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The theatre of the oppressed : performance as political transformation

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THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED:
PERFORMANCE AS POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Television, Radio, Film, and Theatre
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By

Michael Roddy

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ABSTRACT

THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED: PERFORMANCE AS POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

By Michael Roddy

This thesis addresses the impact of theatre activist Augusto Boal's ideas, commonly referred to as The Theatre of the Oppressed, on the world of performance today, and its influence on personal, social, and political transformation, specifically in the United States. Programs that practice these ideas are examined here, measuring them to a set of criteria that reflect the intentions of Boal and that of his influential predecessor, educator Paulo Freire.

Research on this subject reveals that there are a number of organizations in the United States that are practicing The Theatre of the Oppressed methods and, although their approaches are often different, they are still adapting Boal's objectives to their different realities, and in many cases, finding success in transforming the lives of the participants.

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Introduction

This paper will examine the impact of theatre activist Augusto Boal's ideas, commonly referred to as the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), on the world of performance today, and its influence on personal, social and political transformation, specifically in the United States. At this time there is little analysis and follow up regarding the effectiveness of his ideas as theater companies, educational institutions and community-based organizations adapt and develop his methods. Although there are plenty of examples of his work in Third World countries, where TO was born and developed, there is little information accumulated about how he has been translated and implemented in a First World country such as the US. After more than thirty years of the message of TO being spread and practiced throughout the world, the question arises: Does the work of Boal still promote activism, or more so, transformation, as it was originally intended, or has it been ignored in the world of theatrical performance, or watered down in the arena of social activism, or just assimilated into a category of personal therapy? In essence, does TO facilitate people to take power over their lives and become active participants in the democracy afforded them? Does it make a difference in changing the conditions of poverty, illiteracy, crime, and health in a wealthy and technologically advanced country like the US?

Mady Schutzman and Jan Coen-Cruz, in perhaps the most comprehensive look at Boal's influence to date, said in their work, Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism:

As Theatre of the Oppressed traverse continents and collides with different cultural values, political systems, and personal ideals, we as TO

practitioners must negotiate the consequences. Yet each of us brings to the work our own cultural biases, psychological conditioning, social status, skills, personal goals, and needs. (Schutzman 14)

It is the goal of this paper to examine the "collision" of Boal and the US, the "negotiations" that have been enacted, and the results and impact of such an encounter.

By reviewing the work of Boal himself through the analysis of texts, periodicals, and Internet information, specifically in the development of his ideas and the accomplishments of several representative theater companies and social institutions in the US, the role of his influence will be clarified to see if his work still retains its primary ideal of social, political, and personal transformation, originally called the "rehearsal for the revolution."

Since Boal's ideas have their seed in the work of the fellow Brazilian and educator Paulo Freire, Freire's work and his philosophy, including specific key terms, will be analyzed and put in the context Boal's growth and efforts. By examining the process of development of both Freire and Boal's ideas, criteria will be established for measuring the effectiveness of TO practices in the US

With the beginning of the 21st Century when people in the US are faced with both fear and a sense of powerlessness, there is a need for citizens to more earnestly engage in a meaningful dialogue and analysis of the ideals and practices of democracy, by critically thinking out the difficult issues, carefully weighing out the balance of preserving a healthy planet, becoming active in the decision-making process, being heard, acting on well-founded beliefs that will benefit society. The Theatre of the Oppressed addresses

these issues, and an analysis of its various practices will contribute to this ongoing dialogue.

Chapter One

The Roots of Education and Theatre as Political Transformation

Knowledge emerges only through the invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 1970, 53)

In the midst of the various socio-political reform movements in Brazil in the early 1960s, Paulo Freire began work that transformed the direction of education and theater for the rest of the century.

Freire had grown up in the city of Recife in northeastern Brazil through hard times, and was determined at an early age to dedicate his life to the fight against poverty. After struggling through school he managed to be accepted to the University of Recife and initiated independent studies in philosophy and the psychology of language, studying Marx and Catholic intellectuals such as Maritain and Bernanos, all of whom strongly influenced his educational philosophy. In 1944, he married a school teacher, Elsa Costa de Oliveira, who encouraged him in his studies and shared his vision for a change in educational practices.

These first 25 years of Freire's life saw Brazil's gradual incorporation into modern times. After the world financial crisis of 1929 foreign investment declined, and the developing national industrial bourgeoisie, facing little competition, rose.

A policy of conciliation between the national bourgeoisie and the workforce was deliberately adopted and implemented by a paternalistic government. The rural areas were relatively quiet. Illiterates could not vote, and about 90% of the peasants was [sic] literate. Mass organizations and movements were limited to urban areas. (Facundo)

After World War II, foreign investment returned to Brazil and soon overran the national industry, creating a struggle between imperialism and a national capitalism. Under the banners of nationalism and the construction of an anti-imperialist, though capitalist, national economy, workers, industrialists, liberals and Communists joined forces. Their aim was a revolution, but with the objective of democratic reform, specifically with the acceptance of universal suffrage and capitalist national development (Arraes). Freire played a part in this movement, and the pedagogy that he was creating was instrumental in getting people not only to read but also to vote and support reforms.

In 1954 Freire began working at the Social Service of Industry, which brought him into contact with the urban poor. The educational and organizational aspect of this work led him to formalize a means of communicating with them that would later develop into his dialogical method for adult education. He taught education courses at the University of Recife, earned a doctoral degree in 1959 and soon became the new director of the University's Cultural Extension Service which brought literacy programs to thousands of peasants in the northeast part of the country.

At this time in the early 1960s, the term "Popular Education" arose from a social and political analysis of the living conditions of the poor in developing countries; it attempted to help people identify, understand, and solve problems such as poor housing, unemployment, or poor nutrition. Freire became its leading spokesperson, and his work in literacy methods based on the idea that everyone has the capacity to effect social change and to shape his or her own history and culture gained in popularity. During the years of 1963 and 1964, his literacy teams worked throughout the nation, claiming

success in the fact that they could teach adult illiterates to read and write in as little as thirty hours. The reason for his success could be seen in the fact that Freire and his co-workers approached literacy through knowledge of reading and writing as a desirable and attainable goal for all Brazilians, above all by including people in the political process. Freire got the attention of the poor and raised their hope that they could start to have a say in the day-to-day decisions that affected their lives. As literacy became attainable and valued, peasant passivity and fatalism decreased, much to the dismay of the Brazilian military and land-owners that were anxious to keep away any thoughts of land reform.

Freire's early success showed elements that he would continue to develop all his life. His emphasis, first of all, was on dialogue that involved respect. It was not one person acting on another—the “banking” concept of a teacher making “deposits” in the empty student—but it involved people interacting. Freire created a vocabulary of key words that were integral to his educational philosophy. “Praxis” is a continuing process of critical reflection and informed action which betters the community, building social capital and leading to respect, justice and human growth. “Conscientization” is self-determination, developing a consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality. Freire insisted on situating educational activity in the lived experience of the participants. He began his early literacy sessions with gathering all the participants into a “circle of culture,” where they would answer questions about their living conditions: The starting point was what they already knew, the facts of their daily lives. Freire urged his learners to look at themselves as productive members of society, not determined by fate, but rather by the economic-political-ideological context of the society

in which they live. According to Freire, when men and women realize themselves as “makers of culture,” they have conquered the first step toward the feeling of importance, the necessity, and the possibility of owning reading and writing. They become literate, politically speaking (Freire and Macedo).

In a typical literacy activity, a facilitator would listen to the people talk, and seventeen words were chosen that were important to their lives, “generative words,” such as favela (slum), terreno (land), chuva (rain), which were phonemically rich and ordered in increasing progression of phonetic difficulty. These words were broken down into syllables, such as FA-VE-LA, and then into the phonemic family of FA-FE-FI-FO-FU, VA-VE-VI-VO-VU, etc. Each generative word had a set of “phonemic families” that allowed the literacy learner to put together pieces, that is, come up with new combinations that form new words. The moment the learner was able to articulate syllables to form words, he or she became literate.

The method follows methodological and linguistic rules, but also goes beyond them, for it challenges men and women who are becoming literate to take ownership of the written code and to politicize themselves, acquiring a totality view of language and the world. [...] it proposes that learners “read the world” and “read the word,” which as Freire emphasizes, are inseparable actions. (Freire and Macedo 8)

In 1961 the United States, fearing more Communist threats like Cuba, created a U.S. AID office in Brazil under the Alliance for Progress program, and provided economic assistance in hope of destroying this “security problem.” Freire’s literacy work, perceived by the forces on the Right to be anti-Communist since Freire was Catholic, was the recipient of this financial assistance, but Freire, in response to the forces of the Left, demanded that there would be no interference from the authorities. Plans were laid out to

use his method for a National Literacy Campaign, with the support of the constitutional President, Joao Goulart. Then, in 1964, the United States suddenly withdrew its aid, the Right in the country denounced the program as “Communist,” and the military brought down the government (Facundo).

With the military coup, all progressive movements were suppressed and reform was brought to an end. Freire was arrested for “subversive” activities and imprisoned. While in prison he wrote his first book, Education as the Practice of Freedom (1964), an analysis of his failure to effect change in Brazil. He eventually was sent into exile to Chile, where he worked for five years with adult education programs, continuing to develop his literacy methods; because of this work the country was acknowledged by UNESCO as one of the five nations in the world which had best succeeded in overcoming illiteracy.

Freire was then invited to be Visiting Professor at Harvard’s Center for Studies in Education and Development and Fellow at the Center for the Study of Development and Social Change. The protest and unrest in the United States at this time profoundly influenced him, where he saw that repression and exclusion from economic and political life was not limited to just Third World countries.

It was during this time that he wrote his most influential work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1968), which synthesized all his efforts and thought up to that time. In Freire’s terms, the purpose of education should be human liberation, which “takes place to the extent that people reflect upon [...] the relationship to the world in which they live. And [...] in conscientizing themselves, they insert themselves in history as subjects”

(Freire, 1970, 20). Learners enter into the process of learning not by acquiring facts but by constructing their reality in social exchange with others. This is achieved through the dialogical approach, where everyone participates as co-learners, and whose goal is critical thinking and action. Critical thinking starts from perceiving the root causes of one's place in society—the socioeconomic, political, cultural and historical context of our personal lives—but continues toward the actions and decisions people make to shape and gain control over their lives. True knowledge evolves from praxis, and occurs where human beings participate in action that transforms their lives.

This problem-posing approach is a group process that draws on personal experience to create social connectedness and mutual responsibility. It is a methodology that involves three phases: listening, or investigating the issues or generative themes of the community; dialogue, or codifying issues into discussion starters for critical thinking; and action, or strategizing the changes students envision following their reflections. Meaning is there from the start, as learners “problematize the existential.” He used the terms, “coding,” basically what is said, and “codification,” what is meant. As activities that are learned correlatively and simultaneously; “decoding” is learning the relationship to sounds and proceeding with interpreting them.

The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy has two distinct stages. In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all people in the process of permanent liberation. (Freire, 1970, 40)

Thomas Heaney and Aimee Horton summed up the core of Freire's ideas in the book Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood, a collection of essays on transformative and liberating learning, as follows:

Education is never politically neutral. It either offers *reasonable* explanations for oppression—thus serving to maintain the existing order—or it offers possibilities for critical self-reflection to challenge assumptions underlying those explanations. The latter is possible only within a praxis of liberation—critical self-reflection in the context of transformative action to change the social order. The term that Freire uses to describe this process is *conscientization*, [...] a breaking into consciousness of hidden dimensions of our reality through our *reflective engagement* in resisting the oppressions of day-to-day life. (Mezirow 84)

After leaving Harvard in the early 1970s, Freire became a worldwide figure, serving as Assistant Secretary of Education for the World Council of Churches, lecturing and devoting his efforts to assisting educational programs of newly independent countries, becoming a respected and popular figure among advocates of radical educational and social change.

In 1980, after fifteen years of exile, Freire was finally allowed back to Brazil, where he assumed a faculty position at the University of Sao Paulo. The political climate still was not totally comfortable for him and the government soon demanded a “report” on him. Rubem Alves, one of the most respected intellectuals in the country, was given the responsibility of fulfilling such a task; his words speak for themselves: “[...] my report is a refusal to write a report. [...] he stands alone [...]. Paulo Freire has reached the highest peak an educator can reach [...]” (Freire, Ana, 1998, 24).

With the Worker's party victory in Sao Paulo in 1989, Freire was appointed Secretary of Education, where he was responsible for guiding school reform. In his

highly democratic administration, he proved that “more teamwork methods and mutual understanding lead to collective responsibility and to reinventing the act of education, making it more effective and adequate” (25). He rebuilt schools, revised the curriculum so that it fit the needs of the popular classes, and improved the level of teaching by establishing staff development programs.

In 1991, Freire left his position and began engaging in national and international programs and activities, still furthering his ideas through tireless dialogue. He wrote two more books, Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1995), a reflection on the text and how it was received, and on the development of policy and practice subsequently, and Pedagogy of Freedom (1998), his last work, where he continued to explore ethics, democracy and freedom in a world marked by threatening globalization and manipulation by the media.

Freire’s legacy of commitment, love, and hope for oppressed peoples throughout the world constitute a tremendous influence on a variety of disciplines: pedagogy, philosophy, anthropology, social service, ecology, medicine, psychotherapy, psychology, history, journalism, the arts, and especially theater, as will shortly be seen. His unmatched impact, however, has been on adult education.

“Freirian” programs multiplied in Third World countries during his lifetime, in areas where there was blatant poverty, injustice, unemployment, hunger and lack of democratic practices. The “oppressed” were easy to see. In the United States, where problems and inequities require more work to uncover, and more courage to accept and deal with, there has been a slower but nonetheless steady response to Freire’s ideas.

The aims of the general adult education programs in the United States over the last decade, like most educational entities under the pressure to prove their accountability as a community resource, have focused more and more on vocational training and personal development that is geared to short-termed solutions, often dead-end, low wage jobs for those living on the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum. With the increase in illiteracy rates and the gap between those who have access to technological knowledge and those who don't, the need for adult education programs to address urgent social problems has become a reality. Dr. Reid Bates of Louisiana State University, a proponent for adult education addressing these issues, has commented on this need: "The emerging social purpose agenda requires adult education to move beyond the boundaries of traditional practices and clientele and to investigate new options and tactics to meet a multiplicity of learning needs for a variety of people." (225)

One answer in effectively addressing the concerns for relevant adult education programs that meet the needs of the community has been rooted in the concept of popular education, which Freire himself began in the 1960s. In many cases in the U.S., however, there has been an attempt to package Freire's ideas into a bland formula that excludes its truly revolutionary flavor. Prominent educator Henry Giroux states:

What has been increasingly lost in North America and Western appropriation of Freire's work is the profound and radical nature of its theory and practice as an anti-colonial and postcolonial discourse [...] Freire's work is often appropriated and taught without any consideration of imperialism and its cultural representation. (McLaren, 1993, 177)

On the other hand, a modest number of national networks of progressive educators in the United States, led by Elsa Auerbach and Nina Wallerstein, have

adapted Freire's methods in a truer fashion. Such community-based and adult education programs have grown and sought success in attempting to hold not only high enrollment, but equally high retention and completion rates. Educators such as Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, Ira Shor, Stephen Brookfield and Jack Mezirow, to name a few, took Freire's ideas and implemented them into the country's educational philosophy, and this form of popular education became an accepted educational practice. Its goal is in line with Freire in that it carries the charge to develop people's capacity for social change through a collective problem-solving approach emphasizing participation, reflection and critical analysis of social problems. Social change is seen as problem-solving which improves the quality of life, enhances dignity and provides individuals and groups with increased control over their environment (Srikandath).

As he wished, Freire's work continues to be reinvented and re-clarified according to changing political and intellectual thought and movements. In terms of hope, he stated that "New forms of subjectivity and new strategies of emancipatory praxis" arising from globally oppressed groups create "struggles which will lead to new forms of political culture and structures of radical democracy" (McLaren xi). Freire believed that as long as the struggle for more humane educational practices, for deeper insights into constructions of power and oppression, and the impulse for people to invent their own identities and realities exist, his ideas will challenge people toward personal and social liberation, both in thought and deed.

With this description of Freire's life and accomplishments, one can see the process and components of successful liberatory practice. It must include dialogue based

on respect that takes place in the lived experience of the participants, be an active, interpretative study of one's social, economic, cultural and political condition, and have a charge to develop a collective problem-solving approach emphasizing participation, reflection and critical analysis. Before these criteria are applied to examining theater programs in the United States committed to personal, political and social change and justice, a similar investigation is required into the person who stepped in Freire's footsteps of liberatory practice in the field of theater, Augusto Boal.

Before he embarked on a career of theater activism, Boal, also from Brazil, became aware of Freire and observed his work in the 1960s. Although they both explored the possibilities of liberatory practice in their separate fields and shared the fate of exile, it was not until 40 years later in 1996 that they finally had the opportunity to work together for the first and last time, receiving doctorates from the University of Nebraska. Part of Boal's keynote speech, which was dedicated to Freire, said:

With Paulo Freire, we learned to learn. In his method, over and above learning to read and write, one learns more: one learns to know and to respect the otherness and the other, difference and the different. My fellow creatures resemble me, but he is not me; he is similar to me, I resemble him. By engaging in dialogue we learn, the two of us gain, teacher and pupil, since we are all pupils, and all teachers. I exist because they exist. To write on a white piece of paper one needs a black pen; to write on a blackboard the chalk must be a different color. For me to be, they must be. For me to exist, Paulo Freire must exist. (Boal, 1998, 129)

On May 2, 1997, Paulo Freire died of heart failure at the age of 75. Boal said:

I am very sad, but he will always exist, like my other fathers, all now deceased. Like Jose Augusto, who taught me to live and work, and to live working; like John Gassner, who taught me dramaturgy; like Nelson Rodriguez, who gave me a hand into theatre [...]. With Paulo Freire's death I have lost my last father. Now all I have are brothers and sisters. (129)

Those who encountered Freire—whether as a lifelong friend, or from a distance through his intellectual writings—remember him with deep respect.

One could not forget his generosity, coherence, humility, tolerance, ability to understand, to respect, and to value others, also his intelligence and outrage at injustices, his political engagement while an educator, and the coherence of his ethical conduct will not be forgotten. In sum, his ability to be human and to live passionately will be remembered.
(Freire, Ana, 1998, 42)

Education has not been the same since Freire started his work. He set a model for personal, social and political transformation that would reach into all parts of the world and into other disciplines. Boal's life and work, although deeply influenced by Freire, had found its own unique path to similar goals.

Boal studied and received a doctorate in Chemistry and set out on that career in the late 1940s when he was afforded the opportunity to study in New York. There, meeting actors, playwrights, poets such as Langston Hughes, he became enveloped in the wealth of museums, theaters, and movie houses—in short, the art scene—that surrounded him. He also met there John Gassner, a graduate drama professor at Columbia and an early mentor to Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, who inspired Boal with his lively seminars on contemporary plays and drama theory. Here Boal staged his first play, and with the ensuing gratification he found his true vocation, the theater.

On returning to Brazil, Boal started directing plays. Armed with Stanislavski's An Actor Prepares, very little money and a group of dedicated actors, he started a theater company.

The study of Stanislavski was a cornerstone in my career. It was he who systematized a method which helps the actor to seek, within him—or her—self, ideas and emotions attributed to the characters. In this sense,

one of the main functions of the director is to be *maieutic*, like Socrates in his philosophizing process—the philosopher is the midwife who makes the student discover what s/he already knows, without knowing that s/he knows it, by means of questions which provoke reflection, thus opening up the path to discovery. (Boal, 2003, 147)

He had his actors do Stanislavski exercises, and eventually he developed his own games and exercises in what he called “The Laboratory of Acting,” which would form the heart of a book he would publish twenty years later, Games for Actors and Non-Actors.

Every day we would study a chapter of Stanislavski and analyze the script. We studied the whole of the master’s first book during rehearsals. It was by studying the Method—not slavishly, but trying to apply it to our reality—that we began to create a Brazilian style of playing [...] A Brazilian show meant being ourselves, Brazilians. We did not go into considerations of class, the social system, etc., just Stanislavski’s ‘emotion memory’. We were more like our audiences[...] (148)

The plays he chose at first were classics, but soon the absence of a Brazilian voice on the stage bothered him and he was faced with the question that guided him in his search for truth in performance: For whom is one making theatre, for oneself or for the public—and which public? He felt he was performing great works without taking into account the realities that were happening outside the theater. He then started conducting seminars in playwriting, open to the public, trying to attract Brazilian writers. His company met with interested writers and acted their plays; they would “discuss, argue, eat, argue a little more, drink, eat and then argue some more” (155).

In 1957 his company made a breakthrough with the production of Black Tie, a play written by a native writer and member of the company, Gianfrancesco Guarnieri; it was the first time Boal’s actors played a script that truly spoke to Brazilians. “Empathy

arose from this total identity, as opposed to the more distant analogy we experienced with foreign plays” (167).

Before continuing to launch more new Brazilian writers, his troupe decided to make a tour of the interior of the country. This turned out to be Boal’s “baptism of fire,” a time when the discussions in his company moved from aesthetic to political with the central question continuing to be: to whom should theater be addressed ? Their audience up to this time had been middle-class, with workers and peasants only as characters. The company did theatre from the perspective which they believed to be “of the people,” but it certainly was not “for the people.” Their dream then became to engage in dialogue with the people. Their theatre company,

The new Diogenes, would have to venture out with a lantern in search of the ‘people’, just as the philosopher went in search of ‘Man’. It was necessary for the Mountain and Mohammed to meet somewhere: Mohammed and the Mountain would have much to talk about, many ideas to swap. (176)

And so they began their journey, through the varied weather and landscape of the neglected back roads of their country, continuing their dialogues about their art: “We went all over in search of Brazilian people. [...] the people were not defined by geography or history; they were a class. We were after the people in the fields and the factories [...]” (182).

Another influence on Boal was the German dramatist and theorist Bertolt Brecht, whose central concern was the theatre’s social and political dimension. While working on a play about economic concerns in the United States, Brecht began to develop the ideas for what would become known as “epic theatre.” He said: “As soon as one realizes

that the modern world is no longer reconcilable with the drama then the drama can no longer be reconciled with the world” (Carlson, 383). Brecht studied Marx and found him “extremely helpful in systemizing many of the concerns he felt—the search for a pattern and direction in human effort, an explanation and even a cure for the corruption in modern society, [...] a stimulating tool for dramaturgical exploration” (383). Epic theatre made the audience confront situations for which they had to make choices. The spectator could no longer sit back, passively consuming and being entertained—now he had to take on an active role, making decisions for or against what was seen on stage, and come to conclusions freely and critically. Brecht rejected (as would Boal) Aristotle’s long standing theory of “catharsis,” where the audience identifies with the characters in the play, which purges the spectator of fear and pity through the imitation of actions arousing fear and pity. Brecht rejected catharsis simply because he wanted to ensure that emotion did not distract man from realizing his social conscience and taking action to change the injustices in the world. Epic theatre not only interpreted the world but sought to make it better. Brecht also created a term, *verfremdungseffekt*, a “distancing effect” which he believed should stop the spectator from being spellbound by the actors and let him maintain a critical distance. If it is strange or new to an individual’s own identity or reality, people will think about it. Boal, in his search for artistic truth, took these ideas of epic theatre and alienation to new ground.

In 1960 Boal wrote his first play, Revolucão Na América, a work about an exemplary factory worker who is manipulated and eventually killed by politicians. The play was well-received, in a time when politics was heating up with the accomplishments

of the Cuban revolution and the activity of the Communist party in Brazil. In art there was excitement with Brazil's success of *Cinema Nova* in Europe. It was a time of "consciousness-raising," but Boal did not buy into communism or the myth of Che Guevara or any other liberation fad. "Many, before us, who practiced so-called 'political message theatre,' were in reality practicing a kind of evangelical theatre: they evangelized, with indisputable dogmas, the sovereign word of an organization or a party" (Boal, 2003, 187).

Boal continued to look for the "people." Another trip to the countryside in the Northeast of Brazil would again change his way of evaluating theatre and its usefulness. After performing a revolutionary-themed play about land reform for peasants, one farmer in the audience approached Boal and asked him to have his cast get the guns they were using in the play and join the local farmers in fighting the people who had been unfairly invading their lands. Boal then understood that no one had the right to incite anyone to do something they were not prepared to do themselves. Boal witnessed the horrible conditions in the land with the virtual slavery of the peasants to wealthy landowners. A priest he met showed him all of the horrors that the peasants had faced and left him with these words: "We must be actors, must go on the stage and fight. To be spectators of an unjust, unequal fight is a crime" (200)! It was here where the idea of the active spectator, the protagonist who oversteps his limits instead of resigning himself to his sedentary participation, entered into Boal's thoughts. It was something beyond Brecht, who only asked the spectator to think with his head, without giving that spectator the stage space to express his thought. Boal describes this as another major turning point in his career:

No more message-bearing theatre. I did not want to be the postman for the unknown sender (the Party ? Divine revelation?). I wanted the spectators, democratically, to use the same theatre language used by the actors. How could this be done ? [...] We were condemned to invent our own path [...]. (201)

Boal was then invited to conduct a playwriting seminar at a trade union. The workers began writing their own plays, and one was acted out, concerning a strike that had happened sometime in the past. One of the audience members recognized himself in the character of the strikebreaker in the play, stood up, approached the stage, and declared that the character had the play all wrong. He had never said those things, he insisted, and then proceeded to explain his version of the story. “I learned a lesson there about living, reliving and experiencing. And what stuck in my memory was this extraordinary image of the human being fighting the character, the man against the image; [...]. Fiction interpenetrating reality” (205).

With the military coup of 1964, Boal’s theatre had to operate in a climate of oppression, where artists, leftists, intellectuals and anyone opposing the dictatorship were beginning to be watched, censored, imprisoned, and tortured and assassinated. Freire had already been sent off in exile. Boal’s company decided to create a “truth-show,” patterned after the *cinema-verdade* style in Brazilian movies where the characters were played by the very people who inspired the story. With the idea of still finding the “people,” Boal continued to experiment. Their first work after the coup, *Opinioao* (1964), was a musical based on the singers’ actual lives, where the characters told their own stories in song to each other. This show was followed by *Zumbi* (1965), a retelling of the Black slave rebellion from the previous century. It was here where Boal made another

discovery: the narrator of the story became the whole cast. This would be developed into what Boal would call the Joker System, or *Sistemas Coringa*, where a character would not be associated with any particular actor. In successive scenes a character would never be played by the same actor and yet everyone had to maintain the same social mask of behavior for each character. Collective interpretation allowed the separation of the essential from the circumstantial. Boal described the show as part of an evolution:

In our realistic phase, much of the actor's work consisted of developing singularities of the character which did not have an impact on his social meaning. Here, the meaning was shown as a social mask, social behavior. The singularities belonged to the actor; the essential to the character. (242)

The show was interrupted by the Joker, master of ceremonies, explainer, director of the scene, stage manager, and he could play any character when necessary. "The Joker represented us [...]. This was the beginning of the dialogue with the audience that would develop fully with the 'Theater of the Oppressed'" (242). Boal built on Freire's ideas of the necessity of dialogue, and the Joker would soon act as a conscience in future plays for the loss of democracy in the country.

In 1968, with the political situation in Brazil deteriorating, Boal decided to travel, first to Cuba, then Paris and Eastern Europe, and finally to New York, where he established contacts with Richard Schechner and Joseph Papp, respected theater people who proved helpful to Boal in the upcoming months. On his return to Brazil, in a silenced and bleak artistic atmosphere, Boal started an experimental workshop called *Teatro Jornal: primeira edicao* (Newspaper Theatre: First Edition), and its purpose was to teach any organized group how to do theatre for themselves, transforming daily news items into theatrical performances, using certain techniques that his company had

developed, such as putting words to music, giving a historical analysis, or even improvising on the hidden messages.

We wanted to offer our audiences not the finished product but the means of production [...] We would not give up making theatre. We offered the population our know-how. We did not know what to say, we did know how to teach people what to say what they wanted. Liberty had been lost, but not dreams. We had lost plays, theatre, grants, costumes, everything except our dreams. [...] here was no difference between us and our audiences, now that we no vestige of our artists' trappings; we were citizens, mere human beings. We—us and them—could do theatre. (282)

Boal's company was invited to perform *Zumbi* in Mexico and Argentina, and they played to enthusiastic crowds; with the news of its success, it was then requested to be played in France. At the height of this good news, in 1969, the government cracked down and after his return Boal was taken away by secret police, imprisoned and tortured. He remained stoic and philosophical during this difficult time, recording his thoughts, reviewing his life, trying to see and create an even better theatre that he could use in the future. "In prison I found freedom [...] Metaphorically the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) was born in prison. I like to say: in this kind of theatre, the citizen—in the present—studies the past and invents the future" (294).

The news of Boal's imprisonment spread, reaching the healthy network of artists he had established in other countries, and international figures such as Arthur Miller, Simone Signoret, Peter Brook, Jean Paul Sartre and thousands of others soon sent messages to the Brazilian government asking for his release. He was released after a few months and threatened with death if he stayed in the country. Like Freire, he then began an exile that lasted ten years taking him to Argentina and finally to Europe.

Boal continued to question, to change, to develop a theatre that would be truthful. In 1973 he was asked to help with a literacy program in Peru, and began to work with the poor and illiterate, experimenting with using theatre as language, capable of being utilized by any person. “We tried to show in practice how the theater can be placed at the service of the oppressed, so that they can express themselves and so that, by using this new language they can discover new concepts” (Boal, 1997, 121).

One evening while Boal and his actors were performing a play based on a true story of a woman whose cheating husband was taking advantage of her, a key insight emerged. The actors were performing the story, but stopped when it came to the point where the wife makes the discovery about the husband. The actors began to question themselves on how this problem could be resolved; they made suggestions, but nothing seemed right. Just then a woman, who had never been to the theater before, rose from the audience and said very angrily that she had experienced something very similar and knew what to do. She was invited up on stage and began to talk, saying that the man needed a “very clear conversation” before he could be pardoned. Then she demonstrated her idea by taking a broom and hitting the actor who represented the husband.

Actual events, lived life, became art; on stage, the image of the real was shown. The spectators, the real people, penetrated the aesthetic space: there they were dualised. They went on being who they were *and* they became characters. Their lives, dualised—themselves and their images—became more comprehensible; lives having become two, each person becoming two—the person as an actor can direct himself, tracing his own steps, inventing his own paths. The actor is he who commands the character, and the character is also himself, the actor! Within the fiction of the theatre the spectator can try out actions for later use in his real life. (Boal, 2003, 207)

Ironically, in another country, Boal had found the “people” he had been looking for, and with this discovery he became very close to answering the question of who theater is for; at this time he conceived the ideas and goals of what he would call the “poetics of the oppressed.” He discovered that through this participation, the audience became empowered not only to imagine change but to actually practice it. They also had the opportunity to reflect collectively on the suggestions, and become ready to generate social action. In honor of Freire, who struggled very much in the same way to find a similar truth, Boal called this art the “Theatre of the Oppressed.”

For Boal in his experience in Peru, the spectator became the “spect-actor,” people who have the opportunity to both act and observe, and engage in a self-empowering process of dialogue that helps foster critical thinking. He recorded his thoughts and observations, and based on these experiences and his study of political and theater history he wrote his major work, The Theatre of the Oppressed (1974). This work was revolutionary in that it dared to challenge the very premise of Western theater, exploring Aristotle and what social meanings exist behind the traditional theatre forms, examining such terms as *imitation*, *tragedy* and *justice*. In the forward Boal makes his aim very clear:

This book attempts to show that all theater is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political. [...] theater can also be a weapon for liberation [...] What is lacking [...] is the destruction of the barriers created by the ruling classes. First, the barrier between actors and spectators [...] all must act, all must be protagonists in the necessary transformations of society. (Boal, 1979, ix)

In the first half of the book Boal analyzed the history of theater, beginning with the Greeks. He agreed with Brecht in thinking that the ideas of Aristotle, which had

virtually shaped the history of theater, had gone on too long without any challenge. He too was bothered by the concept of “catharsis” as leaving the audience too passive. This “coercive system of tragedy” is very much with us today, a “powerful system of intimidation” whose basic goal is the “purgation of all antisocial elements.”

Aristotle tells us that poetry, tragedy, theater have nothing to do with politics. But reality tells us something else. His own *Poetics* tell us it is not so. We have to be better friends of reality: all of man’s activities—including of course, all the arts, especially theater—are political. (39)

Boal analyzed the theatre of the Middle Ages, which was controlled by the nobility and the clergy and whose goal was to “immobilize society by perpetuating the existing system [...] purging the audience of all ideas or tendencies capable of modifying society” (56). Then came Shakespeare, according to Boal the first “bourgeois” dramatist who focused not on common man but on those with exceptional qualities, those “endowed with *virtu*,” and audiences were manipulated by this “will of virtuous men.”

Boal devoted a chapter to Machiavelli, who wrote extensively on manipulation but who also wrote a play called *Mandragola*, where for the first time the characters “synthesize characteristics and abstract ideas in perfect balance.” Boal praised the work as the most successful example of popular dramaturgy because it “relates to the spectator in an intelligent manner, and when it succeeds, it does so through reason, not through an empathetic, abstractly emotional bond” (72).

Boal covered the ideas of Hegel, Hugo and Marx in the passage through Romanticism and Realism, concluding that this

brings to an end the trajectory of that theater in which the multidimensional man is repeatedly subjected to reductions that transform him entirely into new abstractions of a psychological, moral, or

metaphysical nature [...]. In opposition to that theater, another one must rise: one determined by a new class and which will dissent not only stylistically but in a much more radical manner. This new theater, dialectically materialist, will necessarily be also a theater of abstractions, at least in its initial phase. Not only superstructural abstractions, but also infrastructural. Its characters will reveal, [...] their condition of mere objects, objects of determined social functions which, by coming into contradiction, develop a system of forces that directs the movement of dramatic action. (79)

Boal finally dealt with Brecht and his “epic theater,” which asked both actors and audience to be socially-aware and conscious of each other’s motivations and anxieties—for action and change are within their grasp.

To understand Brecht more clearly, we should recall that in his view the artist’s duty consists not in showing true things but in revealing how things truly are. And how is this to be done? [...] No one can answer better than Brecht himself. “[...]the present-day world can only be described to present-day people if it is described as capable of transformation [...]. (112)

Boal continued to develop the ideas of Brecht after this work was finished, arriving at a grassroots and participatory use of theatre that emphasized democratic and cooperative forms of interaction among participants. Boal was tearing down the wall between actor and audience, returning theatre to the people, where it had once originated in primitive rites. Theater was no longer a spectacle but rather a forum in which to analyze and discuss problems of oppression and power, and explore solutions.

The second half of the book dealt with the poetics of the oppressed, Boal’s first ideas and practices for changing theater in the first part. “In the beginning theater was the dithyrambic song: free people singing in the open air [...]. Later the ruling classes took possession of the theatre and built their dividing walls. First, they divided the people, separating actors from spectators [...]. The coercive doctrine began” (119)! But

Boal believed now that a change had taken place, where the oppressed were liberated and once more making the theater their own.

Boal explained the beginnings of his experiments toward actually achieving this change, which consisted of four stages. The first stage was “Knowing the Body,” a series of exercises by which one gets to know one’s body, its limitations and possibilities, its social distortions and possibilities of rehabilitation. The second was “Making the Body Expressive,” a series of games where one begins to express one’s self through the body, abandoning other more common and habitual forms of expression. The third stage was “Theater as Language,” where one begins to practice theatre as a language that is living and present, not as a finished product displaying images from the past. Within this stage he invented “Simultaneous Dramaturgy,” where spectators write simultaneously with the actors’ acting; “Image Theater,” where spectators intervene directly, “speaking” through the images made with the actors’ bodies; and “Forum Theater,” where spectators intervene directly in the dramatic action and act. Boal’s fourth stage was “Theater as Discourse,” simple forms in which the spectator-actor creates “spectacles” according to his need to discuss certain themes or rehearse certain actions.

Boal was already beginning to build a glossary of terms that would be reevaluated, combined, and reinvented in the next twenty years. The Theatre of the Oppressed would remain the seed for all future growth.

The last idea that he describes in the book was that of the “Joker,” which he had developed when he was with the Arena Stage in Brazil. The “Joker System” was characterized by the mixing of fact and fiction, the shifting of roles during the play so

that all actors could play all characters, and the reinforcement of the separation of actors and characters through Brechtian techniques. The joker was the director or master of ceremonies who addressed the audience directly, jumping in and out of any role, setting up rules, facilitating the spectators' replacement of the protagonist, and who summed up the essence of each proposed solution in the interventions. The term "joker" came from the wild card in a deck of playing cards, and as it is not committed to a specific suit or value, neither is this joker committed to a performer, spectator or any one interpretation of events. The Joker System above all allowed the spectator to "see the rituals of daily life as such, to see the social needs and not the individual wishes, to see the character's alienation without establishing an emphatic relationship with him" (193).

The Theatre of the Oppressed established Boal as a theoretician who boldly dared to critique the "sacred cows" of the history of theater with an intelligent and compelling argument. It has been translated into 25 languages and his ideas, games, exercises and concept of performance have inspired practitioners and scholars all over the world. Much like his own evolution of thought, this foundation of ideas is now being continually reinvented, always responding to the different, emerging needs of a changing world as a form of socially critical and transformative drama which helps people become aware of how their participation impacts society.

With the publication of this book Boal joined Freire in setting down a template for social change, based on the belief that the act of becoming a fully realized human being is also a process of analyzing and becoming critically aware of social and political circumstances. Their work places great faith in the ability of ordinary people to

understand, learn and change. “Development” is not simply a matter of economics but a process of liberation and acculturation.

Freire and Boal's discoveries were the results of patience, persistence and focused energy; they are the results of continually searching for both truth and change. The processes in which they were engaged provide the possible seeds for further development of their work toward significant political, social and personal transformation, especially in a modern country like the United States.

Through this examination and analysis of the development of the ideas of Freire and Boal, criteria can now be established for measuring true liberatory practice. First of all, there must be an emphasis on critical consciousness where individuals can examine their own problematic experience, or oppression. Next, participants must be active in the investigation and transformation of their reality, striving to be free from any ideology or hierarchy, and engage in planned activities which emphasize dialogue and bear the goal of transforming the conditions that cause that oppression. Finally, the results of these programs should produce some measure of political, social or personal change.

Taking these criteria and applying it through the information provided in texts and articles in the media to TO programs in the United States, one should have a better idea of how and to what extent this transformation is taking place.

The last step before examining these programs will be to investigate in this next chapter the methods that Boal has developed in the passage from theory to practice, highlighting the components of successful implementation.

Chapter Two

Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and Its Descendents

In her introduction to Boal's The Rainbow of Desire, translator and theatre activist Adrian Jackson, gave a brief overview of Boal's work:

The trajectory of Augusto Boal's work can be mapped as a series of epiphanies, a series of discoveries, a continuous process of response to his own perception of inadequacy of what he was doing before; this is very self-critical work, which thrives on problems. Viewed over its forty-year history, the work glides naturally, organically, from the socio-political to the individual-political and back again—but it is always rooted in practice and it is always theatre. (Boal, 1996, xviii)

In his exile, Boal began to develop the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) on a larger, international scale, establishing the first center where he implemented his principal theatre inventions: the Forum Theatre, the Image Theatre and the Invisible Theatre.

The Forum Theatre is a technique that begins with the enactment of a scene, or anti-model, in which the protagonist unsuccessfully tries to overcome oppression relevant to that particular audience. The joker then invites the spectators to replace the protagonist at any point in the scene where they can imagine an alternative action that could lead to a solution. The scene is replayed numerous times with different interventions, which results in a dialogue about oppression, an examination of alternatives, and a “rehearsal” for real situations. This kind of theatre is a gathering of active spectators who bring their own experience and suggestions to the question or problem presented.

Boal was once talking to factory workers who felt that they were being exploited in terrible working conditions. Their ideas for a solution were all different, and so they

were acted out in forum style before everyone. This created an atmosphere of true dialogue, and from all their proposals they agreed that forming a union was their best solution.

The Image Theatre is a series of wordless exercises in which participants create embodiments of their feelings and experiences. Beginning with a selective theme, participants “sculpt” images with their own and others’ bodies. These frozen images are then “dynamized,” or brought to life through a sequence of movement-based and interactive exercises. The group moves from an actual image through a transitional one to finally an ideal one.

This form of image theatre is without doubt one of the most stimulating, because it is so easy to practice and because of its extraordinary capacity for making thought visible. This happens because use of the language idiom is avoided. Each word has a denotation that is the same for all, but it also has a connotation that is unique for each individual. [...] The image synthesizes the individual connotation and the collective denotation. (Boal, 1979, 138)

Boal used image theatre in Peru, with people from a village where the army had come and tortured a suspect in the town square. The scene was reenacted and all the participants had the opportunity to “sculpt” the players—the soldiers, the tortured, the townspeople—into various positions which spoke about their feelings and created ideas on how they could become more active in the changing causes of this injustice.

Invisible Theatre is a rehearsed sequence of events that are acted out in public for people who don’t know they’re watching a planned performance. The goal is to bring attention to a social problem in order to stimulate public dialogue. Boal adds: “ [...] the theatrical rituals are abolished; only the theater exists, without its old, worn-out patterns.

The theatrical energy is completely liberated, and the impact produced by this free theater is much more powerful and longer lasting” (147).

Two actresses went to an open market and one began complaining that she had been cheated. The other actress insisted that the vendor was right and the problem was that the buyer could not read and recommended going to a literacy program. As they argued, people gathered around and listened, finding out at the same time about the benefits of this literacy program. When one actress said that she was too old to learn, an old woman witnessing it all said to the laughter of everyone else that for learning and making love, it is never too late.

In Europe, Boal established a scheme in using these techniques, especially for the heterogeneous groups he now faced. Workshops followed a pattern where the first two days he would integrate the group with games and exercises, for he believed that actors must always work on their bodies to get to know them better and to make them more expressive. These exercises were categorized into five groups: muscular, sensory, memory, imagination and emotion.

Our first guiding precept [...] was that emotion took precedence over all else and should be given a free rein to shape the final form of the actor's interpretation of a role [...] But how can emotions “freely” manifest themselves throughout an actor's body, if that very instrument (the body) is mechanized, automated in its muscle structures and insensible to 70 per cent of its possibilities ? [...] Like all human beings, the actor acts and reacts in a repetitive way. For this reason we must start with the “de-mechanization,” the retuning (or detuning) of the actor, so that he may be able to take on the mechanizations of the character he is going to play. He must relearn to perceive his emotions and sensations he has lost the habit of recognizing. (Boal, 2002, 30)

In the following two days exercises and games would be linked together and preparation would include the use of Invisible and Forum Theatre scenes and on the sixth day the Forum Theatre presentation.

Contact with the audience in the Forum Theatre sessions was always established following the same format: physical warm-up and disinhibition of the spect-actors by means of games and exercises, then Image Theatre work, and finally the Forum Theatre piece itself. The themes to be treated were always suggested by the group or by the spect-actors; I myself never imposed, or even proposed, anything by way of subject matter—if the intention is to create a theatre which liberates, then it is vital to let those concerned put forward their own themes. And, as the preparation time was short, we never managed to write whole plays, just short scenarios. (18)

Boal realized in his time in Europe that he was dealing with a more educated, higher socio-economic population with often a different way of perceiving things. Problems were there, but they weren't so obvious and extreme as in Third World countries. He had to deal with different perceptions of the concept of "oppression."

When I started working in Europe, many people said their oppression was "noncommunication," "loneliness," "emptiness," etc. At first I didn't understand—I was used to social and political oppression: police, the boss, unemployment, and so on. Then I found out that in countries like Sweden and Finland where the main social problems have been solved, like education, social security, minimum wages, housing—the suicide rate is much higher than it is in Brazil where people die of starvation or from being murdered by the police. If a person prefers to die she must be suffering terribly. The oppression is different but death is just as final. (Cohen-Cruz 44)

Boal saw the depth of pain these oppressions produced. "I felt obliged to invent new techniques that could help the victims of these forms of psychological torture to theatricalise their oppressions, in order to understand them and fight them" (Boal, 2003, 324). The influence of his wife, Cecilia, a psychoanalyst, further enhanced his

receptiveness to therapeutic interpretations of these oppressions. He came to conceptualize them as responses to internalized “cops,” related to but different from the external ones. In trying to deal with this, he created a series of workshops called “Cops in the Head,” specific exercises that addressed internalized oppressions. Boal explains that some people stopped themselves from taking political actions because they had “cops in their heads.” Fears that persisted after the oppressor no longer had real power over them. Boal believed that all the cops in our heads have identities and “headquarters” in the external world that need to be located. He saw this part of his work as bordering on psychology, but firmly rooted in the realm of the theater. The notion of oppression expanded to include not only societal values—“moral dictates” pronounced by parents, peers, teachers, politicians, media, etc—but personal ones, all of which obstruct the will and encourage passivity. Boal’s work was now often therapeutic, but on an individual level it still responded to community needs.

All of this led Boal to the next evolution of his theatre, the “Rainbow of Desire.” Its basic vocabulary was that of Image Theatre, and the techniques started with an improvisation based on an actual situation, initially cast by its real-life protagonist who plays him- or herself. An investigation, or improvisation, is started and images of the characters are made and offered by the larger group of spectators present. These images are then “dynamized” in various ways, and the results are observed objectively. Comments are invited, discussed and related back to the protagonist.

Adrian Jackson comments further about the Rainbow of Desire method in her Forward to Boal’s work as follows:

In the Rainbow of Desire as in Forum Theatre, we work on the case of an individual, and from that individual case we extrapolate into the group present, and then, sometimes, from that group into the larger society of which it is a microcosm or a fragment. This process Boal calls “ascesis,” the movement from the phenomenon of that kind; and his concept of “osmosis” enables this free play from one arena to the other, suggesting as it does that no individual consciousness can remain unmarked by societal values. There are cops in our head, they must have come from somewhere—and if they are in our head, maybe they are in other people’s heads as well. (Boal, 1996, xx)

The title came from one particular exercise Boal did, where all the other techniques are similar, in that they had something to do with trying to help in the analysis of colors, putting them in other desired proportions or configurations. He described this in the following passage:

No sensation, emotion or desire exists in a pure state in the human being [...] Love and hate, sadness and joy, cowardice and courage, mix and mingle in constantly differing proportions. That which emerges socially, at any given moment, is only the “dominant” strain of all forces at work in the human soul [...] this technique helps to clarify these desires, these wills, emotions, sensations. It allows the protagonist to see herself not as a univocal being, like her physical image reflected in a physical mirror, but as a multiple being, her image reflected by the prism which is the other participants. The protagonist’s passions appear here in all their colors...as clear as the rainbow, which tells us the truth. (150)

Boal first presented these ideas in a public forum in 1989 when he was invited to speak at the 10th World Congress of the International Association of Group Psychotherapists, an organization founded by the inventor of another use of theatre in psychotherapy, psychodrama, Jacob Moreno. Boal had taken another large step in his quest for truth in theater. Jackson says:

In the Rainbow of Desire there is another continuity with the preceding work, which is located in Boal’s desire to democratize, to demystify processes which have become the sole province of “professionals.” Having democratized theatre, he now works on democratizing therapy

[...] If everyone can and does act [...] perhaps everyone can play a part in the therapeutic process—and perhaps they can play the largest part themselves. (xxii)

As Boal continued to explore the wealth of TO, his exile finally ended in 1986, and he returned to Brazil. On arriving he noticed that little had changed politically, economically and socially, and so he immediately went to work in doing something about it, first by establishing over a dozen companies that soon developed community-based performances. However, he wanted to make a stronger impact and decided that he had to take a more active part in the political process if he ever wanted to see any real change. He joined the Worker's Party, and was eventually elected as City Councillor in 1992. Boal had created the next step in his evolution: Legislative Theatre.

I am a man of the theatre: Now that I am directly involved in politics, I use the means at my disposal—the stage! The Legislative Theatre is a new system, a more complex form, since it includes all the previous forms of Theatre of the Oppressed plus others which have a specifically parliamentary application. (Boal, 1998, 5)

He realized that Legislative Theatre was a way of “making Forum Theatre performance have practical and visible effects[...]not merely to rehearse for the future but to realize it. To try something beyond reflection and rehearsal. (16)”

The task of Boal's work was enormous. The problems in Brazil and Rio were many: besides crime, poverty, kidnapping, drug dealing and corruption, there were the modern menaces of television, technology and globalization. All of this contributed to a sense of hopelessness for the average citizen; the spectators had returned to the audience and passivity was creating a new oppressed class. Boal felt that his theatrical forms would contribute well to the “resistance” of such an onslaught of problems. He had to

employ the dynamics of the theatre to discuss what kinds of legislation needed to be enacted to address community problems. There was an obvious need for organizing groups of people and begin involving them in discussions and demonstrations which Boal hoped would become the basis for actual legislation in the Chamber of Vereadores.

Boal organized a network of partners, structured as what he called “links” and “nuclei,” each with its own particular focus and function. A link was a group of people from the same community who communicated periodically with the mandate, putting forward its opinions, desires and needs. A nucleus was a link constituted as a TO group who actively collaborated with the mandate in a more frequent and systematic way. The nuclei fell into three main categories: Community, formed by the participants who lived and worked in the same community, sharing many of the same problems; Thematic, which was defined by a community of interest, formed by the participants who are brought together by a shared interest, an idea, or an objective, such as helping the disabled, street children, domestic servants or blacks; Thematic and Community, which was composed of participants who combined both of these characteristics, like old people, patients discharged from mental hospitals, or a group linked to the Catholic church.

Boal chose “Jokers” for his workshops with the community actors and work began. These cultural-political meetings were rehearsals in which the citizens would make theatre concerning their own problems, trying out their own solutions. Boal used the games and exercises he had developed over the years, except this time every technique was both art and politics. As Boal said:

Rehearsal is much more than simply rehearsing[...] we should not lose sight of the fact that the objective of the rehearsals (which are already a form of political activity in themselves, a way of discussing the problems of the community and the relationships between those individuals and their community)—the end-point of the rehearsals—is the actual show, when a group opens itself to the rest of the community and together, using the language of theatre, they discuss and try to rehearse solutions. And they try to invent the required laws which I, in my role as *verador*, must present to the Chamber. (52)

Boal remained in office for four years, creating thirteen new laws as a result of his work, some dealing with helping in the practice of geriatric diseases and problems, others for the rights of mental patients and the disabled, and still others for better health practices. Boal felt, however, that the most important law that he ever got into practice was the “Law of Protection of Witnesses of Crimes.” This not only protected witnesses from a criminal’s revenge, but provided the person with a new identity card, a new home and job. Also, with his position he obtained funding for the first International Festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Brazil in 1993, and which has taken place every year since. Legislative Theatre had helped TO achieve one of its underlying goals: results that change reality.

In 1996 Boal faced lawsuits from conservative groups and he went on to lose his bid for re-election. The “Jokers” went out to the communities continued to work until they finally had to find jobs elsewhere. The Center of the Theatre of the Oppressed was legally constituted and became a non-government organization. Funding was sought both in and outside the country, and contacts were made with the governments of other cities, with the doctors’ union, and the State University of Brazil, to name a few. Boal wrote his

next book, Legislative Theatre (1998) and now entered a new phase: Legislative Theatre without a legislator.

Although he was in Brazil to stay and remain active with his center, Boal's ideas, much in the manner of Freire's, began to be tested in other countries. He insisted that TO was "not Brazilian, not Latin American—it is a process that can be used—and further developed!—in all societies where a minimum of freedom exists" (117). With invitations to offer TO workshops in other parts of the world, he, like Freire, became an international figure. "Boal's books, workshops and theatrical productions have spawned a movement that is international in scope and independent in spirit," says Christopher Reardon in his article "Democracy Onstage," that he wrote for the Ford Foundation. "Today hundreds of community theater groups are practicing TO, in such disparate places as New York, Omaha, Vancouver, London, Vienna, Johannesburg, Ouagadougou, Calcutta and Adelaide" (Reardon).

For any work to be adapted to different situations, there runs a risk of ideas being changed, watered down or reinvented with different objectives. Although it is the goal of this paper to examine how Boal-inspired programs work in the United States, I would like to first examine four international programs that have adapted TO and measure them to the true spirit of Boal and Freire that was established as criteria earlier. To summarize those components, there should be 1) critical consciousness, 2) an active investigation and transformation of the participants' reality, 3) activities which emphasize dialogue and bear the goal of transforming the conditions that cause that oppression, and 4) some measure of political, social or personal change.

In India, Jana Sanskriti, a cultural organization in Calcutta and directed by trained Sanjoy Ganguly, supports 32 community theaters in West Bengal that are using TO to write and present plays dealing with a variety of issues, such as the payment of equal wages to women and men, alcoholism, violence toward women, corruption within the political system, health education and citizens' rights. The Jana Sanskriti teams rehearse and perform theatre on a regular basis, on open stages that have been built by the people of each community, which serve not only as theater space but as a symbol of collective achievement. Currently Jana Sanskriti is working toward the formation of Human Rights Protection Committees which will hope to be the foundation of a civil society based on cooperation, humanity and non-violence.

To give an example of the TO work this organization does, it's interesting to analyze how they dealt with an issue identified very strongly by the women of several villages, that of alcoholism. Following the format of Forum Theatre, plays were performed on the issue and discussions and debates ensued. Initially the action was violent—the burning of liquor stores—but in the next phase of their work they came upon more refined results, such as forming anti-liquor committees, trying to find alternative jobs for liquor store owners, and finally not allowing those who drink to participate in public social functions (Ganguly).

Jana Sanskriti faithfully follows TO techniques of Forum Theatre, Invisible Theatre and Legislative Theater. Its number of theaters has increased over the years, and working now in seven states and claiming a membership of more than 500, performances occur with regularity. Nationally, it was recognized by being selected to perform for the

prestigious Prithvi Festival, a gathering of theater companies from all over India. It is difficult to measure Jana Sanskriti's success but it has made an impact in certain areas where this theater exists, and according to the Center of TO website (www.theatreoftheoppressed.org), it is listed as an exemplary program in the field of Forum Theatre in Rural Areas. It follows the criteria of Freire-inspired programs, but still doesn't offer any statistical proof of its success.

Another Center of the Theatre of the Oppressed (CTO) exemplary programs is the Ashtar Theatre, a non-profit organization that started the first theatre-training program in Palestine, and is now actively engaged in researching and experimenting with various artistic elements, tools and techniques. Ashtar Theatre aims at “making theatre a fundamental need within Palestinian society, through stimulating cultural awareness, awakening perception toward aesthetics and arousing artistic sensibility and taste” (Green, E.). Today, Ashtar is equipped with a professional team of actors, technicians and administrative staff, producing three types of theatre: that for school students, another of a professional quality with original works for theatergoers, and lastly a special department dedicated to TO through Forum Theatre. The Forum produces shows that look at problems such as child labor, rights of the disabled, sexual abuse, and is performed in the villages, cities and refugee camps of the Palestine community. It is true to Boal's intentions in that it allows the audience to become spect-actors by stopping the shows, proposing solutions, altering roles or developing questions. A series has been established of Forum Theatre under the title of Abu Shaker, who is a villainous character who always represents some problem that the audience must deal with.

In 2003 Ashtar performed in 17 cities and nine refugee camps, engaging almost three thousand people. The CTO, under the direction of Boal and his organization's leadership, chose this as an exemplary site for use of Forum Theatre in war areas. The theatre continues today and shows that theatre can serve many different audiences and still be effective in bringing about positive change in communities.

An example of TO being adapted in another area, that in England, represents a smaller picture and less organized application of TO. At the University of Sheffield's school of Midwifery, students were feeling a sense of failure in their work, being blamed for what they didn't know, of being silenced and humiliated. A Progress workshop came in and performed a Forum Theatre. A scene was acted out in front of all the students and faculty that incorporated all of the problems the students had been talking about. The result was a success in that everyone felt that they had been heard, the problems were there for everyone to see, and the solutions came from a democratic process. As one of the professors summed it up: "The culture of maternity care serves to empower neither midwives nor their clients. To change this culture, midwives need to explore how they can change both their behaviour and that of others. Forum Theatre gives them a safe but challenging setting in which to do this" (Kirkham). The use of TO here was considered for the participants as effective in solving the causes of a particular problem. The question regarding its true effectiveness is in whether it will continue to be part of the system in which these workers operate.

The final program outside of Brazil to be examined is the Headlines Theater, a 25 year old troupe in Vancouver, British Columbia, which was selected by the CTO as an

exemplary program in Forum Theatre and Sustainable Development. Headlines has performed many projects over the past ten years that have brought them awards, but the one to be examined here was one called Corporate U. This was a Forum Theatre production that was developed with anti-globalization activists in Vancouver, trying to interconnect and energize the activist community in Vancouver and create a global dialogue about the connections between people's lives on a grassroots level, the corporatization of education, and issues of globalization (corporate relationship to developing nations). A local theatre venue was turned into the "Corporate University Campus," broadcast live around the world and with an interactive dialogue format on local community television and the web. It was felt that the project generated an increased awareness of development issues both in Vancouver and around the world. Spect-actors during performances were estimated to be 25,000. There was no specific follow-up on this project. However, it was the first Forum web cast in history and there are plans to develop this use of technology even more (Diamond).

These four programs show how Boal's work has been adapted with both differences and similarities in various parts of the world, both in poor and rich countries, in both developed and rural areas. Now it is time to look at Boal inspired programs in the United States.

By 1992 Boal had established a following in the United States and was invited to be the keynote speaker for the National Conference of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1994 he presented introductory workshops at the University of Nebraska and was invited back the following year to

keynote the Pedagogy of the Oppressed Conference, now an annual event. In 1997 Boal was awarded the career achievement Award by the ATHE, and in 1999 he went on his first major tour of the United States.

As TO has spread throughout the world, the question arises about its viability in a wealthy, technologically advanced country like the United States that seemingly doesn't have a high profile of oppression. The next chapter will focus on Boal's influence in the U.S. and describe and analyze representative types of theaters, community organizations, and educational institutions that use these methods. In the last chapter the results of their efforts will be measured to the criteria established for successful transformation.

Chapter Three

Boal's Influence in the United States

The theater, Boal famously says, is a rehearsal for the revolution. For what revolution, then, are North Americans rehearsing, as theater practitioners, mental health workers, and community activists incorporate his techniques into their work in schools, hospitals, community centers and more[...]? (Green 47)

The background for analyzing the practice of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) in the United States centers in the development and spread of activist performance in the 1960s, which included a liberal political movement to support it, taking words beyond the confines of traditional proscenium theaters and into the streets, parks, schools, migrant camps, hospitals, prisons, churches, union halls and community centers. Companies such as Luis Valdez's *El Teatro Campesino* began helping the farmworkers' struggle for better working conditions in California; The San Francisco Mime Troupe performed satires on the state of society, acting as a political conscience after the Free Speech movement; the Free Southern Theater was the cultural extension of the civil rights movement; The Bread and Puppet Theatre performed anti-Vietnam war pieces with their enormous puppets; It's All Right to Be Woman Theatre was an influential part of the early feminist movement. These theaters, and of course many others, led the way in changing many of the stagnant forms and restrictions of drama at that time and bringing grass roots political works in a more accessible format to the public.

Also during this time there was a marked difference in the idea of what constituted the dramatic text. Very much in the spirit of Boal and Freire, the process took on a precedence over the product, and the script was no longer seen as the heart of the

performance; many experimented with “collective creation” to arrive at a product that was as consequential as life itself; the fourth wall was taken down, and audience participation and even discussions were encouraged after a work was finished. The role of the creator had expanded beyond the playwright and the director.

For example, in 1970, I attended a play about the conditions of life in prison that was held at Stanford University, written and performed by former prison inmates, who at the end of the play led a discussion with the audience about the problems the work had presented, even suggesting things that people could do about it.

At this time in the United States, changes were also taking place, particularly in the field of adult education, thanks to the influence of Freire and Boal, and the concept of “popular education” was starting to take hold; and not far behind was the idea of “popular theatre.” Adult education programs began to recognize theatre as a useful tool in the teaching and learning process. In this context, popular theatre could be defined as a group pedagogy aimed at the active, interpretative study of one’s own social, economic, cultural and political conditions whose result is a participatory theatrical presentation (DeCosta, 1992). Its objectives were to research and analyze community problems, facilitate dialogue among the community of learners, and provide an organizational base from which collective action could be taken (Bates, 1996). This kind of educational theatre was called popular because it strived to meet people’s needs as they defined them, with different purposes changing the structure of the theatrical work, its interpretation, and the way it communicated with the people (Eskamp, 1989). Bates added that the popular theatre is significant because “ [...] the aims and objectives are determined by the

participants [...]. This community-based focus combined with an emphasis on conscientization and organization for action, and the flexibility of the theatrical medium suggest [...] a process capable of addressing the dynamic nature of community problems” (Bates, 233).

With these ideas both in theater and education as a background, an examination is in order of a select but comprehensive representation of programs in the United States which reflect a wide range of demographics, clients-served, methods, evaluation and program structure. As was done with international programs with a TO focus, these programs will be measured to the criteria already established in the first chapter: an emphasis on critical consciousness where individuals can examine their own problematic experience, or oppression; participants must be active in the investigation and transformation of their reality, free from any ideology or hierarchy; engagement in planned activities which emphasize dialogue and bear the goal of transforming the conditions that cause that oppression; and finally, the results of these programs should produce some measure of political, social or personal change.

The Pedagogy and the Theatre of the Oppressed (PTO) organization was the first to put Freire and Boal together at their initial conference in 1995 in Omaha, Nebraska. Doug Patterson, a professor of Dramatic Arts there, arranged that event and has facilitated the annual conferences since, plus coordinating Boal’s visits to the US. He maintains the PTO website with information about Freire and Boal, and conducts workshops on TO. PTO developed from its conferences and is now a non-profit organization dedicated to challenging oppressive systems by promoting critical thinking

and social justice. PTO has a diverse membership of liberatory practitioners and theorists, including educators, students, critical pedagogists, artists, and community activists. PTO serves to inspire others through workshops, information and discussion. As Paterson says on his website, following the goals of PTO: “The objective is always to leave behind at least a core of people who can offer Boal-style workshops, analysis, and ideas. Hopefully there are hundreds and even thousands of people carrying out this liberatory approach to community animation” (Patterson).

In 1999 the Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development at Kansas State University initiated a Freire and Boal influenced project that dealt with a school system in a rural setting. After the project’s staff had witnessed a presentation on popular theatre in Ghana, they felt that the same methods could also be used to enrich education in rural schools in the northern Arizona and the Yakima Valley in Washington. Through the Exemplary Multicultural Practices in Rural Schools Project, the concept of community theater was introduced to a group of rural educators working to implement multicultural reform. Both adults and high school students, Native Americans, Whites and Mexican-Americans from a range of upper-middle class to poor families, were introduced to the concepts and functions of popular theatre at two four-day workshops in Washington and then Arizona. They then agreed to do an issue play. They researched and identified fourteen issues which concerned them, then discussed, prioritized and finally decided on the subject. In Washington it was the topic of gangs, while in Arizona it was violence in schools. Both groups succeeded in developing and creating their own plays about name calling, jealousy, and harassment. The audience was engaged at times

by the performers to give comments regarding certain problems, so the performance had an interactive aspect to it. At the end of the performances the audiences had the opportunity to discuss, debate and synthesize the issues from the plays. Suggestions were made on how to deal with the problems and in both cases ideas were enacted, one being to present the play in other places and the other to set up programs that would continue to deal with the problems with more community input (Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development at Kansas State University).

This project satisfied the criteria that have been established for a program of true liberatory practice in the spirit of Boal and Freire. It engaged in dialogue, dealt with relevant problems, and aimed to produce action and transformation. Many of its participants from the different systems of education involved claimed to have benefited from the experience. However, with its limited funding and fixed amount of time, it remained a single effort and this seems to have hurt its effectiveness. The lack of follow up on the work and its discontinuation prevented any true transformation and indicate that such continuity should be considered as an important element in judging a program's effectiveness.

The Los Angeles Bus Riders Union/*Sindicato de Paseros* (BRU) was founded in 1992 by advocates for the civil rights and mass transit interests of its working class, ethnically and racially diverse membership. BRU has more than 3,000 dues-paying members and an additional 50,000 self-identified members on the buses. In 1999 BRU organizers started a theater project, called the BRU Teatro, as an instrument to organize bus riders and improve transportation problems. Its lead organizer, Martin Hernandez,

who had previous acting and directing experience with the Cornerstone Theater, received a grant to explore ways to bridge differences among bus riders. Cornerstone was founded in 1960 in Los Angeles and has a national reputation for engaging amateur community members in classical plays updated to local conditions and experience. BRU formed a partnership with Cornerstone that helped 12 BRU leaders develop skits about public transit concerns.

BRU Teatro's performances have rotating casts from their membership base. Each skit is performed at least ten times on buses and at bus stops. The actors incorporate into their performances the responses and twists provided by the bus riders themselves. Sometimes the skit's writer or director is one of the performers, like Shepherd Petit, who, confined to a wheel chair, wrote a skit about the common contempt he felt people had for handicapped bus riders. The BRU measures success by the number of new members they recruit as a result of a skit and by the leadership skills and confidence gained by members as they develop scripts and perform in public. As Hernandez puts it,

When you do skits on buses, it's the little things you notice. The passengers that engage with the actors, the questions people ask, maybe even just one person that for the first time realizes his or her rights as a bus rider. This is where we really start to hear about people's issues and experiences, and it is also an opportunity to popularize the facts concerning transit policy and rights. (Kohl)

BRU feels that they have learned invaluable lessons in their efforts and that to be successful in the future they need to take a deeper look at all perspectives and the meaning and content of their messages, balance the promotion of debate and the

mitigation of altercations, and finally to incorporate citizen responses and interests into strategies and messages (Kohl).

This project connected a theatre company and a community-based organization in ways that helped each other. BRU became stronger because of these activities of consciousness raising, dialogue and problem-solving, and a lot was surely learned; however, there lacked any definitive results of their actions, such as an increase in membership, or concessions by the transit system. Still, BRU, without the help of TO, remains a very active voice in transportation issues in Los Angeles today.

In 1987 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, performance artist Susan Lacy initiated The Minnesota Whisper Project, a public art/organizing venture with women between the ages of 45 and 90 (Schutzman 115). Lacy thought it was time to celebrate the diversity and wisdom of this often-ignored age group and brought together hundreds of women who had been retired from leadership position jobs to take part in this three year period.

Lacy first trained thirty-five women in a leadership training program, and then they went out and recruited other women in a process of getting to know each other, meeting regularly, writing a newsletter, and dialoging about issues of older women such as self-image, sexuality, family, community, illness, invisibility and activism. All these meetings were taped and became the basis for the sound collage, along with sounds from nature, that accomplished the performance of the project centerpiece, *The Crystal Quilt*. This was performed on Mother's Day in the Crystal Court, one of the most prestigious office buildings in Minneapolis. With elegant quilt-covered tables on a black carpet with a red trim the 430 black-clad women entered the courtyard and sat at the tables and

engaged in private discussions of their accomplishments and disappointments, their hopes and fears, while the audience of three thousand looked down from the various balconies and listened to the sound collage tape. The piece ended when the audience was invited to mingle with the performers and join in their conversations.

Participants and audience felt the project successful because it created a meaningful experience for them, and served as a structure that would lead to further social action. *The Crystal Quilt* has, in fact, done so, with performers taking “Speak-Outs” on the subject of older women to small communities throughout the state.

The Crystal Quilt remains today more a performance piece than a true TO project. It certainly addressed a relevant issue in the U.S. and engaged its participants in dialogue and consciousness raising--from the various interviews afterward it indeed changed many lives of both audience and performers. What was not part of the equation was the engagement and commitment in finding systemic solutions to the issues brought to the center of this work.

Native American Qwo-Li Driskill of the Northwest Indian Prevention and Intervention Research Core of the Oregon Social Learning Center has presented workshops for fellow Native Americans in language restoration but has found that he has to engage in multidimensional approaches to the healing needed for each community. In discovering TO techniques in 2002, specifically with the use of Image and Forum Theatre, he has found a meaningful tool for dealing with the problems of historical and personal trauma he encounters.

Many language teachers realize the importance of integrating theatre into language curriculum as a pedagogical strategy, and TO spirals this concept

out to another level: it enables its participants to tell their stories to one another in an aesthetic and visceral manner that cuts through over-intellectualization and strikes at our emotions and spirits. TO is an exceptional tool to help create social change, because it so often challenges our assumptions of the possible and helps us imagine non-oppressive realities. (Reyhner 156)

Once Driskill presented a series of TO exercises to a group of indigenous people, in which they were supposed to walk around a room, keeping equidistant from each other and vocalizing how they were feeling. Soon everyone began to moan or scream and he had to stop the exercise and have a discussion. Driskill believes that Native people

[...] suffer from severe Post traumatic Stress Disorder, which is further impacted by our personal experiences with trauma. Simply asking us to be present in our own bodies can be a frightening, and also healing, experience. Many of us were taught that we have no right to our own bodies, which directly relates to being taught that we have no right to our homelands, languages, or lifeways. For me, this experience was further evidence of how important TO work is within our Native communities. In the case of language restoration, for example, how can we hope for our peoples to learn our language if we are not able to be present within our bodies? How can we heal these deep wounds so we can embrace our Mothertongues? Conversely, how can our Mothertongues be used as medicinals on our journey toward personal, community and cultural restoration? (158)

In 2002 Driskill developed a workshop called “Mothertongue: Healing from Patriarchy and Colonization” to address the needs he has discovered, and now he travels Native American areas in the Northwest giving these workshops. He feels he has achieved success through his encounters with his fellow Native Americans, since people who had lost their native language are now “re-learning” it, and in doing so restoring dignity to their own connection to history. They are conscious of the oppression and beginning to act on changing it. “[...] theatre is a potent approach to language stabilization, and a genre such as TO lends itself to our work by helping us repair the

damage caused by colonialization and abuse, and pushes us to envision our futures” (159).

The Mothertongue project is an active and ongoing project. Its strength lies in dealing with a homogeneous group who face the same oppression. This is rare in a country as diverse as the U.S. Their focus on language is also a powerful and meaningful tool for finding solutions to transformation. It harkens back to Freire’s idea of reading the word is really reading the world, the first step toward the feeling of importance, where people become “makers of culture,” and become literate, politically speaking.

Hope is Vital is a national prevention/education, community dialogue and outreach program project, based in Washington D.C. that uses Boal’s techniques and other methods to develop interactive workshops exploring specific community needs. Michael Rohd is the founder and author of Theatre for Community, Conflict and Dialogue, a training manual derived from his work with youth and adults on a variety of issues, including AIDS, conflict resolution and substance abuse. He met Boal in 1995 and commingled his interactive approaches with those of Boal.

Hope is Vital is based on the belief that education is dialogue. Paulo Freire spent a lifetime shouting to educators [...] we learn by doing, not by being told [...] Information is not enough. It is useless without the power to act [...] Hope is Vital seeks to create safe spaces, have dialogue, explore choices, practice for real life, utilize the multiple perspectives different individuals bring to every interaction as a positive tool for problem solving, critically and viscerally analyze life situations, to take action and be the protagonist in one’s life. (Rohd xviii)

Rohd’s program operates with the idea that anyone can participate in this kind of theater. What is required is a desire to engage in dialogue about oppressions in our lives and use theatre as a tool to effect that engagement. Also, there should be “intrinsic need

of the human psyche--body, mind, heart, spirit--for dialogue"(xviii). He believes that people create themselves by means of the dialogue of languages, art and culture. The task then is for the oppressed to confront the oppressor and reestablish dialogue (xii).

Rohd takes the peer groups he trains into communities to engage in dialogue with community representatives. An example of the power of this work is seen in a story he told of one of his workshops. In this particular community a father publicly voiced his disapproval of the workshop, which was on teen pregnancy. During the workshop the man finally stood up and began to lecture that the whole problem was that the girl didn't practice safe sex and that was the only issue that should be addressed. Getting into an argument with the moderator, he finally was invited to step into the "scene" and speak to his "daughter." He agreed and as soon as he got into the scene and interacted with the girl, he changed his attitude and slowly began to accept the girl and acknowledge her problem of being thrown out of her house. The man in fact began to cry and then hugged the girl. His action indicated to the group that there was a genuine need for the workshop's future work there.

As Rohd says: "Theatre allows us to converse with our souls—to passionately pursue and discover ways of living with [...] others. [...] We have no better way to grow together, to learn about each other, to heal, to grow. (xix)"

Hope is Vital remains an active training ground for TO. It certainly addresses important issues of oppression and has created an impressive tool, a training manual, for future dissemination of its work. Hope is Vital incorporates the ideas of not only Boal, but those of Viola Spolin and other masters of improvisation; it even discovers its own,

specific exercises, such as those of discovering space and building trust, which shows that it keeps creativity alive in its mission in seeking “discussion, trust, and a step forward in each person’s ability to take care of themselves and to look at their world with compassion” (xviii).

Directly related to Boal himself, who often visits and conducts workshops there, the TO Laboratory (TOPLAB) was founded in New York City in 1990 by a group of educators, cultural and political activists and artists who had studied TO; its purpose is to provide a forum for the practice, performance and dissemination of TO techniques. Work is done with educators, human service and mental health workers, union organizers and community activists who are interested in using interactive theatre as a tool for analyzing and exploring solutions to problems of oppression and power that appear in the workplace, school and the community. The principal end which TOPLAB works for is

To change the power relations in our society and to create mechanisms of collective power [...] to help groups, within the context of a democratic learning process, to confront and transform power relations of domination and subjugation that give rise to oppression. Within this process: 1) all participants are learners; 2) all participate in and contribute equally to the production of knowledge, which is a continuous dialogue; 3) the learners are the subject and not the object of the process; 4) the objective of the process is to liberate participants from both internal and external oppression, so as to make them capable of changing their reality, their lives and the society they live in. (Picher)

The Laboratory initiated and organized workshops that dealt with racism, homelessness, AIDS, and has sent members to the International TO Festival in Rio de Janeiro. It remains partners with the Brecht Forum, which is its fiscal sponsor, and New York Transfer, which maintains its website.

TOPLAB also maintains a strong philosophical and political base that sustains their work and is integrated into an active forum concerning the true direction of the ideas of Boal and Freire. It is involved in a continuous flow of projects, workshops and outreach projects with the purpose of giving participants the tools to free themselves from the oppression in which they find themselves and to change both their lives and their community toward positive ends.

One of the notable workshops that grew out of TOPLAB is called “Rashomon,” inspired by Akira Kurosawa’s cinematic study in multiple perspectives. It serves to collectively challenge stereotypes and promote greater understanding of others. Workshop members are first asked to volunteer to tell the story of a personal incident of oppression. The group then decides on one story and the participants take parts to act it out. Then the narrator makes an exaggerated image of how he/she felt and saw each of the characters, and gives them their corresponding image. They in turn wear it and freeze. Keeping their images as masks, they improvise the same story. Each of the characters then gets to create a set of images that all will assume during successive improvisations. When all images have been generated, the scene is improvised once more, this time with characters alternating between masks. At this point the characters shed their masks and improvise the scene one last time. Now the audience becomes spect-actors, able to yell to stop and intervene in the action at any moment with new alternatives they feel are more empowering.

TOPLAB is a true TO organization in its objectives to transform personal but more so the political reality behind any problem they encounter. More than any other

program profiled here they maintain a strong leftist stance in the reasoning behind their work. The Brecht Forum gives monthly lectures and workshops on Marx, Hegel and Third World political struggles. TOBLAB doesn't offer statistics on how many they have served but already in their 14th year of existence and still conducting two to three workshops a month indicates that it is still relevant and popular.

Act for Action – Theatre for All is a Portland, Oregon, based organization that is dedicated to the use of theatre for education and social justice. Founded in 1984 by Jeannie LaFrance, who remains its director, Act for Action teaches theatrical disciplines in traditional theater, improvisation, social activism, education, drama therapy, and TO. It conducts classes, workshops, and projects using TO techniques to deal with racism, health issues, ecology, domestic violence, anger management, and other community concerns, with an array of clients that include K-12 education, health workers, community organizations, the criminal justice system, and higher education. Its program emphasis is on group work to create social change through problem solving, confliction resolution and leadership training, internal community building, and self-discovery. For the summer of 2004 they are providing instruction and curriculum for a class at Portland State University in Social Change Theatre, based on TO.

Act for Action concerns itself with very relevant topics, and makes no distinction in working with all parts of their community. Dealing with self-exploration with developmentally-disabled children, eating disorders, and pregnancy with teens, urban environmental issues with middle school students, or forming gay and lesbian task forces keep this organization active and connected to the reality of the community. One of their

successful efforts connected a high school and a correctional facility, where inmates were asked to write stories about their lives. Once that was done they were given to high school students who created a play from the stories, which then was performed for the same inmates. The students got a deeper understanding of the inmates' lives and the inmates were able to see their mistakes more clearly (LaFrance).

Act for Action is a low profile, efficiently run program that reaches throughout the community of Portland to offer its services. Its record of workshops shows a true diversity and they have been received two community service awards from the city of Portland. Their TO department keeps the philosophy of transformation and personal and community empowerment current.-

Through experimental workshops, performances and other creative events, the Mandala Center of Awareness, Transformation and Action is a multi-disciplinary education organization dedicated to community dialogue and social justice. Based in Port Townsend, Washington, the Center is an active hub for the training and practice of TO, especially that of Rainbow of Desire, and provides a forum which, according to its mission statement on its website, invites all “[...] towards a greater sense of healing at both an individual and community level, [...]” encouraging them “[...]to take action in their own lives as well as toward a more just and joyous world” (The Mandala Center for Awareness, Transformation & Action, www.mandalaforchange.com). The key point about this center is that although it addresses the “New Age” concerns of the self and the spiritual, they still keep a focus on justice and action. Their latest project is a multi-generational interactive theatre ensemble focusing on long term peace and justice work,

which combines both TO and another form of interactive theatre called Playback Theatre. Playback was first developed in 1975 and is an improvisational theatre in which audience members tell personal stories which are then acted out through the “conducting” of trained actors by a moderator after having interviewed the subject. Its founder, Jonathan Fox, has described Playback as the following:

A playback theatre event is integrally both an artistic event and an interactive social event involving both complex group dynamics and sensitive one-to-one communication. If the task of art is the creation of form to express the artist’s perception of meaning, then the playback artist’s task, specifically, is to create cohesive and shapely pieces of theatre based on an acute sense of meaning of the teller’s story. It is their artist’s sensibility that enables playback performers to transform moments from real lives, however simply or roughly told, into well-crafted dramas that have resonance for the audience as well as the teller. (Fox, J. 22)

Playback has also focused on an individual’s story which is meant to be heard, shared and honored, whereas in TO the story becomes a social exploration that acts as a springboard for action. The mix of these once separate theatre forms, one that invites story and healing, and the other dialogue and action, marks an important step in TO’s future evolution, demonstrating that the goals of transformation are more important than the institutions of TO and Playback themselves. Their own deep commitment to undoing the systemic roots of racism and the other oppressions in society made them partners. Hannah Fox, who was the first to combine these techniques in a workshop, commented: “The blending of the TO and Playback Theatre techniques provided an effective and powerful toolkit with which to explore our relationships to our communities” (Fox, H.)

The Mandala Center, besides being committed to personal and spiritual fulfillment through experiential performances and other creative events, keeps the idea of

TO alive in its articles and workshops. It is true to Boal techniques, even defining them on the opening page of their website, and the center remains authentically concerned with social justice.

In the world of theatre companies, TO has also made its mark in a project called The American Festival Project, as profiled in the work, Playing Boal (1994), edited by Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman. The American Festival Project was founded in 1982 by John O'Neal, director of Junebug Productions in New Orleans and Dudley Cocke, director of the Roadside Theatre of Appalachia. This activist network was “discovered” when the directors of these two companies who do original work could add understanding to each other by performing in the other’s home territory. The plays emphasized their common working class link and their different ethnic backgrounds, John O'Neal being African-American and Dudley Cocke being white. The result of this encounter led to the decision to do more exchanges, and finally to tour with other companies that perform original work, and who are grounded in distinct cultural traditions and have comparable politics.

The network grew in an ad-hoc way until the companies started to organize so that future events could build out of one another [...]. The AFP mission is cultural exchange, based on equality and mutual respect, [...] thus [...] providing a context in which Americans can better understand one another in all their diversity [...]. The defining characteristic of AFP companies is a basis in culturally-specific traditions of storytelling, music, or movement, through which very contemporary content is expressed [...]. Although each company tours [...] it has a home base in a community that shares its cultural identity. Pride in cultural expression becomes a step toward a sense of political entitlement. (Cohen-Cruz 118)

An AFP advisory board, made up from a representative from each of the participating companies, reviews requests from communities and decides which companies will take part. AFP work usually takes place over a period of weeks or even months, and includes performances, workshops, panel discussions, and collaborations with schools, churches and community centers. The project normally culminates in a series of performances by both the visiting companies and the local groups. Afterwards all meet to discuss what needs to happen in the community next.

For example, Urban Cultures Festival, the AFP in Philadelphia, was initiated by the Painted Bride Art Center to strengthen its connection with community-based arts organizations. To that end the center's community coordinator, Gil Ott, helped pair AFP companies with local groups for residencies and joint performances. (119)

AFP co-coordinator Caron Atlas indicated that each event happens differently according to the needs and desires of the community, but there always remains a long range goal:

The notion is that the community group sees the festival as a catalyst for something else they're trying to achieve, that our group supports and wants to help further. So we ask each potential host to come up with a mission statement and fit it into a long term plan because we're not interested in doing events that don't have any impact. (119)

An example of one theater that offers TO workshops besides maintaining a traditional season of shows is the Seattle Public Theater (SPT), founded in 1993 by four young theater enthusiasts who wanted a theater that promotes change, creativity, justice and community dialogue. The company, under its first director Marc Weinblatt, has always been influenced by TO. SPT has committed itself not only to producing quality theater, but also to exploring ideas, cultures and the community, and building and

strengthening their own Greenlake neighborhood. During the spring of 2004 they had two shows running that went out to schools, one about violence for middle schools and high schools, and the other for elementary schools, about crimes against the sea. There was no information available regarding the results of these efforts.

Although theatre companies are not as active in adapting and practicing TO programs in the U.S. as community based organizations, whose goals are mainly in serving to help raise the living standards and resolve issues in the community, they still appear in the unlikeliest of places. An example of a smaller theatre company that works in a rural area is the Maranacook Community School Interactive Theatre in the state of Maine. This performance group is dedicated to raising awareness of student and family relations, friendship, dating, rape, substance abuse, neglect and other contemporary issues. They perform for both schools and parent groups alike using TO techniques, but do not publish any statistics regarding the clients they served or if they were any follow up sessions.

This concludes this selection of representative programs in the United States that have practiced TO techniques. Most are still working today. They come from different fields, such as education, community based service and theater companies, representing a wide range of economic and social differences. Although the descriptions of their activities come for the most part from their own point of view, they nonetheless indicate the enthusiasm that many feel about their work. From their efforts one can't help notice how TO continues to adapt, staying for the most part close to its roots of thought and original intent and yet at the same time attempting to make their efforts more attuned to

their particular population and its circumstances. As Boal predicted, changes would happen as TO delved into new ground, and the result could be almost a re-invented process, because TO must be true to the different communities where it is practiced. Those needs will undoubtedly make new demands in order for it to survive and be effective. According to Cohen-Cruz,

TO's reception in the United States is most promising. Like much contemporary US activist performance, TO finds political efficacy by inserting itself in social contexts. It necessitates new sites, draws on multiple phases of the theater process, and expands the roles of actor and spectator. In a time marked by a belief that there is nothing new in art, that the best we can do is parody and borrow old forms, interdisciplinary hybrids may be on the rise. (122)

The question then remains: Are these programs successful in regards to the goals and objectives of TO and the criteria that was established earlier, based on the pioneering work of Freire? In the following chapter I will conclude by examining the results of these programs in the U.S., comparing them in their makeup and practice, to determine whether or not they are affecting true personal, social and political transformation.

Chapter Four

The Theatre of the Oppressed in the United States: Performance as Political Transformation?

The fact that Theatre of the Oppressed resonates for so many, is used by so many, has influenced so many, indicates that while not all its structures may be a good fit with systems of power that don't break down easily oppressor/oppressed models, the body of work still has much to offer, and the foundational philosophy endures. Even in the United States, the techniques have given the means of theatrical production—the means of creating representations of themselves, of their world, and their dreams—back to the people, to use in their struggles for justice, equality, and understanding. Boal encourages people to “adapt the method to their own culture, their own language, their own desires and needs. This is not the Bible, nor a recipe book: it is a method used by people, and the people are more important than the method.” (Green 49)

After reviewing the birth and growth of TO through the lives and work of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, and the processes they went through to find their “truth,” from liberation theology to popular education to popular theatre and TO, questions arise regarding its impact and effectiveness today, specifically in a First World country such as the United States. Primarily, are the efforts of the organizations in the U.S. reviewed in the previous chapter indicating that these are viable practices for political and social transformation?

To answer this, or at least to put this issue in a clearer light, the criteria for a true TO program established in the first chapter, and referred to in the following chapters, must be revisited and then measured to the representational programs profiled in Chapter Three. Those criteria are as follows: an emphasis on critical consciousness where individuals can examine their own problematic experience or oppression; the participants are active in the investigation and transformation of their reality free from any ideology

or hierarchy and engage in planned activities which bear the goal of transforming the conditions that create that oppression; and the results of these programs should produce some measure of political, social or personal change. Along with these criteria the following factors should also be considered in judging a program's effectiveness: the funding and organizational structures that keep these programs in existence; the content of these programs and the makeup of its participants; the evidence of continuity and follow-up; the relationship to the TO organization; the evaluation process; and, any defined and measurable results and how that information is acquired.

In perusing the Yellow Pages of the CTO website, which tries to keep track of all TO organizations around the world, it should be noted that there are currently, as of the summer of 2004, twenty active organizations practicing TO in the United States. This is not a completely accurate number since one of the programs reviewed here, Act for Action, was not included, but it gives us a reasonable number of organizations who feel that it is important to keep in communication with worldwide efforts of using TO. The CTO website is a strong indication of the growth and potential of TO, with its wealth of resources, including descriptions of exemplary programs, the latest in articles and books, and an interactive forum where people all over the world can pose questions and problems, request interns, and engage in virtual dialogue with people who have gone through the similar experiences. This website, taking the spirit of dialogue to a new level, allows Boal and TO practitioners to communicate with people all over the world; it brings closer to reality his wish to see TO become a working, effective and popular presence.

Now, when so many certainties have become so many doubts, when so many dreams have withered on exposure to sunlight and so many hopes have become as many deceptions—now that we are living through times and situations of great perplexity, full of doubts and uncertainties, now more than ever I believe it is time for a theatre which, at its best, will ask the right questions at the right times. Let us be democratic and ask our audiences to tell us their desires, and let us show them alternatives. Let us hope that one day—please, not too far in the future—we'll be able to convince or force our governments, our leaders, to do the same: to ask our audiences—us—what they should do, so as to make this world a place to live and be happy in—yes, it is possible—rather than just a vast market in which we sell our goods and our souls. Let's hope. Let's work for it! (Boal, 1992, 276)

The Internet also allows Boal to make proposals or present his ideas, and then get feedback on them. In the spring of 2004 he posted the draft of a new article on the “Aesthetics of the Oppressed,” which explains ideas on how to use exercises and games to deal with those who have been overwhelmed with the media and television. People were given the opportunity to react to it through the message boards. Boal has also offered an idea of “Flying Jokers,” which would consist of TO practitioners who would travel around the world facilitating workshops in the role as the Jokers.

In looking at the programs reviewed in the past chapter, it is now time to examine their influence and effectiveness, comparing their similarities and pointing out their differences, measuring them to the criteria set for effective programs, to see if they are making steps toward transformation, and if so, what are the reasons for such success.

Three programs, the Minnesota Whisper Project, the Exemplary Multicultural Practices in Rural School Project and the Bus Riders Union project are similar in that they were all small in scale, with specific goals and a determined ending date, and linked to a limited amount of funding. In their processes they emphasized consciousness

raising, problem solving, dialogue, and action; what was not built into their work was a more realistic time frame in which to find the root of the problems. Freire and Boal took time to create change, to dialogue, externally and internally, about the “truth” of a project, that is, the true needs of the people in that community, an important point in determining the success of a TO project.

The Minnesota Whisper project ended its grant funding in 1988 but there still remain various small groups continuing on that same work on a smaller scale, spin offs, if you will. Although BRU no longer works with Cornerstone Theatre, another grant funded project, it surfaces in the news as a continuing advocate for more affordable and more convenient bus service in meetings with the Los Angeles City Council. Although the Rural School project ended after its funding ran out, the results were extremely positive:

- ` The activities, experiences, and feedback recounted from both workshops have shown that popular theatre has several advantages which are pivotal for the improvement of the school education. For instance, it has the capability to sharpen students’ consciousness with regards to issues which may stunt their overall education, growth, and development. It can also empower students to articulate their feelings about those things in an entertaining way without stepping on anybody’s toes unduly. (Kemeh 3)

So it can be seen that these three projects, well-organized, with worthwhile intentions, set out to achieve modest goals and accomplished that. What wasn't built into their work and their grants was any follow up on a scale equivalent to the size of their original projects.

The Act for Action program in Portland, Oregon, remains an active project, giving workshops during the summer of 2004 and planning new ones for the fall. One of

their projects on multiculturalism and leadership is featured as an exemplary practice in Association of College Unions International. They have also been recognized in their community, winning the Portland “For Goodness Sakes” award in 2001, the Peacemaker award in 1999 and the Community Treasure award in 1997. Act for Action retains its commitment to TO, but it is still only one part of its theatrical services. The organization has survived financially and philosophically for 20 years, and with their recognition one can conclude that people have been affected by their work; by the continual requests for their services for the past twenty years there are plenty of individual success stories. Their website lists 40 organizations as their clients and projects over the past two years. However, like so many other organizations, Act for Action does not keep any statistics beyond those enrolled in workshops or projects, and there remains no quantitative data on any social or political transformation.

The Mandala Center’s strength is in its informative website, which regularly publishes articles about the state of TO, and their workshops and performances promoting TO. It functions as an organization with strong ties to CTO in Brazil and has adequate funding to continue carrying out its objectives. Mandala is very much like CTO Omaha, another organization with a strong website, in that they spend most of their energies as learning centers; their hope is that those who attend their workshops will go out and effect change in their respective communities. CTO Omaha has a university connection and has continued its work as the organizer of the annual International TO conference. The conference just celebrated its tenth year, selling out, and bringing in such prestigious speakers as progressive educator Herbert Kohl, Dr. Antonio Darder, a

critical pedagogist from the University of Illinois, Dr. Rudolfo Chavez, an expert on Freire and multiculturalism, and Boal himself. This event indicated that change is still a popular issue for educators in the United States.

The Mothertongue project, which works to restore Native Americans' culture and language through TO, fits the criteria that has been established for a true TO program, in that people are encouraged to become critically aware of the social and political circumstances in which they find themselves. The strength of this program, as pointed out earlier, is that this project deals with a single oppressor, and as a homogeneous group they can deal with their problem together, especially within the context of their culture and even that of “trickster thinking.”

[...] solutions rest on the talents we already possess, even if we don't understand immediately how they relate to the present problem. Trickster thinking involves manifesting creative solutions in response to seemingly impossible situations. This is one of the reasons TO carries hope to our language struggles: it requires innovative thinking and action and taps into knowledge we already carry inside of us. TO enables all of us to think like tricksters by allowing us to organically convey our emotions and ideas within the moment. (Reyhner 161)

Mothertongue is a relatively new project and hopefully it will provide more information about the results of their efforts in the future.

The Hope is Vital project continues today, with director Michael Rohd conducting workshops all over the country. He has been very successful in getting grants to sustain this program, which remains true to the criteria of TO, but so far there is little in way of measured results from these efforts. At the same time, he has taken TO into a new field, collaborating with avante garde artists such as Ping Chong on original works for the theater that emphasize consciousness for social change. Rohd has also participated in

other projects such as Animating Democracy, a Ford Foundation project that encourages civil dialogue on contemporary issues. His book, Theater for Community, Conflict and Dialogue remains an active resource for theatre and community-based organization activists.

In the field of theatre companies, TO is still taught and practiced in workshops at Seattle Public Theater's Theater of Liberation, reaching out to schools and community organizations, creating plays, conducting workshops and addressing community concerns, as was pointed out earlier. It follows TO methodology but works on a limited budget from grants and fees, and doesn't keep track of any measured change. It should be noted that the 2003-2004 season presented a full, traditional theater season and next year's looks equally busy.

The AFP continues its charge for better cultural understanding through partnerships established between theater companies and communities. Although not representing strictly the methods of TO, this project continues to work in the spirit of dialogue, change and understanding, and as their website claims, "helping to build coalitions, stimulate dialogues, and explore and celebrate the diversity of the culture of the community." The project is well-organized, democratic and financially responsible. It would seem that this organization is evaluated by its own members on a continual basis and the follow up on activities after performances would be of considerable interest.

In May of 2004 I had the opportunity to talk with Augusto Boal on a visit to San Francisco, and when I asked him about the implementation and effect of TO in the United States, he said that he thought it was going well, especially with the new additions of TO

organizations in Los Angeles and San Francisco. He mentioned that he was very impressed with the work in New York of TOPLAB. In my research, this program had the strongest output of TO workshops over the past 14 years, at least two per month.

TOPLAB also maintains a strong philosophical and political foundation, although some may say it is leftist or even Marxist. Nonetheless, it is one of the few TO organizations in the U.S. that places a great deal of emphasis on the political vision of revolutionary cultural practice within the context of the work.

[...]TO is a repertory of aesthetic activities, the political content of which depends in the political vision it serves. In turn, the political vision depends on the model of cultural practice in which it is embedded. In North America, the dominant model of cultural practice is the capitalist, or corporate model: one that creates the illusion of embodying democratic process while actually reproducing and promoting monologic, exclusionary and competitive social relations antithetical to transformative, participatory democracy and the creation of an egalitarian society. [...] A counter-model that allows for revolutionary, anti-capitalist cultural practice is the one that we are exploring: the popular education model. Cultural practices informed by this transformative model are [...] activist in nature, [...] committed to ongoing, long-term support of communities in need [...] they embody and promote popular culture [...] the social relations they reproduce are based on dialogue, inclusion, cooperation and consensus [...] the political vision inherent in the popular education model is the reality [...] of a revolutionized, just and egalitarian society based on participatory democracy, social and economic justice and respect for human rights. (TOPLAB)

Besides TO's workshops, which often involve Boal himself, TOPLAB shows signs of vibrant activity in New York and even in Mexico and Central America.

Workshops have been given at New York's literacy centers and public schools, Hunter College, Action for Community Empowerment in East Harlem, the University Settlement House in the Lower East Side, the Foundation for Research on Sexually Transmitted

Diseases in New York, the Diocese of San Cristobel de las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico, and the Caritas-Quiche in Guatemala.

TOPLAB, like the other projects covered here, offers no statistical measurement of the number of actual participants, concrete evidence of change, or any follow up after their workshops. One assumes that since most of these organizations, minus the three mentioned earlier whose funding ran out, have a strong organizational structure, adequate funding through fees or grants, and a commitment to and belief in TO. They continue to exist, and for the most part remain true to the ideas of critical consciousness, action and problem solving; they also continue to attract enough people to keep them doing their work. Perhaps future research into these organizations will provide more information to clarify their true effectiveness.

An article about TO's current progress in the U.S. on The Mandala for Awareness, Transformation & Action website entitled, "The Mosaic of TO in the U.S. and Canada," by Marc Weinblatt, who started the Seattle Public Theater and then went on to create the Mandala Center, brought up some interesting points on the progress and future of TO in the United States. The mosaic, he explains, is the many and varied intentions, approaches and styles of TO that he observed at meeting of nine of the most experienced TO practitioners in New York in July of 2000. "TO has finally exploded in the U.S. and Canada [...]," he writes. "[...] there is a growing wave of people captivated by its power and effectiveness. Thousands of people, often invisible to all but the populations they work with directly, are creating a veritable grassroots movement" (The Mandala Center for Awareness, Transformation & Action).

He goes on to explore what he feels has been working, what hasn't and what is being changed. He claims that the language of the "oppressor/oppressed" is having mixed results, and in some cases, changing entirely, to "Theatre of Liberation," "Theater for Living," "Redo Theatre," etc. This is perhaps reflective of an "overall highly privileged audience not relating to or uncomfortable with the word oppression.[...] many practitioners are finding it more useful to use words like 'disrespected,' 'powerless,' 'silent.'" In the programs reviewed in this paper, this wasn't evident, or highlighted as an important point.

Weinblatt believes that Forum Theatre is most successful when the group is homogeneous and is in complete agreement with the problem or who is causing it, something that Freire and Boal experienced in their work in Brazil and other Third World countries. But in the U.S., he claims, most groups are heterogeneous and creating an "image of images" is difficult. "Many jokers allow audience members to replace whoever they feel is having the problem—the dialogue, although rich, is not pure Forum and potentially problematic" (Weinblatt).

In the TO programs reviewed there was only one group, the Mothertongue Project, which avoided this "heterogeneous" issue, in that they work with the same tribe of Native Americans, and their problem of reclaiming their language is the one, shared concern.

Weinblatt points out the lack of any legislative theatre in the U.S, with only Doug Patterson of CTO Omaha trying to run for congress but failing. It's an interesting point, since Freire insisted that education is a political act, and Boal said the same of theater.

But what political influence is TO having through its workshops and community work? Perhaps it is only slight, maybe even intangible, but the changes are definitely part of the intentions. At the present time TO's potential in the U.S. is yet to be fully realized.

Also, there is another challenge to TO in the U.S., according to Weinblatt, and that is for the most part the most prominent leaders are white. The charge for TO, he pushes, is to “invite, make room for, and actively support more diverse leadership [...].” In my research of TO programs, however, this wasn't brought up as an issue.

Weinblatt's last observation of TO in the U.S. is that there is a tendency of various organizations and individuals to mix TO with other methods and approaches.

Mady Schutzman sometimes integrates sociometry (Moreno) and creative writing in her workshops [...] Julie Salverson weaves in the visual arts [...] Jan Cohen-Cruz may incorporate cultural-specific forms (Hip-Hop with urban teens) [...] the Creative Arts team incorporates puppetry into their work [...] David Diamond used Polaroid photography [...]

Boal referred to this in previous pages, what was termed the "hybrid," and expected this as a natural way of keeping his ideas alive and well. In a country like the U.S. that is so active and technologically driven, this embracing plurality is very healthy.

There are signs of increasing influence when in Los Angeles a TO organization started working after Boal's visit in 2003, and the same thing happened in San Francisco in 2004. Those two cities are now offering a host of TO activities. In fact, Boal's scheduled workshops for two weeks in San Francisco were all sold out. The Theatre of the Oppressed workshops, conferences, its presence on the Internet, and the publication of books are all signs of interest and increasing awareness. Generally speaking, people in

the United States have begun with a "modest" interest for TO, but at the majority of these relatively few sites it is practiced enthusiastically.

In this paper I have traced the development of TO thought and practice in the United States. Due to the rapidly expanding and ever-changing influence of TO, the results of this investigation point to the need for future research focusing on both quantitative and qualitative data to ascertain the extent of TO presence and influence in the United States

"Knowledge emerges only through the invention and reinvention," Freire tells us, quoted at the beginning of this paper, and this is what seems to be happening in TO practice in the U.S. today, a work in progress, making discoveries, testing out what works, and then looking for more. The value of TO in the United States, with many programs following the criteria for true libertory practice, now still moves in the process, and with not clearly-measured, finished products.

Boal was once asked about what we should expect in the twenty-first century, and he replied:

If we do not want the Thousand Year Empire to be installed in the world, if we do not want the end of History, if we still want to exist as individuals and not merely as statistics, grains of sand on the immense global beach, we must develop popular organizations which allow debate, plurality, diversity, transitivity of dialogue, rebuttal, the power to say no! (Boal, 1997, 254)

One can conclude that so it must be, if the U.S. is going to be truly affected by The Theatre of the Oppressed as Boal and Freire envisioned.

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