image of that oppression in itself is a reality... So the oppressed person belongs to two worlds: his normal world where he is oppressed and at the same time, to the world of the image of that oppression. That’s what we technically call “metaxis”: it’s the belonging to both the world of reality and the reality of the image of that reality. That’s the Theatre of the Oppressed...

The range of practices that make up the Theatre of the Oppressed works towards the development of an awareness of the influences that act upon a social situation or condition, and the individual’s choices and capacities to affect that situation or condition. For Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed functions to show how reality can be changed. Of course an important step that needs to be made, before effective action is possible, is the recognition of the certainty that a reality requires changing; the recognition of the necessity to address certain restrictions which can be shown to be undesirable, detrimental, inhumane or life-threatening. Boal recognises that some restrictions exist in the name of reality. But which reality? It is an historically determined reality. Theatre of the Oppressed seeks to make the participant a conscious determinant of their reality. To facilitate this, the language of theatre is used; speaking in image and word, in reality and representation. Liko Turle, as an animateur who worked with Boal at the Centro de Teatro do Oprimido in Rio de Janeiro, observes that the use of theatre in this way offers the possibility of presenting a constructed image of reality which can allow for the image to be entered. In this way, the image can be altered, rearranged, adjusted and replaced with an ideal image within the constructed reality. The possibility is then opened up for this ideal image to be brought
back into the actual reality. As a participant, you see the symbolic reality represented through theatre, enter this representation, change it and bring back what you’ve changed to your reality. It would be overly idealistic, often unrealistic, to expect a group of people to agree on one perfect and complete solution. It is more likely that a performance, such as the one in Liege, would lead to disagreements, and strong reactions between and amongst its participants and viewers. In Boal’s opinion, debate, the conflict of ideas, dialectics, argument and counter-argument - all this stimulates, arouses, enriches, prepares the spectator for action in real life. When the discussions continue after the performance or session, then the theatre can claim some measure of success:

In truth, a session of Theatre of the Oppressed has no end, because everything which happens in it must extend into life. Theatre shall never end! The Theatre of the Oppressed is located precisely on the frontier between fiction and reality - and this border must be crossed. If the show starts in fiction, its objective is to become integrated into reality, into life.

Questions of Aesthetics

Human behaviour and action can be initiated and guided by a considerable range of impulses. The development of a knowledge and awareness of one’s situation and the choices available within that situation both calls for and leads to an activation of one’s consciousness in the decision-making processes necessitated by the situation, and the desire to change or develop that situation. Edelman writes that:

Consciousness shows intentionality; it is of or about things or events. It is also to some extent bound up with volition. Some psychologists suggest that consciousness is marked by the presence of mental

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28 Ibid., p. 247.
images and by their use to regulate behavior. But it is not a simple copy of experience (a “mirror of reality”)...29

The aesthetic experience generates and reinforces many of the mental images, the symbols, that guide and restrict our behaviour. A proportion of all the mental images that operate within us might be derived from actual experiences, but an equally large if not greater proportion would have reached us through symbolic or aesthetic experiences. Boal uses theatre as a way of examining and working with the symbols that make up the knowledge that guides our decisions and actions. “Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.”30

It is this belief, that theatre and consequently art can influence the way that we perceive and influence reality, that lies at the heart of the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed and Invisible Theatre. A key question arises when we consider the ways in which Invisible Theatre works in an aesthetic sense. Consciousness of one’s actions and choices is a desired result upon the participant, but Invisible Theatre relies on the ‘unconscious’ participation of members of the actual ‘social’ reality, the environment in which the Invisible Theatre performance occurs. They become participants in, rather than spectators of, the performance. The intentionality of the performance as a performative event is necessary. But the invisibility of its performative intention is equally necessary. The form strives not to create a copy of experience, rather an actual experience - a reality and not a mirror of reality.

Kohtes believes this to be a rejection of “aesthetic formalism in favour of life-like content”. Invisible Theatre does not conform to the conventional prerequisite of aesthetic experience in “the agreement between actors and audience on the fictional character of the performance” - the onlooker’s

awareness that what they are observing and experiencing is an artistic phenomenon rather than an aspect of actual ‘real’ life. He sees this rejection as a reaction to the political conditions of the environment of those producing the performance event, being of the opinion that “the threatening experience of anti-democratic tendencies further explains the radical insistence on removing the event from the artistic sphere.” He concludes that in these situations the theatre retreats into the realm of actual reality, as it did in Weimar Germany, because of “the subjective assessment that artistic means have lost their efficacy.” For Kohtes there is a question that begs to be asked, “does theatre that is not recognised by the onlookers as such still fall within a useful definition of theatre as an art form?” Conversely, “how can examining Invisible Theatre help to determine more equivocally what makes theatre theatre?” He believes that theatre as an art form is unique, because it uses the human body as its principal medium. Therefore it is in its physical appearance more readily identifiable with empirical reality. “Theatre is the (actual) event of communicating and at the same time it is the communicating of a (fictional) event - the latter only realized through the frame of art, indicated by certain theatrical conventions.” Kohtes maintains that the lack of awareness, in spectators of Invisible Theatre, that the situation being presented occurs within the domain of symbolic play makes the performance indistinguishable from actual reality. He argues that this lack effectively prevents the spectator’s aestheticisation of the event. He reasons that the spectator’s aesthetic experience and appreciation of a theatre performance is based on the recognition of its symbolic quality, and Invisible Theatre avoids this recognition by not allowing the transparency of the event. In his opinion, Invisible Theatre should therefore be classified, not as political theatre, but as political action with theatrical elements. Because of its “utilitarian character”, he believes Invisible Theatre should not be evaluated for its artistic but for its practical effects. He raises further questions on the ability of Invisible Theatre to educate:
In evaluating Invisible Theatre as political theatre, the aesthetic deficiency is crucial. If the fictional level, the ‘as-if’, is not realized by the spectator, then the aesthetic distance and sensuous valuation are also withheld from him. Diametrically opposed to Brecht’s anti-realistic method of estrangement, the Invisible Theatre scenario is hyper-real: as a consequence the onlooker will react just as in a real situation, either emotionally or rationally - common reactions... The specific enlightening potential exclusively inherent in art, in the aesthetization of reality, is not realized.31

The potential of Invisible Theatre lies in its placement of the actor and the performance in a situation that will challenge the accepted standards and modes of a particular environment. Kohtes’ position seems to apply best to artistic situations that seek to create actor-spectator relationships. He acknowledges that for its initial impact upon the spectator, which is an emotional appeal to the spectator’s ethical sensibility, Invisible Theatre relies upon Aristotelian dynamics of pity and fear.32 It is indeed contestable whether Invisible Theatre can create a situation wherein all participants derive equal measures of benefit or ‘enlightenment’ from the experience. But in referring to the form as political action he ignores the necessity, inherent in the creation of an Invisible Theatre event, to create an aestheticised reality that can and will be entered into by those who participate in it, knowingly or not. The reality created by Invisible Theatre requires a sufficient level of aesthetic seductiveness in order to draw in those who experience it into its reality. It must have a beauty and truth that entices participation and action. It requires an artistic vocabulary that will connect with the ‘potentials for enlightenment’ of those who become party to the event. It can be attested that an Invisible Theatre performance is no less artistic than a sculpture that has become part of a streetscape and familiar over time, or an architectural concept that has been materialised, or a well made television commercial. Central to Kohtes’ argument is the tension created by the form between the fictional and the actual realities. This clash of realities has the potential to

31 Kohtes 1993, “Invisible Theatre: Reflections on an Overlooked Form” NTQ.
32 Ibid.
challenge the fixedness of any reality; in this way it is aesthetically violent. Boal writes that:

The juxtaposition of two universes (the real and the fictitious) also produces other aggressive effects: the spectator experiences the fiction and incorporates its elements. The spectator - a real, living person - accepts as life and reality what is presented to him in the work of art as art. Aesthetic osmosis.33

Whilst Edelman draws a connection between intention and the factor of consciousness - the mental images or symbolic realities that influence behaviour - he is quick to point out that consciousness is not always present. Edelman suggests that consciousness is not necessary for a good deal of behaviour. “Some kinds of learning, conceptual processes, and even some forms of inference proceed without it.”34 The hypotheses of aesthetic osmosis describes a process whereby an artistic phenomenon influences the spectator by the contact made between the symbols in an aestheticised reality and an actual reality. This process, it can be argued, can and does occur with or without the spectator’s awareness that what they are perceiving is indeed an artistic phenomenon. We are not always conscious and aware of the range of artistic phenomena that daily influence our lives and environment - of the values inherent in the works that we absorb. In Invisible Theatre, the spectator becomes a participant or observer of an event; perhaps unlikely to become aware of their role of spectator-of-an-artistic-phenomenon. They are nevertheless participating in or observing an event reliant on the invocation of an aesthetic experience. The participant and the observer are presented with an opportunity to enter the symbolic reality by way of the actual reality - by the collision of two realities. Participant and observer experience the ‘undeniability’ of the presented situation, occurring as it does in ‘real’ life. The situation is intended to lead to the active participation of the onlooker, or at least to present the imperative for activation. A symbol can activate its receptor towards a particular action or behaviour because of the value that is

33 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 113.
34 Edelman 1992, Bright Air Brilliant Fire, p. 112.
embodied by the symbol. Firth observes that symbols can generate and receive effects, often of high emotional charge, which are otherwise reserved for the objects to which they refer. Circumstances can intensify or diminish the symbolic effects - most notably when receivers suspend scepticism or disbelief that might be there in other circumstances. Trance states - the phenomenon of the ‘dissociated’ personality - is an example of a heightened symbolic occurrence, one that is not received as a performative event but an actual state. Such techniques or mechanisms can become vehicles for the conveyance of convictions and principles of thoughts and ethics. The nature of the art form itself can be seen to lend expressive power to the symbol.

In the discourse of the protagonist in the performance event, Boal holds that although the narrative might talk about somebody else - the protagonist - the process of identification inevitably leads us to talk about ourselves, as spectators of the narrative. This process, which takes the narrative and the event from the individual to the collective experience, occurs even though we keep talking about the protagonist. To achieve this in a performance, all the singular elements of individual discourses must become symbolic and therefore lose their exclusivity. In this way it is possible to effect a shift from the particular event to its social context. In this shift we see aesthetic osmosis - as a mimetic process - at work. Boal refers to a “poetics of the oppressed” for which he exhorts that in order to be best understood, “one must keep in mind its main objective: to change the people - ‘spectators,’ passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon - into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action.” He draws its development from a lineage of classicism:

Aristotle proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him.

Firth 1973, pp. 15-16, 78 & 86.
Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the character who thus acts in his place but the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character. In the first case, a “catharsis” occurs; in the second, an awakening or critical consciousness. But the poetics of the oppressed focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change...38

Perhaps it is the inferences that are inherent in the notion of fictionality that causes much of the difficulties in accepting the theatricality of Invisible Theatre. It is central to Kohtes’ argument that an awareness of a fiction as such is essential to the perceptor’s transportation into aesthetic experience. For him, fiction and reality require separation and a distinguishability between them. But the distinguishing line between the symbolic and actuality is not always so evident - artistic works often integrate completely into everyday reality. For Boal, the two are less clearly defined. “I really don’t believe there is a separation between fiction and reality. I believe that the only fiction that exists is the word fiction. I think everything is real. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, we say that the image of reality is a reality as an image, and the whole of the Theatre of the Oppressed stands on that.” 39 But Boal concedes that it is not possible to discard the term ‘fiction’ altogether at this stage, instead it becomes more of a starting point. The performance event might be a planned action, but it is a real action; it is not fiction anymore.40 Referring to what he terms synchronic truths and diachronic truths, he distinguishes between the reality that is actually happening here and now - the unrepresented synchronous reality, and the reality that happens in symbolic time - the performed diachronic reality.41 He considers this dynamic to effectively illustrate what he sees as the metaxis phenomenon: the event’s total and simultaneous adherence to two different and autonomous worlds.42

38 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 122.
39 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
He believes that an aesthetic transubstantiation takes place in the two autonomous worlds - in reality and in the image of reality that has been created. He further believes it necessary for the image of reality to become an autonomous phenomenon in order for metaxis to occur. “It is very important that these two worlds are truly autonomous. The artistic creativity of the oppressed-protagonist should not limit itself to a simple reproduction of reality, or to the symbolic illustration of the real oppression; artistic creativity must have its own aesthetic dimension.”43 The aesthetic dimension created and explored by Invisible Theatre challenges the role of the spectator within an event, in effect there are no spectators within an Invisible Theatre performance. There would be participants and observers, both would be part of the performance event - of the collision of two realities; an actual reality and an aesthetically symbolic reality. The aestheticisation of the experience for its perceptors, can occur when the experience generates sufficient magnetism to seduce, into its world of symbols, those who are exposed to it - delivered by a truth and beauty that perhaps belongs to tragedy, or courage, or humanity.

The process of mimesis is the intermediary between the symbolic world and the empirical reality. Generally, as Gebauer and Wulf observe, there is a determination made regarding which world counts as the true reality and which is the illusion, game, exaggeration or caricature - the apparent. This is a declaration of unreality on the part of the creator and the recipient of the symbolic reality, a sign that says ‘this world is not real’. However, this sign is not always apparent in mimetic processes. All areas of mimetic operation contain fluid boundaries between representation, illustration, reproduction, deception, illusion and appearance. With the proliferation of instruments of communication delivery, comes the increasing involvement of mimetic processes in the empirical world, as well as the increasing integration of elements of empirical reality in mimetic media - in this way the effects of mimesis is intensified. The possibility in this is that the

43 Ibid.
empirical reality loses its autonomy, to become increasingly subject to mimetic worlds - events can become indistinguishable from interpretations and quotations. This possibility has always been an element of the mimetic process. For example, Jung believed that ‘primitive’ storytellers never worried about the origins of their fantasies - their stories were simply told.

**Questions of Ethics**

Few would probably find comfort in the idea of a world where Invisible Theatre was a common and everyday part of existence - where one could never be certain whether the reality they were being confronted with was actuality or a presumed reality. On the other hand, it can be maintained that we are already living in a world and society where relatives and forms of Invisible Theatre function as a part of our daily lives. As Boal points out, many forms of usually undetected simulated roles and realities are played out by mechanisms of commerce and state, at times in cooperation and sometimes in competition with each other. Law enforcement, defence and intelligence agencies, political and media organisations, organised crime, commercial enterprises and even educational and religious institutions have at one time or another applied disguised, manufactured and orchestrated realities onto actual realities in order to achieve a desired effect or goal. And so what makes Invisible Theatre different to any one of these practices? Perhaps the short answer is there is no difference, at least in methodology. But recognisable differences can be detected in the interests that these events and practices purport and appear to serve. Kohtes describes a performance event recorded by Michael Doliner at the University of Chicago in 1968, at the height of the Vietnam War (a few years before Boal began his own practice of Invisible Theatre). Doliner and his group staged a performance where actors playing FBI agents entered the campus refectory announcing that they were looking for draft-dodgers. Kohtes describes that the performance provoked students into a spontaneous defence of threatened friends, and the

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performers were successful in mobilising the bystanders that observed the incident to participate in an act of civil disobedience. “Although this took place in the realm of fiction, the experience for the individual was authentic and at best might inspire and encourage more such action and enhance the participants’ desire for social change.” Kohtes adds that perhaps there ought to be an acknowledgement of the “problem of the potential backlash resulting from participants feeling betrayed when they discover they have been deceived.” It is probably this issue of ‘deception’ that poses the most provocative questions on the ethics of Invisible Theatre. A colleague of the author once described an instance of Invisible Theatre that this colleague and his group had staged, wherein an actor playing a pedestrian in a busy location has a bag snatched by another actor who runs through the crowd as the first actor calls for help. At the end of the event, this colleague found himself bombarded by an angry barrage from passers-by and observers who had somehow discovered the nature of the event and felt duped and exploited of their goodwill in coming to the aid of the first actor. Of course this colleague came out of this experience with a firm respect for the potency of Invisible Theatre; and a healthy understanding of some of the key ethical questions inherent in its practice.

Boal’s own practice of Invisible Theatre constantly raises questions of ethics, even in dealing with the most simple issues - for example littering. He describes a performance event in New York in 1992, when questions came from an even more doubtful source:

I want to talk about the problem of morals that comes everytime I use Invisible Theatre. For instance yesterday, when we did Invisible Theatre on the Staten Island Ferry, a reporter from the Wall Street Journal came along and asked the actors how they felt about duping spectators. They said it was not a deception; they were doing a play about littering. ...The reporter asked, “Is it moral to do that?” ...I believe Invisible Theatre is moral because first, we never lie - that is, we use incidents that are not only possible but that happen frequently,

45 Jung 1977, p. 248.
46 Kohtes 1993, “Invisible Theatre: Reflections on an Overlooked Form” NTQ.
like littering. In New York we see how dirty the streets are, it is a reality. Second, when we do Invisible Theatre we are running a risk. It’s theatre when we rehearsed it but when we go to the real Staten Island Ferry it is reality. The man who threw the garbage on the floor - he was really throwing garbage on the floor. He takes responsibility for the action.47

It is interesting that a reporter from that particular media organisation would find such artistic practice objectionable. Perhaps it is the first-hand working knowledge, of just how little effort (as long as it’s well directed and stylishly executed) it really takes to influence public opinion, that drives the “moral” objection.

As Boal would find in the 1989 presidential election campaign in Brazil when he came out to support the candidate of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ Party), Lula (Luis Inacio Lula da Silva), Brazil’s ruling parties in their campaign for Fernando Collor de Mello were quite prepared and proficient in their use of their own brand of Invisible Theatre techniques:

Collor, who was running against Lula, did horrible things; his party made a sort of clandestine theatre. I would not call it Invisible Theatre. ...For instance, they would go to people’s houses, or sometimes they would phone and say, “I’m calling from the Workers’ Party, and I’d like to know how many rooms you have in your house.” And the person would say, “But what do you care about that? That’s my problem.” And they would say, “We are taking an inventory of all the rooms that exist here, especially in Copacabana, Ipanema” - those places with middle-class and wealthy people. “We are from the Workers’ Party and after Lula wins we are planning a city-wide reform of the houses. You will have to lend one of your rooms to the people from the favela.”48

Although there was a certain obviousness to the tactic (few supporters were genuinely fooled or put off by the action), and a quick repudiation from the Workers’ Party limited its effect, the real damage came from the rumours that were generated, however unsubstantiated. Therein lies the power of its

objective - disinformation. What followed, with Boal’s reaction, was a strategy that would perhaps be closer to the type of action that a commercial opinion-polling company that was contracted by a political organisation, rather than a theatre practitioner, would take. In Brazil, commercial opinion-polling firms refer to themselves as “research institutes” thus endowing themselves, through that invoked symbol, with a level of credibility that they hope will place them and their resultant claims above questioning. Boal responded by staging an Invisible Theatre event in Rio de Janeiro:

...we invented an organization, the National Institute for Electoral Research. We had beautiful stationery made up with very professional letterhead, so it looked authoritative. Then we printed some questions in different sized letters. The question we asked was, “Who are you going to vote for?”

His group performed the scene in the city’s open markets and other places where people gathered. Obviously, the main objective of the performance was not to gather data. The assumed reality and character of the research interviewer provided an interesting starting point because of the popularly held and carefully cultivated perceptions that people had about the nature of opinion-polling and commercial research - the perception that individual opinions attain increased significance. The posed question was a clear opening and invitation for participation:

If people said Lula, we said good. But if people said they were going to vote for Collor, we’d say, “Oh, that’s nice. We’re from the National Institute for Electoral Research and we’d like to know your motivation. We’re doing a scientific research.” When they heard the word scientific, they became very serious. And then we asked, “Why are you going to vote for the same candidate who is backed by Roberto Marinho and by the multinationals?”

Marinho, as owner of the largest media organisation in Brazil (at the time, the fourth largest in the world behind the three network giants of the USA), is

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
something of an archetype of power and control amongst Brazilians today. Quoted as saying “Yes, I use this power, but I always do so patriotically, trying to correct things, looking for the best paths for the country and its states. We would like to have the power to fix everything that doesn’t work in Brazil. We dedicate all our power to this.” Brazilians are well aware of many examples of his use and abuse of this power. Everyday about 80 million of them watch his evening news programs and his television channels. He had publicly declared his full support of Collor. What the “researcher’s” question implied would have been clear to all but the most naive:

...most of us would go away, but we would leave some of our people in the crowd, those we call the “warmer-uppers” in Invisible Theatre. One would say, “I was going to vote for Collor. But I think they are right. I’m not going to vote for him any more.” And other people would say, “Yes, I thought I should vote for him but I’m not, I’m going to vote for Lula.” ...We are sure that we got votes for Lula that way because we had immediate proof of their changed opinion.

Lula and the Workers’ Party lost that particular election, for there were many tactics and practices that led to that result, regardless of widespread support. This was neither the first nor the last time that Boal and his theatre had jumped into Brazil’s political mêlée. Boal’s involvement in the political arena has always been a part of his theatre work. The Theatre of the Oppressed participates in the larger forum of artistic practice that looks at artistic phenomena as instruments of human expression. The questions of morality and ethics take into account not only that which the work addresses but also the manner in which it is addressed. In Invisible Theatre, the participant and the observer are offered choices to act in response to a posed question, in the form of an action or event. The issue of the perceptor’s awareness of the offer being made as a theatrical event seems to complicate the nature of the offer itself. Regardless of how many parallels can be drawn

50 Ibid.
between Invisible Theatre and common practices of media and government, the morality of all such practices is fair game for critics from all areas of interest. Media and government would share Boal’s opinion that:

The person is potential. Each human being is infinitely rich, full of psychological and intellectual possibilities. One may consider these possibilities good or bad. Everyone is potentially capable of performing all the actions, feeling all the emotions, and enjoying all the pleasures a person is able to do, without any moral connotations.53

Nevertheless, the subsequent questions of the potential effect of art upon its environment and how that is achieved will continue to arise. The preceding examples demonstrate the range of functions and objectives that such techniques can be made to serve. Practitioners of the arts must consider the wisdom of accepting this agency without at least some regard for the direction in which their work affects their environment. As an artistic practice, the challenges that Invisible Theatre presents to the practitioner is as formidable as the inherent power of the form itself.

Boal relates an instance of Invisible Theatre that was done at an urban railway station that was notorious for its high incidence of sexual harassments and assaults on women. An actor, a woman, played a passenger waiting for a train one evening. The woman playing the part had been herself severely harassed at the same station. A group of observers from the workshop group that created the performance were planted in nearby locations as a security measure. Sure enough and without much delay, a man arrived and started to harass the woman. During the workshop preparation, this woman and the workshop group had worked on the situation in great detail, experimenting with a range of options available to any woman in this situation. Encouraged by the practice of possible courses of action and, certainly, the presence of nearby support, she played out the scene. With a combination of counterforce

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and strategy she was able to deter and frighten away the potential attacker.\textsuperscript{54} This is, arguably, Invisible Theatre at its best and most effective.

**Critique of a Difficult Example**

Invisible Theatre takes performance and the perception of it to a position prior to the constructs of ‘fiction’ and ‘reality’. When a performer in an Invisible Theatre piece crosses a street, to a viewer they are not performing the action, the viewer would see (if they see it at all) someone walking across the street. Similarly, a ritual performer who is possessed by the spirit of an animal is not performing the animal spirit, they become the animal spirit. Ritual makes a claim of being that which it represents.\textsuperscript{55} So it is, in the area of artistic practice outside the dichotomy of fiction and reality. At one time, when myths and stories were told, before the notion of fiction, there was no question that what was being related was a telling of a reality. Invisible Theatre relocates the viewer into that state of unpreparedness for and innocence of fiction. When it is done effectively. Among other things, the notion of fiction is a defence mechanism that we employ and rely upon to prevent our acceptance and absorption of what we would consider ‘untruths’ - not of our reality. Invisible Theatre sneaks up on us and juxtaposes a created reality upon our actual reality. This violation of the viewer’s ‘right to reality’ will inevitably cause the viewer to question the motivation behind the ‘violation’, should the viewer realise the nature of the reality they had witnessed. It is important then that the practice of Invisible Theatre be prepared to defend itself and its avowed purpose. This, one can posit, is an integral and inherent part of the practice of Invisible Theatre.

\textsuperscript{54} Author - workshop notes, Adelaide 1993.
\textsuperscript{55} D. Young 1991, Origins of the Sacred: The Ecstasies of Love and War, p. 94.
An Invisible Theatre project was performed in December 1991 at a shopping mall in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The theme selected by the performers was espionage and “popular culture” perspectives on the character of the spy. The group drew upon these popular notions in order to represent them at a shopping centre unannounced. The project and the performance was documented by Jonathan M. Gray. It must be pointed out that because of the nature of the performances of Invisible Theatre, it has only been through essays and documentations such as the work by Gray that the practice can be critiqued, evaluated, and so developed. He describes that he was “one of 11 special agents who infiltrated Cortana Shopping Mall in Baton Rouge.” The group set out, within a 45 minute performance, “to covertly inhabit a public space for the purpose of appropriating and acting out the popular codes of espionage thrillers.” Observing that although “Invisible Theatre seeks to expose and challenge any mystified and socialized form of oppression, with Boal’s key examples being about one form - economic disparity,” the group felt drawn to other areas of exploration. The performers decided that “rather than confront a current social issue or an overt source of economic disparity, we chose to turn the methods of Invisible Theatre to the arena of popular culture and its consumer audience.” They reasoned that they wished “to explore Boal’s Invisible Theatre as a tool for examining and exposing forces of oppression in the discursive construction of popular culture.” The performance consisted of a partially orchestrated and choreographed series of exchanges of briefcases and other objects in a style that “parodies the traditional exchange of top secret documents in a public space by using choreography in the style of a Busby Berkeley review or synchronized swimming.” The performance culminates in a group exit wherein a “busted” agent was escorted to a waiting vehicle.

Although Gray makes a claim that the performance “did not announce itself as a performance: our spy activities were not coded as a performance” and that “this performance not only sought to remain invisible as theatre but also invisible as activity” this position seems to have been seriously undermined and compromised by a number of stylistic choices that were made for the performance. He admits that the group’s “behaviour was overtly secretive and cued similar responses in [their] audience” and that their “performance was anything but unnoticed.” He points out that performing a spy thriller necessarily calls for acts featuring the hidden through performance choices that paradoxically draw attention to it. He draws a comparison with labelling something ‘top secret’, a practice which “at once attempts to maintain secrecy while drawing attention to the fact that a secret is present.” The central component of ‘invisibility’ for Invisible Theatre does not seem to be achievable, it has been compromised. “Many of our performance choices served just such a function, signalling that something was going on but not revealing exactly what that something was.” They sought this effect by “choosing broad character types rather than performing characters more appropriate to the social space” and opting to use them as “stereotypes drawn from popular culture for both its actions and its characters, while”, he acknowledges, “Boal’s Invisible Theatre positions actors in roles and actions appropriate to the chosen social setting.” They chose to do this because they wanted “to see what would happen when stereotypical figures and activities glamorized in popular tales came to life in the very marketplace that encourages the consumption of the commodities,” in the shopping centre where so many sales rely on the glamorization of its products. Eventually it became apparent to some observers that the event was a performance, including the shopping centre’s security team who were content to watch rather than intervene. Gray reports that one viewer who watched a group of performers for a period of time spoke to one of them who seemed to be a bystander to discern what was happening and then
“quickly figured out that the actor was involved (we all, after all, were wearing earphones and cassette players) and persuaded the actor to confess that this was a kind of performance,” and then happily continued to watch as a spectator once the suspicion was confirmed. By this point, the performance cannot be considered Invisible Theatre, as it’s obviously not invisible, that is, it was apparent to observers that what they were observing was a performance, this realisation being cued by the performance itself. This was one of the few instances of communication between performers and observers, Gray reports that “there was not much opportunity for actor-audience interaction.” “In no case,” he observes, “was any actor stopped or questioned by a curious witness.” This, again, makes this example very difficult to think of as Invisible Theatre, where the involvement of observers is a primary objective of the event. This performance seems not to have much to distinguish it from most street theatre performances that reasonably sophisticated urban dwellers would encounter and be spectators of. Once the line of actor-audience is discovered and established then the formalities are well known and adhered to by any well-trained law-abiding audience member. Although Gray maintains that the performance group “left without revealing [their] activities as a performance”\textsuperscript{57} it doesn’t seem enough that the performance is unannounced for it to successfully operate as Invisible Theatre can. If it is displaying signs of being a performance then it cannot create the same effect, it is visible.

Another difficulty with this performance and, arguably, a common tendency in performances of Invisible Theatre amongst individuals and groups, is the apparent presence of the “dare” element - the human tendency to create and undergo experiences for the excitement that the experience appears to offer. It is essential, by all means, to devise contingency plans for various possibilities but it is disturbing when logistical choices are made that

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
increase the already substantial potential for volatility that performers face and the public exposed to. This is the implication when Gray writes:

When we set out to perform in the mall, we thought it likely that our drama of exchanges would attract serious attention from some source of authority; Cortana Mall had been the site of a bomb threat as well as a major drug-related arrest the month before our performance. ...It was somewhat disappointing to realize that such precautions were not necessary. ...We performed activities that we have been socialized to believe are dangerous. ...Thus, while playing “James Bond” may seem a somewhat dangerous enactment of a rather puerile fantasy, it is ultimately a complicated act of empowerment.58

Many instances of Invisible Theatre generate moments of empowerment for those that perform and participate in it. This is where Theatre of the Oppressed well and truly crosses the borders of theatre into therapy. That this therapeutic effect could be achieved by the practice of Invisible Theatre does not make it any easier to defend the practice itself, as it could be easily pointed out, there are more appropriate and less impositional Theatre of the Oppressed techniques that can facilitate that type of empowerment.

Gray further defends the performance by claiming that their work “took those espionage commodities back to their site of exchange, transforming the producer’s space into our own. In so doing, we challenged that space with the very activities its commodities glamorize... our activities challenged producer/consumer relationship.” He counters criticisms that “by acting out recognizable signifiers of the genre,” symbols that were common knowledge, “we were promoting and maintaining the culture text’s systems of oppression”. He reflects that “by applying the political agenda of Boal’s poetics to a popular culture context, we hoped to challenge and expose some of the oppressive functions of commodity consumption.” An important measure, of course, are the qualities of perception produced amongst the observers of the event. Gray relates that performance triggered some potent cultural symbols. “Interpretations of the witnessed activity ranged from
‘creative shoplifting’ to ‘mafia activity’.” The disparity between the intention and the reception is further reflected in the subjective assessments of the experience and its effects as offered by Gray when he comments that the performance “demonstrates an experiment in Invisible Theatre that is political for the performers.” In its own way, the experience would have been an empowering one. The symbols evoked were powerful ones. “Admittedly, the political ramifications for the audience in this performance are less clear.”

Another lesson that this group derived from the experience is worthy of note:

Invisible Theatre usually involve a protagonist and a supporting cast of agitators who provoke non-actor participation. Our departure from this protagonist / supporting cast format is probably the strongest reason for the lack of non-actor participation in our venture.59

Given the demonstrable power of Invisible Theatre, it would never be too difficult to find justifications, perhaps, for any performance that might be brought to a public, as long as the interest that is being served is recognised by its performers and responsibility is accepted by them. Is it really as simple as that? What this section is coming to in conclusion is that there is a necessity, in accepting the power of the form, to consider Invisible Theatre not merely as a tool but perhaps also as a weapon, or at the very least, a powerful tool. Therefore, one that requires careful deliberation and clarity of intention if and when it comes to be used. It is indeed debatable whether artistic practice could or should possess some form of ethics, or boundaries beyond which moral considerations take on greater imperatives and considerations. But the conscious use of a weapon or tool requires some awareness of when and where that instrument is likely to cause unwanted or undesirable damage. The purpose of the instrument is to facilitate changes in the material. The user of the instrument, or even the one who is used by the instrument, is bound to be responsible for the changes that are brought upon the material and the environment, regardless of intention.

58 Ibid.
In a belligerent context, similar use of symbols can demonstrate the range of the power process of which Invisible Theatre partakes. In warfare, one of the most important components of strategy is the element of deception. The symbols utilised are the most basic ones, the ones that are closest to the target. As with Invisible Theatre, the process of deception sets out to be hidden. Eco writes of the tendency of symbolic realms to develop their own systems of truths. “A fictional text has an ontology of its own that must be respected.” In the practice of deception, this observation takes on a rather serious meaning. A compromised deception process in warfare can be a most unhealthy experience.

**Lansdale's Simple Deceptions**

One of the first psywar operations that Lansdale had participated in was with the Philippine Army’s Colonel Napoleon Valeriano and the 7th Battalion Combat Team (BCT) in 1951. A company of volunteers was formed from the BCT and trained to pose as insurgents during the Huk uprisings. The men of Charlie Company 7th BCT were trained to live and operate as a Huk squadron in enemy-controlled areas. The company lived in jungle camps, went around barefoot, ate with their fingers out of community bowls, let their hair and beards grow, dressed as the Huks would, learnt the vocabulary of dialectic materialism, and sang the songs that the Huk fighters sang. They adopted and mimicked the culture of the Huk fighter. They operated mostly effectively, but there were a number of occasions and incidents that brought the technique itself into ill-repute among the military hierarchy. On one occasion a neighbouring BCT mistook them for real Huks and badly mauled them. Later on, the Huks retaliated by fielding one of their own units disguised as 7th BCT men. This Huk unit eventually encountered Charlie Company in Huk disguise. The two groups mistook each other for

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59  Ibid.
60  Eco 1990, p. 72.
their ‘true’ comrades, initially greeting each other wholeheartedly before breaking into a violent scramble when both sides realised what was happening and fled from each other. Lansdale recalls that “the confusion of identities had made the encounter too unnatural for the combatants.” Charlie Company 7th BCT was disbanded soon after these incidents and its men reassigned to more conventional missions. Had this not been a description of groups of men killing each other, it would have been a far more amusing tale. Perhaps what it best demonstrates is that symbolic power of the presumed identity is most certainly a double-edged sword that must be handled with much respect and thought. Obviously, the strategy itself was not abandoned as it was realised that it must either be used sparingly to ensure that the presumed identities do not outlast their effective shelf-life in instances where it is necessary to act in contradiction to the presumed identity (as in opening fire upon presumed comrades), or be used as part of a longer term strategy where the necessity to act in contradiction to the presumed identity is avoided (as in deep cover operations). Although utterly simple in principle, the technique possesses great symbolic power and immense capacity for cultivating chaos and distrust within its target group. Refinements in the technique would in later years result in inestimable damage being inflicted upon many organisations that were targeted with it. Arguably, the greatest damage it inflicts upon any group is the erosion of interpersonal trust that organisations need in order to function effectively, as suspicion and paranoia eventually paralyse the decision-making and action-taking mechanisms of a group. Symbolically, the power of this technique lies in its ability to attack and neutralise the power of trust. The technique attacks the interpersonal bonds that hold groups together, sets out to dissolve the symbols of solidarity - the sense of group identity, and isolates individuals from others by eventually rendering alliances impossible.

61 Lansdale 1972, p. 88.
Chapter 4

A DOCUMENTARY
Como Querem Beber Agua

The following is a text transcript of a documentary - the video component of this thesis, entitled “Como Querem Beber Agua: Augusto Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro”, that was made by the author as a result of a research and documentation project in the second half of 1994. At that time, Boal was halfway into his term of office as a Vereador of the city of Rio de Janeiro. In addition, at that time Boal and his collaborators were campaigning for the Workers’ Party of Brazil during the presidential election campaign of that year. The documentary includes interviews with Boal and two of his collaborators, Claudete Felix and Liko Turle. The documentary was produced in association with the Centre for Innovation in the Arts at Queensland University of Technology, and with the support of the Australia Council for the Arts.

V/O
Rio de Janeiro: home of carnivale, cachaça and cheap cocaine; a mecca for many who seek sun, sex and samba, or at least that is what the majority of tourists seem to be there for.

But for those who make their life here, there is a constant feeling of flux, of change just about to happen; loaded with both hope and trepidation. The days are long, the crime rate is astronomical, and poverty sits on a hillside overlooking affluence.

In July 1994, one more in a series of changes in currency brought about apparent economic stability, compared to the previous decade of wildly galloping inflation. With the Real, the new currency, Brazil had come of age. This was what the conservative government wanted the population to believe. National elections were just around the corner.

Two years earlier, in municipal elections, a man who up until then had little time for Brazilian political establishment, ran for a seat in the Legislative Chamber of the city. In his 30 seconds of free television time (which all
candidates were given) he advised voters that he didn’t care if they voted for him, but when they do vote they should cast it in favour of the Workers’ Party because, he said, they are good people.

Needless to say, he was elected; possibly because he was the only candidate not to have begged, bribed, cajoled or threatened the electorate to vote for him. He became an elected Legislator, a Vereador of the Municipal Chamber of Rio de Janeiro. This man was also an established man of the theatre. His name is Augusto Boal.

**POLITICS**

*Boal:* I have always done politics, not like I’m doing now, not as a Legislator. That is a first time in my life. But always I had been politically active. What I can abandon, if I get too tired; because the work here is very hard. Because you have to deal with some colleagues, that we have here, that are horrible people. That are horrible! Because who are they, who are we? We have been elected by the population, and the population is not homogenous. We cannot say “the people of Rio de Janeiro”. The people of Rio de Janeiro are very much different from one another.

And also we have here anything. We have here, people like myself; who am what I am. I don’t know what kind, like myself! You have people, like people that belonged to the death squads; and they are here as Legislators too. People with the traffic of narcotics, that are linked with narcotics; and they are represented here, they
are also Legislators here. People with the illegal gambling; we know about that, we know, we see it. And so the daily confrontation with this kind of people, sometimes it’s amusing, sometimes it’s curious - sometimes. But most of the time it’s very hard to deal with them.

The monstrosity of the actions of some of the people here are so terrible. The corruption here is so terrible.

And to live with this is very hard. On the other side, I can have here my group. I can never forget that it’s the first time that, not only, a man of the theatre enters the Legislative power, but I enter with my whole company. It’s the first time that a theatrical company takes the power. It’s a small power, but it is power. And so it’s a very important experience, to have here a group of theatre.

Claudete Felix: Boal had an idea. In 1991 he said this: “I have an idea. The idea’s a bit crazy, what do
you think? I want to be Vereador.” A Vereador for the PT!

Claudete Felix

So then we thought and thought; and created a theatrical plan in order to do his campaign. So we started to mobilise, to move many people - who liked the theatre, who liked Boal, people who had made contact with us about our work. So we were able to get many people involved. We managed to do some good promotions of the work of Boal.

V/O

In 1985, the government of then president Jose Sarney implemented the Cruzado Plan, which replaced the old currency, the Cruzeiro, with the Cruzado. Over the next ten years, Brazilians would learn to spend the Cruzado; then the Cruzado Novo; then go back to the Cruzeiro; until that became the Cruzeiro Real. So by the time the Real Plan had come along, to give them the latest kind of money to spend - the Real - they could not blamed for questioning the wisdoms behind such economic plans. Few were expecting any miracles; though hopes were a different matter. The previous decade had gotten Brazilians accustomed to the idea of annual inflation rates that hover around 2000 percent, on a good year. So much so that it became unfashionable to measure inflation rates in anything but monthly figures. Whilst calculating yearly figures became a favourite pastime of economists and journalists who didn’t have to go shopping or live in Brazil.

The CTO, the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro, perform a piece that deals with some of the questions and
confusions that surrounds the new currency. While the old currency is being phased out, it still circulates as legal tender during the transition period; 2750 Cruzeiro Reals is equivalent to 1 Real. After paying a thousand of the old money for an ice cream, now you only pay 45 centavos. The impact of appearing to spend thousands less on purchases than before might lead some to believe they are getting a bargain; until you make the calculations and find that the changing prices represent an effective increase overnight of around 30 percent on most day-to-day items. And so the accompanying promise that inflation will soon hit zero as a result of the plan offers little comfort. This is the material out of which theatre is made, for Boal and his group.

The Real Plan was devised by the man who was now running for the presidency of Brazil, gaining ground against the candidate of Boal’s party - the Workers’ Party. Boal’s theatre cannot be described as sitting on the political fence. It is a theatre that is unashamedly partisan.

**Boal:** Politics is a form of theatre, not only in the vulgar sense. Sometimes here in this House, sometimes the other Vereadores, like myself, they speak in a way and make gestures and their voices change completely. And sometimes some people say, oh they are making theatre! And then I correct them. I say they are making bad theatre. That’s not theatre, that’s bad theatre. In this sense, of course politics is theatre; but also in the sense that as theatre shows a reality, and the structure of this reality. In politics, what we try is to change this structure. We have to do our job as politicians; it has a lot to do with changing the structure of our society. And theatre reveals the structure of our society. We try to change it. And theatre most of the time shows it. And what I’m trying to do with Legislative Theatre is to do a theatre which is political; theatre as politics. We try to change society, not by the usual means of politicians which is only by talking, but by acting.
What we do in the Theatre of the Oppressed is not to offer alternatives, but to ask for alternatives; and allow the spectator to become actor. Because this change, spectator-actor and actor-spectator, I believe is what makes us more capable of creation, of being creative.

V/O
Campaigning for the Workers’ Party, Boal and his group perform in the streets and squares, in and around the city of Rio. The pieces they perform make humorous situations out of the blunders and audacities of those who hold power in Brazil. Comedy and catchy tunes decorate the observations and examinations of the forces that influence daily life. Recent events and incidents that befall prominent figures on electronic media are the subject matter of “Radio Brasil” - another piece in the repertoire of the CTO - a satire of a radio talk show. The tunes and the incidents are familiar to the audiences that see it. Satire requires recognition of the situation being referred to. But more than that, it requires a personal experience, albeit indirect, and opinion of that given situation.

THEATRE

Boal: If I’m in the situation and I look at the other, and I don’t look at myself, I do instinctively what I have to do - what I want to do. But if I go away from myself and I look at myself, I am myself looking at myself. I am dual, I am two and not only one; and then I know where I am. I see myself in the situation. I’m not in the situation seeing the other, but I see myself
in the situation. I see the situation and I see the other.

Theatre is a way of showing our lives, showing our reality; because it shows something that is our reality. But out of that reality, the normal day reality, we create a new reality.

Fiction is a reality. Fiction does not exist. Everything is real. But we call fiction a real reality that we create; which is not the same as we have here. We create another one.

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Street kids

V/O
The streets, parks and squares of the centre of the city of Rio de Janeiro is home to a large number of children who have no other home. Many have been victims of violent family members. Many are lured by the possibility of escape from poverty and quick money by begging, prostitution and petty theft. Many resort to the cheapest kinds of mind-numbing substances available, glue is a favourite. Many have known little more than the culture of violence and exploitation that fills their world. There is very little in the way of safety nets for the young and the lost in Rio. Many wish that the children of the streets - the problem - would go away. Some will do different things to make them go away.

One Sunday night in July in 1993, a group of children of the streets are gathered outside an 18th century cathedral in the heart of the city of Rio. A group of police officers pass them, and open fire on the children. They kill seven and injure many more.

The massacre sparked disgust and horror worldwide. Little is heard of the individual deaths that occur much more frequently in less visible circumstances at the hands of the death squads. Four police officers, including one lieutenant have been charged with the killings and await their trial. But media reports indicate that many more in the police force are willing to take commissions from owners of local businesses to ensure discreet and regular deaths of children of the streets.
Exactly one year later, a rally has been called at the scene of the massacre, the old church of Candelária, to commemorate the deaths of the children.

The CTO is there to perform a simple and powerful theatre piece that was first created and performed by a group of children of the streets that had worked with the CTO, not long after the killings of the year before.

The performance, like the rally, is an act of remembrance.

Boal: For me the theatre is the art of looking at oneself. This means that if I can look at myself, I know where I am in the situation and where can I be. I can program the future. I can find alternatives. So it’s not the theatre only looking at ourselves; but this is the basis.

Without looking at ourselves we would not be capable of creating culture. We would have habits. We would have some techniques of doing a nest, of singing, of making a bridge; but not inventing new forms. And I believe that we are able to have culture. Culture is not what we do, it’s the way that we do it. Eating is not culture. It’s instinctive that we eat. But the way of eating is cultural. And we eat with the hands, we eat with a fork and a knife and spoon, at what time of the day we eat. Eating is a biological action. But how to eat is a cultural action.

And we are capable of having culture because we are capable of looking at ourselves. Which means to be spectators, of ourselves as actors. And so we are actor and spectator at the same time. This only happens with human beings, it does not happen with animals.
V/O
But the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed, by necessity, involves more than the act of merely looking at oneself, or a representation thereof. The process of empowerment demands that those who are made passive by the conventions of the form, in conventional theatre this means the spectator, be given the choice to participate in the action, as actors do. In Theatre of the Oppressed the spectator becomes the spectator. For this, the wall comes down. The fourth wall is not so much done without as given an entranceway by which those from the other side may step through. This is the essence of a form of Theatre of the Oppressed known as Forum Theatre.

Boal: To abolish the fourth wall is important to allow the transit, the transitivity - between the scene where the fiction takes place and the audience, where the audience is; these two realities. We have to be transitive. And in my opinion, that is the only way in which the spectator really becomes dynamised.

You can be dynamised also by what the actors say on stage. But you are even more dynamised when you go on stage. Because by doing so what you do is a transgression. To penetrate into the stage is a transgression.

And then it works symbolically to tell the spectator, “I am able to do this here”. The phrase I-am-able-to-do-this-here includes I-am-able-to-do-this. OK here, but if I am able to do this here, I am perhaps able to do this somewhere else.

And this fact that the spectator enters into the scene is a symbolic transgression; symbolic of all
the transgressions. It is a transgression in itself and is a symbolic transgression of all the other transgressions he has to make. Because, of course, if the oppressed is going to fight not to be oppressed, inevitably he is going to make some sort of transgression. Because if he does not, he’s going to be oppressed all of the time.

CTO Workshop Forum

SOLUTIONS

It is difficult for us to show the solutions. But if we try altogether to find alternatives, it’s much easier than if I try myself, alone.

Boal

When I write a play, if I write a play about myself, for instance, like I did with a play that I wrote about my exile - I was in exile for fifteen years. Part of this time I was in Buenos Aires in Argentina; then I went to Lisbon in Portugal; then I went to Paris in France. And I spent, living outside of my country, fifteen years. Now I’m still travelling all over the world, but I am mostly based here. And I wrote a play about that; to show what has happened to me. I want to show me as a witness of what has happened to me. I want to witness about my time.

So it’s my experience that counts. It’s my play about my own life. About my friends, about my family, about my country, about the country where I went; but seen from my point of view. So I don’t want anyone to say “stop!” and replace me and show alternatives for my past.
But if I’m thinking about the future, I want people to tell me what should I do; not what should I have done, but what can I do now. What can I do now? That’s what I’m concerned about. The Theatre of the Oppressed is not the theatre - the witness - of the past. It is the invention of the future.

When we think about the past, we can be witness of the past; and say, I saw this in the past. But when we try together to build a future, we have to ask the questions even if we don’t have the good answers.

QUESTIONS

To ask the good questions is better than to have the good answer. Because I had the good answer. What should be Legislative Theatre? I had a very good answer. But in the practice, it’s not the way I wanted. It’s not possible. But it does not mean it’s not possible at all. It’s possible and people come and tell me. For example, they’ll say, oh we have to go to the slums and found popular centres of culture in all of the slums here. Yes that’s nice, I still want to do that. In some it’s possible. In others it has been possible in the past and it’s not possible now. And in others we could not even dare to do that; because slums they are controlled by the gangs of narco-trafficantes. And then in some we could not even get into - like Morro da Saudade.

We had one of the best groups that we had founded, that we had developed, was in Morro da Saudade. And then one day they came to us and they said: please don’t come again here because now it’s dangerous, before we had no traffic and now we have - so don’t come. We lost contact with them.

So one thing is to imagine the future; the other thing is to build it. And to build it, sometimes we know how to; sometimes we learn in the process of questioning - of asking.
Claudete Felix: If you're working with the communities, you have to discuss their themes. I do the work in Morro de Saudade, with women and children in Morro de Saudade. When they do a play, for the first time, that talks about Morro de Saudade, I think for them it is very important; very important to shed light through theatre and to show in the work, to show the place where they live. Because no one goes to Morro de Saudade, because it’s a slum.

To show their Morro de Saudade, and show to people how they live their lives there. So you transform your life, your day to day life, your reality, in a piece of theatre. And show to people, to discuss with people, how it is.

How it is to live in a place that has a lot of problems. I think for these people it is fundamental also, when you discover your potential to struggle. That you are able to discover the ability to struggle, within you; to discover the human body; to discover the characters. These works that we do with the techniques, with the exercises and games of Theatre of the Oppressed is, I think, a powerful force for people. The groups that we have are groups that have a lot of force; a lot of motivation to continue working - because it’s so good. It’s good for the individual, for the person, and for the collective. With these various forms, you discuss and discover interesting things - about yourself, about other people. I love doing Theatre of the Oppressed.

TELEVISION

V/O
In an age where electronic and print communications are the forms that we are most exposed to, it would be natural to ask the question - what chance does one theatre group anywhere in the world have of affecting peoples’ lives? Or for that matter, what place is there for theatre in a world where rituals, narratives, and experiences can be derived and communicated via channels of mass dissemination? When 3D technology finally allows simulated performance environments to enter the consumer's own home, how can theatre survive?
As Boal’s group entered the 1994 presidential campaign on behalf of the Workers’ Party, they faced the prospect of battling opinions and beliefs manufactured by the fourth largest electronic media organisation in the world - behind the three television giants of the United States. Although Boal and his group were by no means alone, their efforts stood against gigantic resources.

Boal: All television, all the newspapers here in Brazil, they are owned by a few people; and a few people that belong to the same economical, political and ideological family; that come from the corruption, from all that we have had up to now. But they have an extraordinary power. One program on the television can be seen by 50, 60, 70 million people at the same time. If the television favours one candidate against the other one, evidently this is a manipulation.

And so it’s been difficult to fight against such a powerful means of communication. One person on the television, at the same time speaks to 50 million people, to 70 million people. And Lula and the Workers’ Party, the caravan of citizenship, had to go all over Brazil. He travelled through 40 thousand kilometres all over Brazil, all across. But everytime he went to a place he’d find a thousand people, 10 thousand people. The most that we got, once, was a hundred thousand people in São Paulo, in a big meeting, political meeting in São Paulo. One hundred thousand, that was the most that we could have. And television, it’s not thousands, it’s millions of people. The newspapers also are also owned by the right winged people. And so
it’s very difficult to fight against them but that’s what we are doing. It’s David against Goliath. We cannot ignore them. And so that’s why we think so much about creating popular centres of culture. Because before ‘64, when we had the first coup d’état here, we had thousands and thousands of popular centres of culture all over Brazil. And the first law of the dictatorship was to extinguish the centres of culture, popular centres of culture. Because they were places in which people got together to discuss, to dialogue, to teach one another. That’s where Paulo Freire started his methods; and myself I started many ideas that later were developed into the Theatre of the Oppressed methods.

**CTO Workshop Discussions**

In each centre of culture sometimes someone who knew philosophy of Hegel would come and teach the philosophy of Hegel. And if someone knew how to do foods - feijoada, our Brazilian national food - came and made feijoada.

Another one who knew how to teach poetry; another one knew how to teach, how to do whatever, to do a house; then, it was a place in which he who knew more would teach the other ones, and learn from the other ones what the other ones knew more than himself.

This is an alternative for television and it is transitive. Television is intransitive. It’s from the screen to the spectator. Like the usual theatre is intransitive. We want transitive forms which will give and take.
As the theatre company in the Legislative Chamber, Boal and his group found their stage to be the city of Rio de Janeiro itself. This marriage, the public declaration of union, between theatrical and legislative activity would foster an offspring that would naturally take its name from both parents. This is Legislative Theatre.

As a Legislator, Boal’s job is to make and amend the laws that govern the city of Rio.

And so Legislative Theatre serves as a tool for consulting the electorate as well as a tool for lobbying fellow Legislators in the Chamber. Boal uses theatre as a way of involving and informing his electorate on the process of law-making.

Claudete Felix: The idea of theatre has become more simple in my mind. It has become easier. Theatre is something close to any person. When we started the CTO, we went to unions, to agencies, to offer our work. It was something that was distant - the CTO and the other places where we spoke of theatre, discussed theatre. And nowadays, people come to us, wanting to make theatre like wanting to drink water. They want theatre for their work, to develop their ideas, to develop their people. So I think the necessity for theatre becomes more clear for these people. Because for us, for me, it has become more easy to recognise that. Theatre is so close to any person, any community. So it’s more easy for people to do theatre.

At the Municipal Chamber we used the same plan. We continued to work with the unions, continued to work in the community. Our service opened so we could help more people.

People wanted to discuss through theatrical work. We were open to anyone who came here; and those that we invited. We had groups in the slums, we had groups of unionists, we had groups of elderly people, we had groups of people with disabilities, children of the streets. We expanded our contacts, in order to be
able to go out there in the communities; and through the theatre work, to discuss the problems in that community.

Câmara

To discuss what was good, what could be made better through the laws. We brought back the discussions to our office. Then we would go and formulate the laws into official form for amendments, and also create new laws.

Claudete

I think the idea of Theatre of the Oppressed in the Municipal Chambers here, each time as more people learn about it; each time it covers more themes; each time covers more issues in the discussion; each time more people from different places are going to know and talk about Theatre of the Oppressed - and are going to learn about and discuss the laws that they can create. People realise that they are able to “create a law?” Discuss a law, and consider that these laws exist. “I didn’t know that these laws existed!” Exist for whom?

BLACkS

V/O
Brazilian government statistics claim that 55 percent of the country’s population are of Caucasian-European origin, in another word white. This is totally believable only if you never actually see the place or its people. The lie seems to want to maintain the same beliefs that made the original Portuguese colonisers one of the largest importers of Africans for slavery, and drove massive pseudo-military campaigns to capture Amazon Indians for the same purpose. In Rio, the grandchildren of slaves make their lives among the grandchildren of slave-owners. The tension this creates is hard to describe. But it is evident. The overwhelming majority of street children in Rio are black.

CENUN “O Prega Dor”

A black students’ organisation works with members of the CTO to produce a Forum Theatre piece that focuses on the ingrained expectations and prejudices, from family and society, faced by young blacks as they make their lives.

Liko Turle
Liko Turle: For me this is the first time that I’ve worked in a group with other blacks only; the first time in addressing the racial question; first time touring the universities as a black group talking about the racial question. For all of them this is the first time they have worked with a group of blacks in order to talk about this through the theatre. I think what we this is creating is an internal revolution.

In the coming year, in Brazil it will be 300 years since Zumbi. Zumbi was a black leader, who many years ago, when there was no Brazil, when it was a Portuguese colony, created a republic - a country within Brazil called Palmares. He was one of the kings of that country.

That country lasted, I think, 200 years, approximately. So it’s been 300 years now since the birth of Zumbi, and the black community of Brazil, the black population of Brazil is organising in order to do a lot of activities, in order to reclaim black heroes. Because we don’t have stories of black heroes officially, only Portuguese or whites.

So my grandparents were slaves. So it hasn’t been possible in history to have black heroes, in the history books, no history books. It still doesn’t exist in history. In schools the black part of history is still not talked about, in schools officially.

In theatre, principally in the Theatre of the Oppressed that we are involved in, there exists a possibility for social dialogue to occur. And what happens, the problem in theatre is that we are not able to get the attendance of millions of people. The television has an audience of millions of people; not the theatre.

But I believe it is important to be able to get to people as in one to one. For example, just with our play “O Prega Dor”, we’ve played to roughly around 10 thousand, 15 thousand people. We’ve performed it 30 times, more or less, and always with large crowds. In universities the average crowd is around 400 people, so 30 performances at 400 people, that’s 12 thousand people. So it’s already played to a large number of people.
IN CLOSING

V/O
Perhaps because it takes less in the way of resources to make a piece of theatre, than it does to make a film or television programme, theatre is still viable as a voice for those who seek to speak. Is it simply that? Perhaps it is also to do with the way that the piece of theatre comes into being. The processes, that makes it more than just a stepping stone into film or television. Perhaps it is to do with the necessity to share a space between the performer and the observer; or the possibility that interaction could occur; or the possibility that anything can, and sometimes does, happen - that it happens at that time and at that place, within reach; even if it is only “pretend”.

In the Theatre of the Oppressed, it is all of this and more. It is also about being able to participate, collaborate, make choices and work as part of a group of others who might share a goal. To create theatre, yes; but also to create action, in and out of the world of the theatre - to act.

Boal: We want to have the CTO, the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed of Rio de Janeiro, free to work in association with groups that don’t want to have a political commitment, a party commitment. Because as I am a member of the Workers’ Party, I want to go on doing some work with organisations that don’t want to have a party link.
We want to work with them and we don’t want to work with them and profit by propaganda for the Workers’ Party. We don’t want that.

Sometimes we don’t want to make Party politics. So it’s important to have both things separate ...So it’s very important to have both things at the same time, simultaneously.

And so that’s what we try to do. But we know that if you want to change the whole country it’s an enormous task. But we are developing.

We are developing as a party, we are developing as a mandate here; we have more and more people working with us.

It’s not like a race, that you have to be the first one. It’s a race without a point of arrival. I think that we should think about that we are in a race, yes; but there is not a point of arrival. We’re not going to get there and then the race stops and we see who won. No, we have to keep running. The important thing is to run. It’s not to win the race. Because the race, this race, never ends. So we are running, and we are running faster, and we are going further. And then let’s go on, going further, running faster and doing the best that we can - stronger, more numerous, more people. And that’s what we are doing. It’s not so fast as we would like, but it is as fast as we can make it.

ROLL CREDITS
Chapter 5
In His Own Words

Theatre of the Oppressed as a Dramatic Art

In his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal described what he termed to be the “poetics” of his theatre as opposed to a theory of it. In later writings he elaborated on a set of hypotheses upon which he built the Introspective Techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed. In *Rainbow of Desire* he addressed issues on the nature of the theatrical stage and the experience of the actor upon it, in relation to a therapeutical reading of this experience. In these works he approached the formation of a theory of Theatre of the Oppressed. This theory, however, when examined as a theory of knowledge can, arguably, begin to lose strength. It is fundamentally dependent upon its application for validation. The effectiveness of the symbolic play can only be judged from its effects. In a critique of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Drew Milne described Boal’s position as a theory of action. Boal’s engagement of Aristotle’s *Poetics* was noted by Milne to be problematic particularly in its reliance on a notion of the theatre and context from which Aristotle drew findings, as Boal interpreted them. The validity of the claim of the oppression inherent in Aristotle’s positioning was brought into question and found wanting, centrally in the assessability of the construed connection between Greek tragedy, Aristotle’s poetics and contemporary television drama.1 Boal’s thesis of ‘coercive intent and dynamic’ in Greek tragedy would be difficult to test. Although a study of television soap opera forms may yield some worthwhile results. However, Boal is interested in the stories being told, in the symbols being presented.

This section of the thesis will examine Boal’s words, both written as well as those spoken in interviews, to focus on the significant concepts of Theatre of the Oppressed and their relationships to generally accepted notions of theatre. In this way, I intend to look at what are said to be the foundations of the practice in order to speculate on their significance to theatre thinking and practice.

**What is Theatre?**

The dramatic art has often been described as a phenomenon comprising of three essential elements. Peter Brook refers to an empty space that is taken as the bare stage upon which someone walks across whilst someone else is watching, considering this to be “all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.”² Eric Bentley believes that the theatrical situation - “the distinction between art and life”, can be reduced to a minimum wherein “A impersonates B while C looks on.”³ William Shakespeare wrote of the “purpose of playing” as being “to hold... the mirror up to nature.”⁴ In each of these descriptions, 1) a player 2) performs a function 3) to a watcher.

Boal considers theatre to be, fundamentally, the art of looking at oneself and that this principle is applicable on an individual and social scale. The art form provides a medium in which to symbolically view the actual reality of the observer. “If I can look at myself, I know where I am in the situation and where can I be. I can program the future, I can find alternatives. ...Without looking at ourselves we would not be capable of creating culture, we would have habits.”⁵ In this process of the human observing itself, Boal saw the essence of theatre. But he also adds that “the human being not only ‘makes’ theatre: it ‘is’ theatre. And some human beings, besides being

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² The Empty Space, Peter Brook 1968 (MacGibbon & Kee, London) p. 1.  
³ The Life of the Drama, Eric Bentley 1965 (Methuen, London) p. 150.  
⁵ Boal, interview with author, August 1994: Appendix A, lines 34-41.
theatre, also make theatre.”6 In the multiplicity of meaning inherent in the word ‘theatre’ Boal eventually locates the base of his discourse in the above definition of theatre. He chooses to acknowledge, then move on, from other understandings of theatre such as the physical elements which combine to accomplish the event and the innate theatricality of events themselves both mundane and extraordinary. He opts to be grounded in the “most archaic sense” of theatricality, using an obscure fable - the story of Xua-Xua,7 to illustrate what he believes to be the cardinal element of the experience of theatre. Attempting to access the primeval experiences of early humanity that give us the capacity to see ourselves in the act of seeing, of thinking our emotions, of being moved by our thoughts. “They can see themselves here and imagine themselves there; they can see themselves today and imagine themselves tomorrow.”8 In addition, he favours the definition of theatre used by the 17th century playwright and dramatist Lope de Vega, of theatre as “two human beings, a passion and a platform.”9 Two human beings - the duality is seen as essential because theatre is a study of interpersonal relationships of individuals within society. It does not limit itself to the contemplation of solitary individuals taken in isolation. “Theatre denotes conflict, contradiction, confrontation, defiance. And the dramatic action lies in the variation and movement of this equation, of these opposing forces. Monologues will not be ‘theatre’ unless the antagonist, though absent, is implied; unless her absence is present.”10 Boal uses “platform” in the broadest sense, the stage can exist anywhere, so long as a performance space is distinguishable from a viewing space. The essential difference between de Vega’s definition and that which applies in Theatre of the Oppressed is that while the former describes a theatre that holds a mirror up to nature (as

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7 Boal 1992, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, Preface.
8 Boal 1992, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, p. xxv-xxvi.
Shakespeare suggests), Theatre of the Oppressed is a mirror which its viewer can penetrate in order to modify the image seen.11

Boal believes that the theatrical language is the most essential human language. “Everything that actors do, we do throughout our lives, always and everywhere. Actors talk, move, dress to suit the setting, express ideas, reveal passions - just as we all do in our daily lives. The only difference is that actors are conscious that they are using the language of theatre, and are thus better able to turn it to their advantage, whereas the woman and man in the street do not know that they are speaking theatre.”12 For Boal, the theatrical language is richer than verbal language. The theatrical language includes all possible languages. The function of the performance is connected to its deconstructability and malleability. The performance of a Forum Theatre model has to serve an audience who will endeavour to destroy it, to modify it, and to find other ways of controlling it. The important thing is the use of the theatrical language and not the finished product.13 As a language, theatre would also be subject to the judgements placed on claims to ‘truth’, as in determinations that “theatre and lies are synonymous”. In terms and phrases such as ‘over-dramatising’, ‘making a scene’, ‘playing it up’ - or in French ‘faire du théâtre’ that are used to describe situations where an individual or group is manipulating or exaggerating or distorting truths.14

Boal believes that as theatre is a way of showing our lives, it is also a way of “showing our reality” and the structure of that reality. Because it shows something that is our reality, out of that reality - the normal day reality, we create a new reality15; the reality of symbols. This creates a dichotomous situation in which one reality is contained in another reality. He holds that the distinctions between fiction and reality are always tenuous. He questions the separation between fiction and reality - believing the only

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13 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
fiction to be the word ‘fiction’. Everything is real. “In the Theatre of the Oppressed, we say that the image of reality is a reality as an image, and the whole of the Theatre of the Oppressed stands on that.”\textsuperscript{16} This is not to say that the image of reality can be taken as interchangeable with actual reality. Questions other than artistic ones are faced. “If the spectator knows that the actor is playing a role, it’s fine, but if the spectator does not know that she is dealing with an actor and believes herself to be in the presence of a ‘real person,’ is this correct? Is it ethically right to borrow somebody else’s identity and use it abusively?”\textsuperscript{17}

A crucial step for Boal’s theatre came at the time when he and those he worked with shifted the focus of their theatre-making. “Instead of doing theatre ourselves, we helped spectators do theatre for themselves.” At this point, Boal’s consideration of theatre begins to differentiate from theatre as Brook, Bentley and Shakespeare define it. Rather than presenting a performance, the objective came to be the facilitation of the use of theatrical language by those wishing to speak for themselves. The theatrical language therefore had to speak of what was of concern to those who used it. “That is what the Theatre of the Oppressed is, nothing that happens on stage is alien from what happens in real life.”\textsuperscript{18} For Boal, the power of the artistic image lay in its ability to allow participants to extrapolate themselves from actuality or social reality, into the reality we call fiction or the symbolic reality. Within the theatrical reality the participant can play with the symbolic image and then, after having created ‘theatre’ they can reverse the extrapolation. The participant has an opportunity to “manipulate the aesthetic reality in order to change the social one.”\textsuperscript{19} For Boal the border between fiction and reality must be crossed. Theatre of the Oppressed might begin in the fictional realm of

\textsuperscript{15}Boal, interview with author, August 1994: Appendix A, lines 71-75.
\textsuperscript{16}Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
\textsuperscript{17}Boal 1990, “Invisible Theatre: Liege, Belgium 1978” The Drama Review T127.
\textsuperscript{18}Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
symbols, but it inevitably has to reach back across the frontier into actual reality - into life.20

*Actor, Spectator and Spect-Actor*

Boal believes that theatre essentially exists through the subjectivity of those who practise it, and at the moment when they practise it. “It needs neither stage nor audience; the actor will suffice. With the actor is born the theatre. The actor is the theatre. We are all actors: we are theatre!”21 He allegorises an origin of theatre wherein “actor and spectator coexisted in the same person” and that “the point at which they were separated, when some specialised as actors and others as spectators, marks the birth of the theatrical forms as we know today.”22 Such a reliance on the notion of an ‘ancient history’ of theatre can indeed be problematic, the claim can only stand as a parable rather than fact. Boal uses it as a legitimisation for his belief that ‘spectator’ is an undesirable word, implying one who is less than whole and unable to engage in action - a passive consumer of the image.23 The main distinction that he draws between the human being as ‘actor’ and ‘spectator’ relates to an awareness of actions and roles. “In life and also on stage, the human body moves; we sing, we speak, we have ideas, we have passions. But when we go on stage we are conscious of that.”24 This belief is expressed and elaborated in practice. It is a fundamental principle of Theatre of the Oppressed that the separation between actor and spectator be breached.

There is no spectator in a Theatre of the Oppressed session: there are only active observers. The centre of gravity is in the auditorium rather than on stage. ...The Theatre of the Oppressed has two fundamental principles: 1) To help the spectator become a protagonist of the dramatic action so that they can 2) apply those actions they have practised in the theatre to real life.25

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23 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 155.
24 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
In referring to the “archaic application” of theatre, Boal identifies a key element of Theatre of the Oppressed practice. “All human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!). They are Spect-Actors.” 26 The spectator is the embodiment of the practice’s complete participant. “The poetics of the oppressed focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change - in short trains himself for real action.” Furthermore, he adds that what is important is not that the action is symbolic or fictional, what matters is that it is action. 27 This underpins the determination that the fundamental principle of Theatre of the Oppressed is not just to offer alternatives but to ask for alternatives and to allow the spectator to become the actor. 28

Boal’s refutation of the Aristotelian model of drama stands on tenuous ground when the basis for the argument is examined. The importance of this position is vital in that it connects the notion of an ‘oppressive’ or ‘coercive’ intent to the form of theatre and drama that was ascribed to by Aristotle. Central to Boal’s argument is the belief that when human beings first ‘discovered’ theatre, it was in the form of the dithyrambic song, the wild and free-form singing in the open air of our ancestors; the carnival and the feast. And then the ruling elites took possession of the theatre and placed it within dividing walls. “First, they divided the people, separating actors from spectators: people who act and people who watch - the party is over! Secondly, among the actors, they separated the protagonists from the mass [the chorus]. The coercive indoctrination began!” 29 He believes that this was undertaken in order that the energy of the spectacle, of the symbolic play,

27 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 122.
29 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 119.
may be harnessed and made to reflect and serve the dominant ideology. Boal’s hypothesis rests on the belief that the poetics of Aristotle, as “the poetics of oppression”, produces a form of catharsis which diverts the impetus for action towards a vicarious experience of action. “Dramatic action substitutes for real action.” It is this concern that drives the ‘activist’ orientation of Theatre of the Oppressed. Nevertheless its weakness or elusiveness as a theory is arguably necessary, as with any system which is, principally, an advocacy for action. It is here that the term ‘poetics’ fits conveniently. Whatever theory there is, exists as a justification for action, and is subservient to action. This is perhaps the reason that Theatre of the Oppressed finds an easy functionality in matters of politics and therapeutics. “We usually work on the boundaries of politics, using Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to study specific events.” At other instances, the work borders on the realm of psychology and psychotherapy, but always on the side of theatre.

Behind the polemical stance of Theatre of the Oppressed is the view of theatre as “an ideological representation of images of social life.” Therefore the theatre-maker needs to be aware of the “pedagogical and combative character” of the work. For Boal, all theatre is necessarily political, as all human activity is political. “Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error - and this is a political attitude.” He considers the poetics of the oppressed to be “the poetics of liberation”. In this, the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters to think or to act in their place. “The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theatre is action!” The work of Theatre of the Oppressed sets out to dynamise its audience. “The solution is not to be found in the theatre, but in real life; if in

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30 Ibid., p. ix.
31 Ibid., p. 155.
34 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. ix.
the theatre we dynamize people, we create the habit of looking at all situations as being one possibility among others.” Inherent in this undertaking is the recognition that the system of practice must encourage its spectators to manifest what they want in a democratic way. “I can say whatever I want, but the fellow who is sitting next to me also has the same right.” In addition, there was also the drive to pose the question of control in the theatre-making process. To “transfer to the people the means of production in the theatre so that the people themselves may utilize them.”

Whereas the term ‘the people’ might hold clearer connotations in one socio-cultural context than in another, other terms such as ‘communities’ or ‘interest groups’ are often used in English-speaking situations to indicate those to whom this process is being offered as an instrument. It is in these facilities for action and expression, within the realm of the theatrical experience, that practitioners of Theatre of the Oppressed base the claims of empowerment of individual and group participants. It is in this area of the work that the ‘manifesto’ of Theatre of the Oppressed finds its basis and scope for articulation.

**Action and Knowledge**

As a poetics advocating action, Boal sees Theatre of the Oppressed as emphasising “theatre as a language that must be spoken, not a discourse that must be listened to.” Additionally, he considers theatre to be “a process that must be developed, rather than a finished product that must be consumed.”

The theatrical experience creates a venue wherein the symbolic dramatic action can throw light upon action in actual reality. “The spectacle is a preparation for action.” The dramatic art creates a situation and experience where we can see ourselves in action, in activity; in the act of seeing, in the act

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36 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
38 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 155.
of acting, in the act of feeling, the act of thinking. It also offers an opportunity to imagine variations of our action; to study alternatives. Of course, activity by itself rarely makes for interesting dramatics. Boal goes back to de Vega’s words:

The passion is necessary: theatre, as an art does not have as its object the commonplace and the trivial, the valueless. It attaches itself to actions in which the characters have an investment, situations in which they venture their lives and their feelings, their moral and political choices: their passions! What is a passion? It is a feeling for someone or something, or an idea, that we prize more highly than our own life.

Boal’s metaphor for the origin of theatre considers it to be “the first human invention and also the invention which paves the way for all other inventions and discoveries.” Accordingly, this invention came to the human being with the knowledge “that it can observe itself; when it discovers that, in this act of seeing, it can see itself - see itself in situ: see itself seeing.” By beginning to see itself in the symbols it was creating, the human began to formulate a knowledge of itself and its environment. “Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society.” The knowledge developed is a knowledge of interpersonal dynamics; a developing knowledge of power processes. “Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.” But he is quick to advise that Theatre of the Oppressed is a form of knowledge that cannot be treated as definitive. It is a form of knowledge that is based on the questions that it asks. “What is important here is not to get a solution, but to develop the capacity of trying to find a solution.”

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40 Ibid., p. 16.
43 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
Boal suggests that the concrete nature of the theatrical event necessitates a continual questioning of both form and content, that subordinates even the process itself:

...pure technique does not exist in the same sense that pure mathematics does. Two plus two is four regardless of the question. But theatre does not struggle against curved lines, angles, numbers, or figures; theatre struggles with the unexpected one wishes to know and it struggles with people. And people cannot be added in a pure or abstract manner.44

On the other hand, feeling that the “modern theatre has emphasized originality too much” and that the concerns of artists serve to beckon responsiveness in the form of “a series of basically formal innovations”, he warns that the desire for a rapidly evolving theatre has led to a tendency to discard tradition; “each new conquest in the theatre has meant the loss of all previous gains.”45 He draws a comparison with rules and conventions in a sport such as soccer, observing that the “game would lose all interest if each match were played in accordance to rules made up for that match alone, if fans had to learn during the match the rules governing it.” Knowledge is cumulative and previous knowledge is indispensable.46

In the interest of finding a balance between these poles of practice, Boal sought to develop the Theatre of the Oppressed as “a system of physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and special improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation [theatre], by turning the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions.”47 He emphasises his position that Theatre of the Oppressed techniques were invented to be useful to people, and certainly not with the

45 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 177.
46 Ibid., p. 177.
goal of adapting the people to suit the techniques. “They were made for human beings, not human beings for them.”

Fundamental to Boal’s objection to the Aristotelian concept of theatre is the distinction he sees between the dynamics of ‘empathy’ and ‘sympathy’ that occur in the observer of the drama. ‘Traditional’ drama seeks to evoke empathy - the capacity to participate in another’s feelings or ideas. Boal considers empathy to be a force that does not lead to activation. “Empathy must be understood as the terrible weapon it really is. Empathy is the most dangerous weapon in the entire arsenal of the theatre and related arts (movies and TV).” For Boal, if empathy was the effect of a Theatre of the Oppressed session it would then have to be considered “the Theatre for the Oppressed.” He argues that it would be of greater value to bring about an effect of sympathy, or an affinity between persons wherein whatever affects one similarly affects the other. “Sym-pathy is immediate: We are all speaking about ourselves.” The desired result is that “the individual story of a person will immediately become plural, since one’s oppression is everybody’s oppression.” Sym-pathy implies a dynamic that is grounded in personal experience, it is not reliant upon the actions of the symbolic characters in order to be moved. “I am not touched by somebody else’s emotions. I produce my own. I control my actions. I am the subject.” Similarly the notion of catharsis as a purgation of undesirable human urges receives much censure from Boal. He warns against the forms of catharsis which serve to discourage the viewer of the drama from actions that might be deemed anti-social or a threat to the norms, therefore acting as instruments of oppression. Catharsis itself is not to be rejected. The consideration falls upon the type of catharsis that is provoked. The catharsis should be of the kind which obliterates the barriers to activation - the barriers to growth. This process is

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48 Ibid., p. 188.
49 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 113.
51 Boal 1990, “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An Interview with Augusto Boal” The Drama Review T127.
set in motion in the aestheticised reality of the dramatic form, where it must still employ the dramatic art’s capacity to place experience ‘at one remove’. As individual experience is the starting point of the exploration of any situation in Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal acknowledges that the individual symbols must become symbolic in a social context; this differentiates theatre from psychotherapy.52

In the manner that the dramatic art “holds the mirror up to nature”, in the “distinction between art and life”, can be found the interface of two different worlds placed in contact - the auditorium and the stage; two realities engaged in a process of diffusion and absorption, i.e. osmosis. The process can be communicative as well as manipulative. The problem that Boal found with conventional theatre practice was that the auditorium was deactivated and reduced to contemplation during the performance, as the narrative and the events develop on-stage. “Osmosis moves from the stage to the auditorium in an intransitive manner.”53 What the Theatre of the Oppressed proposes is a furthering of the process of metaxis - “the belonging to both the world of reality and the reality of the image of that reality.” Boal believes that this process can be utilised for the activation of the normally passive participant - “we create images of reality, then train ourselves in the image, so that we go back to our world’s reality better trained.”54 The Theatre of the Oppressed sets out “to make the auditorium-stage dialog entirely transitive: the stage may attempt to transform the auditorium but the auditorium can attempt to change everything.”55

**Theatre of the Oppressed as Therapy**

*ther·a·py* \-pe\ n [NL therapia, fr. Gk therapeia, fr. therapeuein] : therapeutic treatment : as : remedial treatment of bodily disorder.

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54 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
Background

When Boal started working in Europe at the end of the 1970s, it became apparent that the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed was entering new territory, one that was inhabited by more internalised forms of oppression. He found that, in general, the participants that he worked with in, initially, Portugal and France were also oppressed but with some free time to preoccupy themselves with themselves. These preoccupations were concerned with things like solitude, incommunicability and emptiness. “I started working on those themes... Theatre of the Oppressed became much more psychological. I started using techniques linked to psychotherapy.”

When he returned to Brazil in the 1980s he was able to test the techniques he had developed in Europe with less economically-privileged participant groups. Although these groups did not suggest the introspective themes he had encountered in Europe, they were acknowledged after he had suggested them. But the less affluent Brazilian participants were still more concerned with the more apparent “police, money and boss problems”.

Boal rejects too close a comparison with Jacob Moreno’s Theatre of Spontaneity. He admits that “once I did psychodrama as a patient and it didn’t work for me.” However, he very quickly realised the value of further explorations into this aspect of his work. “I want to develop the psychotherapeutic techniques as I want to develop the educational techniques.” Boal believes that the spectatorial experience of confronting one form of reality (which we perceive consciously or unconsciously to be a constructed symbolic one) whilst residing in another form of reality (the one

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56 Boal 1990, “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An Interview with Augusto Boal” The Drama Review T127.
57 Ibid.
we perceive to be our actual reality) inevitably provokes the receptor in one of two ways - either towards disease or health; towards the spectator becoming wise or stupid, better or worse. He believes that a key element in the quality and effect of this experience is the spectator’s ability, or lack thereof, to enter and perhaps alter the reality of the fiction - the symbolic constructed reality. In this sense theatre has the potential to be a therapeutic force.60

Intention

For theatre work to be described as psychotherapeutic often carries an implication that such undertakings would, at best, rest outside aesthetic considerations. In drawing a comparison between psychotherapy and theatre practice, Elsass found an apparent similarity between the work of actors and psychotherapists. Both had an aim of creating new insights or making implicit knowledge explicit for the audience or patients; ‘healing’ and ‘good performance’ imply something created that was not there before. Furthermore, he believes that both processes “may be productive in bringing about either a performance or a healing if the actor or the therapist has an outer vision which he experiences as a kind of truth and meaning.” This ‘outer vision’ is in the realm of the symbolic, it also guides the symbolic work. “Without this, no implicit knowledge will be revealed. ...Without a vision, neither the performance nor the therapy will have an empowering effect on their ‘objects’.”61 Boal takes this thinking even further in advancing a broader denotation of the term ‘actor’, holding the view that “The actor is the theatre. We are all actors: we are theatre!” Adding that although “actor and spectator can be two different people; they can also coincide in the same person.”62 This view of the role of the actor and the spectator touches upon

59 Boal 1990, “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An Interview with Augusto Boal” The Drama Review T127.
what could perhaps be described, in Elsass’ terms, as the “vision” of Theatre of the Oppressed. For Boal, a primary purpose of Theatre of the Oppressed is “to dynamize the audience, ...if in the theatre we dynamize people, we create the habit of looking at all situations as being one possibility among others.” Theatre of the Oppressed seeks to use the art form as a tool for the understanding of social and personal problems, and in the search for their solutions.

In Rainbow of Desire, Boal uses the example of an actor who sets out to perform a classic murder scene to demonstrate a fundamental dynamic of aestheticisation that operates in the psychotherapeutic functioning of Theatre of the Oppressed. “Playing Othello, only a madman - never an actor! - could actually strangle the actress playing Desdemona. The actor does not deprive himself of the pleasure of killing the character but he preserves the physical integrity of the actress.” The act of killing, in this sense, is only a symbolic one. “This is what happens on a theatre stage and in a similar fashion, on a therapeutic stage. Here too, the dichotomic and ‘dichotomizing’ properties of the aesthetic space take root and exercise their powers.” In considering the dynamic of the psychotherapeutic stage, he distinguishes between the experience of the actor and the patient as protagonists in a drama. “The protagonist-actor produces thoughts and releases emotions and sentiments which, whether her own or not, are supposed to belong to the character, that is to say, someone else... [While] the protagonist-patient (the patient-actor) reproduces her thoughts and releases anew her own emotions and her own sentiments (which are recognised and declared as being her own).” Beyond the simple process of entering a performance space and enacting experience, both the actor and the patient-actor partake in the focalising power of the ‘aesthetic space’ of theatre, whilst encountering the dichotomous result of the layering of theatrical reality upon actual reality - of one experience of existence over another. In this situation, self-observation and self-awareness

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63 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
occur in a heightened form, in a physical and psychological sense. Facilitating this heightening of focus is the observation, awareness and attention of others - the audience at the edge of the symbolic platform - together with the desire of the actor or the patient-actor to relate an experience of reality. For the patient-actor, who might be enacting or drawing upon past experience, the heightening of experience and awareness allows for the possibility of the observation of themselves in the context of that past experience, the “I-before”, which would still be a part of their present make-up, the “I-now”. This process of observation is necessarily a process of distancing and detaching. The patient-actor also necessarily faces the question of which “I” they identify themselves as; either as the “I-before” that lived the experience, or as the “I-now” that has chosen to revisit that experience. Arguably, however, the question answers itself by virtue of the evident space and time that separates the experience and its recounting. The past experience and the part of oneself that lived this experience can thus become an object of analysis and study. They become “aesthetically reified”. The patient-actor moves from being a subject-in-sitú to being a subject-observer, within the theatricality. Boal believes that the importance of theatre as psychotherapy rests on this possibility for transformation of the patient-actor as protagonist, assisted by the observance of the other participants.65

The three essential qualities that make up theatre’s capacity to enhance knowledge and to transform those who partake of it (the plasticity of the medium, the doubling or dichotomizing property of the theatrical stage, the telemicroscopic property) are aesthetic properties - they are related to the senses. Communication in theatre occurs by means of the principal senses, in this way knowledge and experience is transmitted and acquired. In the psychotherapeutic functioning of theatrical processes, the sensorial experience of self-observation enables the patient-actor to acquire knowledge of their own self. The “doubling of the self”, which can take place in other situations and spaces, occurs on the theatrical stage with a particular intensity

65 Ibid., p. 25-27.
deriving from the aesthetic nature of the experience. Ideas, emotions and sensations are the elements of the phenomena that the human being and consciousness dips into. “Theatre is a therapy into which one enters body and soul, soma and psyche.”

**Process**

Boal has come to appreciate the value of studying the dynamics of one particular action and impulse - that of desire - in his explorations of the psychotherapeutic functions of the Theatre of the Oppressed. The desire may be for “love or hate, attack or flight, construction or destruction” among other things. As the patient-actor enacts an experience, that experience is dichotomised by the theatrical stage and comes to be regarded as material in an aesthetic space. Concretised desires, both declared and undeclared, are relived in the context of the exercises. As with an actor exploring a character in rehearsal, the experience of the patient-actor might be lived with emotion in the first or original instance. In the reliving of the experience, the emotions that coloured the original instance of experience are revisited. At the same time, the patient-actor strives to relate the experience to the other participants in the exercise. Emotion in the first or original instance of experience, as with the actor in rehearsal, is by nature an introversive and solitary discovery. Whereas the relived emotion constitutes a dialogue wherein the patient-actor, as with the actor, sets out to reveal the discovery of the experience to the other participants or to the audience. In the study of desire, Boal finds that in these explorations “To desire becomes a thing. The verb becomes a palpable noun.”

However, further progress and genuine transformation for the patient-actor requires more than just the process of observing the desire. A therapeutic process requires the introduction of the possibility of the exercise of choice, while presenting an inventory of possible alternatives.

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A process is therapeutic when it allows - and encourages - the patient to choose from several alternatives to the situation in which he finds himself, the situation which causes him unwanted suffering or unhappiness. In enabling, and indeed requiring, the patient to observe himself in action - since his own desire to show obliges him both to see and to see himself - this theatrical process of recounting, in the present, and in front of witnesses ‘in solidarity’, a story lived in the past, offers, in itself, an alternative.68

It is in the exploration of alternatives that the patient-actor moves towards a desired transformation. Just as an actor’s characterisation of a role holds a number of possibilities and variances, so a patient-actor’s power of choice within the revisited experience allows for the invocation of possibilities that might not have been apparent at the first instance of experience. In the process, the patient-actor can explore the possibilities and variances available in the role of the “I-before”69. For the “witnesses”, the vicarious nature of the experience allows for the possibility to penetrate into the lived experience which the patient-actor revisits and to travel with them as a protagonist in the situation. If the witnesses are able to draw analogies between their own lives and those of the protagonist, identification with and recognition of the protagonist-patient’s perspective can occur.70

It would be difficult to ascertain precisely what degree of similarity exists between the realms in which theatre and psychotherapy function. The modes of communication inherent in psychotherapy and the theatrical process both aim to create change. In psychotherapy, an outside agent (the therapist) and a subject (the patient) undertake to implement some form of healing process. In the theatrical process, a performance (be it by actors or patient-actors) undertakes to introduce to its audience an element of reality that was not there previously. Elsass notes that both activities utilise the element of repetition to achieve their objectives. Actors rely on repetition in

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67 Ibid., p. 24-25.
69 Ibid., p. 38-39.
70 Ibid., p. 26.
rehearsal and performance, while the psychotherapist works within the repetitive “repertoire” of the patient’s problems, that may need to be revisited many times over many sessions. Practitioners of theatre and psychotherapy work with ‘the other’ via the instrument of their own self.71

In the Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal undertakes to meld the two processes of theatre and psychotherapy. By utilising the language of theatrical practice for the purposes of analysis and healing of individual suffering, he subjugates the conventionally accepted role of theatre as entertainment. What is essential is the process; indeed the process is the product. The communication between the performer and the observer needs to be intimate - a dialogue, rather than a monologue, between the two parties. Nevertheless, the space that the processes of Theatre of the Oppressed creates and requires must be aesthetic in nature. They are sensorial and reified manipulations of time, space and human physicality; in another word, theatrical. The psychotherapeutic techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed is an application of theatrical practice. To attempt to classify them as something other than theatre is to deny the totality of the vocabulary of theatrical practice.

Theatre of the Oppressed as Politics

pol.i.tics\(\text{\textipa{pəl-\textipa{lt}	extipa{s}}}\) n [Gk politika, fr. neut. pl. of politikos political]: 1: the art or science of government, the guiding or influencing of governmental policy, the winning and holding control over a government 2: the competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership in a government or other group 3: the total complex of relations between human beings in society. (Websters - paraphrased)

Background

With the publication in 1974 of Teatro del Oprimido y Otras Poeticas Politicas (Buenos Aires, Ediciones de la Flor), Boal took his discussions on the roles of the actor, the spectator and the protagonist to the wider theatre community. He uses as examples the work he had developed with the national literacy campaign in Peru in 1973, and to a certain extent the work with the Arena Theatre of São Paulo, of which he was the artistic director from 1956 until he had to leave Brazil in 1971.\(^{72}\) The work with Arena set the stage for the creation of the role of the Joker and its rationale, while questioning the roles of the “hero” and the “myth”. The work in Peru solidified the Joker role and brought about the initial development of such forms as Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, Newspaper Theatre and Invisible Theatre among others. In response to Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Pedagogia del Oprimido, 1970), Boal began his exploration of what he termed the “poetics of the oppressed” as a “plan for transforming the spectator into actor.”\(^{73}\)

In 1964, Boal witnessed a political act that reinforced his belief in the power of art and culture. In the preceding years, a large network of Popular Centres of Culture were established around Brazil. These centres utilised Brazilian culture and arts to foster community spirit and exchange. He recalls poetry workshops, discussions on philosophy, cooking classes, house-building workshops and many other forms of skills exchange that revolved

\(^{72}\) Boal 1992, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, p. 40.
\(^{73}\) Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 120-122.
around the centres; that is, until the coup d’État of 1964. Then the incoming dictatorship saw fit to legislate, as one of its first laws, the abolition of all Popular Centres of Culture. Not because, according to Boal, they were political venues, but because they were venues for in-depth dialogue. Boal realises that dialogue is a key to analysis, to the understanding of social situations and structures. Boal has always considered his work to be political, though the manner in which he carries out this work changes over the years. From the activities that lead to his being ‘strongly advised’ by internal security officers to leave Brazil in 1971, to his election as a Legislator at the Municipal Chambers of Rio de Janeiro in 1992, he considers himself to have always been “politically active”. He holds hope for the return of the Popular Centres of Culture to the social landscape of Brazil.

He considers the Theatre of the Oppressed to contain three main branches - the educational, the social and the therapeutic. These utilise techniques from the “arsenal” of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Political activity, to Boal, can mean the utilisation of these theatre games and exercises for the production of short plays for overtly political purposes, as well as the development of its application in law-making through Legislative Theatre. He has found that Theatre of the Oppressed work can often sit on the boundaries of politics. Particularly when the techniques are put to use in the examination of specific events such as how to organise a strike. “There are many people who dare not participate in a strike or other political actions. Why? Because they have cops in their heads. They have internalized their oppressions.”

In these ways, Boal lives up to his belief that “The theatrical profession, which belongs to a few, should not hide the existence and permanence of the theatrical vocation, which belongs to all. Theatre is a vocation for all human

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76 Ibid., lines 260-267.
77 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47; Rainbow of Desire, p. 15.
beings: it is the true nature of humanity.” To this end, he sees the objective of Theatre of the Oppressed as being the safeguarding, development and reshaping of this human vocation. To Boal, the vocation must become a tool for the examination of social and personal symbols that are problems. Thus it becomes a tool in the search for solutions to those problems. To achieve this Boal considered that theatre cannot remain confined to the sanctified spaces. “Theatre cannot be imprisoned in the theatrical buildings, just as religion cannot be imprisoned in churches.”

Theory

Boal’s first major objective in the book Theatre of the Oppressed was to examine the classic and modern underpinnings of theatre which survive and prosper in contemporary theatre and the entertainment industry. He brings into question the intentions, and to a certain extent the strategies that evolved around the practice of Tragedy and then later during the Renaissance. He suggests that Tragedy developed (by way of the elements of the tragic hero, exploitation of empathy, and discussions of ethos through such mechanisms as the ‘fatal flaw’ of the hero) into a coercive system which has since been employed by various hierarchical interests over the ages. With the rise of the bourgeoisie, theatre during the Renaissance took on values based on the Machiavellian poetics of ‘virtù’ and nurtured assumptions that would later be challenged by Hegelian and Marxist values. Using the work of Hegel and then Brecht, Boal describes a movement towards a more analytical poetic, in the developments of the nature of the dramatic character and form, as well as in the relationship between the performance and the spectator.

81 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, Part One.
In his later work *Rainbow of Desire*, Boal refers to Lope de Vega’s definition of theatre - “two human beings, a passion and a platform.” The platform or the “place of representation” is the venue upon which human wills in collision create dramatic action. “Theatre denotes conflict, contradiction, confrontation, defiance.” As the third essential element of the formula, passion elevates theatrical action onto a level that solicits the observer’s concern. Passion lifts the action above and beyond “the commonplace and the trivial, the valueless.” It represents the values of the characters, the symbols that most influence their decisions and actions, their moral and political choices. It represents the symbols “that we prize more highly than our own life.”

Boal therefore believes that the art of theatre necessarily serves a purpose that is highly subjectified, related to personal and perceived social values, and is not bound by the Romantic notion of ‘truth’. ‘Over-dramatising’, ‘making a scene’, ‘playing it up’, ‘faire du théâtre’ all denote situations wherein there is an element of manipulation, exaggeration or distortion of what can be perceived as ‘facts’ or the ‘truths’. These are also the elements that ‘fictionalise’ the theatrical event, that make theatre and lies synonymous.

Thus Boal holds that “the theatre is a weapon... a very efficient weapon” and that for this reason, sectors of society would “strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilize it as a tool for domination.”

In these comments, Boal’s own passion for the role of theatre in society becomes most apparent.

In addition, his views of theatre as a language that must be spoken as a dialogue between actor and spect-actor - a process rather than a finished product - are fundamental to the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed. As the theatrical language uses actions, words and image to express ideas and reveal passions, it can be considered “the most essential human language” in

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84 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. ix.
the way that it uses the totality of human form and expression. “Theatre is a form of knowledge.” Through theatre, humans “observe themselves in action” and exercise the conscious ability “to identify (themselves and others) and not merely to recognise.” Not only can human beings practise identification, there is an additional capability, one that is central to the viewing of theatre - the ability to draw implications. “I can identify a friend by a single gesture, a painter by his style, a politician by the policies he supports.” Boal encapsulates this position in a central hypothesis that:

All the moral and political values of a given society along with its structures of power and domination, as well as its corresponding mechanisms of oppression are contained in the smallest cells of the social organization (the couple, the family, the neighborhood, the school, the office, the factory, etc.).

Around this human capacity to perceive an implied message, and around theatre’s ability as a language to transmit and communicate a broader image or experience than what is immediately perceivable within the frame of the theatrical experience, lies Boal’s assertion that “all theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them.” He believes that these potentials lie behind the movement in earlier classical traditions to create “established divisions” between those who would create and those who are to receive the creation, between the actor and the spectator. For Boal, this movement was naturally and intrinsically political.

His response, in the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed, was to seek and create a “theatre of freedom” to counteract what he saw to be the coercive forms that existed. He sought forms that would allow its participants to view a range of choices that they would have available to them in a given situation. These choices should not be guided by the performance or its

88 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. ix.
facilitators, but by the sensibilities of the participants, the spect-actors themselves. Boal seeks a form that is democratic in the sense that the spect-actor can say whatever they want, and the spect-actor sitting in the next seat also has that same right. In a Theatre of the Oppressed session, he considers there to be no spectators, “there are only active observers.” Thus the term ‘spect-actor’ has become a key element in the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed. It is a symbol that is intended to activate the observer of the event. A symbol that emphasises the difference between choice and coercion.

**Practice**

The theatre practice that Boal developed was shaped by a range of different political and social landscapes that he had encountered along the way. As artistic director of the Arena Theatre of São Paulo between 1956 and 1971, his work was influenced by the political climate that preceded the 1964 military coup d’état. This was characterised by a growing level of national pride, perhaps at its most apparent in the arts through the emergence of a vibrant Brazilian popular music sub-culture (the movement of the late 1960s that became known as Música Popular Brasileira or MPB). In Boal’s work with Arena, it was manifest through the infusion of greater levels of Brazilian content and form in the theatre work that they produced, in reaction to the continental European aspirations of the more established theatre companies of the time. Naturally, his work was also greatly influenced by the socio-political climate that descended after 1964. Works such as “Zumbi” (1964) and “Opinião” (1968) were indicative of this period, as works that dealt with concerns arising from the socio-political situations in Brazil. By 1971 Boal had felt the full force of the backlash against this work, with the murder of two of his colleagues at Arena, repeated violent attacks by armed groups at their performances, and eventually his own detention and torture. He was freed

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89 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
three months after his arrest following an international campaign for his release, and was forewarned by his captors to leave Brazil or face an even more dreadful consequence. His move that year to Argentina and, later, Peru eventually led to his work with the national literacy campaigns of ALFIN (Operación Alfabetización Integral), which used many of the ideas of Paulo Freire. This work gave Boal important research opportunities that eventually resulted in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*. This time also allowed him to produce works such as “Torquemada” (1971) and “Uncle Scrooge McDuck” (1973), which allowed him to respond to his recent experiences in Brazil. As the political situation in Argentina deteriorated in the mid 1970s he found himself, again, unable to work freely without threats of persecution. He eventually moved to Portugal in 1976 where he worked at the National Conservatory of Theatre, until the political climate there also became more conservative. This contributed to his acceptance of an offer to work at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1978. This and the subsequent work that he carried out in France led to the development of the strand of his work that came to be known as Rainbow of Desire, the Introspective Techniques.

In looking at the political implications of the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed, it would be perhaps most useful to focus on the various techniques and examine their functions in the context of the notion of politics. This thesis takes the definition of politics as that which is concerned with the total complex of relations between human beings in society, as well the competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership in a government or other group. With this in mind, this section will briefly examine three aspects of Boal’s work - Invisible Theatre, Forum Theatre and the work that Boal undertook in Rio de Janeiro in collaboration with the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores) of Brazil between 1986 and 1996.

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92 Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz 1994, Playing Boal, p. 3.
93 Boal 1990, “Invisible Theatre: Liege, Belgium 1978” The Drama Review T127; Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 120.
94 Websters.
Boal emphasises the importance of approaching Invisible Theatre as theatre. It is, at its most basic, a scripted theatrical performance. However possible it might be that an ‘audience’ of an Invisible Theatre performance would actually realise its theatrical and performative nature, however much it might be modified in performance, nevertheless it is theatre being presented to an audience. The performance is intended to be performed in a place which is not a theatre - a public space that does not designate ‘performance’, and for an audience which does not expect to become a ‘performance’ audience. The subject of the performance must be an important symbol, especially for those who will experience it. The concern invoked must be profound and genuine. Issues that have been dealt with, by groups that have worked with Boal, include sexual harassment, racism, economic disparities and parenting of children, to name a few. Although he insists that in Invisible Theatre, actors perform as actors do - “they must live”, he also notes that since it will present scenes of fictional reality without the effects of the rites of conventional theatre, this performed symbolic reality becomes a part of actual reality. To Boal, Invisible Theatre is not only concerned with ‘realism’, it is concerned with becoming ‘reality’.\(^95\) In taking theatrical practice to the point wherein the receptors of the theatre work may not be aware that they are perceiving a work of theatre, the question is raised as to whether this practice can, if at all, be considered to be a form of theatre; whether the practice, as Kohtes has argued, is not political theatre but rather political action that should not be regarded as an aesthetic phenomenon.\(^96\) Boal has also described Invisible Theatre as “a planned action,... it’s a real action; it’s not fiction anymore.”\(^97\) It is apparent in this case that there is no shortage of political intent in the work, in its desire to influence the work’s receptor towards a particular course of action in a societal sphere. It could also be argued that Invisible Theatre possesses some coercive tendencies, in that the participants in the event do not make a choice to become participants. Instead, its participants come to be

\(^95\) Boal 1992, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, pp. 6-17.


that by circumstance. There is also a tendency to be exposed to censures on
the basis of a shortage of artistic significance or content. Because, it may be
argued, a substantial proportion of its participants do not get the opportunity
to regard it as an artistic endeavour, the Invisible Theatre event does not
register as ‘art’ and therefore does not resonate artistic significance.
However, the practitioners of Invisible Theatre must regard it as a practice
that is firmly rooted in the dramatic arts, whose significance must be assessed
no less comprehensively than a conventional theatre performance. This
evaluation becomes particularly necessary for the practice to be developed. In
this sense, Invisible Theatre can be genuinely considered to be a covert art
form.

Forum Theatre is a form which seeks and encourages the participation
of its audience, or spect-actors, in the destruction and reconstruction of its
narrative line. In this case, Boal sets out a venue in which the receptor of the
work can be made consciously active. As the spect-actor participates, either
personally or vicariously in the reality of the play, and attempts to change
that reality, Boal considers that they do so as preparation for being able to
make similar changes in their actual reality. As the spect-actor confronts the
difficulties presented before them in the reality of the play, and if they
manage to overcome these difficulties within the Forum Theatre, they can
become better equipped to overcome similar difficulties in their actual reality
when the situation arises. Boal believes that Forum Theatre affects its
receptors in a way that stimulates their desire “to change the world.” Like
Invisible Theatre and other strands of Theatre of the Oppressed, Forum
Theatre has developed “in response to concrete and particular political
situations.” Boal saw the need to develop Forum Theatre techniques out of a
desire to encourage the spect-actor to “fully assume their function of
protagonist.” It derives from work he had carried out in the period between
1971 and 1973 in Argentina and Peru, during an interval when the level of
political repression had eased without completely disappearing. He sought to
focus on the spect-actor as protagonist at a time when he thought “the people
would have a role to play in the near future.” Forum Theatre was developed as a theatrical system by which participants could experiment with social and political roles that might be required of them during the difficult and sometimes dangerous living conditions under the military regimes of the Latin Americas of the early 1970s.

When Boal returned to Brazil and again undertook theatre projects in 1986 after 15 years in exile, there was widespread interest in his work from a range of sources. He received an offer to stage some Invisible Theatre performances from a television network in Rio de Janeiro. These were broadcast on commercial television and eventually discontinued when it evidently attracted the interest of unamused network heads. Another project that came his way at that time was a collaboration with Darcy Ribeiro, an anthropologist who was then also vice governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Ribeiro had instigated an innovative program through the public school system, which involved food distribution to underprivileged students as an incentive to attend school. Through this scheme Boal, with a group of collaborators whom he had trained, held workshops and Forum Theatre performances with students and teachers. That is, until funding for the program was withdrawn by incoming city and state governments. He was drawn towards a vigorous political movement spearheaded by a newly formed political party that was rapidly gaining a great deal of popular support. This was the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ Party). It was around this time that, according to Boal, he first adapted theatrical techniques specifically for use in an election campaign. Boal and his group campaigned for Ribeiro in 1986, for Lula (Luis Inacio Lula da Silva) the Workers’ Party presidential candidate for the 1989 campaign, for his own mandate as a Workers’ Party candidate in the 1992 municipal elections in Rio de Janeiro, for Lula again in the 1994 presidential elections, and for a second term as municipal legislator (vereador) in 1996. Each time, theatre became a central

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99 Boal 1990, “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An interview with Augusto Boal” The Drama Review T127; and in Playing Boal 1994, p. 4.
aspect of his campaign strategy through street theatre, Forum Theatre and Invisible Theatre performances at various stages. With his election to the Municipal Chambers of Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Boal was able to employ his core group of theatre collaborators as officers of his mandate. Not long before this, the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed of Rio de Janeiro was formed around a group of “cultural animateurs” that Boal had trained and worked with since the Ribeiro program. These two projects - the CTO and the legislative mandate - became the focus for Boal in Brazil. A new technique was also developed around the use of theatre within the legislative process that Boal was now a part of. This became the technique of Legislative Theatre. This involved the creation of a number “nucleus groups” around the city of Rio de Janeiro facilitated by the work of the CTO and his mandate. The workshops that were carried out by the nucleus groups produced theatre pieces that were performed at various locations and events. Mainly through the performances of Forum Theatre pieces, Boal’s mandate would document various ideas and recommendations that would come out of these performances. His mandate would then structure them into proposals for amendments to existing legislation or as models for new legislation, which Boal then tabled in his capacity as legislator. The subject matter of the performances came out of the concerns of the groups that would workshop and perform them. One example, and the first piece of legislation that was successfully tabled by Boal in this way, decreed that facilities for visually impaired people be installed at public telephones around the city. By using techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed to undertake research and consultation processes with various communities, and then using the material derived from these processes as basis for legislative amendments and proposals, Boal once more undertakes to meld the functions of theatrical and political processes, in ways that challenge accepted notions of what constitute both these processes. Naturally, Boal encountered not only the benefits inherent in these processes, but also the problems, to a greater degree.

101 Ibid., p. 234.
Throughout the latter period of his work at the Municipal Chambers, political manoeuvrings had become a much more integral part of the landscape through which he navigated. Perhaps the main difference between this and the earlier period of his work in Brazil has been that in the latter period he had been able to be more open and conscious about the manner in which he works in the theatrical and political arenas.

**Possibilities**

In response to the occasional comment that often came from legislators describing one of their fellow’s effort-full rhetorical style as ‘making theatre’, Boal sometimes responded by saying “that’s not theatre, that’s bad theatre!” He clearly considers that “politics is a form of theatre,” although “not only in the vulgar sense.” As theatre illustrates a reality and the structure of that reality, he felt that his job as an elected politician “has a lot to do with changing the structure of our society.” In this sense, he uses theatre as a means of pinpointing aspects of life which he could influence, and perhaps improve, in the course of his work as a municipal legislator. In his development of Legislative Theatre, he saw a way of not only creating “theatre which is political” but also a way of using “theatre as politics.” He viewed what he was doing as an attempt to affect his society by means beyond ‘the speech’, the conventional tool of the politician, to include ‘action’, specifically the dramatic action. He also acknowledges the extreme difficulties inherent in such an experiment, given the vast array of uncontrollable and intangible conditions that come into play in the political arena. For example, it is one accomplishment to pass a proposal into legislative form, while an entirely different undertaking lies in implementing and enforcing that law. It is a condition which somehow strengthens Boal’s assertion that the different strands of work that he and his group did at that time in Rio de Janeiro navigated the same basic territory - “theatre is politics, and politics is theatre” - especially given the range of uncontrollable and
intangible factors that also come into play in the theatrical arena. Perhaps what this experience illustrates most strongly is the intrinsic links between theatre and politics, as two of the aspects of human cultural activity.103

Faced with the task of developing the Legislative Theatre project, Boal attempted to maintain a clarity of distinction between the work that he did as an elected legislator on the Workers’ Party ticket and the work carried out by the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed of Rio de Janeiro, of which he was the director. Although undoubtedly, some level of cross-fertilisation did and had to occur between the two strands of work, Boal felt strongly that the CTO’s work as a non-party organisation needed to develop and maintain its own integrity. Just as he felt that his work as a member of the Workers’ Party needed to develop its own sense of firmness that was anchored in political practice. Some of this caution probably lay in the political climate of Brazil, in which a large number of political organisations and coalitions will field candidates at every level of election. Political party affiliations and loyalties can and often cause difficulties in the field of artistic collaborations. In this sense, Boal attempted to make clear the distinction between his political theatre work and his political party work.104 In both spheres, however, he approached his work from the role of the ‘cultural animateur’.

It is not only the manoeuvrings on the overt political stage that Boal’s work must contend with. In the election campaigns that he had participated in, a constant factor had been the loosely declared but persistent bias displayed by Roberto Marinho, the television and print media magnate of Brazil. Marinho and his media organisations, whose television networks alone routinely reach 80 percent of the viewing audience in the country.105 This effectively made him a powerful controller of symbols for the Brazilian people of the time. He had an unsurprising habit of using his powers of influence against Boal’s party, the Workers’ Party. In this light, a successful

104 Ibid., lines 95-108.
105 “Rio Journal: One Man’s Political Views Color Brazil’s TV Eye” Alan Riding: New York Times,
Workers’ Party rally which might attract a hundred thousand people in the streets of São Paulo seems minor in comparison. The strongest evidence of this disparity has been the failure of the Workers’ Party to win the presidential office regardless of the growing massive popular support in the larger cities. Against this level of ingrained opposition, it would be natural to wonder just how effective one theatre-worker-politician and his group, working in a large city, can be. One answer that Boal deems desirable is the revival, in some form, of the Popular Centres of Culture that had flourished in Brazil prior to the 1964 coup d’état. A network of community centres in which skills and ideas can be exchanged and developed, Boal believes, “is an alternative for television, and it is transitive.” It is this quality of possessing a direct object and capacity to accommodate dialogue, that differentiates the type of communication forms that Boal wishes to create from mass media communication. “Television is intransitive, it’s from the screen to the spectator, like the usual theatre is intransitive. We want transitive forms which will give and take.”

Perhaps it is in these venues - where it becomes possible for a small group of individuals to process information and ideas, to develop them into usable intelligence and insight - that an effective response can be found to the powerlessness and the subjugated feeling that debilitates many in the post-modern world. What Boal seems to offer is a model and a methodology that is transparent and adaptable enough to be useful in a range of contemporary socio-political contexts.

Elections are the pillars of democracy; powerful symbols of the ‘will of the people’. They are also the machinery by which the power process of democracies are ‘rubber-stamped’ by a collective act of will; the process by which leaders are determined. It is a powerful ritual and event which can be played and scripted in many different ways; a symbolic process that represents a multi-millenial tradition of civilisation. For symbolic processes to be navigated effectively, a strong ‘vision’ is required - a vision that

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undertakes to utilise the symbolic process for an overarching purpose. In elections it is the vision that gathers the majority will. Boal and Lansdale share a scope of vision that certainly encompasses the electoral process, as a means to an end as well as an integral part of modern cultural make-up. Each participated in the electoral act with distinctive flair. With his background in advertising, Lansdale would have fully realised that the process of electioneering is simply persuasion. The product is the candidate and the ideas, and these are promoted through personal influence and the media. Psychological warfare practitioners will consider the media to be “the ordnance of psychological warfare.”

Lansdale was a consummate political adviser and campaign manager, utilising systematic issue research to position his candidate, media saturation, opinion surveys and ‘grassroots organisation from above’ - processes now routinely applied by the best campaign management consultants in the United States.

Lansdale’s King-Making

Lansdale saw the electoral process as a powerful element of his psychological operations repertoire. This is not to say that he was absolutely committed to ensuring the running of ‘just and fair’ elections. In the Philippines of 1951, it was critical in the context of his operations against the Huks that a just and fair election be seen to take place in order to contradict a powerful symbol held by the Huks which asserted that the oligarchic elite that was in government was clearly not committed to the ‘democratic’ process, the “Bullets Not Ballots” symbol. In Vietnam of 1955, it became crucial that an election result went a particular way in order to consolidate the tenuously held power-position of its then prime minister Ngo Dinh Diem, with whom Lansdale had been working to create a sufficiently stable political and military administration to counter the Vietminh campaigns. In that case

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108 Mayhew 1997, p. 211.
Lansdale collaborated in the rigging of a plebiscite that gave Diem supreme powers of office he previously had not possessed, with a result that gave him 98.2% of the election votes.\footnote{A Bright Shining Lie - Neil Sheehan 1988 (Random House, New York) p. 141.} It was a case in which the necessity to create a symbol of strong government had overridden the merely desirable symbol of democratic process. In Vietnam, Lansdale became Diem’s most trusted American adviser. Previously in the Philippines, Lansdale also became the most trusted adviser of its head of state - Ramón Magsaysay. Lansdale was more than that, in fact, because he had engineered Magsaysay’s rise from the House of Representatives to the presidency in 1953.

Lansdale had talent-spotted Magsaysay in Washington in 1950. Magsaysay was on an official visit on behalf of the Philippine Congress and Lansdale was about to take up his Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) post in Manila. At their first meeting, Lansdale was impressed by what he saw as the potential of the Filipino Congressman. So much so that he immediately arranged a ‘special meeting’ with some key men who would later be instrumental in channelling the support of the United States behind Magsaysay’s rise to power. Present at this meeting - which could probably be justifiably described as a high-level job interview - was Magsaysay as the star candidate, Lansdale as his sponsor and advocate, Colonel Richard Stillwell as Lansdale’s immediate superior at OPC, Livingston Merchant as Assistant Secretary of State, General Nathan Twining as Vice Chief of Staff of the US Air Force, Colonel George Chester of the OPC, and Frank Wisner as the Director of the OPC. This ‘panel’ was sufficiently satisfied with Magsaysay to approve a plan of action and mobilise in a concerted effort which resulted, soon after, in Magsaysay receiving the job of Secretary of National Defense of the Philippines. This job came as a direct result of strong recommendations made by George Chester and Livingston Merchant to the then Philippine President Elpidio Quirino, and marks the beginning of Lansdale’s work with Magsaysay. When Lansdale arrived in Manila in 1951, ostensibly as an Air Force lieutenant colonel posted as a military intelligence adviser to the
Filipino armed forces, the two men collaborated very closely. They even lived together for some time in Lansdale’s fortified home, where he guided Magsaysay’s efforts and career to the point where the latter became regarded as an open and honest Secretary of Defense, a staunch opponent of the Huks, and the most popular political figure in the Philippines. By the time that the 1953 presidential elections were announced, Magsaysay was deemed ready to be pushed into the centre-stage spotlight. Lansdale mobilised a massive force to support Magsaysay which involved the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Herald, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Saturday Evening Post, all the major Manila newspapers, Time, Newsweek, Fortune, Cosmopolitan, Reader’s Digest, the US Information Service, Voice of America, the US Embassy in Manila, US Ambassador Raymond Spruance, JUSMAG General Albert Pierson, the Manila American Chamber of Commerce, and the Philippine-American Chamber of Commerce in New York. Lansdale also wrote key speeches for Magsaysay and ensured his appearance at strategic events. With this machinery behind him and the groundwork laid in the previous two years, Magsaysay was resoundingly elected President of the Philippines in 1953. Lansdale’s purpose in promoting Magsaysay was to create the symbol of a ‘clean and strong’ government in the Philippines that was loyal to the United States, thus preserving its military and commercial interests there. The symbol of the Office of Policy Coordination represented a way of working across government departments and bureaucracies, business corporations and major media organisations in order to harness their power for high-level strategic US foreign policy objectives.
Chapter 4

A DOCUMENTARY
Como Querem Beber Agua

The following is a text transcript of a documentary - the video component of this thesis, entitled “Como Querem Beber Agua: Augusto Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro”, that was made by the author as a result of a research and documentation project in the second half of 1994. At that time, Boal was halfway into his term of office as a Vereador of the city of Rio de Janeiro. In addition, at that time Boal and his collaborators were campaigning for the Workers’ Party of Brazil during the presidential election campaign of that year. The documentary includes interviews with Boal and two of his collaborators, Claudete Felix and Liko Turle. The documentary was produced in association with the Centre for Innovation in the Arts at Queensland University of Technology, and with the support of the Australia Council for the Arts.

V/O
Rio de Janeiro: home of carnivale, cachaca and cheap cocaine; a mecca for many who seek sun, sex and samba, or at least that is what the majority of tourists seem to be there for.

But for those who make their life here, there is a constant feeling of flux, of change just about to happen; loaded with both hope and trepidation. The days are long, the crime rate is astronomical, and poverty sits on a hillside overlooking affluence.

In July 1994, one more in a series of changes in currency brought about apparent economic stability, compared to the previous decade of wildly galloping inflation. With the Real, the new currency, Brazil had come of age. This was what the conservative government wanted the population to believe. National elections were just around the corner.

Two years earlier, in municipal elections, a man who up until then had little time for Brazilian political establishment, ran for a seat in the Legislative Chamber of the city. In his 30 seconds of free television time (which all
candidates were given) he advised voters that he didn’t care if they voted for him, but when they do vote they should cast it in favour of the Workers’ Party because, he said, they are good people.

Needless to say, he was elected; possibly because he was the only candidate not to have begged, bribed, cajoled or threatened the electorate to vote for him. He became an elected Legislator, a Vereador of the Municipal Chamber of Rio de Janeiro. This man was also an established man of the theatre. His name is Augusto Boal.

**POLITICS**

**Boal:** I have always done politics, not like I’m doing now, not as a Legislator. That is a first time in my life. But always I had been politically active. What I can abandon, if I get too tired; because the work here is very hard. Because you have to deal with some colleagues, that we have here, that are horrible people. That are horrible! Because who are they, who are we? We have been elected by the population, and the population is not homogenous. We cannot say “the people of Rio de Janeiro”. The people of Rio de Janeiro are very much different from one another.

And also we have here anything. We have here, people like myself; who am what I am. I don’t know what kind, like myself! You have people, like people that belonged to the death squads; and they are here as Legislators too. People with the traffic of narcotics, that are linked with narcotics; and they are represented here, they
are also Legislators here. People with the illegal gambling; we know about that, we know, we see it. And so the daily confrontation with this kind of people, sometimes it’s amusing, sometimes it’s curious - sometimes. But most of the time it’s very hard to deal with them.

The monstrosity of the actions of some of the people here are so terrible. The corruption here is so terrible.

And to live with this is very hard. On the other side, I can have here my group. I can never forget that it’s the first time that, not only, a man of the theatre enters the Legislative power, but I enter with my whole company. It’s the first time that a theatrical company takes the power. It’s a small power, but it is power. And so it’s a very important experience, to have here a group of theatre.

_Claudete Felix:_ Boal had an idea. In 1991 he said this: “I have an idea. The idea’s a bit crazy, what do
you think? I want to be Vereador.” A Vereador for the PT!

Claudete Felix

So then we thought and thought; and created a theatrical plan in order to do his campaign. So we started to mobilise, to move many people -who liked the theatre, who liked Boal, people who had made contact with us about our work. So we were able to get many people involved. We managed to do some good promotions of the work of Boal.

CTO “Cair Um Real”

V/O
In 1985, the government of then president Jose Sarney implemented the Cruzado Plan, which replaced the old currency, the Cruzeiro, with the Cruzado. Over the next ten years, Brazilians would learn to spend the Cruzado; then the Cruzado Novo; then go back to the Cruzeiro; until that became the Cruzeiro Real. So by the time the Real Plan had come along, to give them the latest kind of money to spend - the Real - they could not blamed for questioning the wisdoms behind such economic plans. Few were expecting any miracles; though hopes were a different matter. The previous decade had gotten Brazilians accustomed to the idea of annual inflation rates that hover around 2000 percent, on a good year. So much so that it became unfashionable to measure inflation rates in anything but monthly figures. Whilst calculating yearly figures became a favourite pastime of economists and journalists who didn’t have to go shopping or live in Brazil.

The CTO, the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro, perform a piece that deals with some of the questions and

Symbols and Power in Theatre of the Oppressed

Ronaldo Morelos 1999
confusions that surrounds the new currency. While the old currency is being phased out, it still circulates as legal tender during the transition period; 2750 Cruzeiro Reals is equivalent to 1 Real. After paying a thousand of the old money for an ice cream, now you only pay 45 centavos. The impact of appearing to spend thousands less on purchases than before might lead some to believe they are getting a bargain; until you make the calculations and find that the changing prices represent an effective increase overnight of around 30 percent on most day-to-day items. And so the accompanying promise that inflation will soon hit zero as a result of the plan offers little comfort. This is the material out of which theatre is made, for Boal and his group.

The Real Plan was devised by the man who was now running for the presidency of Brazil, gaining ground against the candidate of Boal’s party - the Workers’ Party. Boal’s theatre cannot be described as sitting on the political fence. It is a theatre that is unashamedly partisan.

Boal: Politics is a form of theatre, not only in the vulgar sense. Sometimes here in this House, sometimes the other Vereadores, like myself, they speak in a way and make gestures and their voices change completely. And sometimes some people say, oh they are making theatre! And then I correct them. I say they are making bad theatre. That’s not theatre, that’s bad theatre. In this sense, of course politics is theatre; but also in the sense that as theatre shows a reality, and the structure of this reality. In politics, what we try is to change this structure. We have to do our job as politicians; it has a lot to do with changing the structure of our society. And theatre reveals the structure of our society. We try to change it. And theatre most of the time shows it. And what I’m trying to do with Legislative Theatre is to do a theatre which is political; theatre as politics. We try to change society, not by the usual means of politicians which is only by talking, but by acting.
What we do in the Theatre of the Oppressed is not to offer alternatives, but to ask for alternatives; and allow the spectator to become actor. Because this change, spectator-actor and actor-spectator, I believe is what makes us more capable of creation, of being creative.

V/O

Campaigning for the Workers’ Party, Boal and his group perform in the streets and squares, in and around the city of Rio. The pieces they perform make humorous situations out of the blunders and audacities of those who hold power in Brazil. Comedy and catchy tunes decorate the observations and examinations of the forces that influence daily life. Recent events and incidents that befall prominent figures on electronic media are the subject matter of “Radio Brasil” - another piece in the repertoire of the CTO - a satire of a radio talk show. The tunes and the incidents are familiar to the audiences that see it. Satire requires recognition of the situation being referred to. But more than that, it requires a personal experience, albeit indirect, and opinion of that given situation.

THEATRE

Boal: If I’m in the situation and I look at the other, and I don’t look at myself, I do instinctively what I have to do - what I want to do. But if I go away from myself and I look at myself, I am myself looking at myself. I am dual, I am two and not only one; and then I know where I am. I see myself in the situation. I’m not in the situation seeing the other, but I see myself
in the situation. I see the situation and I see the other.

Theatre is a way of showing our lives, showing our reality; because it shows something that is our reality. But out of that reality, the normal day reality, we create a new reality.

Fiction is a reality. Fiction does not exist. Everything is real. But we call fiction a real reality that we create; which is not the same as we have here. We create another one.

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V/O
The streets, parks and squares of the centre of the city of Rio de Janeiro is home to a large number of children who have no other home. Many have been victims of violent family members. Many are lured by the possibility of escape from poverty and quick money by begging, prostitution and petty theft. Many resort to the cheapest kinds of mind-numbing substances available, glue is a favourite. Many have known little more than the culture of violence and exploitation that fills their world. There is very little in the way of safety nets for the young and the lost in Rio. Many wish that the children of the streets - the problem - would go away. Some will do different things to make them go away.

One Sunday night in July in 1993, a group of children of the streets are gathered outside an 18th century cathedral in the heart of the city of Rio. A group of police officers pass them, and open fire on the children. They kill seven and injure many more.

The massacre sparked disgust and horror worldwide. Little is heard of the individual deaths that occur much more frequently in less visible circumstances at the hands of the death squads. Four police officers, including one lieutenant have been charged with the killings and await their trial. But media reports indicate that many more in the police force are willing to take commissions from owners of local businesses to ensure discreet and regular deaths of children of the streets.
Exactly one year later, a rally has been called at the scene of the massacre, the old church of Candelária, to commemorate the deaths of the children.

The CTO is there to perform a simple and powerful theatre piece that was first created and performed by a group of children of the streets that had worked with the CTO, not long after the killings of the year before.

The performance, like the rally, is an act of remembrance.

************************** FADE TO BLACK

Boal: For me the theatre is the art of looking at oneself. This means that if I can look at myself, I know where I am in the situation and where can I be. I can program the future. I can find alternatives. So it’s not the theatre only looking at ourselves; but this is the basis.

Without looking at ourselves we would not be capable of creating culture. We would have habits. We would have some techniques of doing a nest, of singing, of making a bridge; but not inventing new forms. And I believe that we are able to have culture. Culture is not what we do, it’s the way that we do it. Eating is not culture. It’s instinctive that we eat. But the way of eating is cultural. And we eat with the hands, we eat with a fork and a knife and spoon, at what time of the day we eat. Eating is a biological action. But how to eat is a cultural action.

And we are capable of having culture because we are capable of looking at ourselves. Which means to be spectators, of ourselves as actors. And so we are actor and spectator at the same time. This only happens with human beings, it does not happen with animals.
But the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed, by necessity, involves more than the act of merely looking at oneself, or a representation thereof. The process of empowerment demands that those who are made passive by the conventions of the form, in conventional theatre this means the spectator, be given the choice to participate in the action, as actors do. In Theatre of the Oppressed the spectator becomes the spectator. For this, the wall comes down. The fourth wall is not so much done without as given an entranceway by which those from the other side may step through. This is the essence of a form of Theatre of the Oppressed known as Forum Theatre.

Boal: To abolish the fourth wall is important to allow the transit, the transitivity - between the scene where the fiction takes place and the audience, where the audience is; these two realities. We have to be transitive. And in my opinion, that is the only way in which the spectator really becomes dynamised.

You can be dynamised also by what the actors say on stage. But you are even more dynamised when you go on stage. Because by doing so what you do is a transgression. To penetrate into the stage is a transgression.

And then it works symbolically to tell the spectator, “I am able to do this here”. The phrase I-am-able-to-do-this-here includes I-am-able-to-do-this. OK here, but if I am able to do this here, I am perhaps able to do this somewhere else.

And this fact that the spectator enters into the scene is a symbolic transgression; symbolic of all
the transgressions. It is a transgression in itself and is a symbolic transgression of all the other transgressions he has to make. Because, of course, if the oppressed is going to fight not to be oppressed, inevitably he is going to make some sort of transgression. Because if he does not, he’s going to be oppressed all of the time.

SOLUTIONS

It is difficult for us to show the solutions. But if we try altogether to find alternatives, it’s much easier than if I try myself, alone.

When I write a play, if I write a play about myself, for instance, like I did with a play that I wrote about my exile - I was in exile for fifteen years. Part of this time I was in Buenos Aires in Argentina; then I went to Lisbon in Portugal; then I went to Paris in France. And I spent, living outside of my country, fifteen years. Now I’m still travelling all over the world, but I am mostly based here. And I wrote a play about that; to show what has happened to me. I want to show me as a witness of what has happened to me. I want to witness about my time.

So it’s my experience that counts. It’s my play about my own life. About my friends, about my family, about my country, about the country where I went; but seen from my point of view. So I don’t want anyone to say “stop!” and replace me and show alternatives for my past.
But if I’m thinking about the future, I want people to tell me what should I do; not what should I have done, but what can I do now. What can I do now? That’s what I’m concerned about. The Theatre of the Oppressed is not the theatre - the witness - of the past. It is the invention of the future.

When we think about the past, we can be witness of the past; and say, I saw this in the past. But when we try together to build a future, we have to ask the questions even if we don’t have the good answers.

**QUESTIONS**

To ask the good questions is better than to have the good answer. Because I had the good answer. What should be Legislative Theatre? I had a very good answer. But in the practice, it’s not the way I wanted. It’s not possible. But it does not mean it’s not possible at all. It’s possible and people come and tell me. For example, they’ll say, oh we have to go to the slums and found popular centres of culture in all of the slums here. Yes that’s nice, I still want to do that. In some it’s possible. In others it has been possible in the past and it’s not possible now. And in others we could not even dare to do that; because slums they are controlled by the gangs of narco-trafficantes. And then in some we could not even get into - like Morro da Saudade.

We had one of the best groups that we had founded, that we had developed, was in Morro da Saudade. And then one day they came to us and they said: please don’t come again here because now it’s dangerous, before we had no traffic and now we have - so don’t come. We lost contact with them.

So one thing is to imagine the future; the other thing is to build it. And to build it, sometimes we know how to; sometimes we learn in the process of questioning - of asking.
Claudete Felix: If you’re working with the communities, you have to discuss their themes. I do the work in Morro de Saudade, with women and children in Morro de Saudade. When they do a play, for the first time, that talks about Morro de Saudade, I think for them it is very important; very important to shed light through theatre and to show in the work, to show the place where they live. Because no one goes to Morro de Saudade, because it’s a slum.

To show their Morro de Saudade, and show to people how they live their lives there. So you transform your life, your day to day life, your reality, in a piece of theatre. And show to people, to discuss with people, how it is.

How it is to live in a place that has a lot of problems. I think for these people it is fundamental also, when you discover your potential to struggle. That you are able to discover the ability to struggle, within you; to discover the human body; to discover the characters. These works that we do with the techniques, with the exercises and games of Theatre of the Oppressed is, I think, a powerful force for people. The groups that we have are groups that have a lot of force; a lot of motivation to continue working - because it’s so good. It’s good for the individual, for the person, and for the collective. With these various forms, you discuss and discover interesting things - about yourself, about other people. I love doing Theatre of the Oppressed.

TELEVISION

V/O
In an age where electronic and print communications are the forms that we are most exposed to, it would be natural to ask the question - what chance does one theatre group anywhere in the world have of affecting peoples’ lives? Or for that matter, what place is there for theatre in a world where rituals, narratives, and experiences can be derived and communicated via channels of mass dissemination? When 3D technology finally allows simulated performance environments to enter the consumer’s own home, how can theatre survive?
As Boal’s group entered the 1994 presidential campaign on behalf of the Workers’ Party, they faced the prospect of battling opinions and beliefs manufactured by the fourth largest electronic media organisation in the world - behind the three television giants of the United States. Although Boal and his group were by no means alone, their efforts stood against gigantic resources.

**Election Media**

_Boal_: All television, all the newspapers here in Brazil, they are owned by a few people; and a few people that belong to the same economical, political and ideological family; that come from the corruption, from all that we have had up to now. But they have an extraordinary power. One program on the television can be seen by 50, 60, 70 million people at the same time. If the television favours one candidate against the other one, evidently this is a manipulation.

And so it’s been difficult to fight against such a powerful means of communication. One person on the television, at the same time speaks to 50 million people, to 70 million people. And Lula and the Workers’ Party, the caravan of citizenship, had to go all over Brazil. He travelled through 40 thousand kilometres all over Brazil, all across. But everytime he went to a place he’d find a thousand people, 10 thousand people. The most that we got, once, was a hundred thousand people in São Paulo, in a big meeting, political meeting in São Paulo. One hundred thousand, that was the most that we could have. And television, it’s not thousands, it’s millions of people. The newspapers also are also owned by the right winged people. And so
it’s very difficult to fight against them but that’s what we are doing. It’s David against Goliath. We cannot ignore them. And so that’s why we think so much about creating popular centres of culture. Because before ’64, when we had the first coup d’état here, we had thousands and thousands of popular centres of culture all over Brazil. And the first law of the dictatorship was to extinguish the centres of culture, popular centres of culture. Because they were places in which people got together to discuss, to dialogue, to teach one another. That’s where Paulo Freire started his methods; and myself I started many ideas that later were developed into the Theatre of the Oppressed methods.

In each centre of culture sometimes someone who knew philosophy of Hegel would come and teach the philosophy of Hegel. And if someone knew how to do foods - feijoada, our Brazilian national food - came and made feijoada.

Another one who knew how to teach poetry; another one knew how to teach, how to do whatever, to do a house; then, it was a place in which he who knew more would teach the other ones, and learn from the other ones what the other ones knew more than himself.

This is an alternative for television and it is transitive. Television is intransitive. It’s from the screen to the spectator. Like the usual theatre is intransitive. We want transitive forms which will give and take.
As the theatre company in the Legislative Chamber, Boal and his group found their stage to be the city of Rio de Janeiro itself. This marriage, the public declaration of union, between theatrical and legislative activity would foster an offspring that would naturally take its name from both parents. This is Legislative Theatre.

As a Legislator, Boal’s job is to make and amend the laws that govern the city of Rio.

And so Legislative Theatre serves as a tool for consulting the electorate as well as a tool for lobbying fellow Legislators in the Chamber. Boal uses theatre as a way of involving and informing his electorate on the process of law-making.

Claudete Felix: The idea of theatre has become more simple in my mind. It has become easier. Theatre is something close to any person. When we started the CTO, we went to unions, to agencies, to offer our work. It was something that was distant - the CTO and the other places where we spoke of theatre, discussed theatre. And nowadays, people come to us, wanting to make theatre like wanting to drink water. They want theatre for their work, to develop their ideas, to develop their people. So I think the necessity for theatre becomes more clear for these people. Because for us, for me, it has become more easy to recognise that. Theatre is so close to any person, any community. So it’s more easy for people to do theatre.

At the Municipal Chamber we used the same plan. We continued to work with the unions, continued to work in the community. Our service opened so we could help more people.

People wanted to discuss through theatrical work. We were open to anyone who came here; and those that we invited. We had groups in the slums, we had groups of unionists, we had groups of elderly people, we had groups of people with disabilities, children of the streets. We expanded our contacts, in order to be
able to go out there in the communities; and through
the theatre work, to discuss the problems in that
community.

To discuss what was good, what could be made better
through the laws. We brought back the discussions to
our office. Then we would go and formulate the laws
into official form for amendments, and also create new
laws.

I think the idea of Theatre of the Oppressed in the
Municipal Chambers here, each time as more people
learn about it; each time it covers more themes; each
time covers more issues in the discussion; each time
more people from different places are going to know
and talk about Theatre of the Oppressed - and are
going to learn about and discuss the laws that they
can create. People realise that they are able to “create
a law?” Discuss a law, and consider that these laws
exist. “I didn’t know that these laws existed!” Exist
for whom?

BLACKS

V/O
Brazilian government statistics claim that 55
percent of the country’s population are of
Caucasian-European origin, in another word
white. This is totally believable only if you
never actually see the place or its people. The
lie seems to want to maintain the same beliefs
that made the original Portuguese colonisers
one of the largest importers of Africans for
slavery, and drove massive pseudo-military
campaigns to capture Amazon Indians for the
same purpose. In Rio, the grandchildren of
slaves make their lives among the
grandchildren of slave-owners. The tension
this creates is hard to describe. But it is evident.
The overwhelming majority of street children
in Rio are black.

CENUN “O Prega Dor”

A black students’ organisation works with
members of the CTO to produce a Forum
Theatre piece that focuses on the ingrained
expectations and prejudices, from family and
society, faced by young blacks as they make
their lives.

Liko Turle
**Liko Turle:** For me this is the first time that I’ve worked in a group with other blacks only; the first time in addressing the racial question; first time touring the universities as a black group talking about the racial question. For all of them this is the first time they have worked with a group of blacks in order to talk about this through the theatre. I think what we this is creating is an internal revolution.

In the coming year, in Brazil it will be 300 years since Zumbi. Zumbi was a black leader, who many years ago, when there was no Brazil, when it was a Portuguese colony, created a republic - a country within Brazil called Palmares. He was one of the kings of that country.

That country lasted, I think, 200 years, approximately. So it’s been 300 years now since the birth of Zumbi, and the black community of Brazil, the black population of Brazil is organising in order to do a lot of activities, in order to reclaim black heroes. Because we don’t have stories of black heroes officially, only Portuguese or whites.

So my grandparents were slaves. So it hasn’t been possible in history to have black heroes, in the history books, no history books. It still doesn’t exist in history. In schools the black part of history is still not talked about, in schools officially.

In theatre, principally in the Theatre of the Oppressed that we are involved in, there exists a possibility for social dialogue to occur. And what happens, the problem in theatre is that we are not able to get the attendance of millions of people. The television has an audience of millions of people; not the theatre.

But I believe it is important to be able to get to people as in one to one. For example, just with our play “O Prega Dor”, we’ve played to roughly around 10 thousand, 15 thousand people. We’ve performed it 30 times, more or less, and always with large crowds. In universities the average crowd is around 400 people, so 30 performances at 400 people, that’s 12 thousand people. So it’s already played to a large number of people.
IN CLOSING

V/O
Perhaps because it takes less in the way of resources to make a piece of theatre, than it does to make a film or television programme, theatre is still viable as a voice for those who seek to speak. Is it simply that? Perhaps it is also to do with the way that the piece of theatre comes into being. The processes, that makes it more than just a stepping stone into film or television. Perhaps it is to do with the necessity to share a space between the performer and the observer; or the possibility that interaction could occur; or the possibility that anything can, and sometimes does, happen - that it happens at that time and at that place, within reach; even if it is only “pretend”.

In the Theatre of the Oppressed, it is all of this and more. It is also about being able to participate, collaborate, make choices and work as part of a group of others who might share a goal. To create theatre, yes; but also to create action, in and out of the world of the theatre - to act.

Boal: We want to have the CTO, the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed of Rio de Janeiro, free to work in association with groups that don’t want to have a political commitment, a party commitment. Because as I am a member of the Workers’ Party, I want to go on doing some work with organisations that don’t want to have a party link.
We want to work with them and we don’t want to work with them and profit by propaganda for the Workers’ Party. We don’t want that.

Sometimes we don’t want to make Party politics. So it’s important to have both things separate ...So it’s very important to have both things at the same time, simultaneously.

And so that’s what we try to do. But we know that if you want to change the whole country it’s an enormous task. But we are developing.

We are developing as a party, we are developing as a mandate here; we have more and more people working with us.

It’s not like a race, that you have to be the first one. It’s a race without a point of arrival. I think that we should think about that we are in a race, yes; but there is not a point of arrival. We’re not going to get there and then the race stops and we see who won. No, we have to keep running. The important thing is to run. It’s not to win the race. Because the race, this race, never ends. So we are running, and we are running faster, and we are going further. And then let’s go on, going further, running faster and doing the best that we can - stronger, more numerous, more people. And that’s what we are doing. It’s not so fast as we would like, but it is as fast as we can make it.
Chapter 5
In His Own Words

Theatre of the Oppressed as a Dramatic Art

In his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal described what he termed to be the “poetics” of his theatre as opposed to a theory of it. In later writings he elaborated on a set of hypotheses upon which he built the Introspective Techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed. In *Rainbow of Desire* he addressed issues on the nature of the theatrical stage and the experience of the actor upon it, in relation to a therapeutical reading of this experience. In these works he approached the formation of a theory of Theatre of the Oppressed. This theory, however, when examined as a theory of knowledge can, arguably, begin to lose strength. It is fundamentally dependent upon its application for validation. The effectiveness of the symbolic play can only be judged from its effects. In a critique of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Drew Milne described Boal’s position as a theory of action. Boal’s engagement of Aristotle’s *Poetics* was noted by Milne to be problematic particularly in its reliance on a notion of the theatre and context from which Aristotle drew findings, as Boal interpreted them. The validity of the claim of the oppression inherent in Aristotle’s positioning was brought into question and found wanting, centrally in the assessability of the construed connection between Greek tragedy, Aristotle’s poetics and contemporary television drama. Boal’s thesis of ‘coercive intent and dynamic’ in Greek tragedy would be difficult to test. Although a study of television soap opera forms may yield some worthwhile results. However, Boal is interested in the stories being told, in the symbols being presented.

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This section of the thesis will examine Boal’s words, both written as well as those spoken in interviews, to focus on the significant concepts of Theatre of the Oppressed and their relationships to generally accepted notions of theatre. In this way, I intend to look at what are said to be the foundations of the practice in order to speculate on their significance to theatre thinking and practice.

**What is Theatre?**

The dramatic art has often been described as a phenomenon comprising of three essential elements. Peter Brook refers to an empty space that is taken as the bare stage upon which someone walks across whilst someone else is watching, considering this to be “all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.” Eric Bentley believes that the theatrical situation - “the distinction between art and life”, can be reduced to a minimum wherein “A impersonates B while C looks on.” William Shakespeare wrote of the “purpose of playing” as being “to hold... the mirror up to nature.” In each of these descriptions, 1) a player 2) performs a function 3) to a watcher.

Boal considers theatre to be, fundamentally, the art of looking at oneself and that this principle is applicable on an individual and social scale. The art form provides a medium in which to symbolically view the actual reality of the observer. “If I can look at myself, I know where I am in the situation and where can I be. I can program the future, I can find alternatives. ...Without looking at ourselves we would not be capable of creating culture, we would have habits.” In this process of the human observing itself, Boal saw the essence of theatre. But he also adds that “the human being not only ‘makes’ theatre: it ‘is’ theatre. And some human beings, besides being

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2 The Empty Space, Peter Brook 1968 (MacGibbon & Kee, London) p. 1.
3 The Life of the Drama, Eric Bentley 1965 (Methuen, London) p. 150.
5 Boal, interview with author, August 1994: Appendix A, lines 34-41.
In the multiplicity of meaning inherent in the word ‘theatre’ Boal eventually locates the base of his discourse in the above definition of theatre. He chooses to acknowledge, then move on, from other understandings of theatre such as the physical elements which combine to accomplish the event and the innate theatricality of events themselves both mundane and extraordinary. He opts to be grounded in the “most archaic sense” of theatricality, using an obscure fable - the story of Xua-Xua, to illustrate what he believes to be the cardinal element of the experience of theatre. Attempting to access the primeval experiences of early humanity that give us the capacity to see ourselves in the act of seeing, of thinking our emotions, of being moved by our thoughts. “They can see themselves here and imagine themselves there; they can see themselves today and imagine themselves tomorrow.” In addition, he favours the definition of theatre used by the 17th century playwright and dramatist Lope de Vega, of theatre as “two human beings, a passion and a platform.” Two human beings - the duality is seen as essential because theatre is a study of interpersonal relationships of individuals within society. It does not limit itself to the contemplation of solitary individuals taken in isolation. “Theatre denotes conflict, contradiction, confrontation, defiance. And the dramatic action lies in the variation and movement of this equation, of these opposing forces. Monologues will not be ‘theatre’ unless the antagonist, though absent, is implied; unless her absence is present.” Boal uses “platform” in the broadest sense, the stage can exist anywhere, so long as a performance space is distinguishable from a viewing space. The essential difference between de Vega’s definition and that which applies in Theatre of the Oppressed is that while the former describes a theatre that holds a mirror up to nature (as

7 Boal 1992, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, Preface.
8 Boal 1992, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, p. xxv-xxvi.
Shakespeare suggests), Theatre of the Oppressed is a mirror which its viewer can penetrate in order to modify the image seen.11

Boal believes that the theatrical language is the most essential human language. “Everything that actors do, we do throughout our lives, always and everywhere. Actors talk, move, dress to suit the setting, express ideas, reveal passions - just as we all do in our daily lives. The only difference is that actors are conscious that they are using the language of theatre, and are thus better able to turn it to their advantage, whereas the woman and man in the street do not know that they are speaking theatre.”12 For Boal, the theatrical language is richer than verbal language. The theatrical language includes all possible languages. The function of the performance is connected to its deconstructability and malleability. The performance of a Forum Theatre model has to serve an audience who will endeavour to destroy it, to modify it, and to find other ways of controlling it. The important thing is the use of the theatrical language and not the finished product.13 As a language, theatre would also be subject to the judgements placed on claims to ‘truth’, as in determinations that “theatre and lies are synonymous”. In terms and phrases such as ‘over-dramatising’, ‘making a scene’, ‘playing it up’ - or in French ‘faire du théâtre’ that are used to describe situations where an individual or group is manipulating or exaggerating or distorting truths.14

Boal believes that as theatre is a way of showing our lives, it is also a way of “showing our reality” and the structure of that reality. Because it shows something that is our reality, out of that reality - the normal day reality, we create a new reality15; the reality of symbols. This creates a dichotomous situation in which one reality is contained in another reality. He holds that the distinctions between fiction and reality are always tenuous. He

13 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
questions the separation between fiction and reality - believing the only fiction to be the word ‘fiction’. Everything is real. “In the Theatre of the Oppressed, we say that the image of reality is a reality as an image, and the whole of the Theatre of the Oppressed stands on that.” 16 This is not to say that the image of reality can be taken as interchangeable with actual reality. Questions other than artistic ones are faced. “If the spectator knows that the actor is playing a role, it’s fine, but if the spectator does not know that she is dealing with an actor and believes herself to be in the presence of a ‘real person,’ is this correct? Is it ethically right to borrow somebody else’s identity and use it abusively?” 17

A crucial step for Boal’s theatre came at the time when he and those he worked with shifted the focus of their theatre-making. “Instead of doing theatre ourselves, we helped spectators do theatre for themselves.” At this point, Boal’s consideration of theatre begins to differentiate from theatre as Brook, Bentley and Shakespeare define it. Rather than presenting a performance, the objective came to be the facilitation of the use of theatrical language by those wishing to speak for themselves. The theatrical language therefore had to speak of what was of concern to those who used it. “That is what the Theatre of the Oppressed is, nothing that happens on stage is alien from what happens in real life.” 18 For Boal, the power of the artistic image lay in its ability to allow participants to extrapolate themselves from actuality or social reality, into the reality we call fiction or the symbolic reality. Within the theatrical reality the participant can play with the symbolic image and then, after having created ‘theatre’ they can reverse the extrapolation. The participant has an opportunity to “manipulate the aesthetic reality in order to change the social one.” 19 For Boal the border between fiction and reality must

16 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
18 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
be crossed. Theatre of the Oppressed might begin in the fictional realm of symbols, but it inevitably has to reach back across the frontier into actual reality - into life.\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{Actor, Spectator and Spect-Actor}

Boal believes that theatre essentially exists through the subjectivity of those who practise it, and at the moment when they practise it. “It needs neither stage nor audience; the actor will suffice. With the actor is born the theatre. The actor is the theatre. We are all actors: we are theatre!”\textsuperscript{21} He allegorises an origin of theatre wherein “actor and spectator coexisted in the same person” and that “the point at which they were separated, when some specialised as actors and others as spectators, marks the birth of the theatrical forms as we know today.”\textsuperscript{22} Such a reliance on the notion of an ‘ancient history’ of theatre can indeed be problematic, the claim can only stand as a parable rather than fact. Boal uses it as a legitimisation for his belief that ‘spectator’ is an undesirable word, implying one who is less than whole and unable to engage in action - a passive consumer of the image.\textsuperscript{23} The main distinction that he draws between the human being as ‘actor’ and ‘spectator’ relates to an awareness of actions and roles. “In life and also on stage, the human body moves; we sing, we speak, we have ideas, we have passions. But when we go on stage we are conscious of that.”\textsuperscript{24} This belief is expressed and elaborated in practice. It is a fundamental principle of Theatre of the Oppressed that the separation between actor and spectator be breached.

There is no spectator in a Theatre of the Oppressed session: there are only active observers. The centre of gravity is in the auditorium rather than on stage. ...The Theatre of the Oppressed has two fundamental principles: 1) To help the spectator become a protagonist of the

\textsuperscript{20} Boal 1992, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, p. 247.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{23} Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 155.
\textsuperscript{24} Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
dramatic action so that they can 2) apply those actions they have practised in the theatre to real life.25

In referring to the “archaic application” of theatre, Boal identifies a key element of Theatre of the Oppressed practice. “All human beings are Actors (they act!) and Spectators (they observe!). They are Spect-Actors.”26 The spectator is the embodiment of the practice’s complete participant. “The poetics of the oppressed focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change - in short trains himself for real action.” Furthermore, he adds that what is important is not that the action is symbolic or fictional, what matters is that it is action.27 This underpins the determination that the fundamental principle of Theatre of the Oppressed is not just to offer alternatives but to ask for alternatives and to allow the spectator to become the actor.28

Boal’s refutation of the Aristotelian model of drama stands on tenuous ground when the basis for the argument is examined. The importance of this position is vital in that it connects the notion of an ‘oppressive’ or ‘coercive’ intent to the form of theatre and drama that was ascribed to by Aristotle. Central to Boal’s argument is the belief that when human beings first ‘discovered’ theatre, it was in the form of the dithyrambic song, the wild and free-form singing in the open air of our ancestors; the carnival and the feast. And then the ruling elites took possession of the theatre and placed it within dividing walls. “First, they divided the people, separating actors from spectators: people who act and people who watch - the party is over! Secondly, among the actors, they separated the protagonists from the mass

27 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 122.
[the chorus]. The coercive indoctrination began!”29 He believes that this was undertaken in order that the energy of the spectacle, of the symbolic play, may be harnessed and made to reflect and serve the dominant ideology.30 Boal’s hypothesis rests on the belief that the poetics of Aristotle, as “the poetics of oppression”, produces a form of catharsis which diverts the impetus for action towards a vicarious experience of action. “Dramatic action substitutes for real action.”31 It is this concern that drives the ‘activist’ orientation of Theatre of the Oppressed. Nevertheless its weakness or elusiveness as a theory is arguably necessary, as with any system which is, principally, an advocacy for action. It is here that the term ‘poetics’ fits conveniently. Whatever theory there is, exists as a justification for action, and is subservient to action. This is perhaps the reason that Theatre of the Oppressed finds an easy functionality in matters of politics and therapeutics. “We usually work on the boundaries of politics, using Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to study specific events.” At other instances, the work borders on the realm of psychology and psychotherapy, but always on the side of theatre.32

Behind the polemical stance of Theatre of the Oppressed is the view of theatre as “an ideological representation of images of social life.” Therefore the theatre-maker needs to be aware of the “pedagogical and combative character” of the work.33 For Boal, all theatre is necessarily political, as all human activity is political. “Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error - and this is a political attitude.”34 He considers the poetics of the oppressed to be “the poetics of liberation”. In this, the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters to think or to act in their place.

29 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 119.
30 Ibid., p. ix.
31 Ibid., p. 155.
34 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. ix.
“The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theatre is action!” The work of Theatre of the Oppressed sets out to dynamise its audience. “The solution is not to be found in the theatre, but in real life; if in the theatre we dynamize people, we create the habit of looking at all situations as being one possibility among others.” Inherent in this undertaking is the recognition that the system of practice must encourage its spectators to manifest what they want in a democratic way. “I can say whatever I want, but the fellow who is sitting next to me also has the same right.” In addition, there was also the drive to pose the question of control in the theatre-making process. To “transfer to the people the means of production in the theatre so that the people themselves may utilize them.”

Whereas the term ‘the people’ might hold clearer connotations in one socio-cultural context than in another, other terms such as ‘communities’ or ‘interest groups’ are often used in English-speaking situations to indicate those to whom this process is being offered as an instrument. It is in these facilities for action and expression, within the realm of the theatrical experience, that practitioners of Theatre of the Oppressed base the claims of empowerment of individual and group participants. It is in this area of the work that the ‘manifesto’ of Theatre of the Oppressed finds its basis and scope for articulation.

**Action and Knowledge**

As a poetics advocating action, Boal sees Theatre of the Oppressed as emphasising “theatre as a language that must be spoken, not a discourse that must be listened to.” Additionally, he considers theatre to be “a process that must be developed, rather than a finished product that must be consumed.”

The theatrical experience creates a venue wherein the symbolic dramatic

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36 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
action can throw light upon action in actual reality. “The spectacle is a preparation for action.” The dramatic art creates a situation and experience where we can see ourselves in action, in activity; in the act of seeing, in the act of acting, in the act of feeling, the act of thinking. It also offers an opportunity to imagine variations of our action; to study alternatives. Of course, activity by itself rarely makes for interesting dramatics. Boal goes back to de Vega’s words:

The passion is necessary: theatre, as an art does not have as its object the commonplace and the trivial, the valueless. It attaches itself to actions in which the characters have an investment, situations in which they venture their lives and their feelings, their moral and political choices: their passions! What is a passion? It is a feeling for someone or something, or an idea, that we prize more highly than our own life.

Boal’s metaphor for the origin of theatre considers it to be “the first human invention and also the invention which paves the way for all other inventions and discoveries.” Accordingly, this invention came to the human being with the knowledge “that it can observe itself; when it discovers that, in this act of seeing, it can see itself - see itself in sitú: see itself seeing.” By beginning to see itself in the symbols it was creating, the human began to formulate a knowledge of itself and its environment. “Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society.” The knowledge developed is a knowledge of interpersonal dynamics; a developing knowledge of power processes. “Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.” But he is quick to advise that Theatre of the Oppressed is a form of knowledge that cannot be treated as definitive. It is a form of knowledge that is based on the questions that it asks. “What is

38 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 155.
40 Ibid., p. 16.
important here is not to get a solution, but to develop the capacity of trying
to find a solution.”

Boal suggests that the concrete nature of the theatrical event
necessitates a continual questioning of both form and content, that
subordinates even the process itself:

...pure technique does not exist in the same sense that pure
mathematics does. Two plus two is four regardless of the question. But
theatre does not struggle against curved lines, angles, numbers, or
figures; theatre struggles with the unexpected one wishes to know and
it struggles with people. And people cannot be added in a pure or
abstract manner.

On the other hand, feeling that the “modern theatre has emphasized
originality too much” and that the concerns of artists serve to beckon
responsiveness in the form of “a series of basically formal innovations”, he
warns that the desire for a rapidly evolving theatre has led to a tendency to
discard tradition; “each new conquest in the theatre has meant the loss of all
previous gains.” He draws a comparison with rules and conventions in a
sport such as soccer, observing that the “game would lose all interest if each
match were played in accordance to rules made up for that match alone, if
fans had to learn during the match the rules governing it.” Knowledge is
cumulative and previous knowledge is indispensable.

In the interest of finding a balance between these poles of practice, Boal
sought to develop the Theatre of the Oppressed as “a system of physical
exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and special improvisations
whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape this human vocation
[theatre], by turning the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the
comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their

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43 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
45 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 177.
solutions.”\textsuperscript{47} He emphasises his position that Theatre of the Oppressed techniques were invented to be useful to people, and certainly not with the goal of adapting the people to suit the techniques. “They were made for human beings, not human beings for them.”\textsuperscript{48}

Fundamental to Boal’s objection to the Aristotelian concept of theatre is the distinction he sees between the dynamics of ‘empathy’ and ‘sympathy’ that occur in the observer of the drama. ‘Traditional’ drama seeks to evoke empathy - the capacity to participate in another’s feelings or ideas. Boal considers empathy to be a force that does not lead to activation. “Empathy must be understood as the terrible weapon it really is. Empathy is the most dangerous weapon in the entire arsenal of the theatre and related arts (movies and TV).”\textsuperscript{49} For Boal, if empathy was the effect of a Theatre of the Oppressed session it would then have to be considered “the Theatre for the Oppressed.” He argues that it would be of greater value to bring about an effect of sympathy, or an affinity between persons wherein whatever affects one similarly affects the other. “Sym-pathy is immediate: We are all speaking about ourselves.” The desired result is that “the individual story of a person will immediately become plural, since one’s oppression is everybody’s oppression.” Sym-pathy implies a dynamic that is grounded in personal experience, it is not reliant upon the actions of the symbolic characters in order to be moved. “I am not touched by somebody else’s emotions. I produce my own. I control my actions. I am the subject.”\textsuperscript{50} Similarly the notion of catharsis as a purgation of undesirable human urges receives much censure from Boal. He warns against the forms of catharsis which serve to dis-courage the viewer of the drama from actions that might be deemed anti-social or a threat to the norms, therefore acting as instruments of oppression.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 177.  
\textsuperscript{47} Boal 1995, The Rainbow of Desire, p. 15.  
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 188.  
\textsuperscript{49} Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 113.
Catharsis itself is not to be rejected. The consideration falls upon the type of catharsis that is provoked. The catharsis should be of the kind which obliterates the barriers to activation - the barriers to growth. \(^51\) This process is set in motion in the aestheticised reality of the dramatic form, where it must still employ the dramatic art’s capacity to place experience ‘at one remove’. As individual experience is the starting point of the exploration of any situation in Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal acknowledges that the individual symbols must become symbolic in a social context; this differentiates theatre from psychotherapy. \(^52\)

In the manner that the dramatic art “holds the mirror up to nature”, in the “distinction between art and life”, can be found the interface of two different worlds placed in contact - the auditorium and the stage; two realities engaged in a process of diffusion and absorption, i.e. osmosis. The process can be communicative as well as manipulative. The problem that Boal found with conventional theatre practice was that the auditorium was deactivated and reduced to contemplation during the performance, as the narrative and the events develop on-stage. “Osmosis moves from the stage to the auditorium in an intransitive manner.”\(^53\) What the Theatre of the Oppressed proposes is a furthering of the process of metaxis - “the belonging to both the world of reality and the reality of the image of that reality.” Boal believes that this process can be utilised for the activation of the normally passive participant - “we create images of reality, then train ourselves in the image, so that we go back to our world’s reality better trained.”\(^54\) The Theatre of the Oppressed sets out “to make the auditorium-stage dialog entirely transitive: the stage may attempt to transform the auditorium but the auditorium can attempt to change everything.”\(^55\)

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\(^51\) Boal 1990, “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An Interview with Augusto Boal” The Drama Review T127.
\(^54\) Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
Theatre of the Oppressed as Therapy


**psy.cho.ther.a.py** \-pe-\ n [ISV] : treatment of mental or emotional disorder or of related bodily ills by psychological means : an agency (as treatment) designed or serving to bring about social adjustment.

**Background**

When Boal started working in Europe at the end of the 1970s, it became apparent that the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed was entering new territory, one that was inhabited by more internalised forms of oppression. He found that, in general, the participants that he worked with in, initially, Portugal and France were also oppressed but with some free time to preoccupy themselves with themselves. These preoccupations were concerned with things like solitude, incommunicability and emptiness. “I started working on those themes... Theatre of the Oppressed became much more psychological. I started using techniques linked to psychotherapy.”

When he returned to Brazil in the 1980s he was able to test the techniques he had developed in Europe with less economically-privileged participant groups. Although these groups did not suggest the introspective themes he had encountered in Europe, they were acknowledged after he had suggested them. But the less affluent Brazilian participants were still more concerned with the more apparent “police, money and boss problems”.

Boal rejects too close a comparison with Jacob Moreno’s Theatre of Spontaneity. He admits that “once I did psychodrama as a patient and it didn’t work for me.” However, he very quickly realised the value of further

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56 Boal 1990, “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An Interview with Augusto Boal” The Drama Review T127.
57 Ibid.
59 Boal 1990, “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An Interview with Augusto Boal” The Drama Review T127.
explorations into this aspect of his work. “I want to develop the psychotherapeutic techniques as I want to develop the educational techniques.” Boal believes that the spectatorial experience of confronting one form of reality (which we perceive consciously or unconsciously to be a constructed symbolic one) whilst residing in another form of reality (the one we perceive to be our actual reality) inevitably provokes the receptor in one of two ways - either towards disease or health; towards the spectator becoming wise or stupid, better or worse. He believes that a key element in the quality and effect of this experience is the spectator’s ability, or lack thereof, to enter and perhaps alter the reality of the fiction - the symbolic constructed reality. In this sense theatre has the potential to be a therapeutic force.60

**Intention**

For theatre work to be described as psychotherapeutic often carries an implication that such undertakings would, at best, rest outside aesthetic considerations. In drawing a comparison between psychotherapy and theatre practice, Elsass found an apparent similarity between the work of actors and psychotherapists. Both had an aim of creating new insights or making implicit knowledge explicit for the audience or patients; ‘healing’ and ‘good performance’ imply something created that was not there before. Furthermore, he believes that both processes “may be productive in bringing about either a performance or a healing if the actor or the therapist has an outer vision which he experiences as a kind of truth and meaning.” This ‘outer vision’ is in the realm of the symbolic, it also guides the symbolic work. “Without this, no implicit knowledge will be revealed. ...Without a vision, neither the performance nor the therapy will have an empowering effect on their ‘objects’.”61 Boal takes this thinking even further in advancing

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61 “The Healing Space in Psychotherapy and Theatre” Peter Elsass, New Theatre Quarterly
a broader denotation of the term ‘actor’, holding the view that “The actor is the theatre. We are all actors: we are theatre!” Adding that although “actor and spectator can be two different people; they can also coincide in the same person.”62 This view of the role of the actor and the spectator touches upon what could perhaps be described, in Elsass’ terms, as the “vision” of Theatre of the Oppressed. For Boal, a primary purpose of Theatre of the Oppressed is “to dynamize the audience, ...if in the theatre we dynamize people, we create the habit of looking at all situations as being one possibility among others.”63 Theatre of the Oppressed seeks to use the art form as a tool for the understanding of social and personal problems, and in the search for their solutions.64

In Rainbow of Desire, Boal uses the example of an actor who sets out to perform a classic murder scene to demonstrate a fundamental dynamic of aestheticisation that operates in the psychotherapeutic functioning of Theatre of the Oppressed. “Playing Othello, only a madman - never an actor! - could actually strangle the actress playing Desdemona. The actor does not deprive himself of the pleasure of killing the character but he preserves the physical integrity of the actress.” The act of killing, in this sense, is only a symbolic one. “This is what happens on a theatre stage and in a similar fashion, on a therapeutic stage. Here too, the dichotomic and ‘dichotomizing’ properties of the aesthetic space take root and exercise their powers.” In considering the dynamic of the psychotherapeutic stage, he distinguishes between the experience of the actor and the patient as protagonists in a drama. “The protagonist-actor produces thoughts and releases emotions and sentiments which, whether her own or not, are supposed to belong to the character, that is to say, someone else... [While] the protagonist-patient (the patient-actor) reproduces her thoughts and releases anew her own emotions and her own

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63 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.
sentiments (which are recognised and declared as being her own).” Beyond the simple process of entering a performance space and enacting experience, both the actor and the patient-actor partake in the focalising power of the ‘aesthetic space’ of theatre, whilst encountering the dichotomous result of the layering of theatrical reality upon actual reality - of one experience of existence over another. In this situation, self-observation and self-awareness occur in a heightened form, in a physical and psychological sense. Facilitating this heightening of focus is the observation, awareness and attention of others - the audience at the edge of the symbolic platform - together with the desire of the actor or the patient-actor to relate an experience of reality. For the patient-actor, who might be enacting or drawing upon past experience, the heightening of experience and awareness allows for the possibility of the observation of themselves in the context of that past experience, the “I-before”, which would still be a part of their present make-up, the “I-now”. This process of observation is necessarily a process of distancing and detaching. The patient-actor also necessarily faces the question of which “I” they identify themselves as; either as the “I-before” that lived the experience, or as the “I-now” that has chosen to revisit that experience. Arguably, however, the question answers itself by virtue of the evident space and time that separates the experience and its recounting. The past experience and the part of oneself that lived this experience can thus become an object of analysis and study. They become “aesthetically reified”. The patient-actor moves from being a subject-in-sitú to being a subject-observer, within the theatricality. Boal believes that the importance of theatre as psychotherapy rests on this possibility for transformation of the patient-actor as protagonist, assisted by the observance of the other participants.65

The three essential qualities that make up theatre’s capacity to enhance knowledge and to transform those who partake of it (the plasticity of the medium, the doubling or dichotomizing property of the theatrical

65 Ibid., p. 25-27.
stage, the telemicroscopic property) are aesthetic properties - they are related to the senses. Communication in theatre occurs by means of the principal senses, in this way knowledge and experience is transmitted and acquired. In the psychotherapeutic functioning of theatrical processes, the sensorial experience of self-observation enables the patient-actor to acquire knowledge of their own self. The “doubling of the self”, which can take place in other situations and spaces, occurs on the theatrical stage with a particular intensity deriving from the aesthetic nature of the experience. Ideas, emotions and sensations are the elements of the phenomena that the human being and consciousness dips into. “Theatre is a therapy into which one enters body and soul, soma and psyche.”

**Process**

Boal has come to appreciate the value of studying the dynamics of one particular action and impulse - that of desire - in his explorations of the psychotherapeutic functions of the Theatre of the Oppressed. The desire may be for “love or hate, attack or flight, construction or destruction” among other things. As the patient-actor enacts an experience, that experience is dichotomised by the theatrical stage and comes to be regarded as material in an aesthetic space. Concretised desires, both declared and undeclared, are relived in the context of the exercises. As with an actor exploring a character in rehearsal, the experience of the patient-actor might be lived with emotion in the first or original instance. In the reliving of the experience, the emotions that coloured the original instance of experience are revisited. At the same time, the patient-actor strives to relate the experience to the other participants in the exercise. Emotion in the first or original instance of experience, as with the actor in rehearsal, is by nature an introversive and solitary discovery. Whereas the relived emotion constitutes a dialogue wherein the patient-actor, as with the actor, sets out to reveal the discovery of the experience to the other participants or to the audience. In the study of desire, Boal finds that in

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these explorations “To desire becomes a thing. The verb becomes a palpable noun.”

However, further progress and genuine transformation for the patient-actor requires more than just the process of observing the desire. A therapeutic process requires the introduction of the possibility of the exercise of choice, while presenting an inventory of possible alternatives.

A process is therapeutic when it allows - and encourages - the patient to choose from several alternatives to the situation in which he finds himself, the situation which causes him unwanted suffering or unhappiness. In enabling, and indeed requiring, the patient to observe himself in action - since his own desire to show obliges him both to see and to see himself - this theatrical process of recounting, in the present, and in front of witnesses ‘in solidarity’, a story lived in the past, offers, in itself, an alternative.

It is in the exploration of alternatives that the patient-actor moves towards a desired transformation. Just as an actor’s characterisation of a role holds a number of possibilities and variances, so a patient-actor’s power of choice within the revisited experience allows for the invocation of possibilities that might not have been apparent at the first instance of experience. In the process, the patient-actor can explore the possibilities and variances available in the role of the “I-before.” For the “witnesses”, the vicarious nature of the experience allows for the possibility to penetrate into the lived experience which the patient-actor revisits and to travel with them as a protagonist in the situation. If the witnesses are able to draw analogies between their own lives and those of the protagonist, identification with and recognition of the protagonist-patient’s perspective can occur.

It would be difficult to ascertain precisely what degree of similarity exists between the realms in which theatre and psychotherapy function. The

67 Ibid., p. 24-25.
69 Ibid., p. 38-39.
modes of communication inherent in psychotherapy and the theatrical process both aim to create change. In psychotherapy, an outside agent (the therapist) and a subject (the patient) undertake to implement some form of healing process. In the theatrical process, a performance (be it by actors or patient-actors) undertakes to introduce to its audience an element of reality that was not there previously. Elsass notes that both activities utilise the element of repetition to achieve their objectives. Actors rely on repetition in rehearsal and performance, while the psychotherapist works within the repetitive “repertoire” of the patient’s problems, that may need to be revisited many times over many sessions. Practitioners of theatre and psychotherapy work with ‘the other’ via the instrument of their own self.71

In the Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal undertakes to meld the two processes of theatre and psychotherapy. By utilising the language of theatrical practice for the purposes of analysis and healing of individual suffering, he subjugates the conventionally accepted role of theatre as entertainment. What is essential is the process; indeed the process is the product. The communication between the performer and the observer needs to be intimate - a dialogue, rather than a monologue, between the two parties. Nevertheless, the space that the processes of Theatre of the Oppressed creates and requires must be aesthetic in nature. They are sensorial and reified manipulations of time, space and human physicality; in another word, theatrical. The psychotherapeutic techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed is an application of theatrical practice. To attempt to classify them as something other than theatre is to deny the totality of the vocabulary of theatrical practice.

70 Ibid., p. 26.
Theatre of the Oppressed as Politics

pol.i.tics  /ˈpaːl-ə-tiks/ n [Gk politika, fr. neut. pl. of politikos political]: 1: the art or science of government, the guiding or influencing of governmental policy, the winning and holding control over a government 2: the competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership in a government or other group 3: the total complex of relations between human beings in society. (Websters - paraphrased)

Background

With the publication in 1974 of Teatro del Oprimido y Otras Poeticas Politicas (Buenos Aires, Ediciones de la Flor), Boal took his discussions on the roles of the actor, the spectator and the protagonist to the wider theatre community. He uses as examples the work he had developed with the national literacy campaign in Peru in 1973, and to a certain extent the work with the Arena Theatre of São Paulo, of which he was the artistic director from 1956 until he had to leave Brazil in 1971. The work with Arena set the stage for the creation of the role of the Joker and its rationale, while questioning the roles of the “hero” and the “myth”. The work in Peru solidified the Joker role and brought about the initial development of such forms as Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, Newspaper Theatre and Invisible Theatre among others. In response to Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Pedagogia del Oprimido, 1970), Boal began his exploration of what he termed the “poetics of the oppressed” as a “plan for transforming the spectator into actor.”

In 1964, Boal witnessed a political act that reinforced his belief in the power of art and culture. In the preceding years, a large network of Popular Centres of Culture were established around Brazil. These centres utilised Brazilian culture and arts to foster community spirit and exchange. He recalls poetry workshops, discussions on philosophy, cooking classes, house-building workshops and many other forms of skills exchange that revolved

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73 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 120-122.
around the centres; that is, until the coup d’état of 1964. Then the incoming dictatorship saw fit to legislate, as one of its first laws, the abolition of all Popular Centres of Culture. Not because, according to Boal, they were political venues, but because they were venues for in-depth dialogue. Boal realises that dialogue is a key to analysis, to the understanding of social situations and structures. Boal has always considered his work to be political, though the manner in which he carries out this work changes over the years. From the activities that lead to his being ‘strongly advised’ by internal security officers to leave Brazil in 1971, to his election as a Legislator at the Municipal Chambers of Rio de Janeiro in 1992, he considers himself to have always been “politically active”. He holds hope for the return of the Popular Centres of Culture to the social landscape of Brazil.

He considers the Theatre of the Oppressed to contain three main branches - the educational, the social and the therapeutic. These utilise techniques from the “arsenal” of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Political activity, to Boal, can mean the utilisation of these theatre games and exercises for the production of short plays for overtly political purposes, as well as the development of its application in law-making through Legislative Theatre. He has found that Theatre of the Oppressed work can often sit on the boundaries of politics. Particularly when the techniques are put to use in the examination of specific events such as how to organise a strike. “There are many people who dare not participate in a strike or other political actions. Why? Because they have cops in their heads. They have internalized their oppressions.”

In these ways, Boal lives up to his belief that “The theatrical profession, which belongs to a few, should not hide the existence and permanence of the

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76 Ibid., lines 260-267.
77 Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47; Rainbow of Desire, p. 15.
theatrical vocation, which belongs to all. Theatre is a vocation for all human beings: it is the true nature of humanity.” To this end, he sees the objective of Theatre of the Oppressed as being the safeguarding, development and reshaping of this human vocation. To Boal, the vocation must become a tool for the examination of social and personal symbols that are problems. Thus it becomes a tool in the search for solutions to those problems.79 To achieve this Boal considered that theatre cannot remain confined to the sanctified spaces. “Theatre cannot be imprisoned in the theatrical buildings, just as religion cannot be imprisoned in churches.”80

Theory

Boal’s first major objective in the book Theatre of the Oppressed was to examine the classic and modern underpinnings of theatre which survive and prosper in contemporary theatre and the entertainment industry. He brings into question the intentions, and to a certain extent the strategies that evolved around the practice of Tragedy and then later during the Renaissance. He suggests that Tragedy developed (by way of the elements of the tragic hero, exploitation of empathy, and discussions of ethos through such mechanisms as the ‘fatal flaw’ of the hero) into a coercive system which has since been employed by various hierarchical interests over the ages. With the rise of the bourgeoisie, theatre during the Renaissance took on values based on the Machiavellian poetics of ‘virtù’ and nurtured assumptions that would later be challenged by Hegelian and Marxist values. Using the work of Hegel and then Brecht, Boal describes a movement towards a more analytical poetic, in the developments of the nature of the dramatic character and form, as well as in the relationship between the performance and the spectator.81

81 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, Part One.
In his later work *Rainbow of Desire*, Boal refers to Lope de Vega’s definition of theatre - “two human beings, a passion and a platform.” The platform or the “place of representation” is the venue upon which human wills in collision create dramatic action. “Theatre denotes conflict, contradiction, confrontation, defiance.” As the third essential element of the formula, passion elevates theatrical action onto a level that solicits the observer’s concern. Passion lifts the action above and beyond “the commonplace and the trivial, the valueless.” It represents the values of the characters, the symbols that most influence their decisions and actions, their moral and political choices. It represents the symbols “that we prize more highly than our own life.”

Boal therefore believes that the art of theatre necessarily serves a purpose that is highly subjectified, related to personal and perceived social values, and is not bound by the Romantic notion of ‘truth’. ‘Over-dramatising’, ‘making a scene’, ‘playing it up’, ‘faire du théâtre’ all denote situations wherein there is an element of manipulation, exaggeration or distortion of what can be perceived as ‘facts’ or the ‘truths’. These are also the elements that ‘fictionalise’ the theatrical event, that make theatre and lies synonymous. Thus Boal holds that “the theatre is a weapon... a very efficient weapon” and that for this reason, sectors of society would “strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and utilize it as a tool for domination.”

In these comments, Boal’s own passion for the role of theatre in society becomes most apparent.

In addition, his views of theatre as a language that must be spoken as a dialogue between actor and spect-actor - a process rather than a finished product - are fundamental to the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed. As the theatrical language uses actions, words and image to express ideas and

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84 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. ix.
reveal passions, it can be considered “the most essential human language” in the way that it uses the totality of human form and expression. “Theatre is a form of knowledge.” Through theatre, humans “observe themselves in action” and exercise the conscious ability “to identify (themselves and others) and not merely to recognise.” Not only can human beings practise identification, there is an additional capability, one that is central to the viewing of theatre - the ability to draw implications. “I can identify a friend by a single gesture, a painter by his style, a politician by the policies he supports.” Boal encapsulates this position in a central hypothesis that:

All the moral and political values of a given society along with its structures of power and domination, as well as its corresponding mechanisms of oppression are contained in the smallest cells of the social organization (the couple, the family, the neighborhood, the school, the office, the factory, etc.).

Around this human capacity to perceive an implied message, and around theatre’s ability as a language to transmit and communicate a broader image or experience than what is immediately perceivable within the frame of the theatrical experience, lies Boal’s assertion that “all theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them.” He believes that these potentials lie behind the movement in earlier classical traditions to create “established divisions” between those who would create and those who are to receive the creation, between the actor and the spectator. For Boal, this movement was naturally and intrinsically political.

His response, in the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed, was to seek and create a “theatre of freedom” to counteract what he saw to be the coercive forms that existed. He sought forms that would allow its participants to view a range of choices that they would have available to them in a given

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88 Boal 1979, Theatre of the Oppressed, p. ix.
situation. These choices should not be guided by the performance or its facilitators, but by the sensibilities of the participants, the spect-actors themselves. Boal seeks a form that is democratic in the sense that the spect-actor can say whatever they want, and the spect-actor sitting in the next seat also has that same right.\(^{89}\) In a Theatre of the Oppressed session, he considers there to be no spectators, “there are only active observers.”\(^{90}\) Thus the term ‘spect-actor’ has become a key element in the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed. It is a symbol that is intended to activate the observer of the event. A symbol that emphasises the difference between choice and coercion.

**Practiced**

The theatre practice that Boal developed was shaped by a range of different political and social landscapes that he had encountered along the way. As artistic director of the Arena Theatre of São Paulo between 1956 and 1971, his work was influenced by the political climate that preceded the 1964 military coup d’état. This was characterised by a growing level of national pride, perhaps at its most apparent in the arts through the emergence of a vibrant Brazilian popular music sub-culture (the movement of the late 1960s that became known as Música Popular Brasileira or MPB).\(^{91}\) In Boal’s work with Arena, it was manifest through the infusion of greater levels of Brazilian content and form in the theatre work that they produced, in reaction to the continental European aspirations of the more established theatre companies of the time. Naturally, his work was also greatly influenced by the socio-political climate that descended after 1964. Works such as “Zumbi” (1964) and “Opinião” (1968) were indicative of this period, as works that dealt with concerns arising from the socio-political situations in Brazil. By 1971 Boal had felt the full force of the backlash against this work, with the murder of two of his colleagues at Arena, repeated violent attacks by armed groups at their

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\(^{89}\) Boal 1985, interview with CBC Radio - Canadian Theatre Review 47.


\(^{91}\) The Billboard Book of Brazilian Music: Samba, Bossa Nova, and the Popular Sounds of Brazil Chris McGowan & Ricarda Pessanda 1991 (Guinness, New York) p. 77.
performances, and eventually his own detention and torture. He was freed three months after his arrest following an international campaign for his release, and was forewarned by his captors to leave Brazil or face an even more dreadful consequence. His move that year to Argentina and, later, Peru eventually led to his work with the national literacy campaigns of ALFIN (Operación Alfabetización Integral), which used many of the ideas of Paulo Freire. This work gave Boal important research opportunities that eventually resulted in his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*. This time also allowed him to produce works such as “Torquemada” (1971) and “Uncle Scrooge McDuck” (1973), which allowed him to respond to his recent experiences in Brazil. As the political situation in Argentina deteriorated in the mid 1970s he found himself, again, unable to work freely without threats of persecution. He eventually moved to Portugal in 1976 where he worked at the National Conservatory of Theatre, until the political climate there also became more conservative. This contributed to his acceptance of an offer to work at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1978. This and the subsequent work that he carried out in France led to the development of the strand of his work that came to be known as Rainbow of Desire, the Introspective Techniques.

In looking at the political implications of the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed, it would be perhaps most useful to focus on the various techniques and examine their functions in the context of the notion of politics. This thesis takes the definition of politics as that which is concerned with the total complex of relations between human beings in society, as well the competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership in a government or other group. With this in mind, this section will briefly examine three aspects of Boal’s work - Invisible Theatre, Forum Theatre and the work that Boal undertook in Rio de Janeiro in collaboration with the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores) of Brazil between 1986 and 1996.

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92 Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz 1994, Playing Boal, p. 3.
93 Boal 1990, “Invisible Theatre: Liege, Belgium 1978” The Drama Review T127; Theatre of the Oppressed, p. 120.
94 Websters.
Boal emphasises the importance of approaching Invisible Theatre as theatre. It is, at its most basic, a scripted theatrical performance. However possible it might be that an ‘audience’ of an Invisible Theatre performance would actually realise its theatrical and performative nature, however much it might be modified in performance, nevertheless it is theatre being presented to an audience. The performance is intended to be performed in a place which is not a theatre - a public space that does not designate ‘performance’, and for an audience which does not expect to become a ‘performance’ audience. The subject of the performance must be an important symbol, especially for those who will experience it. The concern invoked must be profound and genuine. Issues that have been dealt with, by groups that have worked with Boal, include sexual harassment, racism, economic disparities and parenting of children, to name a few. Although he insists that in Invisible Theatre, actors perform as actors do - “they must live”, he also notes that since it will present scenes of fictional reality without the effects of the rites of conventional theatre, this performed symbolic reality becomes a part of actual reality. To Boal, Invisible Theatre is not only concerned with ‘realism’, it is concerned with becoming ‘reality’. In taking theatrical practice to the point wherein the receptors of the theatre work may not be aware that they are perceiving a work of theatre, the question is raised as to whether this practice can, if at all, be considered to be a form of theatre; whether the practice, as Kohtes has argued, is not political theatre but rather political action that should not be regarded as an aesthetic phenomenon. Boal has also described Invisible Theatre as “a planned action,... it’s a real action; it’s not fiction anymore.” It is apparent in this case that there is no shortage of political intent in the work, in its desire to influence the work’s receptor towards a particular course of action in a societal sphere. It could also be argued that Invisible Theatre possesses some coercive tendencies, in that the participants in the event do

95 Boal 1992, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, pp. 6-17.
not make a choice to become participants. Instead, its participants come to be that by circumstance. There is also a tendency to be exposed to censures on the basis of a shortage of artistic significance or content. Because, it may be argued, a substantial proportion of its participants do not get the opportunity to regard it as an artistic endeavour, the Invisible Theatre event does not register as ‘art’ and therefore does not resonate artistic significance. However, the practitioners of Invisible Theatre must regard it as a practice that is firmly rooted in the dramatic arts, whose significance must be assessed no less comprehensively than a conventional theatre performance. This evaluation becomes particularly necessary for the practice to be developed. In this sense, Invisible Theatre can be genuinely considered to be a covert art form.

Forum Theatre is a form which seeks and encourages the participation of its audience, or spect-actors, in the destruction and reconstruction of its narrative line. In this case, Boal sets out a venue in which the receptor of the work can be made consciously active. As the spect-actor participates, either personally or vicariously in the reality of the play, and attempts to change that reality, Boal considers that they do so as preparation for being able to make similar changes in their actual reality. As the spect-actor confronts the difficulties presented before them in the reality of the play, and if they manage to overcome these difficulties within the Forum Theatre, they can become better equipped to overcome similar difficulties in their actual reality when the situation arises. Boal believes that Forum Theatre affects its receptors in a way that stimulates their desire “to change the world.” Like Invisible Theatre and other strands of Theatre of the Oppressed, Forum Theatre has developed “in response to concrete and particular political situations.” Boal saw the need to develop Forum Theatre techniques out of a desire to encourage the spect-actor to “fully assume their function of protagonist.” It derives from work he had carried out in the period between 1971 and 1973 in Argentina and Peru, during an interval when the level of

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political repression had eased without completely disappearing. He sought to focus on the spect-actor as protagonist at a time when he thought “the people would have a role to play in the near future.”

Forum Theatre was developed as a theatrical system by which participants could experiment with social and political roles that might be required of them during the difficult and sometimes dangerous living conditions under the military regimes of the Latin Americas of the early 1970s.

When Boal returned to Brazil and again undertook theatre projects in 1986 after 15 years in exile, there was widespread interest in his work from a range of sources. He received an offer to stage some Invisible Theatre performances from a television network in Rio de Janeiro. These were broadcast on commercial television and eventually discontinued when it evidently attracted the interest of unamused network heads. Another project that came his way at that time was a collaboration with Darcy Ribeiro, an anthropologist who was then also vice governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Ribeiro had instigated an innovative program through the public school system, which involved food distribution to underprivileged students as an incentive to attend school. Through this scheme Boal, with a group of collaborators whom he had trained, held workshops and Forum Theatre performances with students and teachers. That is, until funding for the program was withdrawn by incoming city and state governments. He was drawn towards a vigorous political movement spearheaded by a newly formed political party that was rapidly gaining a great deal of popular support. This was the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ Party). It was around this time that, according to Boal, he first adapted theatrical techniques specifically for use in an election campaign.

Boal and his group campaigned for Ribeiro in 1986, for Lula (Luis Inacio Lula da Silva) the Workers’ Party presidential candidate for the 1989 campaign, for his own mandate as a

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99 Boal 1990, “Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: An interview with Augusto Boal” The Drama Review T127; and in Playing Boal 1994, p. 4.
Workers’ Party candidate in the 1992 municipal elections in Rio de Janeiro, for Lula again in the 1994 presidential elections, and for a second term as municipal legislator (vereador) in 1996. Each time, theatre became a central aspect of his campaign strategy through street theatre, Forum Theatre and Invisible Theatre performances at various stages. With his election to the Municipal Chambers of Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Boal was able to employ his core group of theatre collaborators as officers of his mandate. Not long before this, the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed of Rio de Janeiro was formed around a group of “cultural animateurs” that Boal had trained and worked with since the Ribeiro program. These two projects - the CTO and the legislative mandate - became the focus for Boal in Brazil. A new technique was also developed around the use of theatre within the legislative process that Boal was now a part of. This became the technique of Legislative Theatre. This involved the creation of a number “nucleus groups” around the city of Rio de Janeiro facilitated by the work of the CTO and his mandate. The workshops that were carried out by the nucleus groups produced theatre pieces that were performed at various locations and events. Mainly through the performances of Forum Theatre pieces, Boal’s mandate would document various ideas and recommendations that would come out of these performances. His mandate would then structure them into proposals for amendments to existing legislation or as models for new legislation, which Boal then tabled in his capacity as legislator. The subject matter of the performances came out of the concerns of the groups that would workshop and perform them. One example, and the first piece of legislation that was successfully tabled by Boal in this way, decreed that facilities for visually impaired people be installed at public telephones around the city. By using techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed to undertake research and consultation processes with various communities, and then using the material derived from these processes as basis for legislative amendments and proposals, Boal once more undertakes to meld the functions of theatrical and

101 Ibid., p. 234.  
political processes, in ways that challenge accepted notions of what constitute both these processes. Naturally, Boal encountered not only the benefits inherent in these processes, but also the problems, to a greater degree. Throughout the latter period of his work at the Municipal Chambers, political manoeuvrings had become a much more integral part of the landscape through which he navigated. Perhaps the main difference between this and the earlier period of his work in Brazil has been that in the latter period he had been able to be more open and conscious about the manner in which he works in the theatrical and political arenas.

**Possibilities**

In response to the occasional comment that often came from legislators describing one of their fellow’s effort-full rhetorical style as ‘making theatre’, Boal sometimes responded by saying “that’s not theatre, that’s bad theatre!” He clearly considers that “politics is a form of theatre,” although “not only in the vulgar sense.” As theatre illustrates a reality and the structure of that reality, he felt that his job as an elected politician “has a lot to do with changing the structure of our society.” In this sense, he uses theatre as a means of pinpointing aspects of life which he could influence, and perhaps improve, in the course of his work as a municipal legislator. In his development of Legislative Theatre, he saw a way of not only creating “theatre which is political” but also a way of using “theatre as politics.” He viewed what he was doing as an attempt to affect his society by means beyond ‘the speech’, the conventional tool of the politician, to include ‘action’, specifically the dramatic action. He also acknowledges the extreme difficulties inherent in such an experiment, given the vast array of uncontrollable and intangible conditions that come into play in the political arena. For example, it is one accomplishment to pass a proposal into legislative form, while an entirely different undertaking lies in implementing and enforcing that law. It is a condition which somehow strengthens Boal’s assertion that the different strands of work that he and his group did at that
time in Rio de Janeiro navigated the same basic territory - “theatre is politics, and politics is theatre” - especially given the range of uncontrollable and intangible factors that also come into play in the theatrical arena. Perhaps what this experience illustrates most strongly is the intrinsic links between theatre and politics, as two of the aspects of human cultural activity.103

Faced with the task of developing the Legislative Theatre project, Boal attempted to maintain a clarity of distinction between the work that he did as an elected legislator on the Workers’ Party ticket and the work carried out by the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed of Rio de Janeiro, of which he was the director. Although undoubtedly, some level of cross-fertilisation did and had to occur between the two strands of work, Boal felt strongly that the CTO’s work as a non-party organisation needed to develop and maintain its own integrity. Just as he felt that his work as a member of the Workers’ Party needed to develop its own sense of firmness that was anchored in political practice. Some of this caution probably lay in the political climate of Brazil, in which a large number of political organisations and coalitions will field candidates at every level of election. Political party affiliations and loyalties can and often cause difficulties in the field of artistic collaborations. In this sense, Boal attempted to make clear the distinction between his political theatre work and his political party work.104 In both spheres, however, he approached his work from the role of the ‘cultural animateur’.

It is not only the manoeuvrings on the overt political stage that Boal’s work must contend with. In the election campaigns that he had participated in, a constant factor had been the loosely declared but persistent bias displayed by Roberto Marinho, the television and print media magnate of Brazil. Marinho and his media organisations, whose television networks alone routinely reach 80 percent of the viewing audience in the country.105 This

104 Ibid., lines 95-108.
effectively made him a powerful controller of symbols for the Brazilian people of the time. He had an unsurprising habit of using his powers of influence against Boal’s party, the Workers’ Party. In this light, a successful Workers’ Party rally which might attract a hundred thousand people in the streets of São Paulo seems minor in comparison. The strongest evidence of this disparity has been the failure of the Workers’ Party to win the presidential office regardless of the growing massive popular support in the larger cities. Against this level of ingrained opposition, it would be natural to wonder just how effective one theatre-worker-politician and his group, working in a large city, can be. One answer that Boal deems desirable is the revival, in some form, of the Popular Centres of Culture that had flourished in Brazil prior to the 1964 coup d’État. A network of community centres in which skills and ideas can be exchanged and developed, Boal believes, “is an alternative for television, and it is transitive.” It is this quality of possessing a direct object and capacity to accommodate dialogue, that differentiates the type of communication forms that Boal wishes to create from mass media communication. “Television is intransitive, it’s from the screen to the spectator, like the usual theatre is intransitive. We want transitive forms which will give and take.”

Perhaps it is in these venues - where it becomes possible for a small group of individuals to process information and ideas, to develop them into usable intelligence and insight - that an effective response can be found to the powerlessness and the subjugated feeling that debilitates many in the post-modern world. What Boal seems to offer is a model and a methodology that is transparent and adaptable enough to be useful in a range of contemporary socio-political contexts.

Elections are the pillars of democracy; powerful symbols of the ‘will of the people’. They are also the machinery by which the power process of democracies are ‘rubber-stamped’ by a collective act of will; the process by which leaders are determined. It is a powerful ritual and event which can be

played and scripted in many different ways; a symbolic process that represents a multi-millennial tradition of civilisation. For symbolic processes to be navigated effectively, a strong ‘vision’ is required - a vision that undertakes to utilise the symbolic process for an overarching purpose. In elections it is the vision that gathers the majority will. Boal and Lansdale share a scope of vision that certainly encompasses the electoral process, as a means to an end as well as an integral part of modern cultural make-up. Each participated in the electoral act with distinctive flair. With his background in advertising, Lansdale would have fully realised that the process of electioneering is simply persuasion. The product is the candidate and the ideas, and these are promoted through personal influence and the media. Psychological warfare practitioners will consider the media to be “the ordnance of psychological warfare.”

Lansdale’s King-Making

Lansdale saw the electoral process as a powerful element of his psychological operations repertoire. This is not to say that he was absolutely committed to ensuring the running of ‘just and fair’ elections. In the Philippines of 1951, it was critical in the context of his operations against the Huks that a just and fair election be seen to take place in order to contradict a powerful symbol held by the Huks which asserted that the oligarchic elite that was in government was clearly not committed to the ‘democratic’ process, the “Bullets Not Ballots” symbol. In Vietnam of 1955, it became crucial that an election result went a particular way in order to consolidate the

tenuously held power-position of its then prime minister Ngo Din Diem, with whom Lansdale had been working to create a sufficiently stable political and military administration to counter the Vietminh campaigns. In that case Lansdale collaborated in the rigging of a plebiscite that gave Diem supreme powers of office he previously had not possessed, with a result that gave him 98.2% of the election votes. It was a case in which the necessity to create a symbol of strong government had overridden the merely desirable symbol of democratic process. In Vietnam, Lansdale became Diem’s most trusted American adviser. Previously in the Philippines, Lansdale also became the most trusted adviser of its head of state - Ramón Magsaysay. Lansdale was more than that, in fact, because he had engineered Magsaysay’s rise from the House of Representatives to the presidency in 1953.

Lansdale had talent-spotted Magsaysay in Washington in 1950. Magsaysay was on an official visit on behalf of the Philippine Congress and Lansdale was about to take up his Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) post in Manila. At their first meeting, Lansdale was impressed by what he saw as the potential of the Filipino Congressman. So much so that he immediately arranged a ‘special meeting’ with some key men who would later be instrumental in channelling the support of the United States behind Magsaysay’s rise to power. Present at this meeting - which could probably be justifiably described as a high-level job interview - was Magsaysay as the star candidate, Lansdale as his sponsor and advocate, Colonel Richard Stillwell as Lansdale’s immediate superior at OPC, Livingston Merchant as Assistant Secretary of State, General Nathan Twining as Vice Chief of Staff of the US Air Force, Colonel George Chester of the OPC, and Frank Wisner as the Director of the OPC. This ‘panel’ was sufficiently satisfied with Magsaysay to approve a plan of action and mobilise in a concerted effort which resulted, soon after, in Magsaysay receiving the job of Secretary of National Defense of the Philippines. This job came as a direct result of strong recommendations.

108 Mayhew 1997, p. 211.
made by George Chester and Livingston Merchant to the then Philippine President Elpidio Quirino, and marks the beginning of Lansdale’s work with Magsaysay. When Lansdale arrived in Manila in 1951, ostensibly as an Air Force lieutenant colonel posted as a military intelligence adviser to the Filipino armed forces, the two men collaborated very closely. They even lived together for some time in Lansdale’s fortified home, where he guided Magsaysay’s efforts and career to the point where the latter became regarded as an open and honest Secretary of Defense, a staunch opponent of the Huks, and the most popular political figure in the Philippines. By the time that the 1953 presidential elections were announced, Magsaysay was deemed ready to be pushed into the centre-stage spotlight. Lansdale mobilised a massive force to support Magsaysay which involved the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Herald, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Saturday Evening Post, all the major Manila newspapers, Time, Newsweek, Fortune, Cosmopolitan, Reader’s Digest, the US Information Service, Voice of America, the US Embassy in Manila, US Ambassador Raymond Spruance, JUSMAG General Albert Pierson, the Manila American Chamber of Commerce, and the Philippine-American Chamber of Commerce in New York. Lansdale also wrote key speeches for Magsaysay and ensured his appearance at strategic events. With this machinery behind him and the groundwork laid in the previous two years, Magsaysay was resoundingly elected President of the Philippines in 1953. Lansdale’s purpose in promoting Magsaysay was to create the symbol of a ‘clean and strong’ government in the Philippines that was loyal to the United States, thus preserving its military and commercial interests there. The symbol of the Office of Policy Coordination represented a way of working across government departments and bureaucracies, business corporations and major media organisations in order to harness their power for high-level strategic US foreign policy objectives.
Chapter 6  
Conclusions  
CHOICE AND COERCION  

Theatre of the Oppressed is a theatrical tradition. It possesses an integrity. It is an integrated set of games, exercises, techniques and systems that are linked and guided by a set of essential concerns. This body of work contains numerous aesthetic and technical guidelines as well as starting points. Most importantly, a set of ethical assumptions are implicit in the practice. Although Boal has never laid out these ethics as such, he began to articulate them in a speech he delivered to the Legislative Council of Rio de Janeiro when he presented his Witness Protection law to the constituency. “Civilisation is only made possible by the invention of Ethics.” He believes that ethics are the counter-force to the law of the jungle - human rights are what elevate human beings above base animalism.1

The many strands that constitute the body of work, that is Theatre of the Oppressed, emanate from the spheres of theatre and drama practice, of therapeutic practice, and of political activity. Boal’s project has been the integration of elements from these spheres of human activity into a cohesive system of practice. Boal provides a focal point for this theoretical and practical convergence. By necessity, these spheres draw guidance and technology from each other; technology in the form of techniques and methodologies, guidance in the form of intrinsic principles conveying moral and intellectual values. An essential aspect of the integrity of this body of work is the purposeful binding of those distinct spheres of human activity - theatre, therapy and politics.

An important threshold in the development of the practice has been the emergence and proliferation of the ‘Theatre of the Oppressed

practitioner’ as other cultural activists have taken on the work. It is a label that not only implies the study and application, in parts or in whole, of the particular body of work. It also indicates a connection with an international network of practitioners. By 1996 the existence of Centres of Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro, Paris, Omaha and New York plus a considerable number of individuals and groups in many countries that have attributed the lineage of a body of their work to Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, and a series of international festivals and conferences dedicated specifically to it, indicate a tradition that has taken root and is continuing to grow. In this process of growth, the questions that are raised in the practice of this work effectively hand over the development of these techniques to those who have undertaken to apply them in the various socio-cultural contexts that its practitioners work within. If and how this process alters the body of work and its integrity is yet to be seen. As the practice has now moved from the practical application of the work by one individual - Boal - to scores of practitioners in many different parts of the world, the question arises as to whether the body of work will be able to maintain its integrity, in theory and practice, or whether it would be desirable and realistic to expect this practical and theoretical wholeness to be maintained. In particular, with inherent necessities to adapt parts or the whole of the practice to each context encountered, the question arises as to whether Theatre of the Oppressed will inevitably go the way that practices such as Dramatherapy have gone in institutionalising a ‘code of practice and ethics’\(^2\) in order to maintain its own standards and integrity of practice. In a sense this might seem like a counter-productive step considering the implicit visions and goals of Theatre of the Oppressed, and the moral and philosophical concerns inherent in its very label. The oppressed must be encouraged to make transgressions, practitioners are expected to challenge conventions - so the arguments might go. The central question in this consideration is that of when does a practitioner who might set out to practise Theatre of the Oppressed cease to practise work that belongs to the tradition of Theatre of the Oppressed.


NOTE CONTINUES NEXT PAGE
Indeed the question arises as to whether Theatre of the Oppressed should be said to have such boundaries given the demands of adaptation. There are the considerations of determining what the practice is, and what it is not. There are also the considerations that will determine whether such practice is consistent with the implicit visions and goals of the Theatre of the Oppressed that we know today in 1999 and that has been the subject of this thesis.

Noam Chomsky talks about ‘vision’ as “the conception of a future society that animates what we actually do”, and of ‘goals’ as “the choices and tasks that are within reach, that we will pursue one way or another guided by a vision that may be distant and hazy.” He also speaks of an “animating vision” which is based on “some conception of human nature, of what’s good for people, of their needs and rights, of the aspects of their nature that should be nurtured, encouraged and permitted to flourish for their benefit and that of others.” One important commonality that Boal and Lansdale have is that they both possess a powerful vision for their endeavours.

Theatre of the Oppressed is theatre with a purpose - to understand social and personal problems, and search for solutions. It is a system, a way of working, a plan. A Forum Theatre session generates intelligence on much the same principle that a research think-tank or focus-group would operate. An Invisible Theatre performance is a covert operation designed to activate an even more ‘public’ Forum. In much the same way we can describe the Deception symbol strategy in terms of long-format sustained character improvisations, or as a kind of Invisible Theatre.

Lansdale’s vision realised the folly of excessive totalitarianism, understanding it and its palpable effects to be a hindrance to the tasks of winning the hearts and minds of ‘the people’. “Social injustice, bullying by

4 SEE Chapter 3, “Lansdale’s Simple Deceptions”.
military or police and corruption must be seen as grave weaknesses in the defense of a country [against insurgency], errors that can lead to its downfall”.5

Boal and Lansdale work in a language of symbols of power. Each applies symbolic processes that influence the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours - particularly those which relate to processes of human relations - of their respective audiences. Lansdale would have read what Linebarger wrote in 1948. “Psychological strategy is planned along the edge of nightmare.”6 By 1950 he was practising psychological warfare in the Philippines.7 The Aswang or Vampire symbol strategy most certainly reflects the Linebarger note. “Force alone is insufficient to change the minds of men.”8 Lansdale would most certainly have agreed, coming as he did with a background in the advertising trade. He would most certainly have understood the persuasive power of the ‘pitch’.

Symbols contain instructions. A symbol is a ‘text’ that has the power to trigger off other ‘texts’. Some of these texts will contain instructions, plans, warnings, motivations and other discourses that could influence our decisions and actions in actual reality. Related to this is the notion of attitude accessibility, including chronic accessibility. Some attitudes clearly influence behaviour more readily than others, and the attitudes that effect the most influence upon action are the ones that are most accessible from memory - the attitudes that are most immediate. The more powerful the symbol, the more that symbol resonates in actuality. The aesthetic experience in its potency is the symbolic resonating intensely in the actual. The aesthetic experience is a moment of transformation - the mimetic process at work. It is the moment that a gesture in actuality transforms into a symbolic gesture; a gesture that is received by the senses and that resonates a meaning as a

5 Lansdale 1972, p. 373.
7 Lansdale 1972, p. 69.
8 Linebarger 1948, p.13.
narrative or event. Willis observed that grounded aesthetics work through the senses - through a process of sensual heightening it produces emotions such as joy, pleasure, desire and even terror. Grounded aesthetics can provide a motivation for realising different possible futures, and can position the self as a dynamic and creative force for bringing about future possibilities.9

Eco wrote of the limitations of symbols that we encounter in daily life. “Possible worlds are cultural constructs but not every cultural construct is a possible world.”10 The degree of possibility of the cultural construct is related to its comprehensibility and accessibility to its receptor. When a symbol is presented to us, by whatever medium, we immediately have a choice. We can either accept or reject the symbol that is presented to us. We can agree or disagree with its values and meanings. A rejected symbol is one that has lost its relevance either temporarily or permanently. If we accept a symbol that is presented to us, if we take it with us - we take it on - then it can begin to influence our values, our decisions and actions. We can take on a symbol and keep it with us for an hour or a lifetime. A symbol of hunger, for instance, could enter our attention frame and influence our decisions and actions until we do something to satisfy our hunger, then exits the stage until it next gets a cue to come on to the centre-stage spotlight. It will very likely get its cue from another symbol, and will in its turn activate other symbols, such as a symbol of food. The symbol of death, however, is one that we meet early in our lives and one that will be with us until we actually encounter the process ourselves at the end of life. This particular symbol is an example of one that we mostly avoid, allowing it to hover off-centre-stage in our attention frame, preferring not to immerse ourselves in its values and meanings too much. Unless, of course, we exercise devotion towards one particular death cult or another. In which case, we would be internalising the symbol, and our decisions and actions are affected accordingly.

10 The Limits of Interpretation - Umberto Eco 1990, p. 68.
Boal examines the symbols of oppression. The symbol of oppression might be the acts of an individual or the mechanisms of a situation. There will most likely be an element of coercion involved in the dramatic action. In life in general, decisions and actions are come to in either one of two ways, by choice or by coercion. For the spect-actor, a Forum Theatre session will often become a process of exercising choice within a coercive situation. Choice and coercion are mutually exclusive. One cannot make a choice to do something when one is being coerced to do it. One cannot be coerced to do something if one is making a choice to do it. A developed critical ability can allow an individual a greater capacity to exercise choice, to agree or disagree with a symbolic appeal - to accept and internalise, or to reject a symbol. Choice and coercion are two steps in the power process, and they go in opposite directions. One is strengthening, we acquire power when we choose. The other is weakening, we surrender power when coerced. Choice requires an adequate level of consciousness for decision-making. Coercion results in an action influenced by an external force, requiring little or no conscious effort. Theatre of the Oppressed is about understanding a problem and searching for solutions, looking for alternatives, making choices informed by an analysis of the symbol of oppression. The oppressed are those who are consistently disadvantaged and exploited by social, economic or political processes and situations. A developed critical ability is an instrument that can break the consistency, and deconstruct the processes and situations that effect oppression.

Secrets and Lies

The secret services - i.e. a state’s covert apparatus of investigation, influence, persuasion and enforcement - are endowed with charters that allow them to act in both real (actual) and unreal (plausibly deniable) ways. All modern states will have embodied in legislation some form of ‘official secrets act’ which sets out the ability of the apparatus to determine what knowledge its common citizenry (the masses) and that state’s sphere of influence can
acquire regarding its policies and actions. By their very nature, secret services will serve the interests of the ruling elite. The secret services are a way of working within society without the ‘baggage’ of the informed consent of its constituents. Sometimes the secret services are called upon to mobilise the common citizenry in collective political acts, such as for the purposes of changes in political leadership. Lasswell and Kaplan observed that the upper echelons of the hierarchy of society will sometimes require the participation of the lower orders in order to validate its actions especially when the transfer of leadership requires the transgression of constitutional procedures. “The mass is directly active in revolution, to be sure, and the resultant power practices may therefore be more indulgent to it, but a power structure remains, and it remains roughly pyramidal.”\(^{11}\) The secret services might also have a sanction to monitor and influence public opinion, to ensure that the values and meanings of the dominant political symbols are internalised and accepted by a majority of the citizenry. Chomsky warns that this endeavour will sometimes necessitate the elimination of all symbols of effective resistance to the dominant political symbols. “For submissiveness to become a reliable trait, it must be entrenched in every realm. The public are to be observers, not participants, consumers of ideology as well as products.”\(^{12}\) Perhaps this is why the secret services inevitably become instruments of repression in totalitarian systems.

It can be said that Lansdale’s work is not atypical of the work that many covert action operatives perform on behalf of various intelligence organisations, public or private, that function in our contemporary world. Lansdale was concerned with cultural matters. In any theatre of operation his first task would have been to understand the cultures that he would be working in, as a foreigner in their midst. Diplomats and soldiers are briefed on the culture of their foreign postings, being the environment in which they will operate. Just as the instigators of advertising campaigns must understand

\(^{11}\) Power and Society - Lasswell & Kaplan 1950, p. 280.
the cultures of the demographic units that they will be addressing. Linebarger describes psychological warfare as “a peculiar kind of advertising campaign, designed to make [the target] like us and our way of doing things.” As a former advertising man, Lansdale had a strong capacity for understanding the cultures of others. He was also adept at finding ways of creatively operating within the various cultures that he worked in, as well as with the idiosyncrasies of individuals. Lansdale understood the power of the story, and saw how these symbols could be used as keys to effective operation. He was also adept at appropriating the techniques of his opposition. Lansdale was masterful in his use of the various elements of propaganda, demonstrated in the media and rumour campaigns he had waged, such as the Vampire, Black Boycott and King-Making operations described earlier. Propaganda, Linebarger writes, is “the planned use of any form of communication designed to affect the minds, emotions, and action of a given group for a specific purpose.” Lansdale performed his work in the service of the foreign policy interests of the United States. To these ends, he applied his knowledge and feeling for symbols with the intent to empower or disempower - encourage or discourage, enable or disable - his ‘audiences’ according to the strategic requirements.

The concepts of empowerment and disempowerment are key issues in the use and expression of the symbolic. The cultural realm can demonstrably be shaped by efforts and events that arise out of our symbolic play. The awareness of one’s objectives allows the cultural activist the ability to create and manipulate culture - our way of doing - to be either empowering or disempowering, more or less violent, more or less courageous, more or less intelligent or intuitive, and a whole range of other choices. Certainly, cultural activists can choose to be guided by developed ethical standards, but an awareness of the power of the instrument is necessary knowledge if one is to accept the responsibility of symbolic cultural work. By applying an awareness

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13 Linebarger 1948, p. 29.
14 Ibid., p. 39.
of objective to the art and craft of the making and breaking of myths, we focus our efforts and, thus hopefully, our effects.

A symbol can coerce. It can present us with values and meanings that force us to act or decide in a particular way. A citizen could be coerced to vote for a particular candidate, a particular symbol. Had they had full choice, they may not decide to vote for that candidate or to vote at all. If they are coerced into casting the vote, they may have been coerced by means of the symbol of a bullet, a threatening gesture. As cognitive dissonance, this symbol, in turn, might activate the symbol of death. The meaning is made that the act of one ‘appropriate’ vote will result in no bullet, therefore no death. Decision is followed by action. The coercive factor might also be an inducement, the symbol of a gift. Often it is a combination of threats and inducements that are used in such circumstances. They are a powerful combination in any circumstance. But this citizen is only coerced because they have not accepted the symbol of the candidate that they are forced to vote for. Had they accepted that symbol out of free choice in the first place, they could not be coerced because they are making a choice. In this case, they have internalised the symbol, the values and meanings represented by that particular candidate. Coercion is no longer necessary nor possible.

However, symbols can encourage particular choices, and discourage others. Choice can also be engineered by symbols. The public relations and advertising industry is built on that principle. Attempting to ground one’s choices on facts is also a significant challenge. Mayhew notes that there are any number of research agencies anywhere in the world that can be called upon to undertake specialised research designed to certify ‘facts’. “The boundaries between research organizations and organizations formed for advocacy range from fluid to invisible.”15 Opinions and attitudes are highly malleable materials that persuasive communications practitioners constantly mold and monitor, as the art is refined. For instance, it has been found that

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information campaigns are most successful at the creation of ‘new opinion’, as well as influencing moderately or weakly held attitudes. Not surprisingly, they are most likely to succeed when dominant social forces are behind them, but also when they set out to activate existing beliefs and attitudes, and when they are supported by interpersonal influence agents. Refinements to the practice of persuasive communications are driven by economic imperatives. For while it will generates sales, there will always be a buyer for the services offered. The consumer commodities themselves significantly impact upon the symbolic world which fosters their proliferation. Willis believes that explosions of commercial cultural commodities generate substantial amounts of symbolic life and activity. By their nature these commodities are, or become, relevant to current symbolic work, because they are also products of the symbolic activity of their consumers. The vigour of this activity owes a great deal to the advertising industry. Mayhew comments that as a model for rationalised instrumental persuasion, advertising in turn owes much of its growth to the social sciences - not only as a knowledge base for the construction of successful sales messages, but also in the justification of its own project. The legitimating frames for advertising draw upon the informational ideals of civic culture, to symbolise the industry as a service in the public interest - as providers of information. In 1928, Edward Bernays published an article entitled “Manipulating Public Opinion: The Why and How” in the American Journal of Sociology. Mayhew noted that Bernays considered he was using the term ‘manipulating’ in a constructive sense. Bernays believed, as many did then and still do now, that someone must take responsibility for integrating and aggregating the diversity of opinion in modern mass societies. This thinking drew upon a long tradition of fear of the tyranny of an unanchored majority, and exploited liberal optimism about the capacity of ‘truth’ to prevail in a well ordered debate. Mills observes that

coercion is the ‘final’ form of power. However, processes of authority - as in power justified by the beliefs of the voluntarily obedient - and processes of manipulation - as in power wielded without the knowledge of the powerless - are considerable and essential instruments in power relations.21

OTHER COMPARISONS

Organisation

The works of Boal and Lansdale span across international boundaries. Their works transcend and utilise cultural distinctions. Boal would not be as well-resourced as Lansdale was in his heyday. Boal works with organisations such as the CTOs of Rio de Janeiro and Paris, CTOs and other groups in the US, in Canada, Europe and other places. His work in public office was carried out under the banner of the Workers’ Party of Brazil. Lansdale worked with various intelligence organisations in the US, from the OSS, to the OPC, then CIA. He has worked in many other places aside from the Philippines and Vietnam. Boal works with a large network of supporters and practitioners, he is regarded as the key figure in the Theatre of the Oppressed tradition. Lansdale worked with an even larger network of associates in government, military and media circles. Boal and Lansdale work with both public and private funding, Lansdale’s resources being greater since he was nearly fully funded by the taxpayers of the United States. Corporate support for Lansdale’s work was more forthcoming. Boal leads the groups that work with him, in the sense that he is looked to for inspiration and guidance. Lansdale was part of a government and military hierarchy, although he was less formally bound to them than most. They both work with committees at various times. They both participate in concerted cultural efforts. Boal is an artist who works with instruments of many sorts. Lansdale was an instrument of state with a touch of the artist. As to the manner in which their

21 Mills 1959, p. 41.
respective works and sensibilities relate to the dominant power structures of the day, Boal can be said to serve ‘people-based’ interests, whereas Lansdale can be said to serve ‘pyramid-based’ interests.

**Artistry**

Boal and Lansdale utilise the narrative and the event - the story, the rumour, the belief; the performance, the rally, the election. These elements and others are shaped by the artistry of each cultural activist, in their manipulation of symbols. They both work with myths; myths of power and authority, myths of subservience and invincibility, the ideals of democracy and freedom - the worlds of structures and limits created by human symbolism. They both work with ‘reality’ as a malleable matter, upon which we are able to exercise control and achieve comprehension. Both work with creations of ‘fiction’ or possible worlds that are intended to influence actual reality. The narratives they work with contain elements of the epic, the heroic journey; tales of discoveries and conquests. They both work with narratives in the context of power processes. Boal sets out to lead the heroic act that comes to understands and learns to work with ‘the force’. Lansdale set out to use ‘the force’ to make leaders and to lead the heroic act. Boal worked with symbols of oppression, symbols of the people and symbols of justice. Lansdale worked with symbols of the people and justice, as well as the symbols of good and bad, symbols of death and symbols of leadership.

**Orientation**

Boal and Lansdale worked with the ideals of democracy, equality, happiness and freedom. Both sought to encourage these symbols in those that they worked with. The ways in which they did so differ substantially. Boal sought to facilitate the understanding of these symbols, so that the visions and goals of others can be influenced and clarified in the course of the
work. Lansdale was guided by these symbols and sought to activate them in others, so that those symbols would become part of their own visions and goals. Boal and Lansdale had different ways of negotiating the power processes that they work with. Boal works with ‘participants’, he encourages the role of ‘spect-actor’, he seeks to activate others to take part in the power processes that affect them. Lansdale worked with an elite ‘audience’ whom he sought to equip and encourage. He also worked with a ‘mass audience’ whom he sought to encourage to support the leadership of the elite, and to discourage from participating in acts contrary to the leadership will. They both work as facilitators of processes. Boal’s emphasis is on processes that develop the critical ability of its participants. Lansdale works with processes that utilise inherent susceptibilities in his audiences. They both utilise processes with persuasive elements. They both create ‘performances’ and participate in concerted efforts that seek to influence the power processes of their respective contexts. Both work with the dynamics of choice and coercion. Boal seeks to encourage informed choice in situations of coercion. Lansdale used coercion but preferred to create situations of choice. Both see choice as preferable to coercion. Boal would rather not create coercive situations even if the choices made were disagreeable to him. Lansdale would not hesitate to create a coercive situation, if there was a disagreement of opinion or ideology. Boal works in a personal and social development context, an artistic and educational arena. Lansdale worked in belligerent contexts, as a martial practitioner serving particular interests. The ‘people-based’ orientation of Boal’s work emphasises the ‘will of the people’. The ‘pyramid-based’ orientation of Lansdale’s work emphasises strong leadership by an elite. Both seek to understand the threats and weaknesses to their respective orientation base and set out to address them in their particular ways.
In Closing... Again

The mimetic process allows a representational form - a symbol - to be presented in such a way that a potential or possible world can be examined and judgements made about that symbolic world. These effects occur on an individual and social level. The judgements made about such symbolic worlds constitute the attitudinal stance of an individual or society. These, in turn, have the capacity to influence behaviour - decisions and actions. What the works of Boal and Lansdale demonstrate is that the symbolic realm can be used to impose a template upon actuality, to impose a context and a content that actual reality then can align with. As the symbolic text generates further text, as it resonates in actuality, the symbol produces solid and physical effects upon actual reality. It is in this way that the cultural manipulations of the cultural activist are made manifest. The practice is not unlimited in its capacity. As with any practice, difficulties and challenges will be encountered, some will be surmounted. However, this cultural practice can certainly be enhanced by research and development that address the issues generated by practice. This is demonstrated in the ways that studies on persuasive communication have enhanced its practice since the beginning of the 20th century. This is also demonstrated in the way that Boal, through his explorations, has extended the views and applications of dramatic and theatrical practice.

The focus of this thesis has been the ways in which the constructed symbolic can be utilised in the shaping of the social environment. Lippmann wrote in 1922 that “whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself.” The symbol specialists of our time, including both Boal and Lansdale, realised that just about everything contained in the constructed symbolic world, that we share with others, is open for

22 Lippmann 1922, p. 4.
negotiation and in a constant state of flux. Of course, that is the nature of the shared symbolic realm. Everything from power relations to individual identity is open to negotiation, and is as malleable as any material in the concrete world. Critical ability allows an observer of these processes of negotiations and changes to keep abreast of intentions and major developments. However, critical ability is just an early step in the process of self-determination. One facet of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed that has been somewhat overlooked in this thesis is the work’s capacity to provide a medium of ‘expression’ for its participants. This is because the focus has been on the dynamic between Boal and his ‘audience’, whereas expression entails the subsequent steps - what use that audience makes of the experience. What both Boal and Lansdale, as cultural activists, provided to their respective audiences were symbols to be interpreted, and the environments and atmospheres in which to generate further symbolic work. Eco comments on the importance of distinguishing between use and interpretation - a critical receptor should be able to say why certain messages have been used in a certain way, finding in their structures the reasons for their use or misuse.23

This thesis has examined how Theatre of the Oppressed, through symbolic work that studies relationships of power, develops the interpretive faculty - the critical ability - of its audiences and participants. What use such audiences and participants make of their interpretations is beyond the scope of this thesis - its currency places these next steps in the realm of action. The social environment, as we can see, is constantly being shaped. A greater understanding of the part which symbols play in that shaping process can allow for a more conscious and intended use of the symbolic realm.

The practices of Boal and Lansdale are processes of knowledge-making. They are some of the processes by which we create meaning for ourselves and our environment. These processes harness the inherent power of the symbolic reality upon actual reality. In the parlance of computer technology, these processes are instances wherein the software affects the

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23 Eco 1990, p. 60.
hardware. By influencing the conditions in which the hardware operates, the software will inevitably transform the hardware. In this way culture acts upon the empirical environment, and the environment acts upon the individual.
APPENDICES

Appendix A

INTERVIEW with Augusto Boal
Rio de Janeiro, 9 August 1994

You’ve described theatre as the art of looking at ourselves, but in practise Theatre of the Oppressed is more than that, obviously looking is not enough, reflection is not enough.

Of course, but when I say that it is the art of looking at ourselves I mean this: that if I am able to look at the other, and to look at myself, I know where I’m going. I can find other places to go. I can change. If I look at myself inside the situation - if I’m in the situation and I look at the other and I don’t look at myself, I do instinctively what I have to do; what I want to do. But if I go away from myself and I look at myself, I am myself looking at myself; I am dual. I am two and not only one. And then I know where I am; I see myself in the situation. I’m not in the situation seeing the other but I see myself in the situation. I see the situation and I see the other. And then the consequence of looking at oneself is that I can choose other ways, of acting, of doing what I want to do. The example that I give usually, is that in the Amazon forest there is a bird, which is called uirapuru. This bird is a fantastic bird; they say that when this bird sings, all the other birds become silent, and even the animals, the carnivorous animals, they stop moving, they’re silenced to hear that bird. But that bird sings only once in the year. It sings in the moment that the nest is finished; between the moment the nest is finished and the moment the female puts the first egg, in that lapse of time, about fifteen minutes. For fifteen minutes it sings; the bird sings, the male sings, and sings the wonderful song, the say. And then it stops and does not sing anymore until next year. But next year it’s going to sing the same song again. It’s the same, exactly the same thing; it’s not going to be a new invention; and again everyone is going to stop to hear the uirapuru singing, and the bird that is being born out of that egg is going to sing the same song also. So the birds they sing wonderfully well but it is genetically programmed. And some animals, they do wonderful things, not only nests, but they are capable of architectural things; but this is genetically programmed. The children of those animals are going to do the same things as their fathers and mothers did. In our case, because we are able to look at ourselves, if we sing we hear ourselves singing and then we can say, oh I’m singing this so I could sing a little bit different. We can invent. So for me the theatre is the art of looking at oneself; this means that if I can look at myself, I know where I am in the situation and where can I be. I can program the future I can find alternatives. So it’s not the
theatre only looking at ourselves, but this is the basis. Without looking at ourselves we would not be capable of creating culture. We would have habits. We would have some techniques of doing a nest, of singing, of making a bridge. But not inventing new forms. And I believe that we are able to have culture. Culture is not what we do, it’s the way that we do it. Eating is not culture. It’s instinctive that we eat, but the way of eating is cultural. And we eat with the hands, we eat with a fork and a knife and spoon, at what time of the day we eat. Eating is a biological action. But how to eat is a cultural action. And we are capable of having culture because we are capable of looking at ourselves. Which means to be spectators, of ourselves as actors; and so we are actor and spectator at the same time. This only happens with human beings, it does not happen with animals.

Is what we do, theatre or therapy? Often the question is related to the way Theatre of the Oppressed breaks down the fourth wall. Why break a tradition that is older than the myth of Christ?

Theatre is a way of showing our lives, showing our reality. Because it shows something that is our reality. But out of that reality, the normal day reality, we create a new reality. Again the idea of dichotomy; you divide it and you see a reality inside another reality. This produces in the spectator, something either, in the sense of therapy - which is a therapeutic result - that is you see a play and then you can become better than before, healthier than before, wiser than before; or the opposite, you can become more stupid and it can do harm to you. So inevitably, either the theatre is going to provoke a reaction in the spectator and the spectator is going to be either towards disease or towards health; towards the spectator becoming more wiser or more stupid, so better or worse. So it’s inevitable, because we are facing a reality and you are in your own reality. This facing of reality can make you be sick, which is what most of the films and television do. They make people sick, they are intended to make people sick; to make people more brutal, more stupid. That’s what most films and television do. Most programs on television, and not only television. But some others try to make people healthier, more intelligent; so they are therapeutic in this sense - not because we are necessarily sick in the beginning, but we become better. And among the forms of the theatre that makes us become better is the necessity, in my opinion, to enter into this second reality, which is the fiction. Fiction is a reality, fiction does not exist, everything is real; but we call fiction a real reality that we create, which is not the same as we have here - we create another one. And then we have seen that many play writers and stage directors have tried different forms of how to make people be healthier, wiser, and they have always the tendency to involve the spectator more closely - not let the spectator passively receive from the scene everything, but be active. Sometimes this action is to make people together; singing or whatever. And even Bertolt Brecht - he had a play which was called “He Who Says Yes, He Who Says No”, in which he offers two alternatives, what is the ending that you prefer. But what we do in the Theatre of the Oppressed is not to offer alternatives but to ask for alternatives and allow the spectator to become actor. Because this change, spectator-actor and actor-spectator, I believe is what makes us more capable of creation, of being creative. So to
abolish the fourth wall is important to allow the transit, the transitivity between the scene where the fiction takes place and the audience, where the audience is, these two realities. We have to be transitive; and in my opinion, that is the only way in which the spectator really becomes dynamised. You can be dynamised also by what the actors say on stage, but you are even more dynamised when you go on stage. Because by doing so what you do is a transgression. To penetrate into the stage is a transgression. And then it works symbolically to tell the spectator, “I am able to do this here”. The phrase I-am-able-to-do-this-here includes I-am-able-to-do-this; OK here, but if I am able to do this here, I am perhaps able to do this somewhere else. And this fact that the spectator enters into the scene is a symbolic transgression; symbolic of all the transgressions. It is a transgression in itself and is a symbolic transgression of all the other transgressions he has to make.

Because, of course, if the oppressed is going to fight not to be oppressed, inevitably he is going to make some sort of transgression; because if he does not, he’s going to be oppressed all of the time.

The experiences that we intellectually refer to as theatre, therapy and politics - the areas that you work in - are they necessarily different areas of experience, do we refer to them in those terms and describe the same activity?

Yes, because I believe that all forms of theatre are, like I said before, either therapeutic or creating disease. But there are many forms of therapy which are not theatrical. All theatre has something of the therapeutic, but not the other way around - not all therapies. For instance, psychoanalysis is based on the fact that there is one person trying to listen to the words that were not spoken. The psychoanalyst, he does not pay so much attention to what is being said, but he pays attention to the unspoken words - to what has not been said. And then, this technique and others similar to this, they don’t use theatre. They even, in the case of psychoanalysis, they even hide the psychotherapist. The patient should not see the psychotherapist; he’s hidden behind the patient. And so there are some forms of therapy which are not theatrical. But theatre is a form of therapy, in my opinion.

And politics?

And politics is a form of theatre; not only in the vulgar sense. Sometimes here in this House, sometimes the other vereadores, like myself, they speak in a way and make gestures and their voices change completely and sometimes some people say, oh they are making theatre and then I correct them, I say they are making bad theatre. That’s not theatre, that’s bad theatre. In this sense, of course politics is theatre. But also in the sense that as theatre shows a reality and the structure of this reality. In politics, what we try is to change this structure. We have to do, our job as politicians has a lot to do with changing the structure of our society; and theatre reveals the structure of our society. We try to change it and theatre most of the time shows it. And what I’m trying to do with Legislative Theatre is to do a theatre which is political; theatre as politics. We try to change society not by the usual means of politicians which is only by talking, but by acting. This experiment that I’m trying here - very difficult to make because we don’t have real conditions to
make it - what we are trying to do is the same thing. Theatre is politics, and politics is theatre. That’s what we are trying to do. So the three terms - therapy, politics and theatre for me they are very well linked together. They are the same, in different aspects. This is a glass, but it has different aspects. This is something, this is something else. The material is not the same, but this a glass. And the same for me in regard to these human activities of theatre, therapy and politics.

What can theatre do in the face of such a powerful rival as television?

I don’t have much hope about television because, as television is owned by rich people, inevitably it’s going to convey whatever rich people want to be conveyed by television; and the rich people don’t think of society from all points of view. They look at society from the profit point of view. If they are rich they want to be richer. So their ideology inevitably is going to be the ideology of the programs. They can change here or there but it’s going to be - sometimes they make something against themselves - but that’s not very often. Here in Brazil in ‘89 we had elections also; Lula was our candidate and Collor, the president that was banished, was ousted, almost two years ago, he was the other candidate. And they had a debate. This debate started at eleven o’clock in the evening and went until three o’clock in the morning. Very few people saw the debate. But the next day, this television Globo broadcasted half an hour struck of that debate; and they showed only the best moments of Collor and the worst moments of Lula. It was not impartial at all. It was very partial, in favour of Collor. So they did a great harm to our candidate and to our party; and we even believe that this edition was vital for the victory of Collor and our loss. We all protested but it was useless. The election was the next day and we lost. And this year - I think if God exists it’s the hand of God that was there - the Minister of Finance was giving an interview and in the intermission break he thought that his image was not going to be broadcasted, but by some reason everything that he said went in the air and was captured by the parabolic antennas and he said the truth. He said that after the election he’s going to put the police against the strikers. He said that inflation is not going to exist until the election and then it’s coming again, it’s inevitable. And he said that the government would do all the government can do to favour our adversary which is Fernando Henrique Cardoso; and our candidate is again Lula. So four years ago they did a great harm to us and now, by the interference of the hand of God, I believe that they did a lot of good for us. Because all that we had said before they said - “no but that’s what the Workers’ Party says” - but now it was the Minister of the government that confirmed exactly what we had said. And he was also ousted, this Minister. There’s another one in his place who said “no, it was a moment of weakness, he was very tired”. I can be as tired as I am, now I’m very tired because yesterday we had lots of work and I went to bed very late, I’m very tired now. But I’m not going to say anything against my thoughts. I’m not going to say the opposite of what I say usually. I can say in a tired way, I can say, oh I’m tired, but I’m not going to say the opposite. So what he did it was not out of tiredness. It was because the government in Brazil has a
language before the elections and another one after the election. And then, that we know. So I don’t believe very much that television is going to change. And the hand of God this time was very helpful, but it’s not going to be there all of the time to show the truth. So I believe that television is going to be what it is; I don’t think it’s going to change. But I do believe that we can find alternatives for the evil that television causes. I think that we can find alternatives. And one of the alternatives is the creation of popular centres of culture. If we get the power here in Rio and in Brazil, evidently we are going to develop forms of popular culture in which people can get together and dialogue. And not only be looking only at the screen. Because he who looks at television does not look at the other one who is looking at television too. It’s everyone looking in the same. And if we find alternative forms of culture, popular culture, that’s dialogue. That’s what we had here before ‘64, when we had democratic government. We had thousands and thousands of popular centres of culture all over Brazil. And then the first law of the dictatorship was to abolish the centres of culture. Not because we had, in the sense of culture we discussed, as politics, but we had dialogue. In each centre of culture sometimes someone who knew philosophy of Hegel would come and teach the philosophy of Hegel. And if someone knew how to do foods - feijoada, our Brazilian national food - came and made feijoada. Another one who knew how to teach poetry; another one knew how to teach how to do whatever, to do a house; then, it was a place in which he who knew more would teach the other ones and learn from the other ones what the other ones knew more than himself. This is an alternative for television and it is transitive. Television is intransitive; it’s from the screen to the spectator. Like the usual theatre is intransitive. We want transitive forms which will give and take.

You were asked by Shell in Brazil to use Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to train their managers, you turned down the job. Why not work for them? If it was on the basis of ideology, are they not oppressed by their own “cops in the head”?

I will put it like this, I refused that job, I refused because that’s not what I want to do. I don’t refuse to work with enterprises; I have worked with many enterprises. In France for instance I remember I have worked with Air France, the national air company. But I work with enterprise if the employees are those who demand the work. If it is the enterprise that demands the work - like we had in Paris, for instance, an invitation from Sandoz, a pharmaceutics company, like here by Shell - but what they want is to adapt the employees and to make them better employees, better workers, produce more. They’re not worried about the worker as a human being. They’re not worried about the necessities, the needs that those human beings have. They are concerned with the needs of the enterprise. To be more effective, to produce more, to have more profits. And I’m not concerned with that. So if Shell or Sandoz or any other company invites me to work with the workers, but to allow the workers to express themselves and to say what they want, I will. Very quickly, I will accept. But if they invite me, like was the case before, to make them more effective, that’s not my job. That’s the job of role play. I don’t teach role play; I teach Theatre of the Oppressed. In it you have to discover
what to do and not be domesticated into doing what they want you to do. It’s the opposite, so I cannot accept this kind of invitation.

Theatre of the Oppressed is a lot to do with deconstructing old or redundant rituals and mythology. Can we continue to deconstruct without offering replacements, continue to ask questions to which we ourselves have no answers?

Sometimes it is difficult for us to show the solutions. But if we try altogether to find alternatives it’s much easier than if I try myself, alone. When I write a play - if I write a play about myself, for instance, like I did with a play that I wrote about my exile, I was in exile for fifteen years. Part of this time I was in Buenos Aires in Argentina, then I went to Lisbon in Portugal, then I went to Paris in France; and I spent, living outside of my country, fifteen years. Now I’m still traveling all over the world, but I am mostly based here. And I wrote a play about that; to show what has happened to me. I want to show me as a witness of what has happened to me. I want to witness about my time. So it’s my experience that counts; it’s my play about my own life; about my friends, about my family, about my country, about the country where I went - but seen from my point of view. So I don’t want anyone to say “stop!” and replace me and show alternatives for my past. But if I’m thinking about the future, I want people to tell me what should I do; not what should I have done, but what can I do now. What can I do now? That’s what I’m concerned about. The Theatre of the Oppressed is not the theatre - the witness - of the past. It is the invention of the future. So as the invention of the future, we can get advice and examples from the other ones to try to build the future; to create the future. So in this case I have ideas; I think it should be this way, but I want to know the other one. That’s why now I am in the Party; in the Party we don’t think altogether. We don’t believe exactly the same things, we have difference of opinions, difference of sentiments, of emotions. But we think mostly in the same direction. But we don’t know exactly how to obtain what we want. And then we learn from one another; and for me this is important - even if we don’t know. Suppose if we win the election here in Rio de Janeiro, and then our candidate to governor, he is in power. And then suppose he invites me to be the Secretary of Culture; I know the idea that I have - what should be done. But I need the other ones to tell me that it is feasible or not. Because even the idea of the Legislative Theatre - I was reading a while ago with some assistants, I was reading what we had written before being here, during the campaign - and what we are doing now is not exactly what we had. It’s what is possible. So I have an idea; and as an idea, it’s wonderful - it’s a pure thing, and very complex. But we come here, the complexity is different. It’s not the same. So we have to learn from the practice to see what’s possible and what’s not. So when we think about the past we can be witness of the past, and say, I saw this in the past. But when we try together to build a future we have to ask the questions even if we don’t have the good answers. But many answers are one answer already; many insufficient answers is the only answer you can give to that problem at that moment. So to ask the good questions is better than to have the good answer. Because I had the good answer, what should be Legislative Theatre, I had a very good
answer. But in the practice, it’s not the way I wanted, it’s not possible. But it does not mean it’s not possible at all. It’s possible and people come and tell me - for example, they’ll say, “oh we have to go to the slums and found popular centres of culture in all of the slums here”. Yes that’s nice, I still want to do that. In some it’s possible, in others it has been possible in the past and it’s not possible now. And in others we could not even dare to do that. Because slums they are controlled by the gangs of narco-trafficking. And then in some we could not even get into - like Morro da Saudade. We had one of the best groups that we had founded, that we had developed, was in Morro da Saudade. And then one day they came to us and they said: “please don’t come again here because now it’s dangerous - before we had no traffic and now we have - so don’t come”. We lost contact with them. So one thing is to imagine the future, the other thing is to build it. And to build it, sometimes we know how to, sometimes we learn in the process of questioning, of asking.

END
Appendix B

INTERVIEW with Augusto Boal
Rio de Janeiro, 6 October 1994

(Three days after the election, the Workers’ Party - the PT, has lost the presidential contest, doing worse than generally expected all around)

What do you think happened with the elections?

It happened, what we were afraid that could happen. And what was this? We had Lula as a possibility of really changing Brazil; especially in the agrarian reform, in fighting against hunger and misery. And this would be the most important thing in his government. The extreme right could not offer any candidate. So they chose to support Fernando Henrique, who used to be someone much closer to the interest of the population, the interest of the people. And Fernando Henrique and his party, in order to win, they made alliances with all the extreme right. People that came from the military government, military dictatorship. Like Marco Maciel, Fiuza, Antonio Carlos Magalhães, all those people who are very reactionary. And he did not make alliances with us. He could have made alliances with us. But the problem is if he could make an alliance with us, of course, Lula would be the candidate.

And he wanted to be, himself, the candidate. And his party wanted to have the whole candidate. So they make an alliance with the extreme right, with the right. And now we’re going to see what’s going to happen. A Brazilian singer, Marisa Molte, she said something very interesting; she said that if he got elected he would have to betray someone. Either he would betray the people and stay with his friends, or he would betray his friends and stay with the people. I think that’s what’s going to happen. Perhaps something in between; he’s going to try to make an agrarian reform but very small and non-significant one. Because on his side is Ronaldo Caiado, who is a landowner and the president of the association of landowners. Perhaps he’s going to do something against hunger and misery but not too much because the bankers are supporting him. I don’t believe that he’s going to be a government of extreme right, I don’t believe that. But certainly he’s not going to be what Lula could have been - in order to put the people in as protagonists of our society. So what we have to do now is to expect, to hope, that he is not going to be too much with his friends. But I believe that - even that, maybe because of himself, of his past - I believe that Fernando Henrique must keep some of his promises. And I believe that it’s very difficult not to do anything. So he has to do something in favour of the people, in favour of the fight against inflation. So what happened is that everyone was - the population believed again for a second time in a salvation plan. Like they had believed in ‘86, when Sarney made the Plano Cruzado; now it was the Plano Real. But we don’t want to be right in our vision of what can happen in the future. We think that it’s not the best but we want it to be the best; even if we did not win. We don’t want to win the election, that’s not our problem. We
don’t want to make a big strong party; of course, we do, we want to have a strong party, but that’s not our main goal. Our main goal is to change Brazilian society. Which is like slavery for most of the people; then we want to change this. If this can be done by another government, like the one that was elected, OK we accept it. But we want this to be done. We don’t want to take the power, but we want the power to be used for the benefit of the people. If he’s able to do that we are going to support him. We are going to say, OK go ahead, you can count on us to help; not to be in government but to help, all other means we can.

What’s next for you then, as a PT vereador?

For me, I think that inside the Party, the Workers Party, we should also see the good things. We did not win for the President of the Republic, but we had only one Senator, now we are going to have four more. So we are going to have five Senators - that’s enormous. We had never a Governor of State, now we have Arraes; which is not of our party but it’s a coalition. He’s already elected in the first round. And we have possibilities. There’s three possibilities, in Espirito Santo, Brasília and Rio Grande de Sul; three more. So we are going to have at least one, two or three Governors of the Workers’ Party, and one or more in coalition. So in the Chamber of Deputies also we believe we are going to have much more. So the Party as a party goes on growing, growing and growing. We did not win for the presidency but we won on many other levels. For me it does not change much because our project is a city project - it was not a project for the whole country. Our project is a mandate of vereador. So what changes though is that we are going to concentrate more now on our work with the groups, with the Nucleus. From next week we are going to revitalize the work with the Nucleus. In the first part, the first semester before the Festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed, we had twelve groups that presented themselves in the Festival - groups of children of the streets, peasants without land, we had twelve and we had even more, many more that did not present themselves in the Festival. We had lots of groups, and now we have less because we concentrated on the election. Now we are going again to develop this and we still have two years left, almost two years and a few months more. So now we are going to really concentrate on the Legislative Theatre. Up to now we had been doing all the Festival or the campaign or other things, but now it’s the moment that we have to really concentrate on the Legislative Theatre; and to develop the groups and to do the circulation of those groups all over Rio. And get really the information of what they want and transform that into Projects of Law. And at the same time do plays about what happens here and take it to the street. We are going to do that now, much more than what we have done up to now because we were concentrating on the elections. The election takes a lot of time, it’s very exhausting. But we have advanced somehow. I don’t know if you saw the last shows that we did in the street, we started with a new thing between one play and another one. We invite the people to come in and sing and dance and do things. And they come and they do something. The other day we saw a man of 82 years old, he was dancing in the street, doing (unrecovered). We don’t know what it is good for, but it’s good for something. And we are
going to develop more this sort of participation; it’s not only participation like the Forum in which we have to go and show an idea in action, but also this sort of happiness - a celebration of happiness.

Will the role of the CTO, as a PT propaganda unit continue or expand here in Rio?

What we want is to have both things going on simultaneous. To have the, what we call, the mandate here; which is concentrated and doing only the Legislative Theatre. And the other side, to have the CTO also as a non-political-party organisation. We want to have the CTO, the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed of Rio de Janeiro, free to work in association with groups don’t want to have a political commitment, a party commitment. Because as I am a member of the Workers’ Party, I want to go on doing some work with organisations that don’t want to have a party link. And sometimes they are right. For instance, now we are supporting the campaign of the citizenship against misery and hunger, which is led by Dom Mauro Morelli and Betinho. This is a non-political, party political, organisation. It’s a national movement. We want to work with them, and we don’t want to work with them and profit by propaganda for the Workers’ Party. We don’t want that. We are very honest and we want to do that work because it’s important. Next Monday, for instance, I have the right to give some medals every year - five medals, I can give to distinguishing people. I’m going to give a medal to Dom Mauro Morelli. And we are going to prepare a show here, in front of the Chamber, about his work as a head of this movement of the citizenship against hunger. So sometimes we don’t want to make Party politics. So it’s important to have both things separate. For instance, now I have received an invitation from UNESCO to receive people with scholarships from Asia and from Africa; for them to come here and stay three months, more or less, working here together with us. I think this is very important, I accepted it. But this cannot be mixed with the Party, it’s not a Party; it’s the Centre of the Theatre of the Oppressed. It’s me as the Director of this Centre, but it’s not the Party. So it’s very important to have both things at the same time, simultaneously. One is a specific goal that we have - it’s the Legislative Theatre, it’s political, fighting the political struggle, the political work. And the other one is not necessarily Party - it’s politics because everything’s politics, but not Party.

After two years as vereador, do you think party politics will continue to be the road for you, and after forty years as an animateur, why is culture not enough?

But culture is enough if you consider that culture is everything that human people do - it’s the way of doing. And so for me - all the forms of theatre that I have, I’ve worked with and developed myself - I still want to do that. I don’t want to abandon anything. For instance, if I started the Forum Theatre, I want to do only the Forum Theatre. If I do the Rainbow of Desire, psychotherapeutic techniques, I want to go on with the psychotherapeutic techniques and develop even more. My book, The Rainbow of Desire, is going to be published now in English. The English edition is much better than
the French edition because I have developed more. It’s going to be published three years after the French edition, so it has many more techniques and they’re developed. So I want to develop the psychotherapeutic techniques as I want to develop the educational techniques. And at the same time I want to go on doing direction of regular plays. I’m preparing now a play, Iphigenia by Euripides, that I want to do with my group in France, the Centre of the Theatre of the Oppressed of France. It’s very possible that we are going to do that. We need subvention from the government, but I do hope that the
government is going to give the subvention. And then I’m going to do the direction of this play, which was written by Euripedes but I want to do it, like, in a Brazilian way. Like, we have many influences from African culture. And what happens in Iphigenia, among other things, is also the use of religion, and the Greek religion has many points in common with some Nago, Yoruba religions from Africa. Even in mythology, their mythology, sometimes they have, sometimes in common, with the myth of Oedipus. For instance, in the Nago mythology they have the myth of Eruga, which is almost the same, the same story. So I’m going to do a sort of an international version of that play. It’s Greek, it is French, it’s Brazilian, it’s African, and it is conventional theatre.

Conventional in a good, not in a bad sense. Convention because it is inside the theatre that we are going to do it. The spectators will have to pay to see the show, they will have to applaud if they like it or go away if they don’t. And so I don’t want to abandon anything that I have, that I have developed before. It’s not like a wife; if you change a wife you cannot keep all of them, all the previous wives that you had. They would not allow you to. But the forms of theatre are not my wives. I can keep them all together and they can get along together well.

Does that include politics as well?

Politics, yes. I never abandoned politics. I have always done politics; not like I’m doing now, not as a Legislator - that is a first time in my life. But always I had been politically active. What I can abandon - if I get too tired, because the work here is very hard. Because you have to deal with some colleagues, that we have here, that are horrible people. That are horrible! Because who are they, who are we? We have been elected by the population, and the population is not homogenous. We cannot say “the people of Rio de Janeiro”; the people of Rio de Janeiro are very much different from one another. And also we have here anything - we have here, people like myself, who am what

I am, I don’t know what kind, like myself! You have people, like people that belonged to the death squads, and they are here as Legislators too; people with the traffic of narcotics, that are linked with narcotics, and they are represented here, they are also Legislators here; people with the illegal gambling. We know about that, we know, we see it. And so the daily

confrontation with this kind of people - sometimes it’s amusing, sometimes it’s curious, sometimes. But most of the time it’s very hard to deal with them. Right now, for instance, we have a problem here because one of those vereadores here is the president of a club that occupied a beach. And that’s highly illegal, you cannot do that - occupy and put walls on a beach for your house or for a club. He has done that, we have to fight against him here. And
so the monstrosity of the actions of some of the people here are so terrible. The corruption here is so terrible; and to live with this is very hard. On the other side, I can have here my group. I can never forget that it’s the first time that - not only a man of the theatre enters the Legislative power, but I enter with my whole company. It’s the first time that a theatrical company takes the power. It’s a small power, but it is power. And so it’s a very important experience, to have here a group of theatre. Now we are going also to develop artistically also this group. Up to now we have been, these first two years, been much more, do all kinds of work. It was full of much confusion. The election, the campaign of the press against myself of last year; of the press, no, of one newspaper that made a violent campaign - the campaign of the mayor against me and against my party. All of this has been very exhausting. Now we are more quiet. Now we are going to concentrate more on developing, artistically, the group. We have done, sometimes things, very, in a hurry, without time to take care of the aesthetic side. Sometimes we have to “go and do it”, “go, we have to sing, go and sing”! Sometimes the person does not how to sing! “We have to sing, we won’t be able to sing!” Then the singing becomes something else. It’s not singing, it’s shouting! And then now we have to have the classes of singing. And only prepare to show things when they are really ready; up to now, no, we have to show [then and there]. Now we have a system of sound; the sound is very important. But at the same time, that sound is very important because it magnifies the voice, the volume and all that. Magnifies also the faults, the bad singing also is magnified. So we have to sing better now; it becomes important. The artistic work, now, is much more important than it was in the first moment, now. These last weeks of this year we are going to concentrate much more on the artistic work on one side; and the formation and development of Nucleus that have been and have to be channels, permanent channels, of communication with my mandate and the fabrication of laws here, the making of laws here.

Many people will say that this election was won and lost through the power, or the myth of the power, of electronic media. As we continue to work, do you think we will be able to go on without a piece of this power, this ability to influence?

The problem, is that, you talk about the media, no, about television, about newspapers - all television, all the newspapers here in Brazil, they are owned by a few people. And the few people that belong to the same economical, political and ideological family; that come from the corruption, from all that we have had up to now. But they have an extraordinary power. One program on the television can be seen by 50, 60, 70 million people at the same time. If the television favours one candidate against the other one, evidently this is a manipulation. That was what was done during the episode of Ricúpero - the minister who said what he really was willing to put the police against the strikers, the workers, to hide the errors and exploit all the success, he said all that. And then he was ousted, he was dismissed as a minister. But this was a scandal, he revealed himself as a man without scruples. He said: “I have no shame to do what I’m doing”. He said that, and everyone saw that on the television. And then, what happened, immediately, when he was dismissed as a minister - he went to the television and he said that he had made a mistake and he asked to be forgiven and all that. And then we
denounced that in the program, in the free program of television. But before we denounced it and after the denunciation, the television showed him praying, showed him as a good man. And then the impression of when he said that - it was a crime what he did - but it passed through the public opinion as an old man that had a moment of weakness. And said something which was true; that he was working for the candidate of the government, that he was hiding information from the people. All this was true and yet he was presented as only a man that had made a mistake because he was very tired that day and he said all those things. And now he got a prize; he was made ambassador to Rome in Italy. This man who says he had no shame to lie; and he said on the television without knowing that he was being televised, that his image was being broadcast. And so it’s been difficult to fight against such a powerful means of communication; one person on the television, at the same time speaks to 50 million people, to 70 million people. And Lula and the Workers’ Party, the caravan of citizenship, had to go all over Brazil. He traveled through 40 thousand kilometres all over Brazil, all across. But everytime he went to a place he’d find a thousand people, 10 thousand people. The most that we got, once, was a hundred thousand people in São Paulo, in a big meeting, political meeting in São Paulo, one hundred thousand. That was the most that we could have. And television, it’s not thousands, it’s millions of people. The newspapers also are owned by the right winged people. And so it’s very difficult to fight against them but that’s what we are doing. It is David against Goliath; we cannot ignore them. And so that’s why we think so much about creating popular centres of culture. Because before ‘64, when we had the first coup d’état here, we had thousands and thousands of popular centres of culture all over Brazil. And the first law of the dictatorship was to extinguish the centres of culture, popular centres of culture. Because they were places in which people got together to discuss, to dialogue, to teach one another. That’s where Paulo Freire started his methods. And myself I started many ideas that later were developed into the Theatre of the Oppressed methods. And so that’s what we try to do. But we know that if you want to change the whole country it’s an enormous task. But we are developing. We are developing as a party, we are developing as a mandate here. We have more and more people working with us. [And it’s best considered] that it’s not like a race, that you have to be the first one. It’s a race without a point of arrival. I think that we should think about that we are in a race, yes, but there is not a point of arrival. We’re not going to get there and then the race stops and we see who won. No, we have to keep running. The important thing is to run; it’s not to win the race. Because the race, this race, never ends. So we are running, and we are running faster, and we are going further. And then let’s go on, going further, running faster and doing the best that we can.

*Getting stronger?*

That’s right, stronger, more numerous, more people. And that’s what we are doing. It’s not so fast as we would like, but it is as fast as we can make it.

END
Appendix C

INTERVIEW with Claudete Felix
Rio de Janeiro, 22 November 1994

(Interview conducted in Portuguese)

How did the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed of Rio de Janeiro start and what was the motivation for it?

Here in Rio it started in 1986. Boal returned in that year, in 1986, after much time outside of politics due to the military dictatorship, that military coup. He was exiled in ’71 and when he returned to Brazil again in ’86 he was invited to do a two month long workshop here in Rio de Janeiro. It was a school, a project by Darcy Ribeiro. It was for cultural animateurs, for around 35 cultural animateurs who had worked as activists and in popular cultural activities in the country and in Rio de Janeiro. And then after the two months, we had the workshop with Boal, with Cecilia Tuni, with Rosa Luisa of Porto Rico. With a firm structure, with a firm financial plan also, we mounted some plays. We mounted simple plays; after two months of workshopping with Boal, with various exercises, various games, we mounted simple Forum Theatre plays - one about mental health, another in which I participated, one about the family, one about violence, one about violence against children, and another about our own self-criticism as cultural animateurs. Within this space - this new school, this new initiative by Darcy Ribeiro - we mounted five plays. That was September ’86. After then it finished, those two months of workshops. We continued to present our work in various municipalities of Rio de Janeiro. So we continued to present the work. And there were people in various places in Rio de Janeiro, some from two or three hours distance away. In my case, Liko, Luis Valeria and Silvia - we were here in Rio de Janeiro. So we formed a group of people here in Rio de Janeiro that we could facilitate, because we were nearer than the others. There were also some people in other places, very far, but still in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Then after we presented these pieces - that was the end of ’86 and ’87 - there was an invitation to continue this proposal; to remount the workshops with cultural animateurs who wanted to be able to continue the idea of working with Theatre of the Oppressed for their own communities and for the schools where they had worked. Then in ‘87 we started to do a workshop that Boal started, but couldn’t continue in Brazil. The project had problems, political problems. With a contract that we signed - which authorities of the municipalities and the municipal secretary of culture would not fulfill and respect. And so there was no funding for us to be able to continue the work. So the workshop finished, stopped halfway through, in the beginning of ‘87, in March ‘87. It stopped and then we couldn’t continue, without Boal. Boal left Brazil because the project could not be continued. But at the same time, we were these five people in Rio de Janeiro who wanted to continue the work. We tried to obtain sponsorship, we tried to get in contact with various entities, various institutions. And it was not possible. And then in 1989, for the campaign for the President of the Republic, we went back and contacted Boal.
Boal was always going to Europe and he’d returned. In one of those times that he stayed we started to think of things that would benefit the campaign of Lula, the PT campaign of ‘89. And then the PT was not elected to the presidency, Lula lost the elections. We thought, “what now?” So Boal, and this group of five people - me, Liko, Luis Vais, Valeria, Sonja and Silvia - we stayed together. We wanted to try to continue the work. So we worked with Boal, and we mounted a play, with another ten people that we invited - a piece called “We Are Thirty One Million, What Now?” Thirty one million people voted for Lula, thirty one million Brazilians, and what now? So we did a piece, a Forum Theatre asking: now, here we don’t have a popular government, what do we do? Because we were dumbstruck - the people here in Brazil. We mounted the work and presented this in March 1990, no, in January 1990. And then it was a very good piece of work. It affected a lot of people, it had a lot of repercussions. And so we thought it was important to continue the work. So we formed the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed. We organised and we invited Boal to participate also, in the direction. And we were able to continue the work; to try to concretize and to organise the Centre of Theatre the Oppressed. We approached the prefectures of the left. Prefectures in Minas Gerais, who supported us and invited us to go and give a workshop. A union of bank workers, that had supported us for a long time, for more than one year, we mounted work with them. They supported us with a place to work for a few months; financially as well. We looked for various associations, various entities; gave open workshops as well. But then it was more difficult than we thought, to continue the structure. We couldn’t find a way. And Boal had an idea. In 1991 he said this: “I have an idea. The idea’s a bit crazy. What do you think? I want to be Vereador”. A Vereador for the PT! So then we thought and thought, and created a theatrical proposal in order to do his campaign. So we started to mobilize. To move many people, who liked the theatre, who liked Boal, people who had made contact with us about our work. So we were able to get many people. We managed to do some good promotion of the work of Boal. And we started to do various theatre pieces with music. With the impeachment of Collor also we did various activities in relation to, and in favour of, the ousting of Collor from the presidency. And so Boal sought to enter the office of Vereador. We continued with the proposal, with a structure that was a little better. At the Municipal Chamber we put forward the same proposal. We continued to work with the unions, continued to work in the community. Our service is free so we could assist people - people who wanted to create discussion through theatrical work. We carried out a total assessment of the problems of the people who came here, and that invited us. We had groups in the slums, we had groups of unionists, we had groups of elderly people, we had groups of people with disabilities, children of the streets. We opened up our contacts, in order to be able to go out into the communities; and through the theatre work, to discuss the problems in that community. To discuss what was good; what could be made better through the laws. We bring back the recommendations to our office, then we would go and verify the existing laws, and also to create new laws.

Was it difficult for you to accept the entry into the political arena, as a theatre group?
For me it was difficult. For me it was difficult because I had never worked with the PT. For me it was difficult, a little difficult, a little strange. This idea, to merge the theatrical proposal with the party proposal. Because it is the Workers’ Party, the party with popular proposal, a proposal for opening. It was a little strange for me at the start, this idea. But with the idea of theatre, of Theatre of the Oppressed, it is so enormous, it is grander, than the proposal that we could have with just the party. The Theatre of the Oppressed is much better; as the idea, as the work. I thought that it was a very interesting idea, we could do the two things. At the start it was strange. Boal himself thought it was strange - how to make this marriage work, between theatre and politics. It was an idea, it was a struggle. I thought it would be a struggle; how would it be in practice. Our idea of this struggle would be interesting. It stimulated us to continue it and keep continuing; we tried to do this. Initially, for example in the mandate of Boal - I think people thought “Boal? Oh, Boal, he does theatre, does little bits of theatre...”, but in truth this is proving that these little bits of theatre, it has a very important function. It has a function to denounce very strongly. We used various ways in our theatrical work; and we found ways within the party as well, that had more force, that people would believe in more, in our work, that we were serious. We as cultural animateurs but also as serious people with serious work like the Theatre of the Oppressed.

**How would you describe your own motivations in working with Theatre of the Oppressed?**

I think my desire to work with Theatre of the Oppressed started the first time that I did the workshop with Boal. Why? Because when you have a proposal - to do theatre, to understand with theatre, to be observer, to work with your body as an instrument of theatre - this proposal is so big. It is so democratic; any person is able to do it, including myself. Because I was always very timid, always thought I would never do theatre. But the idea, the idea as you do it, is so fantastic. As you place your character, as you speak as yourself, when you show these characters. When you work with various themes that you want to discuss. When you, when I, discovered the potential as a person, we get to know various characters, to study various themes that we want to discuss with theatre and in other ways. I wanted, and it stimulated me, to make Theatre of the Oppressed a part of me. Part of my necessity that I saw each time, became stronger. To do theatre; for me the form became each time more alive. In Theatre of the Oppressed, what is proposed to you - to do the work, for you to speak as an actor, as an actualiser - I think is very important. And now, if you’re working with the communities, you discuss themes. I do the work in Morro da Saudade, women and children in Morro da Saudade. When they do, for the first time, a play talking about Morro da Saudade, I think for them is very important; very important to illuminate through theatre. And to show the work, to show the place where they live. Because no one goes to Morro da Saudade, because it’s a slum; their Morro da Saudade. And show to people how they live their lives there. So you transform your life, your day to day life, your reality, in a piece of theatre and show to people; to discuss with people, how it is, about living in a place that has a lot of problems. I think for these people it is fundamental also, when you discover your potential to struggle. That what you are able to discover, the
ability to struggle within you; to discover the human body, to discover the characters. These works that we do - with techniques, with exercises and games of Theatre of the Oppressed - is, I think, a thing with much force for people. The groups that we have are groups that have a lot of force; much motivation to continue working, because it’s so good. It’s good for the individual, for the person, as for the collective. With the various forms that you discuss and discover interesting things - about yourself, about other people. I love doing Theatre of the Oppressed.

After two years as a political mandate, has Theatre of the Oppressed changed or evolved?

For me it has evolved a lot. When we started, our first idea was to go to the communities, to work with groups in the communities or in institutions, and through these groups we would discuss laws, examine laws and work out new laws, always using theatre. So I think, in doing this, because here in Rio de Janeiro we have many different groups, church groups, favela groups, groups that are very different, each group has its own necessities, as a discussion for us it was very important, very rich for us. I think the idea of Theatre of the Oppressed in the Municipal Chambers here, each time as more people learn and know about it, each time more themes, each time becomes more differentiated; the discussion, each time more different people from different places are going to know and discuss Theatre of the Oppressed, are going to learn about and discuss the laws that they can create. People realise that they are able to “create a law?”, discuss a law, can consider that these laws exist, “I didn’t know that these laws existed!”; exists for whom!. So I think this proposal that you join - Theatre of the Oppressed as the rights of citizens, as a right and out of respect - has evolved a lot. Because who does theatre - it’s people, and if people are better, stronger, more conscious of their rights, they are going to do better by theatre. Getting to know how to discuss their oppressions. So I think it evolved, better. People improve their conditions in this work.

For you, has the idea of theatre changed?

I think the idea of theatre has become more simple in my mind; become easier. Theatre is a thing closer to any person. As when we started the CTO, we went to unions, to agencies, to offer our work. So there was a thing that was distant, the CTO and the other places where we spoke of theatre, discussed theatre. And nowadays, people come to us, wanting theatre like wanting to drink water. They want theatre for their work, to develop their ideas, to develop their people. So I think the necessity for theatre becomes more clear for these people. Because for us, for me, it has become more easy to recognize that theatre is so close to any person, any community. So more easy for people to do theatre. Now that people know that we are always here - that we can do this work at any time - it is more easy to do, better to do. For people looking for us it’s become more simple. “I want to do theatre / want to do a play here in my locality / want to join your group”. So we are more well known and people are closer to us. So theatre becomes more simple, easier; becomes more natural. And yes, I think so, any person could do theatre; and understanding this in practice, we don’t have any more
obstacles. Any person can do this with us; coming here, having time, whoever comes. We do this work with more facility, and with a stronger will.

END
Appendix D

INTERVIEW with Liko Turle
Rio de Janeiro, 26 November 1994

(Interview conducted in Portuguese)

How long has the CENUN Nucleus been going?

The work with CENUN started more or less in September of last year. I attended a meeting in Salvador in Bahia and when we returned we started the first workshops with Theatre of the Oppressed. We mounted a piece about the percentage of (black) students in universities. It was called “Ten Percent” if I’m not mistaken. The piece was a total flop. We started performing it within the collective, the meeting of students and once more at the CTO. But it was a total flop, we stopped the piece then. Afterwards, in that first year, we did another workshop in Arcoseiro, a nearby city and then we mounted it there and started performing the play “O Prega Dor”. The first show was the 24th of June here in Casa Ta Na Rua. And now we must have had more or less, more than 30 performances, approximately.

What was the motivation for starting the CENUN Nucleus?

Well we had (always wanted) to start up the Nucleus. The motivation was very simple. It’s a group that is organised for the struggle, political and social, or the more immediate necessities. In this case the Nucleus was a natural thing. (It) was not organised as theatre, but was organised on the national level to address the question of students within the universities, of the blacks in the universities. When I made contact with Banana, with Eduardo who was the president, we started to talk about (what we could do with theatre as something to use). Before this our own CTO had done a work, a play for a state meeting with them at UERJ. They had already done this before. They already knew the work and the motivation was basically this. Because it is a group that already uses various possibilities for its work of organising, so this was one more.

Why theatre?

Why theatre? This group? No this group doesn’t only do theatre, it works in various other areas. This is just one of its projects. They work, for example on the question of gender, masculine and feminine, the gender question. Here there is the question of the academic (profession), what is the (role/benefit) for blacks going in and working within the universities today. It also works with one more Nucleus, I forget the name, but 3 or 4 other Nuclei. I think the difference between this and the others is that this theatre is somewhat more, how would you say, more direct, the contact is more direct. Something that can be done as an external action; so because of this, it has greater contact within the universities. It appears more, the others require more necessities like graphics to print what is discussed, requires money for promotion. And
the theatre becomes a vehicle for promotion. But not only theatre; also theatre - in the case of CENUN, also theatre.

Theatre as an instrument?

Theatre as an instrument for discussion of racial issues within the universities and communities.

How would you describe the effect of the work?

What effect has it had? Well, I’ll speak for myself. Now anyway I think you should ask Elena who I now work with, she has other reasons and she started working with us this year, and also afterwards talk with the people of the Nucleus. I’m going to give my personal vision, what I think can happen. Until now I’ve had a belief, that on the performance level, that the Nucleus, when working outside the universities, has resulted, has worked better aesthetically than when we do it within the universities. Within the universities, at times the group gets a little timid; has a little difficulty in doing the work within the universities. Because I think they are thinking that before in the classes, they are hidden. They see very few blacks, at times one or two, at times there’s none, no blacks in the room. And then they arrive as these eighteen people, into the university, the universities where they study, and they go and interrupt university life, and generally set up in an open space where there’s a concentration of people, and they become the principal attention at that moment. So I think they become..., I have the impression that the performances in the universities are more internal; the performances outside the universities are more open. So thinking about these two things; now the effect I think, or the objective, that is happening, for example, nowadays the group is being invited all the time to perform at various places because it’s the only active black group in Rio de Janeiro. We have other black groups but they are not active. They’d do one play and then finish, but CENUN is active. So CENUN today, this theatre Nucleus I see, in Rio de Janeiro, as being the one reflection of the black community, as a theatre group. The only theatre group, functioning black theatre group; it has an effect, a big psychological effect. When people see the piece, we get many people commenting immediately, wanting to participate in the group. They think it’s very beautiful, love the work very much. On the same objective level of the Nucleus, I think it has not yet reached its potential totally. We haven’t yet looked at the question of Legislative Theatre. Neither has it looked at the question of research; the extent of the racial question in Rio de Janeiro. Because the idea is to utilise the theatre to explore it scientifically; the question, how is the racial question in Rio de Janeiro. We don’t yet have the mechanisms - our own - for training, to arrive at this level during or after the play, to bring in the measurements, the feedback. So to go and to do the work, we don’t have yet the structures for feedback about what happens in these locales. We also haven’t yet returned to those places where we do the presentations. With the exception of Ta Na Rua, where we have already repeated it here; in another university we want to return with the play. We want to find out the transformations in that locale; if there is interest in the
organisation, interest in the black organisations through CENUN - that is our objective. Theatre that comes and promotes; that brings other people in, into the organisation or the entities, for CENUN. So this measurement has not yet had time for mental organisation and also for written organisation. We don’t have the structure for this. We don’t have a place; we use this place here, we use other places, we use free spaces. We don’t have equipment - video, typewriters, computers. We don’t have the structure to transform the work more scientifically. Now I think that the biggest effect at the moment, in the immediate sense is our own group - it’s easy to see. Because for us the theatre has effects in various ways. It has a personal effect. For me above all the effects are very strong. For me this is my first time working in a group of only blacks; first time speaking of the racial question, first time touring the universities as a black group talking about the racial question. For all of them this is the first time they have worked with a group of blacks in order to talk about this through the theatre. I think what we are seeing is an internal revolution. In all areas, this effect is measurable, I sense this. Within the group the people wanting this very much including me, are conflicting, much conflict within the group. There’s fighting, because some want more and some don’t understand the grand effect that is possible by going outward. So I think the effect within the group is very strong. The effect outside the group - we have, informally in São Paulo, for example, there we found out after we returned, that we had a massive effect, a wide effect, in the entire city. They didn’t expect suddenly a group of blacks from Rio de Janeiro doing theatre about a racial question. They are wanting us to go back to São Paulo. So that we can work there to amplify (our effect), creating groups there also. So we don’t have this information. When we presented the play, for example in PUC, there were 4 people asking to talk, wanting us to work in the community, asking to know more about the work; some people wanting the music - to tape, to record the music on disk or CD. Two people, Ricardo Brasil and Frank Santos, asking or offering to tape the music. So it seems that people like it; that’s the impression I get. And like it very much, not just because it’s a group of blacks, but also for the work; it seems they like it. Now in order to be more clear, this year was more for the experience; for me was more of the experience. I think the coming year as well. I think in the coming year in Brazil it will be 300 years since Zumbi. Zumbi was a black leader, who many years ago, when there was no Brazil, when it was a Portuguese colony, created a republic. A country within Brazil called Palmares. He was one of the kings of that country. That country lasted, I think, 200 years, approximately. So it’s been 300 years now since the birth of Zumbi. And the black community of Brazil, the black population of Brazil, is organising in order to do a lot of activities in order to reclaim black heroes. Because we don’t have stories of black heroes officially; only Portuguese or whites.

Why?

Because of domination, our history, of Brazil, is very recent. Brazil is only young. Only 150 years, a little more, only 170 years; more exactly 172 years. Since the Aurea Law - the law that abolished slavery, ended slave labour in
1888 - was about 110, less than 110 years ago. So my grandparents were slaves. So it hasn’t been possible in history to have black heroes, in the history books, no history books. It still doesn’t exist in history. In schools the black part is still not talked about, in schools officially.

*When we watch television we always see just the one aspect of life, what is the strength of this theatre work that we do in comparison to television?*

This is what can happen - there is a great deal of difference between television and theatre. Television doesn’t permit a direct reflection or discussion. It’s basically a monologue. It speaks and the others listen. In theatre - principally in Theatre of the Oppressed that we are involved in - there exists a possibility for social dialogue to occur. And what happens, the problem in theatre is that we are not able to get the attendance of millions of people; the television has an audience of millions of people, not the theatre. But I believe it is important to be able to get to individuals as in one to one. For example, just with our play “O Prega Dor”, we’ve played to roughly around 10 thousand, 15 thousand people. We’ve performed it 30 times, more or less, and always with large crowds. In universities the average crowd is around 400 people. So 30 performances at 400 people, that’s 12 thousand people. So it’s already played to a large number of people. For this, until the end of the year, I intend to maintain the work on a greater scale, including the rest of Brazil, not just Rio. We’re going, towards the next year, to take the play outside of Brazil and into the interior of the country as well. But I think it’s worth it, as with television, doing completely different work; I think it’s worth doing this theatre work.

*In your experience what happens when the dialogue between the performance and its audience occurs?*

Well, in relation to things that have already occurred - for example, we’ve found that when people enter the Forum, non-blacks, white people, to discuss and to discover that the racial question was more a black issue and not so much a white issue. We’ve seen black people enter, accept and speak, having to accept what they see in the work because there is no other possibility. We’ve had people who use the theatre, in the university to criticise their own university. In PUC on Thursday, there was an intervention - a young woman who started to play the scene with the hair straightening, the nose peg and the mask being placed on her because it was like that for her in PUC. PUC is a university for the upper class, so she wanted to be equal to the other young women there, this was what was represented. But when I asked the audience if they understood, they understood that she was doing a parody, doing a critique of the institution. “Ah yes, you’re going to do this to me, yes I want this. Yes I want to be equal to the others.” So ridiculing that group in the institution. So a lot of things can happen, anything can happen. And I’ve come to notice that all of this can happen in order to see what is the phenomenon. What can happen if it is placed in a general context, a generic context or what can happen only in the universities. But I’m beginning to believe that the phenomenon applies to all places it is presented. So what can happen with the recognition - the alienation of blacks who see the play in the
level of consciousness that they have, as well as the discussion of white people with black people.

*Why do you do Theatre of the Oppressed?*

Why? Well it was like this - I always had a connection to political work; not for party politics, but on the question of the revolution, as in Brazil. I think the country needs a more systematized struggle to improve the situation. Just here, I hadn’t had or encountered this neither within the parties nor within the organisations. When I made contact with Boal, with Theatre of the Oppressed, I believed I’d come to across a concrete possibility to create a revolution in the minds of the people; that showed possibilities. So Theatre of the Oppressed, for me, is a philosophy; it is a way of life. I try to live by this philosophy that I’ve learnt. How would you describe this philosophy? You see what is happening and you can consciously intervene. You can, through theatre, understand life better. And understanding life better, you can intervene in life. Shakespeare said that theatre is a mirror to society. It is an image of society - theatre, this is what Shakespeare said. Boal says that if this is society - in this mirror that is theatre, the image that is mirrored, is shown - it is already distorted, it is awful, it is already deformed. So it is possible to leave reality and enter the image, that awful image, and rearrange this image within the theatre; rearrange this image, and fix it there, replace with the ideal, and then return with this ideal image to reality. So theatre, principally Theatre of the Oppressed with the individual’s intervention, there is a third possibility. You see the reality, represent the reality through theatre, enter this representation, change it and bring back what you’ve changed to reality again. So Theatre of the Oppressed, for me, is this philosophy. I see, I change and I return again. For me this is the thesis of Theatre of the Oppressed, this philosophy. For me this is a way of life for today. I think it is a very interesting thing. Theatre of the Oppressed has various angles. It has a social angle, philosophy, politics, aesthetics, theatrics. It has many possibilities, not just one possibility. More or less this.

*What do you think will happen with this work in the future here in Rio?*

Well I think we’re going to see a lot of growth. Before the elections that have just past, we had a stage in our work that was very much in flux. With the problem with the election, this diminished the momentum of these groups; and now we are returning to this work. So I think that in the next 2 years we’ll see a very big expansion. That we’ll get a lot done through this. And also with the idea of Legislative Theatre, it will be another arm of Theatre of the Oppressed. As we try to understand and create something that hadn’t existed before now. We have done only a little with this work. I think it’s certainly going to expand. And also just with continuation of the Theatre of the Oppressed work; just studying it to continue it. We understand more in order to do more.

END
Appendix E

CORRESPONDENCE with Alvin Tan
Artistic Director of The Necessary Stage, Singapore

Date: 09 Mar 96 04:07:22 EST
From: ALVIN TAN <100745.1144@compuserve.com>
To: Ronaldo Morelos <morelos@pigeon.qut.edu.au>
Subject: Boal’s Theatre

Dear Ronaldo,

Greetings!

I am Alvin, Artistic Director of The Necessary Stage in Singapore. I am writing with regards to your interest in Boal’s theatre as how we have had the opportunity to execute it in Singapore.

What we did was Boal’s Forum Theatre. We had gone into workshop with Boal in New York in 1992. We returned to Singapore and did Forum Theatre dealing with two short “anti-plays”. One was MCP (Male Chauvinist Pig) concerning a wife who does free lance professional work but faces an verbally-abusive husband. She is caught between her friends who want her to get herself out of the ridiculous situation and her husband whom she loves. This was inspired by our own observations of life in Singapore where women who hold managerial posts transform into spineless jelly with their husbands. The other piece, “Mixed Blessings” dealt with the failure of a racially mixed couple (Indian and Chinese) when faced with pressures from family and friends. Both pieces were initially predicted as not workable in the Singapore context by skeptics from friends to journalists. However, when executed, it was a success as participants or “spec-actors” were forthcoming. There were nights when it got difficult to end the evening as people wanted to “forum” the piece for a longer period of time.

We found it of great benefit where theatre and education were put in service for cultural development, where art met with society in the most interesting manifestations, never like what we have done before. The actors who were in the process of preparing the two pieces were excited and challenged by a range of possible scenarios that would and did explode on stage, where their creativity and thinking on their feet were called for, where they were suddenly put into a position of co-authorship - the composition of the pieces took place with the participation with “spec-actors” who contributed in the production of meaning and the completion of the play. Actors became author, director all rolled into one as they, in character had to follow the spine of their characters to inform their expression and the decisions they made when in interaction with the proposed solutions that were offered by the “spec-actors”. Guided spontaneity but nevertheless, space for creative
expression independent of a playwright, hence, a space which is not
totalizing or closed appeared and became the experience of both cast and
audience. The conventional definition of passive audience, consuming an
end-product was broken down and the audience’s position became one of
authorship as well as all struggled to “save” the protagonist from the
“avoidable” tragic end of the “anti-play” (each 20 mins long). Audiences
informed each other by the dramatization of their decisions what strategies
would be appropriate and hence direct exhibition of their values gave way to
interesting discussions of why certain strategies were employed and why
others were not as good. Feedback to plays that were once relegated to
after theatre discussions over late night suppers were part of the life and
process of the production in the same space. Feedback were not kept to
pockets and were not isolated but were brought forth by the same
community who saw the “anti-play” and resonated with other people’s
thinking who responded by taking the challenge to be in the protagonist’s
shoes. Some told us later that they had it all figured out but all had to be
thrown to the winds and revised once they got into the protagonist’s shoes.
That it was easier to be an arm-chair critic and actually more difficult to take
the problems hands-on. It was a humbling experience...an educational one.
Art and theatre made way for such invaluable interaction to take place.

We thought it was a good idea to bring it to schools and found an
immeasurable success with both students and teachers.

But all too soon, Forum Theatre was seen as subversive and a journalist
wrote an article alleging that we were Marxists because we attended a Boal
workshop at the Brecht Forum which is situated at the New York Marxist
School. The form is now proscribed in Singapore. Anyone who wants to
stage Forum Theatre has to put a S$10,000 deposit. The concern is that
there is no script and thus no control. The event can be exploited by those
who do not mean well and thus hijacked and turned into a riot.

There were a lot of press coverage over this with some other articles and
forum writers who wrote to defend us and the form but nevertheless it is
now no longer in practice.

I hope this is of some help.

Yours sincerely,
alvin
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