Aesthetics of the Oppressed

Dates & Times: Wednesdays 7:10-9:40pm
Venue: Fireside Room
Instructor: Jiwon Chung (Jiwonchung@sksm.edu)

Course Description

Aesthetics of the Oppressed is the term that Augusto Boal used to refer to the full spectrum of cultural and artistic activities that a community develops to resist, challenge and transform oppression. Building on the foundations of Theater of the Oppressed (TO) and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (PO), Aesthetics of the Oppressed (AO) recuperates the power of art and theater “to liberate both oppressor and oppressed” and “recover our deepest humanity” through creativity, art, dialogue, and education.

Informed by the conviction that transformation requires the engagement and development of all our creative facilities and potentials, this course will develop skills from Introduction to Theater of the Oppressed (RSED 4036), integrating writing, spoken word/poetry, movement, dance, visual arts, as well as music, architecture & sculpture, to develop a fluid, liberatory poesis & praxis between and across different art forms. There will be a focus on deepening the techniques and practices as practitioner/facilitator/educator/activist, refining the aesthetics and artistry of the work, while expanding the range, depth, and scope of theoretical analysis and political action and engagement.

The workshop will be 80% experiential and 20% reflective/didactic. RSED 4036 or prior TO training/experience is recommended. Experience or background in other an art form is useful but not necessary. Reading proficiency in French or Portuguese is also helpful but not necessary. Prominent practitioners of Theater of the Oppressed, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Popular Education, or other artists may be invited as guest facilitators or presenters.

Course Outline

The course is structured to develop and refine experiential techniques and practices from the Theater of the Oppressed and Aesthetics of the Oppressed, so that participants can apply them as tools in a practice of personal and collective liberation; as educators, activists, organizers, and workshop facilitators. 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 panoply of techniques, exercises, and artistic tools, starting with the physical and kinesthetic forms of Theater of the Oppressed, and transducing these forms into a multiplicity of artistic languages and styles, while developing skill, artistry, and aesthetic fluidity between diverse modes of engagement.

This course will engage the intelligence of the whole body and the whole collective, to dialogue, learn & unlearn, self-teach, and problem-solve fundamental issues of oppression and social injustice.

Multi-modal and collective techniques of representing, thinking and communicating, combined with methods of translating & transducing fluidly between art forms will also be cultivated, creating a rich, polymathic, multi-dimensional, healing community toolkit.
Critical thinking—in multi-modal ways—will be developed to analyze power relations, oppression, liberation, and social justice. Participants should come out solidly grounded in theory & practice, more deeply aware, and more courageous, passionate, spontaneous, and creative in their ability and 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.

All participants will be expected to complete one of the following:

- a) community project: a performance, presentation, community workshop(s); or
- b) a work of art in any medium, or
- c) a critical paper (not to exceed 20 pages, double-spaced), that engages with, utilizes, or demonstrates the aesthetics of the oppressed. In addition, short reflective essays after each class will also be required, as well as participation in facilitation during the class.

The instructor will be available for further discussion outside of class by appointment; questions and concerns can also be addressed to me by email (jiwonchung@sksm.edu) or by phone.

Participants will be supported and encouraged to facilitate with groups outside the class. There will be structured opportunities to assist in facilitation of community workshops, and group and individual support will be given to those who take the initiative to develop their own community workshops. **Please dress comfortably to move.**

**Grading:**

Participants will be graded **Pass/Fail** with a written evaluation unless a letter grade is requested. Absence from two classes without arrangements for makeup will result in failure from the course. Any planned absences should be discussed with instructor ahead of time. Successful completion of the course will be based on:

- a) Attendance and active participation: 60%
- b) Reflective essays: 15%
- c) Final Project: 25%

Additional work may be submitted for extra credit; please discuss with instructor.

**The course will cover the following areas:**

- Advanced TO practice, application, and facilitation
- Embodied practice through TO/AO: mindfulness in action; enaction as mindfulness
- TO as language: Image theater, dynamization, and related forms; narrative and subjunctive languages of the body.
- TO across the spectrum of oppression: Interpersonal Oppression (Forum Theater), Institutional Oppression (Legislative Theater Techniques), Ideological Oppression (Invisible Theater Techniques)
- TO & Internalized Oppression (Rainbow and Cop-in-the-head).
- Devising/Scripting/Directing/Rehearsing Theatrical forms.
• Multiple approaches to Forum Theater
• TO/PO/AO in Historical Context
• Aesthetics of TO: Form, Skill, Style in Performance, Acting & Art
• TO in the Agora, TO as Ideology, TO in the institutions
• Ritual and Epideictic Uses of TO; mediation, celebration, reparation and dialogue.
• Transducing & translating TO/PO: Poetry, Spoken word, Writing/Journaling, Found Art, Collage, Mixed/Media, Zines, Mask Work, Dance, and other popular forms of art.
• Cultural Resistance/Cultural Activism, Organizing & Movement Building: Theory & Practice

We will also discuss/cover the following related aspects of the work

• Radical & Liberatory Pedagogies: Landless, Grassroots, & Popular Education Methods; the pedagogies of Paulo Freire, Vygotski, Jacques Ranciere, Ivan Illich, Mitra, Edgar Morin; Soviet Socialist Pedagogies, Participatory Action Methods.
• Embodied, Situated, Enactive Epistemologies: Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Hubert Dreyfus, Noe Alva; Somatics and Somatic Practice; mindfulness, attention, embodiment & liberation
• Performance Theory & Liberatory Theory: Goffman, Turner, Grotowski, Brecht, Boal, Debord, Brook, Schechner, Cixous, Butler
• Politics of Body Discipline & Oppression: Martinet, Taylor, Gilbreth, Foucault, Bourdieu, Waquant, Boal
• Approaches to Cultural & Political Action, Messaging, and Movement Building: network theory, social memes, “detournement/jamming”, organizing and movement building,

**Expected Outcomes:**

At the end of the course, participants should:

• Understand approaches, techniques, and theories of Theater of the Oppressed, Aesthetics of the Oppressed and Popular Education
• Be able to teach a TO/AO workshop to a wide variety of groups, for a variety of purposes.
• Be able to devise/script/direct and facilitate a play with a group of participants to be used for educational purposes or as a forum theater piece.
• Be able to build trust, safety, empathy, and facilitate dialogue.
• Understand and apply the core skills of demechanization, dynamization, codification, experimentation, transduction, metaphorization, pluralization, jokering.
• 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/PO/AO, across individual, interpersonal, institutional & ideological quadrants.
• Have tools to 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 following outline is a tentative outline. The actual progression will evolve organically and dialogically from session to session, based on the needs, situations and topics that are generated by the participants.

Session #1: Mindfulness, Embodiment, Attention & Action
Introduction to the powerful body-based practices of attention, depatterning, and dishabituation within TO: demechanization to develop sensitivity to the somatic (bodily) and energetic dimensions of oppression; effects of Demechanization & Dynamization in TO in liberating the body.

Readings:
Augusto Boal: A Theoretical Foundation (from Aesthetics of the Oppressed; Reader)
Herbert Marcuse: An Essay on Liberation, Chapter 2 (Reader)
Branding the Body: Capitalism & the Somatics of Exploitation (Reader)
Elizabeth Behnke: World Without Opposites/Flesh of the World (Reader)
Marcel Mauss: “Habitus” (Reader)
Michelle Foucault: “Docile Bodies” (from Discipline & Punish; Reader)
Being in the World (Film).

Session #2: Generating, Representing, Analyzing, and Shaping: The Mirror, the Scalpel, and the Hammer
TO as language: Image Theater, Dynamization, and related forms (sculpts, fluid sculptures, machines, tableaux, constellations, and other somatic and social “codifications” of power); formats of image theater; approaches to sculpting; use of dynamized image theater & simultaneous dramaturgy to represent, concretize and codify experience and social issues; listening, responding, and building representations of experience; the body as a sculptural form

Readings:
Augusto Boal: The Practical Realization: The Prometheus Project (from Aesthetics of the Oppressed; Reader)
Mark Weinberg: One Line Plays (from Come Closer; Reader)
Jana Sanskriti: A Desire Greater than Hunger (Reader)

Session #3: Eliciting, transducing, concretizing experience & narrative:
Panopticon, Panauricon, Image into Fluid sculptures; Playback & Simultaneous dramaturgy; skilled listening; reflective techniques; metaphoricity, “tele”, role reversal, doubling; ritualization & containment; skillful characterization; complexity, polysemy, aesthetics of representation & story telling

Readings:
Jonathan Fox: Acts of Service (Reader)
Jo Salas: Improvising Real Life (Reader)
Playback Handbook (Reader)
**Session #4: Theater in the subjunctive: “Devising” Forum Theater I**
Devising Forum through Image Theater, enacting Forum Theater; individual and pluralized forms of forum; intervention approaches (traditional, lightning, seconds)

**Readings:**
Case Studies in Forum (Reader)
How to Devise Your Own Play (From “Acting for Indigenous Rights”; Reader)
Judith Butler: The Drag Act (from Gender Trouble; Reader)

**Session #5: Theater in the subjunctive: “Devising” Forum Theater II**
Directing and Rehearsing the Forum, Multiple approaches to Forum Theater; individual and pluralized forms; advanced intervention (stacking, choral, symbolic forum interventions, Boxing seconds); Meta-forum; Embedded Fora; Forum to Simultaneous Dramaturgy; Simultaneous Dramaturgy to Forum & vice versa;

**Readings:**
Case Studies in Forum (Reader)
Case Studies in Facilitation (Reader)
Guy Debord: Society of the Spectacle (Excerpts; Reader)
Jacques Ranciere: The Emancipated Spectator (Excerpts; Reader)

**Session #6: Advanced Forum & the Aesthetics of TO:**
"Jokering" & "directing" Forum Theater; Advanced facilitation/Jokering, rehearsal techniques
Exploring Form, Skill, Style, Rehearsal Techniques in Performance and Acting: (Diderot, Stanislavsky, Strasberg, Chekhov, Grotowsky, Boal); Mask, Voice & Body

**Readings:**
Antonin Artaud: Towards a Theater of Cruelty (Reader)
Bertold Brecht: Organon (Excerpts; Reader)
Approaches to Acting (Reader)
Robert Cohan: Goal/Obstacle/Tactics/Expectation/Emotion (from Acting One; Reader)
Mikhael Bahktin: Rabelais and His World (Excerpts; Reader)

**Session #7: Shaving the Inside of Your Skull: TO and Internalized Oppression:**
Rainbow of Desire, Cop in the Head; related forms (Psychodrama, Dramatherapy, Constellation Work); Rainbow into Forum; Forum using Rainbow.

**Readings:**
Augusto Boal: Three Hypotheses of Cop-in-the-Head (Reader)
Walther Benjamin: On the Concept of History [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm)

**Session #8: TO in the Agora: Ideology and Struggle**
Invisible Theater, Guerilla Theater, Agit Prop, Happenings, and other forms of Political Street Theater; TO for non-violent direct action; TO in historical context: Newspaper Theater & Simultaneous Dramaturgy

**Readings:**
Harold Pinter: “Art, Truth & Politics” (Reader)
Session #9: TO in the institutions: Madness, Violence, and Power
TO in schools, hospitals, prisons, congregations, institutions, legislative bodies; TO with special populations; TO & Service Learning; TO for “Development”.

Readings:
TO Case Studies (Reader)
Augusto Boal: Sartrouville (from Rainbow of Desire; Reader)
Nancy Scheper Hughes: Bodies, Death, Silence (from Violence in War & Peace; Reader)
Franco Basaglia: Institutions of Violence; The Disease & Its Double (Reader)
Michael Taussig: Talking Terror (from Violence in War & Peace; Reader)
Clifford Geertz: Deep Play (from Interpretation of Cultures; reader)

Session #10: Sacred, Profane, & Liminal: Ritual and Epideictic Uses of TO/Theater:
Theater for mediation, reparation, celebration, and dialogue.

Readings:
Jonathan Fox: Acts of Service (Reader)
Victor Turner: From Ritual to Theater; Liminal & Liminoid (from Play, Flow, and Ritual; Reader)
Mikhail Bakhtin: Rabelais and His World (Excerpts; Reader)
Erving Goffman: Frame Analysis (Excerpts; Reader)

Session #11: Aesthetics of Polymathy: Transduction, Translation, Transformation
Poetry, Spoken word, Story-telling, Writing, Movement

Readings/Video:
Gil Scott Heron: The Revolution will not be Televised (Video; Poem; Reader)
Shailja Patel: To my Sisters in Love with Soldiers; Shilling Love (Poem; Reader)
Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Masque of Anarchy (Poem: Reader)
Etheridge Knight: For Malcom; (Poem: Reader)
Michel De Certeau: The Scriptural Economy & Reading as Poaching (from The Practice of Everyday Life; Reader)
http://danm.ucsc.edu/~dustin/library/de%20certeau,%20the%20practice%20of%20everyday%20life.pdf

Session #12: Polymathy: Aesthetics of Translation
Image, Movement, Dance, Found Art, Mask Work, Performance

Readings/Video:
Theatre du Soleil (Video Clips)
Amandla (Film)
Jacques Lecoq (Video; Readings; Reader)

Session #13: Polymathy: Aesthetics of Transformation
Performance/presentation of work; TO/AO for Political Engagement & Movement Building;
Legislative Theater, The work of Jana Sanskriti, Theater for Cultural Activism; Theories of Political Action

Readings/Video:
Arna’s Children (Film)
Isle of Flowers (Film)
In the Shadow of Freire (Reader)
How to Change the World without Taking Power (Reader)
Bell Hooks: Teaching Resistance (In Killing Rage, Ending Racism; Reader)

Session #14: Full Spectrum Resistance:
Multi-dimensional Approaches to Cultural & Political Action, Messaging, and Movement Building: network theory, meme theory, “detournement”, organizing and movement building

Readings/Video:
The Yes Men (Film)
RSA Animate Selected Clips (Video)
Community Builder’s Handbook (Reader)
Smart Meme: The Battle of the Story (Reader)
Beautiful Trouble: Excerpts (Reader)
Selected Case Studies: Global Non-violent Action Database of Gene Sharpe’s Methods
http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/browse_methods

Threshold Areas:
This course falls under the rubrics of Educating for Wholeness and Liberation (Threshold 7), Prophetic Witness and Work (Threshold 2), and Embodied Wisdom and Beauty (Threshold 8).