

3rd Edition



THE TWENTIETH- CENTURY PERFORMANCE READER

A black and white photograph of a theatrical performance. In the center, a woman in a light-colored, flowing dress is captured in a dynamic pose, with her arms outstretched and her head tilted back. To her left, another woman in a dark, patterned dress is also in a dynamic pose. To the right, a man in a dark shirt is visible, looking towards the central figure. The background is dark and filled with foliage, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall mood is one of intense, expressive movement.

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Third edition published 2014

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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First edition published by Routledge 1996

Second edition published by Routledge 2002

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

The twentieth century performance reader / edited by Teresa Brayshaw and Noel Witts. – [3rd edition].

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Performing arts. I. Brayshaw, Teresa. II. Witts, Noel, 1937–

PN1584.T84 2013

791–dc23

2013003422

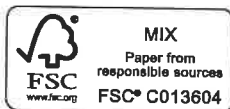
ISBN: 978-0-415-69664-7 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-415-69665-4 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-12523-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Bell Gothic

by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong



Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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Augusto Boal

THE THEATER AS DISCOURSE

GEORGE IKISHAWA used to say that the bourgeois theater is the finished theater. The bourgeoisie already knows what the world is like, *their* world, and is able to present images of this complete, finished world. The bourgeoisie presents the spectacle. On the other hand, the proletariat and the oppressed classes do not know yet what their world will be like; consequently their theater will be the rehearsal, not the finished spectacle. This is quite true, though it is equally true that the theater can present images of transition.

I have been able to observe the truth of this view during all my activities in the people's theater of so many and such different countries of Latin America. Popular audiences are interested in experimenting, in rehearsing, and they abhor the 'closed' spectacles. In those cases they try to enter into a dialogue with the actors, to interrupt the action, to ask for explanations without waiting politely for the end of the play. Contrary to the bourgeois code of manners, the people's code allows and encourages the spectator to ask questions, to dialogue, to participate.

All the methods that I have discussed are forms of a rehearsal-theater, and not a spectacle-theater. One knows how these experiments will begin but not how they will end, because the spectator is freed from his chains, finally acts, and becomes a protagonist. Because they respond to the real needs of a popular audience they are practiced with success and joy.

But nothing in this prohibits a popular audience from practicing also more 'finished' forms of theater. In Peru many forms previously developed in other countries, especially Brazil and Argentina, were also utilized and with great success. Some of these forms were:

¹ *Newspaper theater*: It was initially developed by the Nucleus Group of the Arena Theater of Sao Paulo, of which I was the artistic director until forced to

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leave Brazil.¹ It consists of several simple techniques for transforming daily news items, or any other non-dramatic material, into theatrical performances.

- (a) Simple reading: the news item is read detaching it from the context of the newspaper, from the format which makes it false or tendentious.
- (b) Crossed reading: two news items are read in crossed (alternating) form, one throwing light on the other, explaining it, giving it a new dimension.
- (c) Complementary reading: data and information generally omitted by the newspapers of the ruling classes are added to the news.
- (d) Rhythmical reading: as a musical commentary, the news is read to the rhythm of the samba, tango, Gregorian chant, etc., so that the rhythm functions as a critical 'filter' of the news, revealing its true content which is obscured in the newspaper.
- (e) Parallel action: the actors mime parallel actions while the news is read, showing the context in which the reported event really occurred; one hears the news and sees something else that complements it visually.
- (f) Improvisation: the news is improvised on stage to exploit all its variants and possibilities.
- (g) Historical: data or scenes showing the same event in other historical moments, in other countries, or in other social systems, are added to the news.
- (h) Reinforcement: the news is read or sung with the aid or accompaniment of slides, jingles, songs, or publicity materials.
- (i) Concretion of the abstract: that which the news often hides in its purely abstract information is made concrete on the stage: torture, hunger, unemployment, etc., are shown concretely, using graphic images, real or symbolic.
- (j) Text out of context: the news is presented out of the context in which it was published; for example, an actor gives the speech about austerity previously delivered by the Minister of Economics while he devours an enormous dinner: the real truth behind the minister's words becomes demystified – he wants austerity for the people but not for himself.

2 *Invisible theater*: It consists of the presentation of a scene in an environment other than the theater, before people who are not spectators. The place can be a restaurant, a sidewalk, a market, a train, a line of people, etc. The people who witness the scene



are those who are there by chance. During the spectacle, these people must not have the slightest idea that it is a 'spectacle,' for this would make them 'spectators.'

The invisible theater calls for the detailed preparation of a skit with a complete text or a simple script; but it is necessary to rehearse the scene sufficiently so that the actors are able to incorporate into their acting and their actions the intervention of the spectators. During the rehearsal it is also necessary to include every imaginable intervention from the spectators; these possibilities will form a kind of optional text.

The invisible theater erupts in a location chosen as a place where the public congregates. All the people who are near become involved in the eruption and the effects of it last long after the skit is ended.

A small example shows how the invisible theater works. In the enormous restaurant of a hotel in Chiclayo, where the literacy agents of ALFIN were staying, together with 400 other people, the 'actors' sit at separate tables. The waiters start to serve. The 'protagonist' in a more or less loud voice (to attract the attention of other diners, but not in a too obvious way) informs the waiter that he cannot go on eating the food served in that hotel, because in his opinion it is too bad. The waiter does not like the remark but tells the customer that he can choose something *à la carte*, which he may like better. The actor chooses a dish called 'Barbecue a la pauper.' The waiter points out that it will cost him 70 soles, to which the actor answers, always in a reasonably loud voice, that there is no problem. Minutes later the waiter brings him the barbecue, the protagonist eats it rapidly and gets ready to get up and leave the restaurant, when the waiter brings the bill. The actor shows a worried expression and tells the people at the next table that his barbecue was much better than the food they are eating, but the pity is that one has pay for it. . . .

'I'm going to pay for it; don't have any doubts. I ate the "barbecue a la pauper" and I'm going to pay for it. But there is a problem: I'm broke.'

'And how are you going to pay?' asks the indignant waiter. 'You knew the price before ordering the barbecue. And now, how are you going to pay for it?'

The diners nearby are, of course, closely following the dialogue — much more attentively than they would if they were witnessing the scene on a stage. The actor continues:

'Don't worry, because I *am* going to pay you. But since I'm broke I will pay you with labor-power.'

'With what?' asks the waiter, astonished. 'What kind of power?'

'With labor-power, just as I said. I am broke but I can rent you my labor-power. So I'll work doing something for as long as it's necessary to pay for my "barbecue a la pauper," which, to tell the truth, was really delicious — much better than the food you serve to those poor souls. . . .'

By this time some of the customers intervene and make remarks among themselves at their tables, about the price of food, the quality of the service in the hotel, etc. The waiter calls the headwaiter to decide the matter. The

actor explains again to the latter the business of renting his labor-power and adds:

'And besides, there is another problem: I'll rent my labor-power but the truth is that I don't know how to do anything, or very little. You will have to give me a very simple job to do. For example, I can take out the hotel's garbage. What's the salary of the garbage man who works for you?'

The headwaiter does not want to give any information about salaries, but a second actor at another table is already prepared and explains that he and the garbage man have gotten to be friends and that the latter has told him his salary: seven *soles* per hour. The two actors make some calculations and the 'protagonist' exclaims:

'How is this possible! If I work as a garbage man I'll have to work ten hours to pay for this barbecue that it took me ten minutes to eat? It can't be! Either you increase the salary of the garbage man or reduce the price of the barbecue! . . . But I can do something more specialized; for example, I can take care of the hotel gardens, which are so beautiful, so well cared for. One can see that a very talented person is in charge of the gardens. How much does the gardener of this hotel make? I'll work as a gardener! How many hours work in the garden are necessary to pay for the "barbecue a la pauper"?''

A third actor, at another table, explains his friendship with the gardener who is an immigrant from the same village as he; for this reason he knows that the gardener makes ten *soles* per hour. Again the 'protagonist' becomes indignant:

'How is this possible? So the man who takes care of these beautiful gardens, who spends his days out there exposed to the wind, the rain, and the sun, has to work seven long hours to be able to eat the barbecue in ten minutes? How can this be, Mr. Headwaiter? Explain it to me!'

The headwaiter is already in despair; he dashes back and forth, gives orders to the waiters in a loud voice to divert the attention of the other customers, alternately laughs and becomes serious, while the restaurant is transformed into a public forum. The 'protagonist' asks the waiter how much he is paid to serve the barbecue and offers to replace him for the necessary number of hours. Another actor, originally from a small village in the interior, gets up and declares that nobody in his village makes 70 *soles* per day; therefore nobody in his village can eat the 'barbecue a la pauper.' (The sincerity of this actor, who was, besides, telling the truth, moved those who were near his table.)

Finally, to conclude the scene, another actor intervenes with the following proposition:

'Friends, it looks as if we are against the waiter and the headwaiter and this does not make sense. They are our brothers. They work like us, and they are not to blame for the prices charged here. I suggest we take up a collection. We at this table are going to ask you to contribute whatever you can; one *sol*, two *soles*, five *soles*, whatever you can afford. And with that money we are going to pay for the barbecue. And be generous, because what is left over will go as a tip for the waiter, who is our brother and a working man.'

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Immediately those who are with him at the table start collecting money to pay the bill. Some customers willingly give one or two *soles*. Others furiously comment:

'He says that the food we're eating is junk, and now he wants us to pay for his barbecue! . . . And am I going to eat this junk? Hell no! I wouldn't give him a peanut, so he'll learn a lesson! Let him wash dishes. . . .'

The collection reached 100 *soles* and the discussion went on through the night. It is always very important that the actors do not reveal themselves to be actors! On this rests the *invisible* nature of this form of theater. And it is precisely this invisible quality that will make the spectator act freely and fully, as if he were living a real situation – and, after all, it is a real situation!

It is necessary to emphasize that the invisible theater is not the same thing as a 'happening,' or the so-called 'guerrilla theater.' In the latter we are clearly talking about 'theater,' and therefore the wall that separates actors from spectators immediately arises, reducing the spectator to impotence: a spectator is always less than a man! In the invisible theater 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.

Several presentations of invisible theater were made in different locations in Peru. Particularly interesting is what happened at the Carmen Market, in the *barrio* of Comas, some 14 kilometers away from downtown Lima. Two actresses were protagonists in a scene enacted at a vegetable stand. One of them, who was pretending to be illiterate, insisted that the vendor was cheating her, taking advantage of the fact that she did not know how to read; the other actress checked the figures, finding them to be correct, and advised the 'illiterate' one to register in one of ALFIN's literacy courses. After some discussion about the best age to start one's studies, about what to study and with whom, the first actress kept on insisting that she was too old for those things. It was then that a little old woman, leaning on her cane, very indignantly shouted:

'My dears, that's not true! For learning and making love one is never too old!'

Everyone witnessing the scene broke into laughter at the old woman's amorous outburst, and the actresses were unable to continue the scene.

3 *Photo-romance*: In many Latin-American countries there is a genuine epidemic of photo-romances, sub-literature on the lowest imaginable level, which furthermore always serves as a vehicle for the ruling classes' ideology. The technique here consists in reading to the participants the general lines in the plot of a photo-romance without telling them the source of this plot. The participants are asked to act out the story. Finally, the acted-out story is compared to the story as it is told in the photo-romance, and the differences are discussed.

For example: a rather stupid story taken from Corín Tellado, the worst author of this brutalizing genre, started like this:

A woman is waiting for her husband in the company of another woman who is helping her with the housework. . . .

The participants acted according to their customs: a woman at home expecting her husband will naturally be preparing the meal; the one helping her is a neighbor, who comes to chat about various things; the husband comes home tired after a long day's work; the house is a one-room shack, etc., etc. In Corín Tellado, on the contrary, the woman is dressed in a long evening gown, with pearl necklaces, etc.; the woman who is helping her is a black maid who says no more than 'Yes, ma'am'; 'The dinner is served, ma'am'; 'Very well, ma'am'; 'Here comes Mr. X, ma'am'; and nothing else. The house is a marble palace; the husband comes home after a day's work in his factory, where he had an argument with the workers because they, 'not understanding the crisis we are all living through, wanted an increase in salaries . . .', and continuing in this vein.

This particular story was sheer trash, but at the same time it served as a magnificent example of ideological insight. The well-dressed woman received a letter from an unknown woman, went to visit her, and discovered her to be a former mistress of her husband; the mistress stated that the husband had left her because he wanted to marry the factory owner's daughter, that is, the well-dressed woman. To top it all, the mistress exclaimed:

'Yes, he betrayed me, deceived me. But I forgive him because, after all, he has always been very ambitious, and he knew very well that with me he could not climb very high. On the other hand, with you he can go very far indeed!'

That is to say, the former mistress forgave her lover because he had in the highest degree that capitalistic eagerness to possess everything. The desire to be a factory owner is presented as something so noble that even a few betrayals on the way up are to be forgiven. . . .

And the young wife, not to be outdone, pretends to be ill so that he will have to remain at her side, and so that, as a result of this trick, he will finally fall in love with her. What an ideology! This love story is crowned with a happy ending rotten to the core. Of course the story, when told without the dialogues and acted out by peasants, takes on an entirely different meaning. When at the end of the performance, the participants are told the origin of the plot they have just acted out, they experience a shock. And this must be understood: when they read Corín Tellado they immediately assume the passive role of 'spectators'; but if they first of all have to act out a story themselves, afterwards, when they do read Corín Tellado's version, they will no longer assume a passive, expectant attitude, but instead a critical, comparative one. They will look at the lady's house, and compare it to their own, at the husband's or wife's attitudes and compare them with those of their own spouses, etc. And they will be prepared to detect the poison infiltrating the pages of those photo-stories, or the comics and other forms of cultural and ideological domination.

I was overjoyed when, months after the experiments with the educators, back in Lima, I was informed that the residents of several *barrios* were using that

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same technique to analyze television programs, an endless source of poison directed against the people.

4 *Breaking of repression:* The dominant classes crush the dominated ones through repression; the old crush the young through repression; certain races subjugate certain others through repression. Never through a cordial understanding, through an honest interchange of ideas, through criticism and autocriticism. No. The ruling classes, the old, the 'superior' races, or the masculine sex, have their sets of values and impose them by force, by unilateral violence, upon the oppressed classes, the young, the races they consider inferior, or women.

The capitalist does not ask the working man if he agrees that the capital should belong to one and the labor to another; he simply places an armed policeman at the factory door and that is that – private property is decreed.

The dominated class, race, sex, or age group suffers the most constant, daily, and omnipresent repression. The ideology becomes concrete in the figure of the dominated person. The proletariat is exploited through the domination that is exerted on all proletarians. Sociology becomes psychology. There is not an oppression by the masculine sex in general of the feminine sex in general: what exists is the concrete oppression that men (individuals) direct against women (individuals).

The technique of breaking repression consists in asking a participant to remember a particular moment when he felt especially repressed, accepted that repression, and began to act in a manner contrary to his own desires. That moment must have a deep personal meaning: I, a proletarian, am oppressed; we proletarians are oppressed; therefore the proletariat is oppressed. It is necessary to pass from the particular to the general, not vice versa, and to deal with something that has happened to someone in particular, but which at the same time is typical of what happens to others.

The person who tells the story also chooses from among the rest of the participants all the other characters who will participate in the reconstruction of the incident. Then, after receiving the information and directions provided by the protagonist, the participants and the protagonist act out the incident just as it happened in reality – recreating the same scene, the same circumstances, and the same original feelings.

Once the 'reproduction' of the actual event is over, the protagonist is asked to repeat the scene, but this time without accepting the repression, fighting to impose his will, his ideas, his wishes. The other participants are urged to maintain the repression as in the first performance. The clash that results helps to measure the possibility one often has to resist and yet fails to do so; it helps to measure the true strength of the enemy. It also gives the protagonist the opportunity of trying once more and carrying out, in fiction, what he had not been able to do in reality. But we have already seen that this is not cathartic: the fact of having rehearsed a resistance to oppression will prepare him to resist effectively in a future reality, when the occasion presents itself once more.

On the other hand, it is necessary to take care that the generic nature of the particular case under study be understood. In this type of theatrical experiment the particular instance must serve as the point of departure, but it is indispensable to reach the general. The process to be realized, during the actual performance or afterward during the discussion, is one that ascends from the *phenomenon* toward the *law*; from the phenomena presented in the plot toward the social laws that govern those phenomena. The spectator-participants must come out of this experience enriched with the knowledge of those laws, obtained through analysis of the phenomena.

5 *Myth theater*: It is simply a question of discovering the obvious behind the myth: to logically tell a story, revealing its evident truths.

In a place called Motupe there was a hill, almost a mountain, with a narrow road that led through the trees to the top; halfway to the top stood a cross. One could go as far as that cross: to go beyond it was dangerous; it inspired fear, and the few who had tried had never returned. It was believed that some sanguinary ghosts inhabited the top of the mountain. But the story is also told of a brave young man who armed himself and climbed to the top, where he found the 'ghosts.' They were in reality some Americans who owned a gold mine located precisely on the top of that mountain.

Another legend is that of the lagoon of Cheken. It is said that there was no water there and that all the peasants, having to travel for several kilometers to get a glass of water, were dying of thirst. Today a lagoon exists there, the property of a local landowner. How did that lagoon spring up and how did it become the property of one man? The legend explains it. When there was still no water, on a day of intense heat all the villagers were lamenting and praying to God to grant them even a tiny stream of water. But God did not have pity on that arid village. At midnight of the same day, however, a man dressed in a long black poncho and riding a black horse arrived and addressed the landowner, who was then only a poor peasant like the others:

'I will give a lagoon for all of you, but *you*, friend, must give me your most precious possession.'

The poor man, very distressed, moaned:

'But I have nothing; I am very poor. We all here suffer from the lack of water, live in miserable shacks, suffer from the most terrible hunger. We have nothing precious, not even our lives. And myself in particular, my only precious possession is my three daughters, nothing else.'

'And of the three,' responded the stranger, 'the oldest is the most beautiful. I will give you a lagoon filled with the freshest water of all Peru; but in exchange you will give me your oldest daughter so that I may marry her.'

The future landlord thought for a long while, cried a lot, and asked his frightened eldest daughter if she would accept such an unusual marriage proposal. The obedient daughter expressed herself in this way:

'If it is for the salvation of all, so that the thirst and hunger of all the peasants will come to an end, if it is so that you may have a lagoon with the freshest water of all Peru, if it is so that that lagoon will belong to you alone and bring you personal prosperity and riches – for you will be able to sell this wonderful water to the peasants, who will find it cheaper to buy from you than to travel so many kilometers – if it is for all this, tell the gentleman in the black poncho, astride his black horse, that I will go with him, even if in my heart I am suspicious of his true identity and of the places he will take me.'

Happy and contented, and of course somewhat tearful, the kind father went to inform the man in black of the decision, meanwhile asking the daughter to make some little signs showing the price of a liter of water, in order to expedite the work. The man in black undressed the girl, for he did not want to take anything from that house besides the girl herself, and placed her on his horse, which set off at a gallop toward a great depression in the plains. Then an enormous explosion was heard, and a large cloud of smoke remained in the very place where the horse, horseman, and naked girl had disappeared. From the huge hole that had been made in the ground, a spring started to flow and formed the lagoon with the freshest water of all Peru.

This myth no doubt hides a truth: the landlord took possession of what did not belong to him. If formerly the noblemen attributed to God the granting of their property and rights, today explanations no less magical are still used. In this case, the property of the lagoon was explained by the loss of the eldest daughter, the landlord's most precious possession – a transaction took place! And serving as a reminder of that, the legend said that on the nights of the new moon one could hear the girl singing at the bottom of the lagoon, still naked and combing her long hair with a beautiful golden comb. . . . Yes, the truth is that for the landlord the lagoon was like gold.

The myths told by the people should be studied and analyzed and their hidden truths revealed. In this task the theater can be extraordinarily useful.

6 *Analytical theater*: A story is told by one of the participants and immediately the actors improvise it. Afterward each character is broken down into all his social roles and the participants are asked to choose a physical object to symbolize each role. For example, a policeman killed a chicken thief. The policeman is analyzed:

- (a) he is a worker because he rents his labor-power; symbol: a pair of overalls;
- (b) he is a bourgeois because he protects private property and values it more than human life; symbol: a necktie, or a top hat, etc.;
- (c) he is a repressive agent because he is a policeman; symbol: a revolver.

This is continued until the participants have analyzed all his roles: head of a family (symbol: the wallet, for example), member of a fraternal order, etc., etc. It is important that the symbols be chosen by the participants present and that

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they not be imposed 'from above.' For a particular community the symbol for the head of the family might be a wallet, because he is the person who controls the household finances, and in this way controls the family. For another community this symbol may not communicate anything, that is, it may not be a symbol; then an armchair may be chosen. . . .

Having analyzed the character, or characters (it is advisable to limit this operation to the central characters only, for the sake of simplicity and clarity), a fresh attempt to tell the story is made, but taking away some of the symbols from each character, and consequently some social roles as well. Would the story be exactly the same if:

- (a) the policeman did not have the top hat or the necktie?
- (b) the robber had a top hat or necktie?
- (c) the robber had a revolver?
- (d) the policeman and the robber both had the same symbol for the fraternal order?

The participants are asked to make varying combinations and the proposed combinations must be performed by the actors and criticized by all those present. In this way they will realize that human actions are not the exclusive and primordial result of individual psychology: almost always, through the individual speaks his class!

7 *Rituals and masks*: The relations of production (infrastructure) determine the culture of a society (superstructure).

Sometimes the infrastructure changes but the superstructure for a while remains the same. In Brazil the landlords would not allow the peasants to look them in the face while talking with them: this would mean lack of respect. The peasants were accustomed to talking with the landlords only while staring at the ground and murmuring: 'yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir.' When the government decreed an agrarian reform (before 1964, date of the fascist *coup d'état*) its emissaries went to the fields to tell the peasants that now they could become landowners. The peasants, staring at the ground, murmured: 'yes, friend; yes, friend; yes, friend.' A feudalistic culture had totally permeated their lives. The relationships of the peasant with the landlord were entirely different from those with the agent of the Institute of Agrarian Reform, but the ritual remained unchanged.

This particular technique of a people's theater ('Rituals and masks') consists precisely in revealing the superstructures, the rituals which reify all human relationships, and the masks of behavior that those rituals impose on each person according to the roles he plays in society and the rituals he must perform.

A very simple example: a man goes to a priest to confess his sins. How will he do it? Of course, he will kneel, confess his sins, hear the penitence, cross himself, and leave. But do all men confess always in the same way before all priests? Who is the man, and who is the priest?

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In this case we need two versatile actors to stage the same confession four times:

- First scene: the priest and the parishioner are landlords;
- Second scene: the priest is a landlord and the parishioner is a peasant;
- Third scene: the priest is a peasant and the parishioner is a landlord;
- Fourth scene: the priest and the parishioner are peasants.

The ritual is the same in each instance, but the different social masks will cause the four scenes to be different also.

This is an extraordinarily rich technique which has countless variants: the same ritual changing masks; the same ritual performed by people of one social class, and later by people of another class; exchange of masks within the same ritual; etc., etc.

Conclusion: 'Spectator,' a Bad Word!

Yes, this is without a doubt the conclusion: 'Spectator' is a bad word! The spectator is less than a man and it is necessary to humanize him, to restore to him his capacity of action in all its fullness. He too must be a subject, an actor on an equal plane with those generally accepted as actors, who must also be spectators. All these experiments of a people's theater have the same objective — the liberation of the spectator, on whom the theater has imposed finished visions of the world. And since those responsible for theatrical performances are in general people who belong directly or indirectly to the ruling classes, obviously their finished images will be reflections of themselves. The spectators in the people's theater (i.e., the people themselves) cannot go on being the passive victims of those images.

As we have seen in the first essay of this book, the poetics of Aristotle is the *poetics of oppression*: the world is known, perfect or about to be perfected, and all its values are imposed on the spectators, who passively delegate power to the characters to act and think in their place. In so doing the spectators purge themselves of their tragic flaw — that is, of something capable of changing society. A catharsis of the revolutionary impetus is produced! Dramatic action substitutes for real action.

Brecht's poetics is that of the enlightened vanguard: the world is revealed as subject to change, and the change starts in the theater itself, for the spectator does not delegate power to the characters to think in his place, although he continues to delegate power to them to act in his place. The experience is revealing on the level of consciousness, but not globally on the level of the action. Dramatic action throws light upon real action. The spectacle is a preparation for action.

The *poetics of the oppressed* is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his

place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is action!

Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!

Note

- 1 Under the author's leadership the Arena Theater developed into one of Brazil's – indeed, one of Latin America's – most outstanding theaters. After 1964, when military rule was established in that country, Boal's work continued, though hampered by censorship and other restrictions imposed by the government. His outspoken position against the authoritarian regime led to his imprisonment and torture in 1971. Released after three months and acquitted of all charges, he was nevertheless compelled to leave Brazil in order to insure the safety of himself and his family. After political circumstances also forced him to leave Buenos Aires, Argentina, he took up residence in Portugal.



Source

Boal, A. (1974, 1979) 'Poetics of the Oppressed: Fourth Stage: The Theatre as Discourse', *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. C.A. and M.O.L. McBride, London: Pluto: 142–156. Originally published as *Teatro de Oprimido*.

Augusto Boal (1934–2009)

Brazilian director and political activist turned politician, who developed a series of theatrical strategies to effect change in the lives of individuals on a personal, social, and political level. His work has become a system known as Theatre of the Oppressed, which makes use of a composite series of games and exercises, published as *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992). Boal began to develop his thinking while director of the Arena Theatre in São Paulo (1956–71). He moved to Argentina in 1971, where he devised the techniques of invisible theatre as a way to stimulate debate on current political issues. Invited to participate in a Peruvian literacy campaign in 1973, he developed image theatre, which promotes physical expression over the spoken word. Boal's work has been influential among theatre practitioners in Europe as an alternative means of training and of restoring theatre to a meaningful role in society outside theatres; a democratic forum for potential change in people's lives. The rainbow of desire is the name given to a new series of exercises which examine individual and internalised oppressions in more detail, and which places the work more in the field of psychotherapy. Boal was a Member of Parliament of Rio de Janeiro's Workers

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Party (PT), where he developed his most recent theatre form – the legislative theatre – which involves using theatre techniques to enable communities to propose laws.

This section from Boal's first book describes in some detail strategies used among the poor and dispossessed of Peru in 1973. It proposes theatre as a universal language, which explains its attraction for Western directors and actors looking for a renewed role for theatre in the second half of the twentieth century.

Compare this article with writings by the following authors in this reader

Barba – contemporary approach to theatre games and exercises

Beck – a contemporary North American view of theatre

Brecht – another, European, political role for theatre to which Boal refers

Brown – comparison with a dancer working with non-theatrical processes and spaces

Grotowski and Stanislavski – acting exercises

Kaprow – for performance as intervention in life

Rainer – whose work in a North American context stressed the democracy of the body

Further reading

Babbage, F. (2004) *Augusto Boal*, London: Routledge.

Boal, A. (1992) *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, trans. A. Jackson, London: Routledge.

Boal, A. (1995) *The Rainbow of Desire*, trans. A. Jackson, London: Routledge.

Boal, A. (2001) *Hamlet and the Baker's Son*, London: Routledge

Schutzman, M. and Cohen-Cruz, J. (eds) (1993) *Playing Boal*, London: Routledge.