

Theater of the Oppressed

A Tool For Social Change

“All theater is necessarily political because all the activities of man are political and theater is one of them.”

- Augusto Boal

What is Theater of The Oppressed?

- Theater of the Oppressed is a non-traditional theater style used to prompt dialogue and promote community-centered problem solving.
- It is designed to promote awareness of one's social situation and how our bodies are bound by tradition.
- It has been used by organizers and educators worldwide for democratizing their own organizations, analyzing problems, and preparing for action.

Augusto Boal

- Theater of the Oppressed was established in the early 90s by Brazilian director Augusto Boal.
- It is a participatory theater that fosters democratic and cooperative forms of interactions among participants
- Theater is emphasized not as a spectacle but rather as a language accessible to all.
- It is a rehearsal theater designed for people who want to learn ways of fighting back against oppression in their daily lives.

Origins

- Boal began experimentation in participatory theater in the 1950s and 60s in Rio de Janeiro.
- He organized performances in the streets, factories, unions, churches, and the slums of Rio.
- He later worked in Argentina and developed "Invisible Theater" aimed at getting around the repressive political climate.
- Invisible theater transforms public space into a public stage.
- Bystanders are drawn into a discourse about social oppression, and urged to take immediate action that might affect the scenario being played out.

Forum Theater

- transforms "monologue" of a performance into a "dialogue" between audience and stage.
- Boal developed a process whereby audience members could stop a performance and suggest different actions for the actor.
- This was the birth of the spect-actor.

Forum Theater

- Participants determine what their priority issues are, usually problems from everyday life, and develop short scenes.
- Role-playing serves as a vehicle for analyzing power, stimulating public debate and searching for solutions.

Forum Theater Interventions

- The “intervention” is when the spec-actor tries to create a different solution to the problem presented.
- Actors have to be ready for any intervention- including ones they never imagined.
- Theater of the Oppressed is a rehearsal for our future selves, not an opportunity to tell other people how they should behave.

Practice: Lightning Round

- Stand in a line
- Interrupt the joke

Forum Theater: Logistics

- Skits are 10-20 minutes long.
- Run through skit once showing a problem around discrimination or oppression.
- First run is called “Anti-Model” - played without interruption. “Oppressor” wins.
- At second time, spect-actor can intervene and yell “STOP!” when they see the oppression happening.
- Following each intervention, audience members discuss the solution offered.

Intervention Guidelines

- The spect-actor comes up on stage and takes the place of one of the characters who they believe could create a positive solution to the problem presented.
- They should take the place of someone they think they might be in the future. The Spect-actor should not take the place of the oppressor.
- The original actors left on-stage work with the audience member with whatever tactic they try.
- No physical interventions: If you think your character might do something physical, please call a “time-out” and we will discuss the outcomes of those actions.
- When the audience member finishes their intervention, the facilitator debriefs with the audience member, the actors, and the rest of the audience.

The Characters

- Oppressed
 - Oppressor
 - Potential Ally
- Make all characters three dimensional
 - name, age, family background, emotional description, what is their relationship to the other characters? Personal characteristics that make them unique, what is their relationship to the particular oppression topic of the play (racism, religious, oppression, heterosexism etc.)
 - Avoid stereotyping
 - *Actors should play the basic demographic of their character - esp. the targeted identity as the oppressed*

The Skit

- Beginning: the Set up: Who, What, Where
- Middle: The conflict: What action takes place?
- End: the protagonist must lose
 - Make the story realistic but not too close to one individual's stories. If it is pretty close change a few facts - enough to give the actor some distance

Rehearsal Process

- Discuss story with group
- Choose characters
- Create outline of play
- Run through 2-3 times
- Rehearse possible interventions you can think of. Discuss as a group reactions you can think of that would be realistic for that particular character to have with that particular intervention.
- Run through play again with guidance from facilitators
 - When building the play - get it on its feet! Don't just sit around talking about the play!

Breakout Groups

need 5 volunteers to come up with stories from the workplace to help direct the skits.

Example: The Bus Scene

“A Rehearsal For Life”

The aim of the forum is not to find an ideal solution, but to invent new ways of confronting problems.

“Theater is change and not simple presentation of what exists: it is becoming and not being”

- Augusto Boal