

Introduction to Theater of the Oppressed

Dates & Times: Tues 7:10-9:40

Venue: Fireside room

Instructor: Jiwon Chung (counterprojects@gmail.com) 510-845-4829

Course Description

Theater of the Oppressed (TO) is a collection of games, techniques, exercises for using theater as a vehicle for personal and social change. It is a method of harnessing the laboratory of the theater as a powerful tool for exploring power, transforming oppression, and finding community-building solutions to the problems of inequality, conflict and injustice. Based on the radical ideas of Paolo Freire and Augusto Boal, it is a collective artistic exploration into the fullest expression of our human dignity, potential and creativity.

This is an introductory workshop covering the theory, application, and facilitation of TO, including:

- *Demechanization*
- *Dynamization*
- *Image Theater*
- *Forum Theater*
- *Rainbow of Desire*
- *Theory & Pedagogy*

The workshop will be 80% experiential and 20% reflective/didactic. No prior theater or performance experience is required. Elements of related counter-oppressive techniques will also be introduced as an adjunct to TO, and prominent practitioners of TO will be invited as guest facilitators.

Course Outline

The course is structured to introduce action and experiential techniques from the Theater of the Oppressed, so that participants can begin to apply them as tools in a practice of personal and collective liberation. Participants will be taught how to observe, analyze, challenge and transform oppression and oppressive practices at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and ideological levels, using a vast spectrum of techniques, exercises, and tools from Theater of the Oppressed.

The core essence of the work lies in Augusto Boal's deep and sustained formulation of Freirian principles into a social and artistic practice. As a method of transformational pedagogy, TO is one of the most radical and powerful methods of translating Paolo Freire's ideas of a Pedagogy of Liberation into social action. This course will explore ways of engaging the intelligence of the whole body, and the wisdom of groups to dialogue, learn & unlearn, self-teach, and problem-solve fundamental issues of oppression and social injustice. We will be experimenting with multi-modal techniques of representing, thinking and communicating (especially as they relate to power dynamics). There will be a strong emphasis on kinesthetic learning, total physical response & meta-learning. There will be a progression of games and exercises for structuring group dynamics. All of these activities are utilized in a structured progression that creates a core practice of liberation and empowerment for all participants.

In addition to the above, we will be bringing a deep analysis of power relations, oppression, liberation and social justice from a viewpoint strongly influenced by a critical/left worldview. The work is an embodied phenomenological exploration into praxis. Participants should come out solidly grounded in theory & practice, more deeply aware, and more courageous and passionate in their desire to challenge social injustice.

Expectations:

The course will be a balance of active experiential techniques and critical reflection/processing. **Active participation (with reasonable accommodation) is expected** both in physical/experiential exploration and in critical intellectual engagement.

In addition, the work is intensive, dialogical, and collectively generated, so good **attendance (80%), participation, and punctuality** are crucial to the success of the class.

Readings in a **course reader** will be assigned for discussion, and participants are encouraged to take notes or to keep a journal for each session.

The instructor will be available for further discussion outside of class by appointment; questions and concerns can also be addressed to me by email (counterprojects@gmail.com) or by phone (510-845-4829).

Participants are encouraged to facilitate with groups outside the class. Those who are interested are encouraged to check in with instructor and/or schedule an appointment. There will be at least two structured opportunities to assist in facilitation outside of class.

Please **dress comfortably to move**.

Grading:

Participants will be graded **Pass/Fail** with a written evaluation unless a letter grade is requested.

A reflective essay on the process, lesson plan(s) involving TO, a report on a community TO project, or a critical paper on theory may be submitted for extra credit.

The following areas of TO will be covered:

Demechanization & Dynamization: Building trust, safety, spontaneity, cohesiveness in groups; engaging & liberating sensation, movement and imagination; developing creativity, embodied intelligence and spontaneity in action.

Image theater: Making the invisible visible; concretizing, engaging, embodying and transforming oppression; observing, analyzing and deconstructing received images, stories, memes/mythologies/ideologies of oppression.

Forum theater: Intervening in & transforming oppressive situations through collective problem-solving; imagining, enacting, rehearsing alternative outcomes; exploring "subjunctive" modes, viewpoints, styles of relating/dialoguing; creating collective empowerment & community-oriented justice

Cop in the Head/Rainbow of Desire: Techniques for transforming intrapsychic and internalized oppression.

TO as a Martial Art: Exploring the dialectical syntax of power: Integrating mind, body & spirit in the transformation of oppression

TO & allied techniques: TO, Simultaneous Dramaturgy, Playback and other allied techniques: sculpting, fluid sculptures, pairs, narrative techniques, empathic listening and witnessing.

Theory: History and Theory of TO; development of TO techniques; application of theatrical/TO techniques in social action, education, therapy, politics, dialogue and conflict resolution; Empathy, catharsis, dynamization; "distributive affective justice"; the function of art in society (propaganda, ideology, meme theory); theater, pedagogy and social transformation.

Expected Outcomes:

At the end of the course, participants should:

- Be able to articulate the basic approaches, techniques and theories of TO.
- Be able to explain the developmental sequencing of a workshop (warm up, demechanization, dynamization, image theater, forum, rainbow); and be able to coordinate and utilize these elements with groups.
- Have tools to build trust, safety, empathy, and facilitate dialogue with groups.
- Be able to identify and measure affiliation, difference & social dynamics; be able to apply this to clarifying, revealing and transforming issues of oppression.
- Be able to apply the skills of *demechanization* (dishabituation) of sight, sound, touch, thought, affect, movement and its effects on liberating and freeing consciousness. Be able to apply the skills of *dynamization in* expressive and focused action for social change.
- Be able to identify their own privilege/status/power, and how it situates them in relation to other groups or individuals; be able to identify the *multiplicity* of ways in which we oppress and are oppressed by ourselves & others.
- Be able to articulate, analyze, witness, dialogue, and transform oppression using the tools and techniques of TO.
- Have tools to be able to enhance, empower, dynamize oneself and other groups, and develop a liberated, transformational approach to being in this world.

Participants should also demonstrate an *increase* in:

- Their ability to shift [between] power dynamics; increased fluidity in *affiliation and individuation*; increased ability to *empathize or distance* as necessary; fluidity in transitioning between *action, affect and reflection* (concrete/experiential and abstract modes).
- Spontaneity, creativity, imagination & *tele*; affect, role and status flexibility.
- Their ability to notice, name and analyze power dynamics, with an increased ability to shift, transform, reverse and neutralize power dynamics.
- Their awareness of the larger institutional, historical & social contexts of oppression & marginalization
- Their desire to create a deep, informed, intelligent, sustained commitment to challenging and transforming oppressive relations of power everywhere

The application of the following exercises and techniques (not exhaustive) will be introduced, taught and discussed in the classes. A schema for progression will be introduced.

Warm ups, Embodiment & Sociometrical Techniques:

Physical Warm ups: Space games, Name games, Sound/Movement exercises, Energy exercises, Imaginative endowments, Endowed offers; Breathing spirals, Feldenkrais exercises, Contact Improvisation, Tai chi push hands, sticky hands, Kali Numerado; Group awareness/cohesion: "Zen counting", "Glass cobra"; Crossings, Cross+drop, Repetition exercises

Demechanization/power dynamics:

Demechanization: "Leading by sound", "Leading centers", "Lovers";
Lead/follow dynamics: "Walk, follow, drop, center", "Flocking", "Bolivian Mimosas" (w/sound), "Columbian hypnosis"
Power/status games: "Card status"; number games; "Great game of power", "Your place in the room", "Enemy/defender", "Bear of Poitiers", "Vampire of Strasbourg"

Image Theater:

Complete the picture, with chairs, with dialogue, concentric circles (gallery of images); Song of the siren, "agora", "freeze tag", "Image of the word", "Mirror image", "Transform the image", Dynamized images (sounds, words, monologues)

Forum Theater/ intervention

Forum warm Up: "modified repetitive listening" (distant, loud, silent); Forum sharing: Story: "holographic witnessing"

Lighting Forum: interventions [discussion]

Rainbow of desire:

Prismatic oppression, Dialogue of internalized images, Rainbow into forum.

The following outline is a tentative outline. The actual progression may evolve organically and dialogically from session to session, depending on the needs, situations and issues that are generated by the participants.

Page numbers refer to the class reader.

Session 1 (Sept 9):

Warm ups

Embodiment & Sociometry

Demechanization & Dynamization

Introduction to Image Theater

History & Theory

Readings:

Introduction: What is Theater of the Oppressed? (Overview): p.3-6

Augusto Boal on Democracy Now! (Interview): p.11-16

The Blessing is Next to the Wound (Interview with Hector Aristizabal by Diane Lefer) in Theater, Therapy, Activism

Session 2 (Sept 16th):

Warmup

Demechanization & Dynamization

Games & Image theater

History, Theory & Facilitation

Readings:

Boal in Brazil, France, the USA (History): p.17-32

The Structure of the Actor's Work (Theory): p.73-82

TO, the Body, and the Phenomenology of Oppression & Liberation (Theory) p. 227-228

The Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed (Theory & History): p.161-162

Session 3 (Sept 23th):

Warm up

Demechanization (Blind Sequences)

Dynamization (Image Theater dynamizations)

Power & Status Analysis (Leader/Follower/Status Exercises)

Forum Theater Preparation (Columbian Hypnosis, Blank Forum)

Readings:

Experiments with the People's Theatre in Peru (History, Theory & Method): p.50-67

Notes on Jokering p.9-10

Techniques of the Joker System: p.69-70

Excerpts from Games for Actors and Non-actors (Handout)

Session 4 (Sept 30th):

Warm up
Power & Space Analysis
Forum Theater (Theory/Dramaturgy & Practice)
Creating a Forum

Readings:

What is Theatre? (Dramaturgy): p.105-110
She Made her Brother Smile (Case): p.201-202
Example of a Class with Forum (Case): p.7-8
How to Create a Play (Handout from "Acting for Indigenous Rights")

Session 5 (Oct 7th):

Warm up
Interventions/Imaginative Spontaneity
Rehearsal Techniques for Forum Theater
Sociometry
Lightning Forum Presentation

Reading:

Forum Theatre: Doubts and Certainties (Theory): p.83-95
Games for Actors and Non-Actors: Forum rehearsal techniques (handout)

Session 6 (Oct 14th):

Warm up
Eliciting & sculpting the narrative
Forum theater & Playback theater (Witnessing, Interpreting, Intervening)
Theory/Dramaturgy

Readings:

Empathy or Osmosis: p.48-49 (Dramaturgy)
Empathy or What? Emotion or Reason? (Dramaturgy): p.45-46
What do I do when I just don't know? (Playback Theory) Handout

Session 7 (Oct 21th):

Warm up
Playback Theater Structures (Fluid Sculptures; Pairs)
Narrative Structures/ The Mirror and the Hammer: Forum Theater & Playback Theater
Interventions
Theory/Discussion: "Homeopathy, Alchemy, and the Theater"
Forum presentation (1)
Mid semester evaluations distributed

Readings:

Three Theatrical Encounters (History): p.97
Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy (Dramaturgy): p.28-35
Catharsis and Repose, or Knowledge and Action? (Dramaturgy): p.46-47
Statement of Principles -Jerzy Grotowski (Theory): p.227-230
Towards a Poor Theater (Handout)
Dramaturgical Forms

Session 8 (Nov 4th):

Warm up
Forum Theater & Legislative Theater
Forum presentation (2)
Theory/Discussion

Readings:

Monologue & Dialogue (Legislative Theatre): p.123-124
History of Legislative Theater (Legislative Theatre): p.125-147
The Image of the Stage (Legislative Theatre): p.143-147
The Prometheus Project (Theory): p.180-182

Please note, **no session Reading week 10/26-11/1**

Session 9 (Nov 11th):

Warm up
Forum Theater
Invisible Theater
Theory/Discussion
Forum Presentation (3)

Reading:

The Ultimate Aim of Tragedy (Dramaturgy): p.28-31
Imprisonment and Jail: The Freedom of Prometheus (Biography): p151-158
Memory and the Torture Chamber (Biography): p148-158

Session 10 (Nov 18th):

Warm up
Forum Theater
TO as a Martial Art: Awareness, Energy, Intention and Transformative Action
Forum Presentation (4)

Readings:

I and Thou-Excerpts (Philosophy): p.255-261
The Unfettered Mind (Handout)

Session 11 (Nov 25th):

Image Theater warm up
Introduction to Cop-in-the Head
Rainbow of Desire

Theory/Dramaturgy

Reading:

Human Beings: a Passion & a Platform (Theory): p.104-115
Three Hypotheses of the Cop-in-the-Head (Theory): p.116-119
Postscript: Experiment in India (Essay): p.120-121

Session 12 (Dec 2):

Warm up
Forum Theater/Rainbow of Desire
Joking/Facilitation
Application: Pedagogy & Activism
Theory

Reading:

Notes on Joking (facilitation): p.9-10
Structures of Power: Toward a Theatre of Liberation: p.211-218
Theatre as Politics and Transitive Democracy as Theatre: p.131-133

Session 13 (Dec 9):

Warm ups
Facilitation
Ideology & Meme Theory (Carnaval of Rio)
Applications/Activism/Pedagogy
Forum Theater Presentation
Forum Theater discussion
Facilitation/Jokering
Evaluations
Closing Ritual

Reading:

Notes on Myself (Pedagogy): p.243-p253
Aesthetics of the Oppressed: a Theoretical Foundation (Theory): p.163-183
Theater in Prisons (Theory): p.186-199
Feminist Acts: Women, Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed: p.219-225

Texts:

A TO reader, containing readings from all of Boal's texts, as well as supplementary sources, is required. The reader is \$19 + tax. Copies will be available for purchase at ICLP (Instant Copying & Laser Printing) at 2138 University Ave., Berkeley (between Shattuck & Oxford). Students who need them can borrow classroom copies on loan (Please do not write in loaned copies).

In addition, the following books are highly recommended:

Theatre of the Oppressed (1979), Augusto Boal, trans C.A. and M.L. McBride. New York: Urizen Books: Theory, development, philosophy and practice

Games for Actors and Non-actors(1992), Augusto Boal, trans. A. Jackson. London, Routledge: How-to handbook of games for all practitioners. Outlines developmental sequences and theory, categorizes approaches. Important sourcebook & reference. **Students who are serious about facilitation should purchase this text.**

Rainbow of desire (1990) Augusto Boal, trans. A. Jackson. London, Routledge: Theory, philosophy, "case studies" and essays on internalized oppression. Presupposes familiarity with his approach and theories.

Legislative theater (1999) Augusto Boal, trans. A. Jackson. London, Routledge: Outlines the theory, development and practice of Legislative Theater

Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970, 1993), Paulo Freire: NY, Continuum. Pedagogical, philosophical and theoretical roots of Theater of the Oppressed. Essential.

Supplementary Readings:

Hamlet and the Baker's Son. (2001) Augusto Boal, London, Routledge: Autobiography and development of the work

Playing Boal: Theatre, therapy, activism (1999) ed. Mady Schutzman & Jan Cohen-Cruz. London, Routledge.

Acts of Service: Spontaneity, Commitment, Tradition in the Non-scripted Theatre (1994) Jonathan Fox: New Paltz, NY, Tulsitala Publishing.

Come Closer: Critical Perspectives on Theatre of the Oppressed (2011)
Ed. Toby Emert & Ellie Friedland: New York, NY, Peter Lang Publishers

Acting for Indigenous Rights: Theatre to Change the World (2013)
Mariana Feireira: Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Human Rights Center Publications
(Chapter 3: "Write and Perform Your Own Play" is in a downloadable pdf. format)

Web resources:

www.theatreoftheoppressed.org: international TO network website

www.ctorio.com.br: Boal's center in Rio

CTO-Rio, Avenida Rio Branco 179-6 Andar, Centro, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

www.smartmeme.com: image, story and meme analysis

www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=05/06/03/1351233&mode=thread&tid=25 interview with Boal on Democracy Now!

Threshold Areas:

This course falls under the rubric of ***Educating for Wholeness and Liberation (Threshold 7)***. Boal's Theater of the Oppressed is an embodied, phenomenological extension of Freire's ideas on education as a liberatory practice.

The work of the TO cultivates a deep, spontaneous authenticity, informed by a deep and unblinkered ability to discern and name social injustice. There is also the cultivation of a deep transpersonal intuition, integrity, compassion and courage to challenge and transform injustice, based on the belief that a life lived in accordance with and struggling for one's ideals is one of the deepest forms of spirituality. This places it under ***Prophetic Witness and Work (Threshold 2)***.

Finally, this course also engages deeply with ***Embodied Wisdom and Beauty (Threshold 8)***: It believes in holding complexity, contradiction, and suffering within the transformative crucible of artistic creation, summoning the healing power of beauty to uncover the blessing within the wound.