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## Boal and the Shifting Sands: the Un-Political Master Swimmer

Augusto Boal is one of the best-known contemporary practitioners and teachers in the use of drama as a means of challenging the status quo. Starting as a self-proclaimed revolutionary, challenging the artistic theories of Aristotle and seeking to supersede those of Brecht, he developed his 'Theatre of the Oppressed' working with the poor of Brazil. Now he is perhaps best known for his work in 'Forum Theatre' and 'Image Theatre'. In this article, David Davis and Carmel O'Sullivan argue that not only have Boal's methods been far from revolutionary for many years, but that they are now focused on individual needs, enabling the individual to survive a little longer within an oppressive social structure. They propose that this is not a case of Marxist revolutionary ideology becoming diluted over time, but that the roots of the change are to be found in a lack of grounding in Marxist theory and philosophy from the beginning. David Davis is Director of the International Centre for Studies in Drama in Education and Professor of Drama in Education at the University of Central England, teaching on the MA programme as well as supervising PhD research. He has presented workshops in many parts of the world, and published widely. Carmel O'Sullivan lectures in the Education Department at Trinity College, Dublin, and is currently completing her doctoral thesis critiquing the theory and practice of Boal at the University of Central England.

AUGUSTO BOAL has a little parable which tells of a handsome master swimmer who is a very talented lifeguard. He is also very political and dedicated to thinking about the disinherited of the entire world. One day he is walking beside the swimming pool, reading the complete works of Marx and Engels, when he hears the cries of a drowning man. He apologises to him for not being able to rescue him, as the drowning man is only an individual and when there are twenty drowning people, then he will be ready to help.<sup>1</sup>

With this little satire on the political activist with grand designs to work for the emancipation of the working and peasant classes of the world, Boal is justifying his turn away from Theatre of the Oppressed as a 'rehearsal of revolution'<sup>2</sup> to a Theatre of the Oppressed Individual. He is proclaiming himself unpolitical with regard to Politics with a capital P. It is this turn that interests us here – an interest prompted by a revelatory workshop run by Boal at the IDEA Second World Congress in Brisbane in 1995

(IDEA is the acronym for The International Drama and Theatre Education Association).

In a demonstration of Forum Theatre, the scene chosen focused on a family sharing a meal together at a family conference, and the discussion was centred on who was going to take responsibility for the elderly mother of the family who was beginning to require a lot of care and attention. The youngest member of the family was the one who was having pressure put on him to take over the care of the mother. This was the oppression. The Theatre of the Oppressed had become focused on how to avoid having your needy mother dumped on you by the rest of the family.

Boal acted as Joker and did not challenge this value system at any stage. Many people afterwards expressed privately that they had wanted to walk out in disgust but could not find a way to get out of the very crowded conditions without causing unnecessary disturbance. The questions prompted in us from this experience had to do with: was this typical of the sort of content Theatre of the

Oppressed now engaged with? What had happened to the earlier advocacy of Marxist poetics?<sup>3</sup> Were the seeds of this shift of attention from 'liberation of the classes oppressed by capital'<sup>4</sup> to 'individual problems'<sup>5</sup> to be found from the start of Boal's work? What are the methodological problems involved? Pursuing these questions is the purpose of this article.

### Shifting Sands

Boal's journey from the peasants of Brazil to the middle classes of Europe has been widely commented on. Schutzman<sup>6</sup> typifies it as moving from rehearsal for revolution to 'rehearsal for healing'. Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz<sup>7</sup> remark on the effect on Boal's work of moving into exile in the West, where participants 'brought themes of loneliness and alienation to his workshops'. They also draw attention to the influence of his wife, who became a psychoanalyst in Paris.

Feldhendler,<sup>8</sup> writing of the relationship of Boal's work to Moreno's, explains how Boal himself described his work in 1989 as 'psycho-theatre'. However, Boal had earlier denied the connection between his work and psychodrama: 'psychodrama was aimed at adapting people to the existing social system', while Boal's work was 'directed towards enabling protest and changing oppressive social mechanisms'<sup>9</sup>. The sands shift further when he declares in an interview,<sup>10</sup> referring to his work on his return to Brazil:

I'm helping them any way I can. There is work in Europe I have to go on doing – but I would do what's needed in Brazil, especially in the areas of theatre of the oppressed – in education, psychotherapy, drug addiction, getting prisoners adjusted to society [our emphasis].

In his theoretical writing, the would-be revolutionary Boal<sup>11</sup> would never have advocated working to adjust anyone to capitalist society.

Adrian Jackson, Boal's translator, states (rather defensively it might be argued) that 'an ossified, unreconstructed Marxist reading of Boal's movement in the therapeutic arena might be that it is a lapse into bourgeois

individualism; this is as unhelpful as it is facile'.<sup>12</sup> (A Marxist of course might see this as an accurate description of Boal's arrival point, but more of this later. A 'reconstructed' Marxist is usually called a revisionist by Marxists – someone who has modified a rejection of capitalism to one of accommodation to it.)

Boal himself traces this move away from Theatre of the Oppressed as a rehearsal for revolution to concern for the individual back to its origins in the 1960s, with the famous story of Virgilio, the peasant who after the play then invited Boal to come and join an attack on the local landowner.

With Virgilio I had learnt to see a human being, rather than simply a social class. ... I learnt to see the human being struggling with her own problems, individual problems, which though they may not concern the totality of a class, nevertheless concern the totality of a life.<sup>13</sup>

This move away from class politics to individuals seems, then, to have been a sharp and early change from what Boal wrote in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, and brings him to his present position, again well described by Jackson in his introduction to *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*<sup>14</sup> as one where

he eschews labels, carefully dodging questions which might pin down his current ideology or pigeon-hole it in a category of, say, 'Marxist' or 'Brechtian' or whatever; such limiting categories are inimical to the whole spirit of the Theatre of the Oppressed. ... In almost every case Theatre of the Oppressed moves from the individual to the general, rather than vice-versa.

This latter formulation, 'from the individual to the general', holds an important clue to the enormous shift Boal has made since the first publication of *The Theatre of the Oppressed* in 1974, and this will be returned to presently. And the extent of this shift should not be underestimated. In that book, Boal set out to destroy Aristotelian theatre and to proclaim himself a Marxist, developing a form of political theatre that claimed both to build on and to supersede Brecht's dialectical materialist theatre.

Aristotelian theatre is shown to be repressive, and Brecht's theatre is the theatre of

the enlightened vanguard which provokes thought but not action – while Boal's theatre is the poetics of liberation itself.

The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theatre is action! . . . Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution.<sup>15</sup>

This is a bold manifesto and a declaration of war.

#### Idealist Leanings

In *The Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal sets out to build his poetics of the oppressed on a Marxist – that is a dialectical materialist – basis.<sup>16</sup> He commits himself to the basic materialist premise that 'being determines consciousness' (which is the cornerstone of a materialist philosophy) and not that 'social thought determines social being'<sup>17</sup> (which is the position of idealist philosophers such as Kant and Hegel). Above all, the implication is that the beliefs which people have will be formed from the foundation of the material and social circumstances in which they live.

Brecht built his theory and practice of Epic Theatre on this fundamental Marxist philosophy: 'This technique allows the theatre to make use in its representations of the new social scientific method known as dialectical materialism.'<sup>18</sup> Lunn stresses that:

Brecht directed his 'estrangement' devices against a merely empirical perception of contemporary reality. Like Marx, he understood science as a process of inquiry into historical structures not always revealed in the immediate 'facts'.<sup>19</sup>

Brecht developed his view of science in terms of Marx's practice of a critical, dialectical, and historical method. He built this philosophy into his *Short Organum* and at the very end of his life returned to it with even greater clarity. In the *Appendices to the Short Organum*, he quotes from Lenin's *On the Question of Dialectics*, arguing that dialectical materialism is not only essential to the artist creating theatre but that this dialectical philosophy needs to be made known so that people can work with it consciously.<sup>20</sup>

Boal aimed to build his Theatre of the Oppressed on the same dialectical materialist foundations as Brecht. Some followers have seen in his *Theatre of the Oppressed*

the promise of a practice geared to the democratic analysis of a shared oppression, to rehearsals for its elimination. . . . Within Boal's 'Poetics of the Oppressed' was the promise of a political theatre cognate with the participatory forms of radical politics. . . .<sup>21</sup>

However, we want to suggest that from the start Boal, unlike Brecht, has not understood the basics of Marxist method, and even while claiming a materialist position he was and still is in fact operating an idealist method. His method will be examined in relation to image-making (his basic method), how the individual is seen, and how the relation of the particular to the general is conceived and operated.

#### Image Theatre

Boal's most common practical form of working during his period in Europe and up to the present day is to encourage those he is working with to create images of the 'real' and 'ideal'.

The oppressed creates images of his [sic] reality. Then he must play with the reality of these images. . . . The oppressed must forget the real world, which was the origin of the image, and play with the image itself, in its artistic embodiment. He must make an extrapolation from his social reality towards the reality which is called fiction . . . and having played with the image, he must make a second extrapolation from his social reality towards the reality . . . which is his world. He practices in the second world (the aesthetic), in order to modify the first (the social).<sup>22</sup> [Emphases in the original.]

This is an example of idealist method where the image of the world is created not as a reflection of the real world (being determines consciousness) but rather where the image of the world is created out of one's head (consciousness determines being). When all agree that this image is how the world is (according to the thoughts in our heads), then it is worked on without making reference back to the real world outside this

fiction. When this is completed, it is possible to return to the world of 'his social reality . . . which is his world' [our emphasis]. It is still not the objective reality (the *sine qua non* of materialist philosophy) but the idealist reality of one's personal images of one's personal reality. This is the method of phenomenology and the social construction of reality, where what the participants agree the world is, becomes the world – not a materialist method which would take as its reference point the objective reality.

In Marx's day, the most popular explanations of what was wrong with society were still of a religious kind: the misery of society was caused by people's failure to do what God wanted of them. A similar view is often rehearsed today, proposing that in order to change society, people must first change themselves – and suggesting that society would automatically improve if individuals could cure themselves of 'selfishness' or 'materialism'.<sup>23</sup>

Marx referred to all such ideas as idealist: where change is seen as a result of old ideas being discarded and new ones adopted.<sup>24</sup> Marx was not against people having 'ideas', but he strongly criticized the position where these ideas are seen as existing in isolation from the conditions in which people live.<sup>25</sup> Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed is built in practice on such an idealist model, ignoring the materialist philosophy that 'People's ideas are intimately linked to the sort of lives they are able to live'.<sup>26</sup>

#### Aims and Methods in Conflict

This idealist approach is illustrated in the Cardboard Citizens forum theatre piece, *A Woman of No Importance*. The play is about the difficulties of a sixteen-year-old girl who runs away from home and ends up in a hostel or on the streets. The interventions offered at two separate performances<sup>27</sup> centred mainly on exploring a range of different ideas that the girl could try out on key figures in her life: for example, being more helpful to her mother, standing up to her stepfather, trying to charm her sister to allow her to stay with her, etc. – all of which

dangerously shied away from the complex and cruel objective realities of this girl's existence, and in the process succeeded in watering down the oppression.

Marx rejected the purely moral criticism, typical of the Hegelian left, who contrasted an existing state of affairs with an ideal one, how society is against how it should be – an opposition much reflected in Boal's theatre work. This is a contradiction between mind and reality and not a contradiction in reality itself, so 'it is a contradiction which can never be overcome'.<sup>28</sup> By contrast,

A dialectical understanding of reality, however, is able to detect within the existing state of affairs possibilities for change, to discover the tendencies within the present situation which will lead to its transformation. Political action must base itself on what is objectively possible, not on fantasies and good intentions spun from the thinker's mind.<sup>29</sup>

The contradiction is clearly illustrated through the acknowledged intention of Boal's theatre work – 'the aim of forum is to change the very nature of social relations, the tissue of society'<sup>30</sup> – which contrasts sharply with the idealist method employed to achieve this aim: 'to educate, to change people's ways of thinking'<sup>31</sup> [our emphasis].

His idealist perspective is further borne out when he talks about the work he was invited to do in Brazil by the then Governor of Rio. Boal noted that, 'My task is to try to form groups of cultural animators, catalyzers, dynamizers – I don't know what – to help people use theatre (and other arts) to express themselves, to study THEIR realities and to change them!!'<sup>32</sup> [Exclamation marks in original; our emphases.] Interestingly, when Marx and Engels split from the Communist League in 1850, Marx denounced the 'left', by whom the revolution is seen not as the product of realities of the situation but as the result of an effort of will.<sup>33</sup>

In *The Theatre of the Oppressed* an example is given where an image has been made of a peasant leader who is castrated in public as his punishment for rebellion. Various solutions are offered to change this image into an ideal image, including one where the landlords reform themselves.<sup>34</sup> All these seem to



be accepted as the individual's version of reality and therefore to be legitimate. For a Marxist, objective reality exists and has its own independent existence no matter how many minds are deciding what it is. It didn't matter how many people thought the world was flat: it wasn't.

As appearances are sometimes deceptive, 'It does not follow that we can come to understand "the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life" merely by observing and recording them'.<sup>35</sup> This misconception is actively demonstrated in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, where images of the oppressor are created based on the oppressed person's perception of them. Participants are then asked to offer possible solutions or ideas based on their observation of what potentially could be a grossly inaccurate representation of the situation. The consequences may be devastating in terms of the action that a protagonist may take when acting upon advice given in a Theatre of the Oppressed workshop.

Fortunately, some protagonists do realize the contradictions involved, as did a young woman participating in a Rainbow of Desire session in Canada.<sup>36</sup> Her oppression focused on difficulties she was experiencing with her employer, who was belittling her and refusing to take her theatre interests seriously. In an interview conducted several days after the event, she commented that immediately after the session she was all 'fired up' and ready to pursue a quite drastic course of action recommended by the various interventions in relation to 'dealing' with her boss (which had included a head-to-head confrontation, a threat to resign, and ceaseless 'moaning' to get her own way), which she now recognized as thoroughly superficial and reactionary, and which would only have served to aggravate the oppression rather than to improve it.

Despite insistence to the contrary, Boal's practice is clearly in support of an idealist Hegelian approach,<sup>37</sup> where, as Feuerbach has argued,

Hegel had turned something that is merely the property of human beings, the faculty of thought,

into the ruling principle of existence. Instead of seeing human beings as part of the material world, and thought merely as the way they reflect that material world, Hegel had turned both man and nature into mere reflections of the all-powerful Absolute Idea.<sup>38</sup>

Certainly, the power to think up an idea and try it out is the ruling principle of Boal's theatre. There is no explicit reference to the social or material objective reality. The 'idea', no matter how abstract or unrelated to objective reality, drives the participants, moving them round the stage in a pawn-like manner. The idea is all-powerful – and will, it is implied, offer the solution to the problem.

#### Conceptions of the Individual

This idealist method is closely related to how Boal conceives the individual by contrast with the perceptions of Brecht and Marx. Early in *The Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal begins by very firmly echoing a Brechtian and Marxist position in his polemic against Hegel:

The Marxist poetics of Bertolt Brecht does not stand opposed to one or another formal aspect of the Hegelian idealist poetics but rather denies its very essence, asserting that the character is not absolute subject but the object of economic or social forces to which he responds and in virtue of which he acts. . . . The character is not free at all. He is an object-subject. [Emphasis in original.]<sup>39</sup>

Following this claim to materialism, he gives examples of his work with peasant communities where the method is clearly idealist and the individual is seen as a free subject. He recounts the story of the illiterate peasant woman who discovers that the important documents she has been guarding for her husband are in fact love letters from another woman. Various strategies are attempted, but fail until a woman in the audience insists that the way to sort this out is to beat the husband with a big stick and then forgive him, which she then apparently demonstrates with the actor playing the husband. This seems to be accepted as a solution.<sup>40</sup> But it is difficult to see it as using 'theatre as a weapon' or seeking to reveal the nature of

the influence on these individuals of their social context. The weapon becomes a stick to hit the husband with.

It is the claimed purpose of Boal's theatre to lay bare the social forces determining social thought, thus enabling the 'spect-actor' to rehearse the revolution. Where is the exploration of the social forces working through this situation? The characters remain individuals, demonstrating a 'clash of free will'. This is the Hegelian approach to theatre which Boal so castigates in *Theatre of the Oppressed*.<sup>41</sup> However, in *Legislative Theatre*<sup>42</sup> he is actually building on Hegel's formulation:

The essence of theatre is the conflict of free wills, conscious of the means they employ to attain their goals, which must be simultaneously subjective and objective.

By 'objective', Boal means one must be concerned with doing something in relation to the world, not just thinking about it. But this does not do enough to take away the subjective idealist basis of this theatre. It has become (and, we want to argue, always was) the antithesis of Brechtian theatre.

#### Concepts of Empowerment

Brecht<sup>43</sup> was 'deeply suspicious of all art which "merely" liberated and refreshed the senses . . . which he crudely saw as politically reactionary in effect, since it obscured the real world and its material problems'. Adrian Jackson, writing in the Introduction to *The Rainbow of Desire*, again exemplifies this individualist perspective:

Forum theatre is always about what a roomful of people believe at a particular moment in time, and what one roomful of people believe is not necessarily the same as what the next roomful will believe.<sup>44</sup>

The shift from radical social transformation to individual liberation, as witnessed particularly in the *Rainbow of Desire* techniques, has been marked by an increase in the use of the term 'empowerment' rather than the oft-cited 'rehearsal for revolution'.

Freire is particularly concerned about the word 'empowerment', arguing that it will not be enough to achieve radical and political social transformation. He believes that liberation is a social act. He does not believe in self-liberation or personal self-empowerment, arguing that if you feel yourself free and if this feeling is not a social feeling – i.e., enabling you to use your recent freedom to help others to be free by transforming the totality of society – then 'you are exercising only an individualist attitude towards empowerment or freedom'.<sup>45</sup>

Freire, rather, understands empowerment as 'social class empowerment',<sup>46</sup> thus making empowerment much more than an individual or psychological event. He urges that the feeling of being changed or being free is absolutely necessary for the process of social transformation, but is not enough concerning the transformation of a whole society. In contrast to the approach in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Freire's criticism that individualism stands in the way of a movement for critical social empowerment here links with Brecht, who 'repeatedly criticized writers who concentrated upon personal psychological analyses without raising issues of historical causality'.<sup>47</sup> Marx believed that 'only a social revolution which swept away private property and individualism' could offer 'human emancipation'.<sup>48</sup>

As a result of Boal's confused understanding of Marxism, the very principles he aspired to in his theoretical origins<sup>49</sup> are shown to be contradicted by his practice. The focus is almost exclusively on the protagonist and the realization of his/her individual wants/needs/desires in isolation from his/her social and material objective reality. Freire<sup>50</sup> has warned that there is a danger of people following the role model of their internalized oppressor; their dream of freedom is selfish, to become rich or powerful like their oppressor so that they can enjoy the same life as s/he does. This results from a lack of critical consciousness about reality and liberation with reference to a wider totality, and indeed, in a Marxist perspective, from a lack of understanding of the social relations of production.

In *Theatre of the Oppressed*, the emphasis on individualism does not secure freedom from oppression for either the individual or society, as they are still tied to the capitalist repressive system as recognized by both Marx and later Brecht; and possibly, depending on the extent to which they empower themselves, may become an oppressor of others.

This was dramatically illustrated during a forum theatre piece in London in 1996.<sup>51</sup> During the reflection period two participants observed that their interventions had worked because they deliberately manipulated the scene. They had observed several earlier interventions in a scene where a teenage daughter had attempted to 'persuade' her authoritarian mother to allow her to stay out quite late one night. They had then tried to trip the actors up, employing similar oppressive techniques to those the oppressor (the mother) in the scene had used – which had implied that success is achieved through simulating or manipulating the behaviour of the oppressor.

There is thus an urgent need to question the role-model aspect of Forum Theatre. Boal fails to recognise that

self-absorption serves the capitalist system's needs to divide and conquer common people, attempting to organize them into a commercial, conformist culture, contradicting the very individualism it proposes.<sup>52</sup>

#### Working within the System

In this light, it is interesting to consider how much of Boal's theatre is actually with the oppressed. Or is it in fact trying to incorporate people into the status quo through its practice? Boal<sup>53</sup> criticizes the moralizing and exemplary nature of medieval theatre and even modern Hollywood films, where the good are rewarded and the bad punished; but in some senses his own theatre has a similar exemplary nature, and thus runs the risk of being accused of helping people to work more efficiently within the system.

The nature of Forum Theatre covertly attempts to suggest that there are acceptable and unacceptable codes of behaviour (the oppressor's consciously or unconsciously

being labelled as wrong). So far as Theatre of the Oppressed continues to suggest acceptable/unacceptable codes of behaviour, it is contributing to the orthodoxy in perpetuating and developing a grossly unjust, dehumanizing capitalist system.

An example of Boal operating within the capitalist system rather than working to provide an alternative to it may be found in his comments regarding his return to Brazil in 1986.<sup>54</sup> Initially the government sponsored Boal's forum work in schools and community centres, but he notes that when the political climate changed the funding stopped, and 'there was no more forum theatre'. Boal observes that some of the groups that they helped to form are still operating, but 'they don't have the same power they had when the work was sponsored by the government'. Schechner, interviewing Boal at this time, picked him up on this point suggesting: 'But opposition has always been the meat of political theatre. You're saying that this political theatre only worked when the government sponsored it.'<sup>55</sup> Boal replied, completely missing the philosophical point, that they weren't fighting the government at that time.

Marx called concrete reality a totality (the 'unity of the diverse'), despite its complexity and diversity. The notion that society forms a whole is central to his method:

The different aspects of society can only be understood as parts of the whole; they do not make any sense in isolation from one another. Resolving the whole into its 'simplest determinations' is only a preliminary to recomposing them into 'a rich totality of many determinations and relations.'<sup>56</sup>

Marx criticized the political economists because they tended to treat society as a collection of individuals, lacking any real relation to one another.<sup>57</sup> Seeing society as a collection of individuals underpins Boal's practice and, indeed, the very fragmented nature of the scenes through which a problem is explored reveals a lack of totality ('unity of the diverse') in relation to society or to an individual's place in that society. Brecht argued that

one can no longer expect private everyday life to provide access to general historical dynamics. The functioning reality of a large corporation, for example, cannot be understood from individual personal experience. To encompass the full social totality required a constructivist montage of shifting multiple viewpoints. . . . Instead of seeking 'typical' harmonious individualities as concretized historical forces or providing individualized 'catharsis' for the emotionally involved reader, Brecht attempted to reveal the contemporary dynamics of collective social structures hidden from normal personal experiences. . . . Brecht avoided individual psychological portraiture by focusing upon his character's active social behaviour.<sup>58</sup>

#### The Particular and the General

This is perhaps the key to Boal's problems with Marxist method. From the beginning, he failed to grasp the relationship of the particular to the general or, in Marxist terms, more properly the universal. He continually sees the particular *in* the universal: 'it is therefore necessary that the particular be seen in the universal'.<sup>59</sup> This is a Kantian, idealist formulation where the universal is seen as a category of thought rather than necessary connections in objective reality.

In Marxist terms, the universal is *in* the particular, as Ilyenkov argues:

The universal is above all the regular connection of two (or more) particular individuals that converts them into moments of one and the same concrete, real unity.<sup>60</sup>

Ilyenkov goes on to state that, 'The genetically understood universal does not simply exist, naturally, in the ether of the abstract',<sup>61</sup> but is linked by Marx and Engels 'with affirmation of the *objective reality of the universal* . . . in the sense of law-governed connection of material phenomena'.<sup>62</sup> Lenin puts it even more succinctly:

The individual exists only in the connection that leads to the universal. The universal exists only in the individual and through the individual. Every individual is (in one way or another) a universal. Every universal is (a fragment, or an aspect, or the essence of) an individual.<sup>63</sup>

Boal's failure to identify the universal *in* the particular enables him to avoid seeking how

those social forces are bound to be in any personal or social situation of image theatre, forum theatre, legislative theatre, therapy theatre or any other form of theatre. The phenomenon cannot be understood without seeking out those connections within the individual situation that reveal the objective presence of those same social forces and ideological forms that permeate all individuals in one form or another in that particular society.

The extraordinary thing is that as late as 1995 Boal can still 'lapse' into a correct formulation of the relation of the particular and the universal:

The smallest cells of social organization . . . and equally the smallest incidents of our social life . . . contain all the moral and political values of society.<sup>64</sup>

This perhaps underlines Boal's confusion and lack of rigour with regard to Marxist theory, as demonstrated by the fact that he continues to refer to it – 'The dominating ideas in a given society are those of the dominating class (Marx)'<sup>65</sup> – while his practice as we have seen is entirely contrary to a Marxist aesthetic. Not that this matters in one sense, as Boal *now* denies allegiance to Marxism or any other 'ism'.<sup>66</sup>

#### Conclusion

Taussig and Schechner note that a participant in a forum theatre session led by Boal at a workshop held at New York University complained: 'This is not avant-garde, it's terrible! This is just soap opera'<sup>67</sup> – thereby illustrating the outcome of the significant shift away from Theatre of the Oppressed's original intended influence.

In Boal's *Rainbow of Desire* approach the individual participant undergoes a catharsis: 'the catharsis of detrimental blocks'.<sup>68</sup> This, it is claimed, paves the way to action. This is not really a Brechtian mode, but an Aristotelian approach which Boal started his working life critiquing. The spectator leaves purged, but not clearer in terms of political action on a social scale necessary to change the world. The individual is temporarily

endowed with the feeling of being empowered to survive and cope with capitalism. Brecht is far more strident in his claims on the actor.

Unless the actor is satisfied to be a parrot or a monkey he must master our period's knowledge of human social life by himself joining in the war of the classes. Some people may feel this to be degrading, because they rank art, once the money side has been settled, as one of the highest things; but mankind's highest decisions are in fact fought out on earth, not in the heavens; in the 'external' world, not inside people's heads. Nobody can stand above the warring classes, for nobody can stand above the human race. Society cannot share a common communication system so long as it is split into warring classes. Thus for art to be 'unpolitical' means only to ally itself with the 'ruling' group.<sup>69</sup>

Boal's unpolitical master swimmer needs to know the company he keeps.

#### Notes and References

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25. Harman, *How Marxism Works*, p. 12.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
27. The first performance of this Forum Theatre piece was at a public meeting with Augusto Boal at the International Student House, Great Portland Street, London, on 24 October 1995. The event was organized by London Bubble. The second performance referred to was during a Forum Theatre workshop, led by Adrian Jackson, 21-25 October 1996, at the Toynbee Studios, Commercial Street, London.
28. Alex Callinicos, *The Revolutionary Ideas of Marx*, p. 78.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Michael Taussig and Richard Schechner, 'Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: an Interview with Michael Taussig and Richard Schechner', *The Drama Review*, XXXIV, No. 3 (Fall 1990), p. 50-65.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
32. Augusto Boal, 'A Letter to the Editor, from Augusto Boal', *The Drama Review*, XXX, No. 3 (1986), p. 9.
33. Alex Callinicos, *The Revolutionary Ideas of Marx*, p. 152.
34. Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1979), p. 135-7.
35. Alex Callinicos, *The Revolutionary Ideas of Marx* (London: Bookmarks, 1995), p. 72.
36. This session took place at a 'Theatre for Living Cabaret', led by David Diamond, as part of the Eighth Festival of the Theatre of the Oppressed, held in Toronto in 1997.
37. Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, p. 92.
38. Alex Callinicos, *The Revolutionary Ideas of Marx*, p. 62.
39. Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, p. 92.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 92-3.
42. Augusto Boal, *Legislative Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 58.
43. Bertolt Brecht, 'On Non-Objective Painting', in B. Lang and F. Williams, eds., *Marxism and Art* (1972), p. 423-5.
44. Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire*, p. xix.
45. Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), p. 109.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Eugene Lun, *Marxism and Modernism: an Historical Study of Lukacs, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
48. Alex Callinicos, *The Revolutionary Ideas of Marx*, p. 18.

49. Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

50. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1972).

51. These interventions and reflections took place during a Forum Theatre workshop, led by Adrian Jackson, 21-25 October 1996, at the Toynbee Studios, Commercial Street, London.

52. Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), p. 111.

53. Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

54. Michael Taussig and Richard Schechner, 'Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: an Interview with Michael Taussig and Richard Schechner', *The Drama Review*, XXXIV, No. 3 (Fall 1990), p. 51.

55. *Ibid.*

56. Alex Callinicos, *The Revolutionary Ideas of Marx*, p. 74-5.

57. Karl Marx, *Collected Works*, Vol. VI (London: Bookmarks, 1975), p. 166-7.

58. Eugene Lun, *Marxism and Modernism: an Historical Study of Lukacs, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 116.

59. Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, p. 96.

60. Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), p. 350.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 354.

63. Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXXVIII: *Philosophical Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1961), p. 361.

64. Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire*, p. 40.

65. Augusto Boal, 'The Cop in the Head: Three Hypotheses', trans. Susana Epstein, *The Drama Review*, XXXIV, No. 3 (Fall 1990), p. 35-42.

66. Augusto Boal, *Rainbow of Desire Workshop*, 28 October-1 November 1996, at Toynbee Studios, Commercial Street, London.

67. Michael Taussig and Richard Schechner, 'Boal in Brazil, France, the USA: an Interview with Michael Taussig and Richard Schechner', *The Drama Review*, XXXIV, No. 3 (Fall 1990), p. 61.

68. Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire*, p. 73.

69. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willett, p. 196.

We wish to acknowledge that Boal's lack of understanding of Marxist method was elegantly argued by Geoff Gillham in an editorial in *SCYPT Journal*, No. 14 (1985), where he usefully anticipates our present arguments.



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Fintan O Toole, *The Irish Times*

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# NTQ NEW THEATRE QUARTERLY

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AUGUST 2000

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A C T I

The cast of the Arena Theatre invites you to hear the story of Zumbi, the last of the kings who reigned in Palmares, a black republic in the heart of Brazil that lasted from 1605 to 1695.

The actors conjure up the spirit of the black king Zumbi and dedicate the show to all who have died fighting for liberty (then and now).

On a slave ship, Zumbi attempts a revolt against his white masters.

Zumbi is sold as a slave. The actors tell of the different kinds of tortures to which he is submitted (then and now).

Zumbi escapes and founds the Republic of Palmares. But not everybody wants to go to Palmares. Young Nico, for example, is afraid of the jungle. His companions sing to him the names of all the animals he will find there.

The jungle has many attractions except women. Everyone joins Nico to return and fetch some.

The white man's suppression is fast approaching. But Zumbi forces his people to work, explaining that only from work comes the strength that guarantees freedom.

Unfortunately, Zumbi decides to leave the responsibility of the black man's victory in God's hands. That is, the white God. Ave Maria.

Governor D. Pedro de Almeida is called on to plan the invasion of Palmares. But the operational costs are too high so D. Pedro demonstrates his good will: he allows the fugitives to stay in Palmares and imports more African slaves, tax free.

Zumbi's grandson, Ganga Zona, is captured and brought to Brazil. On the slave ship he meets Gongoba. She has no hope for the future, but he convinces her of the dream of Palmares.

Work, work, my brother // work with all your heart // Palmares is growing with the strength of the black hand.

White cities buy Palmares products and in return sell them firearms and ammunition. This pleases the merchants, but not the landowners. But when the blacks raise their prices, the merchants and landowners join forces. Palmares must be destroyed.

Captain Joao Blaer tells of his unforgettable adventures with the blacks.

Ganga Zona (Zumbi's grandson) is freed by the guerrilla fighters of Palmares. He sings to his distant Gongoba.

D. Pedro de Almeida proposes at a state reception that the women, especially the daughters of well-bred people, should form a league against the black rebellion. They sing against the "black threat".

Gongoba reveals to her son, Ganga Zumbi, who his father is. She urges him to go to Palmares to find his father, Ganga Zona. The landowner beats her to death.

Ganga Zumba, on his way to Palmares, comes upon a black boy lost in the jungle and sings to him the story of the struggle that awaits him.

The whites are losing their military strength; D. Pedro again demonstrates his good will and proposes peace talks (then and now).

D. Pedro is replaced by D. Ayres de Souza de Castro, a man of principle who carries a big stick.

In a speech, D. Ayres states that his army will no longer be used to protect Brazil's boundaries; they will be used only to fight against internal subversion, since it is his primary duty to serve the foreign king against the national enemy.

Ganga Zumba arrives at Palmares and is welcomed by his people: "Come and be happy. Aruanda is Paradise, but Paradise is not now: so, come and fight with us."

## A C T I I

D. Ayres names Captain Domingos Jorge Velho to head the battle against the blacks. He plans to destroy the white city of Serinhaem which is doing business with the blacks.

Ganga Zumba and Dandara sing a song of their love (without lyrics). Ganga Zumba learns that his father has been killed in the battle of Serinhaem.

Ganga Zumba asks old Zambi for vengeance.

Zambi sings that we live in times of war and he cannot keep up with the violence that the new era requires. As a king he cannot resign: he must kill himself to make room for a more aggressive warrior: Ganga Zumba, who is also known as "Olorum's Sword".

Ganga Zumba and his people weep over the dead king and the battle ensues.

Domingos Jorge Velho proposes to the Governor and to the Bishop a peace plan, step by step: 1) blockade Palmares; 2) free blacks with contagious diseases and send them to Palmares; 3) set fire to blacks' houses and 4) slaughter and annihilate every single living person in Palmares. "We will have finally achieved peace." He asks God's help. Litany.

The Battle -- The play shows successive battle scenes. Palmares is destroyed. Zumbi complains that the blacks' only mistake was to believe in their hearts that their white masters would finally practice justice. Zumbi understands that fighting is the only thing that is lasting.

"to fight after all  
is the only way toward believing  
is the way toward having  
a reason for living."



①

## PROGRAM NOTES

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

WE LIVE IN TIMES OF WAR

by Augusto Boal and Gianfrancesco Guarnieri

We live in ~~war time~~ times of war. The whole world is restless. In all fields of human activity this ~~war~~ unrest determines the rise of new ways and means of confronting new ~~challenges~~ problems. Except the theatre.

The theatre always tries to ~~present~~ reflect society. Perfect ~~images~~ accurate images, ~~a~~ in accordance with every analytical viewpoint. But, frozen images. Traditional theatre tries to paralyze, to fix in time and space, changing realities. Little has been done to convey in art this change, this transformation.

That is ~~why~~ the new realities, the new processes of analysis continue using ~~the~~ outmoded forms, that belong to other processes and other realities. The ~~theatre~~ theatre is conceptual, definable. That is its major limitation. When we affirm what theatre is, we deny it any other potential.

its present

In ~~this~~ phase of its development, the Arena does not know what is theatre. We ~~we~~ just want to tell a story from our point of view. We have an arena stage, some old lighting instruments with lamps (approximately ~~\$50~~ 50¢ each), seating capacity of a little less than 200, costumes, ~~wood~~ lumber, projectors, screens, etc. We are a group of good people, directors, actors, technicians, authors, electricians, doormen, and house personnel. We are almost 20 in number. We think alike. These people, ~~work~~ working together, using the available material, are going to tell a story with a hidden moral. A story which we hope is going to help the world to understand better things that have happened and that are happening now. Which will help everyone see things ~~with~~ more ~~clearly~~ clearly.

It is a complicated story, ~~full of~~ with all kinds of people, a true story with missing facts that are replaced by the imagination. To stage a play like this, we would need (if we were conventional) ~~more~~ much more than 100 actors, much more than 30 sets, ~~even including~~ and even include a ship's belly, a detailed forest, a large house,

2

a slaves' quarters, a churches, a pillory. ~~Because we~~ Since we are not a National Theatre, nor do we have ~~backers~~ angels at our beck and call, but at least we have ourselves. From those concrete facts ~~new techniques~~ we developed new techniques which we are using in Arena Conta Zumbi: a character completely detached from the actor (everyone does everything, women play men's roles without being concerned about it, etc.), fragmented narrative without chronology, important facts mixed with incidental ones, dramatic scenes together with documentary ones, facts lost in time and news from the latest press, all kinds of anachronisms. There is only one unity that ~~is~~ remains out of all those used to date: the unity of ideas. Only one idea guided the creation of the text and of the show. That is the idea found in the ~~text of "The Bishop of Pernambuco"~~ writings of the Bishop of Pernambuco: "The habit of freedom makes man dangerous." This is the idea: we want to be free.

Our show "Opinion" ~~is~~ used the more concrete truth, although ~~it caused~~ many times it did not allow us to show the complexity of the fact: the concrete fact would become singular. In Arena Conta Zumbi we tried to go beyond that: to use the concrete fact, but to keep in tact always the universalization of the facts presented. Whether or not that was achieved, we will soon know.

3

Th

history of black people  
~~fight~~ their  
of ~~the~~ fight for justice

which is not unlike today  
for the truth in question

only a man who doesn't know anything

is a man who can laugh

I live in a time of war

I live in a world with no sun

trunk

bough

stake

~~whip~~

chain

rope

whip -- specially made from crude leather

and it was with those ingenious instruments that the black man was convinced to  
collaborate in establishing the wealth of brazil.

break the mast, break the sail,

break everthing you find,

break the pain, break the heartache,

braak everything until it sinks.

(4)

and ~~ik~~ look, your excellency: those blacks, inferior by nature, threaten to build a society far better organized, productive and strong than ours. it is anti-historical.

it is zumbi fighting, he is a fighter,

<sup>a</sup>  
~~cutting~~ knife ~~cutting~~ stabbing, cuts without pain.

the slavemasters of brazil were losing their slaves day after day, hour after hour, every minute. each ~~box~~ slave in good health went for 20,000 reis. two or three million new cruzieros, over a thousand dollars on yesterday's exchange.

the habit of freedom makes man dangerous.

his eminence the bishop of pernambuco  
XVII Century

...the strength of the black man's arms that knows what is his.....

I lived in cities in times of the riots. i lived among my people in time of revolt. That's how I spent the time i was given on earth. i rose with my people. i may have been wrong but it was not wrong to have this world desire for freedom. i ate my food on the battelfield for the want of freedom. i loved without descretion, for the want of freedom. i looked at all i could see without having time to see it well, for the want of freedom. that's how i spent the time ~~w~~ i was allotted to live, for the want of freedom. the voice of my people rose for want of freedom. and my voice rose with theirs, for ~~the~~ want of freedom'. my voice is not very strong, but cry out i did well. i am sure that the owners of those lands and plantations would have been happier if they hadn't have had to hear my voice, for the want of freedom. that's how i spent the time i was allotted to live....for the want of freedom.



5  
dialogue  
gentlemen, ~~dissention~~ gives birth to wisdom. opinionones must be proclaimed,  
defended, protested. the duty of the ~~goverment~~ distirict governor is to listen  
to everyone, but should act  $\alpha$  only according to the dictates of his own individual  
conscience. ~~perio~~ let us be magnanimous in ~~dialogue~~ discussion, but firm in action.  
diversified in oppinion, singular in obedience to my mandate. there will be the  
unsatisfied  
~~discontented~~, as there always will be. a ~~vigorous~~ government takes unpopular  
measures of ~~protection~~ ~~protection~~ protecting the crown, not the discontented. my government  
will be unpopular, and so it must conquer, step by step, within the law, that I  
~~must~~ myself must make. gentlemen, you will make war as one who makes politicsx.  
I make politics as one who makes war.

dom ayres sousa de castro, district governor

the whip lashed, the whip taughtx  
it lashed so many times, that the people grew tired

come, come to be happy, x ay come,  
leave your master and come,  
come, love is found only here,  
come, this land is ours  
and the work is good, massa!

aruanda can bring peace,  
but not here.  
peace on earth is an everlasting  
love that people yearn for, ~~come~~ ay come!

if the free hand of the black man touches the clay  
what will come forthx?

hair will come forth to cover our shame,  
rugs will come forth to cover our floor,  
little beds will come forth to cushion our sex  
~~and a drum to have some place to~~  
and drums on which we can play.

if the free hand of the black man touches the  
palm tree,  
what will come forth?

urns will come forth so that we can  
drink, pans will come forth so that  
we can eat,  
pots will come forth, walls will come  
forth, pretty statues will come forth  
for us to see!

if the free hand of the black man touche  
the panther,  
what will come forth?

6  
grass huts will come forth where we can live,  
hammocks will come forth where we can swim,  
straw mats will come forth where we can rest  
~~fanx~~ straw fans will come forth to refresh us!

the whip lashed  
the whip lashed  
it lashed so many times  
that it killed my father.

ay, ~~sox~~ sun that is just about to rise  
it will bring nothing new.  
my dream of life is over  
not even your love will mean anything to me.

the whip lashed  
the whip lashed  
it lashed so many times  
that it killed my father.

no, i don't want to be like this anymore  
to live a life of loneliness.  
& i'm going, i'm going to look for a love  
to be found among countless people.

i only want to live!:

~~will to exist exist~~  
a will to exist.  
a way of knowing  
what we don't have  
to just be people.

the whip lashed  
the whip taught  
it lashed so many times  
that ~~the people~~ grew tired  
we

so tired, we understood  
that after all ~~to fight~~ fighting  
is the ~~only~~ way ~~to believe~~ to believing  
is the way to having  
a reason for being.

he who forgets its own will  
he who accepts not to fulfilling his desire  
is recognized by all as being wise

it's that that i always see  
it's to that that i say, no!

229 W.42 Tel.244-1482  
Aug.20

Dear Don,

Thanks for saving the day by recovering "the lost" Brazilian scene shots and saving Abner Klipstein from committing hari-kari.

Would like to suggest that Augusto Boal, the founder and director of Sao Paulo's Arena Theatre might make a good feature.

He's here thru the 28th with his wife Cecilia Thumim, a member of the troupe of Arena Conta Zumbi.

Boal, who speaks excellent English, studied theatre at Columbia University. He and his wife have a daughter.

I gather some of the action of the show, in which the military become gorillas before your eyes, is not the way it is permitted to be performed in Sao Paulo.

His concepts of theatre in its totality wouldn't sound much different from Tom O'Horgan, except he has a military dictatorship to contend with in his home country.

Like most revolutionaries he is a mild, softspoken and attentive man. His theatre was consciously modeled on the Actors Studio here. Incidentally, one of Augusto's one acts written when he was studying here, was produced at the Studio.

His technique developed in Zumbi, who is a legendary Brazilian folk hero, is to take the fable and play it against modern music and an updated newspaper story of an uprising against each other. He says, "It's as if Columbus arriving in America had pronounced the same first words of Armstrong touching the moon."

He's at the Hotel Edison if you'd care to have anyone chat with him.

Regards,

Jane Holtzman  
THAT SHOW - JOAN RIVERS  
(NBC)  
161 W. 54th St.  
New York, N.Y.

X 2 3 4 5

Dear Miss Holtzman:

Augusto Boal, artistic director of the Arena Theatre of Sao Paulo is coming to town Aug. 11 to prepare the way for his company of Brazilian actors appearing in "Arena Conta Zumbi" at St. Clement's Church from Aug. 18 thru 27. A company of 12 actors and musicians will appear in the play with music in Portuguese with a running English narrative.

Boal is a liberal in a tough county to be a liberal. He is articulate and fluent in English. He studied at Columbia University under John Gassner and, I should think, make an interesting off-beat interview.

The play, written by Boal in collaboration with Gianfrancesco Guaranieri, has Bossa Nova music by Edu Cobo.

Joanne Pottlitzer, managing director of the Theatre of Latin America, is presenting the Brazilians here.

Come see the troupe but in the meantime please consider Boal and maybe other members of his company.

Sincerely,



Sol Jacobson-Lewis Harmon-Abner Klipstein  
Press Reps. THEATRE OF LATIN AMERICA



Aug. 7, 1969

Julie Rubenstein  
Today Show

Dear Julie:

Augusto Boal, artistic director of the Arena Theatre of Sao Paulo is coming to town Aug. 11 to prepare the way for his company of Brazilian actors appearing in "Arena Conta Zumbi" at St. Clement's Church from Aug. 18 thru 27. A company of 12 actors and musicians will appear in the play with music in Portuguese with a running English narrative.

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Joanne Pottlitzer, managing director of the Theatre of Latin America, is presenting the Brazilians here.

Come see the troupe but in the meantime please consider Boal and maybe other members of his company.

Thanks and best,



## Biography of Augusto Boal

Founder and director of Sao Paulo, Brazil's famed Arena Theatre.  
One of South America's top theatrical companies.

Currently playing a sellout engagement at St. Clement's Church,  
where it opened Aug. 18 and has to close Aug. 30th.

Playing "Arena Conta Zumbi," a samba swininging musical ~~about~~ in  
most modern idiom, yet it is about an ~~18th~~ slave uprising in Colonial  
times.

Boal studied in New York City at Columbia University, worked with  
the Actors Studio.

He has written as well as directed many productions, including  
Arena Conta Zumbi.

Arena was founded in 1950.

Started a seminar on playwrighting, and stimulated Brazilian authors to  
write for theatre. From 1958 to 1962 we produced only Brazilian new  
plays. Much influenced by Brecht.

In 1963 started doing classics, Moliere, Lope De Vega, Michavello, etc.

---

Despite the satire ~~against~~ the military in Arena Conta Zumbi,  
his government allowed his troupe to come here.

He is married to one of the actresses in the show, Cecilia Thumim. They  
have a daughter (young).

---

Get him to talk about Brazil-and problems of a theatre artist there.

# VILLAGE VOICE Sep. 12

On the anniversary of the Junta's overthrow of the democratic forces in Chile, it seems fitting to quote from Augusto Boal's recent letter to me from Buenos Aires. Boal, an exiled Brazilian playwright and director, conceived the Latin American Fair of Opinion at Saint Clement's, which won an "Obie" several seasons ago. He writes that he is working on "my version of Shakespeare's 'The Tempest.' From the point of view of Caliban, not Prospero. . . . The play is terribly colonialist—mine is exactly the opposite. I'll try to do that play in New York. Manduka, a young Brazilian composer who is exiled here in Buenos Aires just like myself, did the music. . . . I'm trying to put the play on in Buenos Aires, but repression here is terrible. There is no official censorship like there is in Brazil, but the theatre owners make their own censorship, and won't let a play which they say is 'political' be played in their theatres. . . . Hard times, much fighting, everything is uncertain. Last year they put fire to a theatre where 'Jesus Christ, Superstar' was supposed to open; it burned to the ground." P. 72 □

Write: Arthur Klipstein

MEMO to: JOE FRANKLIN

from Lewis Harmon  
229 West 42nd Street  
New York City  
CH 4-1482  
Aug. 6, 1969

Dear Joe:

Would like to suggest famed Brazilian playwright & director Augusto Boal for an interview. He arrived from Sao Paulo on Aug. 11. He will be offering his Arena Theatre of Sao Paulo at St. Clement's Church from Aug. 18 thru 27.

Also as an accompanying guest, Joanne Pottlitzer, the comely managing director of the Theatre of Latin America, who is presenting the Brazilian acting company here. She's the lass who had the Chilean company here last year.

Abner Klipstein will be pinch-hitting for us next week until Sol returns on the 18th. I'm off for a vacation Sat.  
Thanks and best,

ARTCRAFT

Dear Lew: This is a copy of Joanne's ad for this Monday, Aug. 11  
in the TIMES.

Jo



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27

1969



## WE LIVE IN TIMES OF WAR

Augusto Boal and Gianfrancesco Guarnieri

We live in times of war. Unrest permeates the entire world. In all fields of human activity this unrest determines the rise of new ways and means of confronting new problems. Except in the theatre.

The theatre always tries to reflect society. Perfect, accurate images in accord with every analytical viewpoint. But frozen images. Traditional theatre tries to paralyze, to fix in time and space, changing realities. Little has been done to convey in art this change, this transformation.

And so new realities, new processes of analysis continue using outmoded forms that belong to other processes and other realities. The theatre is conceptual, definable. That is its major limitation. When we affirm what theatre is, we deny it any other potential.

In its present phase of development, the Arena does not know what theatre is. We just want to tell a story from our point of view. In Sao Paulo we have an arena stage, some old lighting equipment, a seating capacity of a little under 200, costumes, lumber, projectors, screens, etc. We are a group of good people: directors, actors, technicians, authors, and house personnel. We are almost 20 in number. We think alike. Working together, using the material available, we have come to tell a story. A story we hope will help the world to understand better things that have happened and that are happening now. A story that will help everyone see things more clearly.

It is a complicated story with all kinds of people, a true story with missing facts that are replaced by the imagination. To stage a play like this conventionally, we would need more than 100 actors, more than 30 sets, including a ship's belly, a forest, a large house, slaves' quarters, churches and a pillory.

We are not a National Theatre, nor do we have angels supporting us. We have only ourselves. We are developing new techniques, some of which we are using in **Arena Conta Zumbi**: a character becomes completely detached from the actor (everyone does everything, women play men's roles, etc.); there is fragmented narrative with no chronology; important facts are mixed with incidental ones; there are dramatic scenes together with documentary ones, facts lost in time and news from the latest press, all sorts of anachronisms. There is only one unity that remains out of all those used to date: the unity of ideas. And only one idea guided the creation of the text and of the show. One that is found in the writings of the Bishop of Pernambuco: "The habit of freedom makes man dangerous." That is the idea: we want to be free.

## ZUMBI

?-1695



the strength of the black man's arm knows what is his . . .

i lived in cities in times of the riots. i lived among my people in time of revolt. that's how i spent the time i was given on earth. i rose with my people. i may have been wrong, but it was not wrong to have this wild desire for freedom. i ate my food on the battlefield, for want of freedom. i loved without descretion, for want of freedom. i looked at all i could see without having time to see it well, for want of freedom. that's how i spent the time i was given to live, for want of freedom. the voice of my people rose for want of freedom! my voice is not very strong, but cry out i did well. i am sure that the owners of those lands and plantations would have been happier if they hadn't had to hear my voice, for want of freedom. that's how i spent the time i was given to live . . . for want of freedom.

LATIN AMERICAN THEATRE FAIR

directed by

AUGUSTO BOAL

A kaleidoscope of Latin American points of view  
through theatre and music

THE BLACK AIRPLANE (Argentina) by Roberto  
Cossa, German Rozenmacher, Carlos  
Somigliana, Ricardo Talesnik

THE COCK (Peru) by Victor Zavala

THE AUTOPSY (Colombia) by Enrique Buena-  
ventura

TORQUEMADA, Prologue. (Brazil) by Augusto  
Boal

GUARDIAN ANGEL (Brazil) by Augusto Boal

MAN DOES NOT DIE BY BREAD ALONE (Chile)  
by Jorge Diaz

ANIMALIA (Brazil) by Gianfrancesco Guarnieri

COLLAGE adapted by Augusto Boal

translations by Joanne Pottlitzer & Susan Rudge  
.....

The audience may attend the first four  
plays as they wish, as they will play  
simultaneously throughout the church;  
the audience will watch the remaining  
four pieces in sequence.

.....

There will be no intermission

**Joanne Pottlitzer**  
38 West 56 Street, New York, NY 10019  
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**BIO**

**Joanne Pottlitzer**, a freelance playwright and theater director, has produced many Latin American plays in New York and is the winner of two Obie Awards. In 1966, she founded Theatre of Latin America, Inc. (TOLA), a New York-based major nonprofit arts organization that pioneered artistic exchange between the US and Latin America. During her 14 years as TOLA's director, Joanne traveled frequently to Latin America to develop exchange programs and build a Latin American theatre library of more than 3,000 volumes. The TOLA Collection was acquired by the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts in 2002 as part of the International Theatre Institute's (ITI) international theatre library.

At TOLA, Joanne produced more than twenty plays Off Broadway, fifteen concerts in major New York concert halls, and ten national tours. Her two Obies were awarded for *A Latin American Fair of Opinion* (1972), directed by Augusto Boal, and *Chile! Chile!* (1976), directed by Joseph Chaikin. In 1979 TOLA produced the first *Theatre in the Americas Festival* at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., La Mama in New York, and the O'Neill Theater Center in Connecticut. The award-winning festival brought together 200 theatre people from Latin America, the US and Canada.

Her translations of plays have been produced in New York and throughout the country, including *Daedalus in the Belly of the Beast* by Marco Antonio de la Parra; *Nelson 2 Rodrigues* by Antunes Filho; *The Toothbrush* by Jorge Díaz; *La Chunga*, *The Young Lady from Tacna*, *Kathie and the Hippopotamus* by Mario Vargas Llosa; and *Mythweavers* by Arturo Uslar Pietri. She translated the dubbed version of Alexandro Jodorowsky's films *El Topo* and *The Holy Mountain*. Her various consultancies include Theatre Communications Group (TCG), as special consultant to TCG's Translation Project, 1985-1987, and the Ford Foundation, as consultant to its Education and Culture division, 1984-1991. The Foundation published her study on *Hispanic Theatre in the U.S. and Puerto Rico* in 1988.

She has written for *The New York Times*, *American Theatre* magazine, the Yale University School of Drama's *Theater* journal, *Review* magazine, *The Drama Review*, and the web magazine *Crimes of War*. Her work appears in two London-based volumes: the *Encyclopedia of World Theatre* and *Censorship: An International Encyclopedia*, both published in 2002. Teaching credits include the Yale University School of Drama, New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, the Theatre School at Ohio University, and CCNY's Hunter and Brooklyn Colleges. She holds a BS degree in Theatre (With Distinction) from Purdue University and an MA degree in Spanish from Middlebury College. She has lived and studied in Chile, Mexico, Brazil, and Spain, and has traveled extensively throughout Latin America. She is fluent in Spanish and Portuguese.

In 1988, Joanne received a playwriting commission from the New York State Council on the Arts to develop her play *Paper Wings*, about the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. Another of her plays, *Kate's Place*, was directed by Estelle Parsons in the 1988 Festival of Short Plays in New York, where Joanne directed a musical adaptation of Saki's short story, *An Open Window*. The same year, with a Fulbright award, Joanne directed Terrence McNally's *Frankie and Johnny in the Claire de Lune* in Santiago de Chile. She has directed at other theatre venues in New York, Los Angeles and Tucson. She is a member of the Dramatists Guild and the League of Professional Theatre Women/New York.

In 1994 and 1995, Joanne received Fulbright awards to begin research in Chile on her book, *Symbols of Resistance: A Chilean Legacy*, about Chilean artists during the Pinochet years and their influence on the political process that led Chile back to a democratic system. In 1995 she also received a Visiting Faculty Fellowship from the Kellogg Institute of International Studies at Notre Dame University to continue her research. She is now in New York writing the book and developing a video documentary about the evolution of artistic expression in Chile over the last three decades.

*"The Envelope" is an excerpt from "Poets, Politics and Lovers," a memoir about my travels in Latin America. It is part of a paper I gave at Humboldt State University's "Conference 2000: Latin American Travel" in Arcata, California, an excerpt from will appear in the University's "Conference 2000" publication. TOLA, referred to in the following excerpt below, stands for Theatre of Latin America, Inc., the non-profit production organization I founded in late 1966. TOLA was established to foster exchange in the arts between Latin America and the United States, to present more accurate images of the cultures and peoples of our hemisphere.*

*J.P.*

**The Envelope ©**  
**(Fragment from a Memoir)**  
by  
Joanne Pottlitzer

The envelope from São Paulo arrived with the morning mail. This was 1971. TOLA's office was operating out of the fourth floor of the ANTA building in New York's Broadway theater district, above the ANTA Theatre (since renamed the Virginia Theatre) on W. 52<sup>nd</sup> Street. The envelope had no return address. Inside was a tiny piece of paper that had been torn from a larger sheet with a note scrawled in pencil in hurried handwriting, "I'm in prison. No one knows where I am. Contact Richard Schechner. Contact anyone you can think of. Help!!! Help!!!" It was from Augusto Boal.

My heart leapt into my throat. I was scared. I didn't know what to do. Do I get involved? Would it be dangerous for me? I was frightened of being directly implicated in such a volatile political situation. Brazil's military government, which had overthrown democratically elected officials in 1964, had been replaced by an even harsher, more repressive regime in 1968.

I had brought Boal and his Arena Theatre of São Paulo to New York in 1969, and again in 1970. Their first production, a musical, *Arena Conta Zumbi*, was highly praised by the New York critics and played to sold out houses during its brief two-week run. Written and directed by Boal, *Zumbi* was based on a story from Brazilian history during the 17<sup>th</sup> century; but it was in fact a not-so-subtly masked parody of Brazil's political situation in the 1960s. Edu Lobo's music, interpreted by only three musicians on stage, captured the audiences that packed into St. Clement's Episcopal Church on West 46<sup>th</sup> Street, one of New York's most charming theatre



spaces, which maintains its religious function as well with the celebration of Sunday Masses by lowering a large crystal cross.

I put the note down and went on with my normal daily work. Late in the afternoon, after struggling all day with the decision of what to do, I knew I couldn't live with myself if I didn't take some action. So I looked for the note. It was nowhere to be found. The office was large with several desks, but I was alone that day so I knew that no one else could have picked it up. I looked everywhere, even went through the wastebaskets. No note. Again I looked on all the desks, under them, behind them, under piles of papers, on the floor. Nothing. Finally I went through the wastepaper once again. At the bottom of one of the baskets I found the note, crumpled into a little ball. I had no recollection whatsoever of having done that. My subconscious fear had been even stronger than my conscious feelings. I smoothed out the little piece of paper and began making a list of people to phone.

The following day I received a letter from the manager of Boal's theater in São Paulo, saying that he had been picked up on the street ten days before on his way to rehearsal. Enclosed was a plea for help from Boal's wife, Cecilia.

I called Gene Monick, the vicar at St. Clement's, who suggested we write a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* demanding Boal's release and that we ask well known theater people to sign it. The letter defended the artist's right to free expression and protested Boal's arrest. I began by calling Richard Schechner, whom Boal had mentioned in his note. (In 1968, shortly after the military crackdown in Brazil, I had taken Richard, then a young avant-garde director whose landmark production of *Dionysus 69* had just opened to rave reviews at the Performing Garage in Soho, on a 3-month trip to Latin America to meet with theater people. We went to Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Chile, and Brazil. In São Paulo, we attended a musical play in a theatre where a bomb had exploded the night before, after the performance, damaging the premises and the lighting and sound equipment. Nonetheless, the group, Teatro Oficina, had

decided to continue performing. We also accepted an invitation from Boal to have lunch at his home. Being a very practical guy, he was interested in learning about the possibilities of his group's performing in New York. Boal wife, Cecilia, an Argentine actress who worked in his company, was more forthright with her feelings toward us as Americans. She didn't open her mouth during the entire time we were there.)

I read the letter to about 15 people, all of whom agreed to sign it. Others who learned of Boal's arrest wrote letters directly to the Arena Theater, which in turn passed their letters on to the relevant authorities. Among those who signed *our* letter were Richard Schechner, Harold Prince, Joe Chaikin, Robert Anderson, Alan Schneider, and Arthur Miller. When I talked to Miller, he wanted to know what else he could do. At the time he was president of the International P.E.N. Club and suggested that P.E.N. could do something as well. He also suggested I get in touch with the New York office of Amnesty International to see if Amnesty could adopt Boal as one of its official political prisoners.

Boal was released shortly thereafter. As fate – or coincidence, or providence – would have it, the day before his scheduled hearing, a paraphrased version of our letter – which had finally been published in the *Times* three weeks after we submitted it, but with only five of the 15 signatures – appeared in *O Jornal do Brasil*, Rio's leading newspaper, with a headline saying "Arthur Miller Defends Augusto Boal."

Several months later, when he came to New York from Europe, Boal told me that a guard had put his scrawled note in an envelope and mailed it to me. He also said that a large dossier filled with letters people had written on his behalf was present at his hearing. The judge had read them all and had seen the *Jornal do Brasil* article the previous day. Among his questions to Boal was, "Isn't Arthur Miller the one who was married to Marilyn Monroe?"

During that conversation with Boal, I was alarmed that his short-term memory was not functioning properly. He didn't remember something of consequence I had said to him an hour

or so before. I brought it to his attention. He said it was because of the electric shocks he received during the ten days he was held in solitary when nobody knew where he was. He explained that you “disappear” during those first days, so that if you die from the torture, you simply disappear permanently. Attempts are made to prevent excesses by having doctors present throughout to test your level of physical resistance.

Boal began to describe the horrible experience. That was the first time I learned about the device called the Parrot’s Perch, a pole on which a person is hung upside down by the knees, naked and blindfolded. Boal told me that he remained in that position for so long that his fingers swelled up and turned blue. They place conductor clips on various parts of your body, throw a bucket of water over you, and as they interrogate you, they apply the electric current. They told Boal they were treating him with dignity because they did not apply the current to his testicles. The current applied to other parts of his body was so strong that all the fillings fell out of his teeth. He chronicled his torture sessions in the prologue of one of his plays, *Torquemada*.

The story is not without its humor. His torturers asked him, for example, why he had dollars in his house, which had been ransacked by the police. Boal explained that he had been paid in dollars when he and his theatre company performed in the United States. They said he was lying and applied the current. For them, dollars were only a means of money exchange. He explained further that in the United States dollars are used as normal currency, that people even buy hamburgers with dollars. More current. At one point, Boal asked them why they were doing this to him. They said, “Because when you’re out of the country, you slander Brazil.” “How do I slander Brazil?” Boal asked them. “You say that in Brazil there’s torture.” As he hung there naked on the Parrot’s Perch, Boal started to laugh. They raised the current to the maximum.

After the ten days of solitary, Boal was placed in a cell with about 25 other political prisoners. When the prisoners on his cellblock learned that he was among them, they would sing to him – at night, after lights out – popular songs from his musicals.

I would hear similar accounts about music and about humor in the mid-1990s, when Chilean artists began to relate their stories to me of their experiences during the Pinochet years.

\* \* \* \* \*