

Theatre—

A Space for Human Connection

Isabelle Gatt

Introduction

The Kwakiutl Indians of northwest America had a tradition referred to as potlatch (Boas, 1966) which involved ceremonies with the gifting of food, wealth, song, dance and the sharing of tales with other tribes. The tribes would not necessarily be at peace, but potlatch was perceived as a way of resolving conflict and promoting understanding of cultures. Performance was such a gift, it was one way of sharing and connecting.

Theatre, process drama, creative drama, forum theatre all create a space and mode in which to discover and explore ideas, opinions, emotions, relationships, similarities, conflicts; in other words, a space and a mode to share and connect. The processes involved, the strategies and conventions used, aid the participants to become more socially competent as they share and connect first internally within the group as they improvise and devise, and then, in the case of performances, the connection is also with their audiences. Having worked in the theatre, as a performer and an educator in schools and drug rehabilitation centers locally and abroad, I never cease to be amazed at the way individuals transform, and a group of people bonds in the process of devising a theatre piece or simply while using drama strategies. I am always aware of the impact and the changes such work

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has on me too as animator and part of the group. The process of doing theatre is intense and changes relationships as each learns more about oneself and the others while discussing and devising theatre.

I am not referring to traditional theatre direction where a director takes a play off a shelf, chooses actors through auditions, and gives them precise directions as to how to play the part, so as to embody her/his vision and interpretation. I am referring to theatre that is a process, a theatre that allows participants space to think critically and creatively, a theatre that is collectively created, borne through discussion, improvisation and workshops. This is a theatre which moves away from the fixed linear hierarchies of scriptwriter, director, actor, audience; even if the director is key since, in the journey of making theatre, s/he is a reference point for the co-generation and co-creation of ideas and material. This is a theatre that takes in all the individuals' contributions and participation to transform, to learn, to grow both individually and as a group. The more participatory the approach is, the more the likelihood of transformation within participants. This is even more effective when the issues chosen to focus on, are political and social issues, issues that are considered to be problems or controversies, issues related to moral values, rights for the voiceless, poverty, racism, sexism and political impotence; issues that the participants perceive to be relevant to them.

In working through theatre, participants improve their communication skills and acquire the confidence to make contributions in discussions. They are encouraged to express their emotions and to voice their opinions even if these conflict with what others are saying. Conflicts are what make the journey challenging and worthwhile as one discovers more of oneself, learns to understand the other, and all can engage in resolving these conflicts, exploring solutions, making compromises, learning collectively. The different approaches used through the process of making theatre, ultimately affirm the possibility of change, the change which might emerge from engagement with that conflict. Theatre making affords a space for participants to share their doubts, emotions, ideas, opinions, dreams, hopes, frustrations, pain, anger, joys, etc. In doing so and listening to what others have to share and in researching the issue in hand, participants grow and change in a unique and meaningful way individually and as a group.

Ultimately, comes the audience; throughout the process of creating the work, the actors work in anticipation of the audience's response. A live performance is an experience that connects spectators and actors. The audience is vital to a performance; the live actor-audience interaction with all its stimulation and surprise is a strategic component in theatre. As Grotowski so aptly reflects:

By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, "live" communion. (Grotowski, 1968, p. 19)

Theatre is about community: the community of artists that create it, the community of the audience that observe it, and the connection between artists and audience in the moment of performance.

Different theatre genres, require different degrees of interaction from the audience. The theatre space is another crucial variable when it comes to interaction; the size of the theatre, its configuration: a proscenium arch versus theatre in the round and indoor versus outdoor theatre all make a huge difference in various aspects but most essentially their impact on the audience. Another central variable is, of course, the audience; the type of individuals that make up the audience. As the audience changes for every performance, so does the interplay between actors and audience so no two performances are ever exactly alike. Each performance affects individuals differently, as with any artform, each performance should lead to enriching experiences by providing the audience with new visions of our life, others and the world. Performances that are the result of creative inquiry, be it collective or individual, reflect societal transformations that could lead the audience to new dimensions of thought that ultimately reshape their perspective of life.

Connecting through emotional engagement and critical reflection

Strategists of the theatre have always conceived theatre to be a means of penetrating through the shell of the audience's ease. Penetrating this involves engaging the audience through emotion or critical reflection or both. In Greece, Aristotle philosophized that while the function of comedy was to expose the flaws in society which would help people see human absurdity and foolishness, the function of Greek tragedy was to evoke extreme emotions of pity and fear, in the safe setting of the theatre, so as to affect the *catharsis*¹ of these emotions in the audience. Tragedy exposes the flaw in the hero's character, with a consequent fall from fortune, thus evoking emotions of fear and pity from the audience. So, the audience leaves the theatre "purged" of these emotions. However, Aristotle also wrote that when watching tragedy, this vicarious experience through "empathy did not appear alone, but simultaneously with another type of relation: *dianoia*."² (Boal 2008:102).

Anti-realism movements in theatre such as Expressionism, Absurdism, Dadaism were also a reaction to the absurdity of life and politics. Such movements deliberately created confusion and explored ways to engage the audience in reflection and a re-evaluation of their notions of life by forcing them to consider a different viewpoint and the possibility of changing the status quo. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty focused on passion and emotion to provoke an emotional reaction from the audience; his theatre was void of rationality with the intent to upset the mental status quo of the audience. Brecht, on the other hand, deliberately broke with the Aristotelian concepts of a linear plot with a climax, a suspension of disbelief, and progressive character development to, instead, present multiple perspec-

tives, introduce a narrator thus pulling down the fourth wall and use episodic plot structures. All Brecht's strategies were intended to create a feeling of estrangement. He referred to this strategy as the *Verfremdung-effekt* which targeted reason and objectivity rather than emotion; the V-effect is intended to make the spectator adopt an attitude of critical inquiry in her/his approach to the incident in the story narrated, turning the spectator into a critical observer while arousing his capacity for action.

Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed

Should art educate, inform, organize, influence, incite to action, or should it simply be an object of pleasure? (Boal, 1992, introduction)

This is a perennial question about the role of theatre. Historically, theatre has been used as a tool for education and, at times, even for indoctrination, both within schools and within the community. Think of the mystery plays in medieval times for example. Different theatre genres engage the members of the audience differently. While all genres generally aim to offer personal recreation and aesthetic pleasure, certain genres also have a strong pedagogical and political aspect intended to engage the audience even to the extent of inciting them to political and social activism.

Augusto Boal, the Brazilian theatre director and radical liberatory educator, specifically used theatre as a vehicle for social change. He believed that

Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it. (Boal, 1992, p. xxxi)

Boal devised a system of exercises, games and different forms of highly interactive theatre referred to as Theatre of the Oppressed (TO). Boal was profoundly influenced by revolutionary pedagogist, Paulo Freire, in fact, he acknowledged this to the point of referring to Freire as "my last father" (Emert & Friedland 2011). The title of his book, *Theatre of the Oppressed* was heavily inspired by Paulo Freire's liberatory educational theory and vision in his landmark book on education, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In this book, Freire expounds his views on the political nature of education which has the power of either domesticating or liberating. He pushed for an education that was liberating, teaching people to become critical, questioning, autonomous thinkers, and moreover people who would take action. Freire's notion of *praxis*,³ theoretically reflective action, is the outcome of continuous, restless, hopeful, critical inquiry with others about society and the world which results in thoughtful action. Freire advocated that learners should be stimulated to develop praxis, an inventive and interventive way of life that encourages free, creative reflection and thoughtful action in order to empower the marginalized and help them confront their oppressions, challenging the status quo.

In Drama Education, Augusto Boal's (TO) techniques can be effective in promoting critical thinking and social justice. Forum theatre in particular helps the participants understand and transform the power relations of everyday life, as, to start with, it takes its source from real situations that particular community is facing. As Hope and Timmel (1984:8) comment, "All education and development projects should start by identifying the issues which the local people speak about with excitement, hope, fear, anxiety or anger." In Boal's theatre, the spectators are not mere viewers of what the actors are doing. Their role is not passive but active as each member of the audience, for whom Boal coined the word *spect-actor*,⁴ is an active spectator. Active not only in terms of engaged thinking, or verbal contribution but also in terms of action. In fact, forum theatre is only effective when *spect-actors* intervene, and try out alternative endings and possible solutions to the challenges presented "on stage", by physically going on stage to take over from the "oppressed" protagonist and acting, or rather take the action they deem necessary to change the situation, instead of him. In forum theatre the *spect-actors* are actively involved not "anaesthetized" (Boal, 1992) or alienated by what is happening on stage; forum theatre is not merely about entertainment but is designed to highlight issues of injustice to stimulate debate, develop learning and alter behaviour.

What fundamentally unites the practices of both Boal and Freire is dialogue. Dialogue as a true praxis of action and reflection, fostering but not dictating action. Augusto Boal's forum theatre is a medium for dialogue, a means of communication, using physical, verbal and aesthetic language on emotive issues, exhibited in a safe environment, with the potential of turning problems into solutions. This does not necessarily mean that the solution arrived at by the spect-actor is the right one, what is important is that the spect-actor empathises, thinks, reflects, tries to come up with a solution to add to the debate: 'I believe it is more important to achieve a good debate than a good solution' (Boal, 1992, p. 230).

Through the use of forum theatre, issues of injustice, exploitation and oppression can be explored not just with the actors but with *spect-actors*. His argument resonates with Paulo Freire's for the necessity of *conscientização*,⁵ developing a critical consciousness of one's social reality through reflection and action in order to provoke reactions against oppression. In this way, theatre can serve as a powerful pedagogical tool to understanding power structures and to fostering inter-ethnic, inter-class, inter-gender solidarity and understanding. Like Freire, Boal believed that the feelings generated by *conscientização* were key to motivating community-based action.

The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection—true reflection—leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection... Otherwise, action is pure activism. (Freire, 1972, p. 41)

Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) rejects spectacle-theatre and embraces a different theatre in which spectators are encouraged "to ask questions, to dialogue, to participate" (Boal, 1992, p. 142). The spectators will engage and participate fully only if the focus to the initial debate is relevant to them and the signal that participation is expected in the process is clearly communicated (Shor & Freire, 1987).

Boal sees theatre as a language accessible to all to help reflect, analyse and discuss issues of oppression and explore group solutions to these issues. Boal's TO serves as a medium for the process of codification and decodification, which resonates with Freire's pedagogical approach. Drama is a form of codification, a way of capturing an aspect of life's reality and bringing it into the group in a different form. The form could be simply a line drawing, a photograph, a story, a poem, drama or music. The different form has the potential of generating interest, debate and alternative perspectives. Freire used codifications to capture aspects of everyday experiences. While Boal used theatre, Freire used line drawings to capture the issue; in this way the issue becomes decontextualized, coded and, consequently, can be seen through a different lens and more critically.

Boal used theatre as a medium and a space to engage and connect all participants in a common project and this leads to understanding others, empathizing with the challenges of others, tolerating and making compromises as personal ideas are sometimes modified, integrated with those of others or simply given up on reflection while other participants' ideas are taken on. Both empathy and reflection are necessary in the process as they are in life as indifference allows injustice and atrocities to happen. Forum theatre dares us to care, reflect, discuss and try to find solutions collectively.

Daring to care and "the practice of freedom"

As we have seen, Boal, whose interacting theatre is rooted in Paulo Freire's pedagogical and political principles, used theatre in an attempt to raise the participants' consciousness and empower them as they reflect, discuss, criticise and challenge oppressive social conditions. Freire's radical pedagogy was geared towards empowering students, strengthening their imagination and developing a critical consciousness by giving students the tools of literacy. For Freire, the dialogue between teachers and students in the teaching setting was essential to help cultivate critical consciousness, enlighten their subjectivity and nurture in them a sense of self-determination and civic engagement. While Freire's tool to promote dialogue and critical thinking was literacy, Boal's was theatre. Boal's theatre differs from mainstream theatre which offers only images of the world as it is and leaves no room for change. Boal created theatre for freedom, theatre for the oppressed, theatre for empowerment, so his theatre deals with change and images of transition, images that inspire hope. Boal pulled down the fourth wall and instead built a bridge between the actor and spectator by inviting the latter to

engage in a self-empowering process of dialogue and consciously intervene in the theatrical situation. Forum theatre is a “practice of freedom,” a rehearsal for social action through a collective analysis of shared problems of oppression.

Another Boalian contribution, which adds to the essence of Boal’s radical pedagogy, is his book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. This a compendium of exercises has various objectives such as dehabituating, de-mechanizing the body, that is, to help participants break away from doing things mechanically, making participants aware of certain mannerisms, ways of thinking and help them come up with alternative solutions, solutions for a more just society. These games are an effective way to engage participants, break the ice, and build trust within a group in a short time. On an individual level, the exercises help to free individuals from both external and internal oppressions, nurture the imagination and to ultimately prepare participants to engage in real and social struggles for liberation. Boal’s techniques were intended to help participants in the practice of freedom.

At about the same time that Augusto Boal was creating the TO in Brazil, a radical pedagogist, Don Milani, was making waves in Italy with his radical ideas. Don Lorenzo Milani was a priest whose ideas were considered so dangerously revolutionary that he was “exiled” by his bishop to a tiny remote “godforsaken” mountain village. The village was Barbiana. Don Milani had a mission which was not just religious but also civic. On arriving at Barbiana he found that the only school in the village was in a desolate state; the school consisted of five classes in one hall and, worse still, he soon discovered that children left semi-illiterate from this school. Don Milani wanted to transform this, so he created his own school. He was looking for a transformation in the individuals who frequented the Barbiana school and to do this he realized he needed to use alternative methods, alternative curricula as well as alternative hours, times convenient for these young people who could only attend after their work in the fields.

Milani used anything that would connect learning and life, theatre, science, current affairs, anatomy, etc. as part of the curriculum in the school he built at Barbiana.

The immediate point of departure for learning was reality, life, or better still, the everyday issues confronting the world of the poor. This constituted the immediate motive of the moment. The longer term purpose was that of enabling the pupil to acquire a baggage of knowledge that was necessary for him or her to grow and become capable of participating in social and political life.

—Eduardo Minelli—ex student of Lorenzo Milani in an interview
(Borg & Mayo 2007) <http://www.barbiana.it/interview.html>

Don Milani used radical pedagogy to educate the students. He wanted to teach them to read, but more than that, he wanted to show them the importance of studying, of thinking critically, of reflecting, of discussing and standing up for what is right. Milani’s pedagogical philosophy resonates closely with that

of Freire. As opposed to mainstream education, he was not interested in merely promoting narrowly defined “commercially and market-oriented” type of competence-based learning (Gadotti, 2008, p. 43), competences that are often measured according to outcomes, narrowly defined competences for exams which the Barbiana students had hitherto failed in. Instead he wanted to equip his students with broader competences that would help them become active democratic citizens. Thus, the Barbiana school would not just prepare them for exams and life as they knew it, but it would help them conceive an alternative vision of reality as they explored concretely the myriad of possibilities and options that life had to offer.

As part of his radical pedagogy, Milani would invite farmers, artists, artisans, scientists and professionals to talk and give hands-on demonstrations of their work. Milani understood the potential of the arts and included these in his school. The arts, and theatre in particular, expand the imagination and the realization of this can unlock endless possibilities, freeing the mind from the chains of reality as perceived up till that point (Csikszentmihalyi, 1986, p. 5). Through the use of theatre, Milani wanted to help his students find their voice, overcome their shy silence while also learning important communication and social skills. In this way, theatre was a means of helping the students acquire perceptions and skills to take action in the face of the injustices they suffered in this forgotten part of the world where there were no asphalted roads, no electricity, no water and no phone. Milani used every medium available to him to make learning more concrete and experiential. Working on subjects of relevance to his students gave these youths the understanding to develop their own moral compass, also instilling the ‘I care’ maxim through the notion of theatre as a democratic space to explore ideas in.

The liberal arts to promote independent thinking and collaborative action for peace

Like Freire, Don Milani, believed that, by prescribing knowledge, schooling was a negatively powerful political tool intended to promote subordination by initiating the young into the existing culture, thus ensuring the status quo where the oppressors always win and the oppressed remain that way. On the other hand, again like Freire, Milani perceived education as a tool to liberate the oppressed and so, in his school, he taught his students to read, think and discuss critically to become aware of the injustices of this world, and to become active in struggling against them through nonviolence.

The liberal arts offer fertile ground for independent thinking and raise the possibility of multiple perspectives, in fact that is why in any dictatorship the arts are scaled back and assaulted, and that is precisely why Don Milani promoted the arts in his school in Barbiana. The democratic processes applied in making theatre lead to a sense of ownership in all the participants as they work together. This furthered the cause of peace in the participants’ lives and the community.

Doing theatre, as in devising theatre, is an educational process. Education, *ex and ducere*, literally translated, means “to draw out of” or ‘to lead out of.’” The process of improvisation and of devising theatre in a group, helps individuals draw out and discover about themselves and others as they work creatively together. The workshop-rehearsal and performative process is very similar to play where ordinary hierarchies dissolve, where certain times and places are set aside for the manipulation of special things in a world defined non-ordinarily (Schechner, 1985, p. 110). New social contracts are formed between the participants as actors as well as between the actors and the audience. Theatre is a point of contact – a space for connection. Unlike the isolation of watching television, cinema or using the internet, theatre is a space for human contact, a space where people gather, it offers a genuine point of interaction where people can become engaged, enlightened and entertained.

Theatre has a powerful potential when used as a pedagogical tool in a democratic approach to promote horizontal, equitable relationships where both teachers and learners are seen as individuals with useful knowledge and experience. It encourages participants to collectively examine even what might be rather controversial issues and find ways to coming to a consensus on issues to resolve injustices.

Reality entails injustices and conflict. Conflict, however, not as the antithesis of peace; creative and non-violent conflict resolution is part of the process for peace. The process can involve an internal conflict within the learners as they develop a critical consciousness, a social and collective awareness. This ties in with Freire’s conscientization which helps learners develop an in-depth understanding of the world and its underlying contradictions. This exercise leads to questioning one’s own beliefs and where they come from. Self-reflection is essential within such an educational process but the next step, praxis, is even more vital. Praxis involves moving from the theoretical to the practical, as learners take their knowledge and apply it in real-world situations. Praxis is key in all peace efforts. The use of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) could serve as rehearsal for praxis, or praxis itself especially forum theatre which acts as a tool to analyze and explore possible collective solutions to problems of the oppression that can arise everywhere. (I will expound on this further on). Theatre can thus be a space for dialogue, a space for community building.

A critical pedagogy stimulus: the newspaper

Interestingly, a common element in Boal, Freire, and Milani, is that all three used the newspaper as a tool of empowerment. As pedagogues all three understood the importance of critical engagement with current issues reported in the media. Literacy is central to Paulo Freire’s work, more importantly, critical literacy. He emphasised that reading the world always comes before reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world. (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

We began with the conviction that the role of man was not only to be in the world, but to engage in relations with the world--that through acts of creation and re-creation, man makes cultural reality and thereby adds to the natural world, which he did not make. (Freire, 2005, p. 39)

Freire insists that, in literacy, the text is not merely neutral print on paper and therefore, other than the skill of reading the words, what is more important is critical literacy which is what enables us understand the injustices. Freire urges us to transform the world through action by working towards a democracy in a collective effort against the forces that oppress and marginalize by gender, class, race or language. Both Milani and Freire explored the newspapers by teaching reading and analysis of what is written through researching the source, the message and the content and, finally, by means of discussion of the issues from various cultural perspectives. In the school at Barbiana, besides the history of the past, students read the newspaper daily from front page to back page. This was a “compulsory” school activity as the newspaper contains useful information relevant to life even if it might not have any content they would be tested in exams.

At Barbiana it was believed that politics and the daily news were important aspects of a school curriculum as one of the boys in *A Letter to a Teacher* insists. He writes that these are relevant to life because they inform one about the sufferings of others even though this might not be important in academic terms, this is the information that is important to learn for life. This implies that reading the newspaper is not merely about being literate and knowing what is going on but also about empathizing with the victims and taking action to help. Don Lorenzo Milani was an outside-the-box priest, who did exactly what he preached and preached what he believed in. He did this even during the precarious times he lived in. If he felt something was not just he would speak up and try to undo the injustice. When he read a letter in *La Nazione*, written by a group of retired military chaplains in which they referred to conscientious objection as “an insult to the fatherland and to its Fallen” he wrote the controversial public letter in response supporting the conscientious objectors, challenging the notion of a “just war” and actually calling for resistance.

Here was a priest defying the church and the state to defend young men who had refused military service at a time when conscientious objection was punishable by a prison sentence. Milani was aware of the possible consequences of doing this but felt compelled to in the name of truth and justice:

I had to teach my pupils well how a citizen reacts to injustice. How he has freedom of speech and of the press. How a Christian reacts also to the priest and even the bishop who errs. How each one has to feel responsible for everyone else.(Milani 1965)

As a result of going to press with this letter, Milani faced prosecution.

At much the same time as Milani wrote this letter, Augusto Boal also started exploring the newspaper to create a new category of popular theatre. Boal was

working in Brazil which was going through hard times of fascist repression with military intervention in schools, unions and the faculties. Boal's Newspaper Theatre, involved the people to make theatre for the people- no middle actor involved. The process involves learning to read the newspaper through headlines chosen by the editor to find the "real news"; the "actors" read through headlines, article placing and layout, collaboratively. The next task is to reframe the information from the news to create theatre using theatre techniques and conventions to bring out the different realities and countervoices. Newspaper theatre, in itself a political theatre genre, works through the composition of a succession of images and dialogue to create the structure of an argument, possibly presenting incongruous messages to reveal certain ironies and to provide a fundamental framework to prompt the audience to critically analyse what is being reported.

Boal's and Milani's Newspaper Theatre today

In my work, I often use Newspaper theatre with university students in Youth Studies and Community Studies; the idea is that even if participants come from a non-drama background, once they have gone through certain Drama processes and theatre games, they can then apply this experience and knowledge to the groups they work with or in their classrooms. My research (Gatt, 2009) has taught me that it is not sufficient for students to learn and be given various examples of the various techniques, but that they need to go through certain experiences themselves to be able to really understand the process and appreciate the outcomes.

Prior to working on Newspaper Theatre exercises, participants go through various trust physical exercises, theatre games, icebreaking and group-building exercises with the aim of creating a safe setting to work in and slowly start unlocking their capacity for critical thinking as well as critical imagination and expression. The drama structures used offer an open framework to explore multiple opinions, possibilities, solutions as well as a context and time for reflective discourse. The drama processes used, integrate personal experiences and provide a space, a safe space, for sharing values and beliefs, while challenging personal dispositions to push for imaginative and creative solutions to help overcome oppressions.

The feedback of these courses reveal that, for students, this is a valuable experience that helps them discover themselves, and understand and empathise with others. Most comment about the non-verbal exercises based on physical games and that though most felt a bit awkward doing these initially, these exercises really helped break the ice. An example is when participants are asked to think of personal experiences about a certain theme of common interest, possibly of injustice or oppression. The technique that then follows is from Image Theatre. Each participant is asked to "sculpt" other participants' bodies into a tableau (a frozen image, statues) to portray the injustice chosen (e.g., a case of harassment, racism, bullying, etc.) Participants are not allowed to communicate verbally at any point.

Attention to detail is key both as to body positions as well as facial expressions. Such an exercise makes use of nonverbal communication which is generally easier for people to do than verbal. The process can then move to having “the audience” interpret what these tableaux mean. This involves a certain element of disclosure even if the person whose experience it is does not need to comment about his/her contribution. Such exercises scaffold the way for Newspaper theatre and eventually Forum theatre.

For Newspaper Theatre, participants are asked to bring with them newspaper articles which report oppressions, so they need to do some research on their own. The articles are shared with the participants in the group. Reasons are given as to also giving reasons why these articles were chosen, sometimes it is because the news is really powerful, other times it is because the story reminds them of a personal experience. The group analyses the article including the source of information, the journalist’s voice, the messages and the content. The process entails intrapersonal as well as interpersonal communication, helping participants learn more about themselves and the others in the group. All participants are engaged in the process, individual contributions are negotiated into a collective exercise of structuring a collective creation. The key difference in this approach to merely reading, analysing and discussing the news is that each participant in Newspaper theatre will be taking an active role to finding solutions, resolving conflict, overcoming challenges. TO is theatre as praxis: it involves dialogue, action and critical reflection.

The first step is for each individual in the group to present their newspaper case. The group is allowed time for dialogue as a group process, the instructions are to listen without being judgmental; be alert to any personal biases that surface and try to deconstruct these; inquire and reflect. The dialogue process is a key aspect of Newspaper theatre as group members ask questions to deepen understanding, gain alternative perspectives and make connections. Next, participants are guided to go beyond discussion and reflection and to imagine and try out different scenarios exploring and expressing their own emotions, attitudes, interpersonal relationships and behaviour.

Newspaper theatre is effective in involving and connecting everyone in the group through the process of creating the scene. An important factor that students mention in their journals about the sessions, is that they feel that, had they not gone through the initial theatre games aimed at integrating the members of the group, they would have found the sharing difficult. The scaffolding aspect of the process with games and exercises to help build trust, open communication and increase empathy is a process that prepares the participants and provides a safe venue for them to disclose, confide, articulate ideas, opinions and to engage in dialogue about certain personal and structural oppressions to try to find ways of overcoming these.

In a recent workshop I had with university students training to work with youth, a student brought an article about a violent attack by four young men on a

lesbian couple that took place on the upper deck of a London night bus on May 30, 2019. Melania Geymonat and her partner, Chris, were traveling home from an evening out together when four boys forced the women to kiss for their own enjoyment and then brutally attacked and robbed them. The group of students that worked on this newspaper article introduced the scene with one of the daughters coming out to her mother who was so shocked at this that she threw the girl out of the house after a long argument. This is a plausible reaction in a country where most consider themselves Catholic and hence tend to be homophobic, even if, Maltese society has become more open and civil marriage is legal since September 2017. In her journal, the student who played the mother's part, who is herself a mother, reflected how she found playing this part disturbing as she could empathize with the mother's pain of having a daughter who is different, knowing full well the challenges that await her daughter and herself due to society's lens of homophobia:

Within the group we decided that the character I was playing would act harshly towards her daughter in an effort to shock some sense into her. Playing the oppressor certainly helped me realize more the hypocrisy of homophobes as I really could find no convincing argument to rebut the daughter's arguments which sounded more genuine and convincing than mine. This exercise made me look deep into myself as, though initially I could resonate with the character being in denial, on reflection I imagined that.... if my daughter were gay, would I really prefer ignorance to reality though? My daughter is my daughter whatever her sexual orientation. People's sexual orientation should be nobody's business but their own. (BT March 2019 journal No. 7)

Theatre is a powerful liberatory tool because theatre is "the art of looking at ourselves" (Boal, 1992, p. 15). It allows space for introspective reflection so we can review our opinions and change the way we think and act: it is essentially about humanizing humanity. TO is a tool for liberation as it requires truth from each person and from within the group. Subsequently TO offers a platform for dialogue with the *spect-actors* who are outside the group in order to deal with the truth, disclose and confront oppressions.

Oppressions can be internal as well as external, that is, sometimes it is not a situation or somebody that is the oppression but it is something within ourselves that oppresses us; such oppressions also block us from growing. These oppressions are ingrained in our past experiences, our culture, our education, our religion, our traditions etc. Originally, Boal's TO methods in Brazil were intended to act as a "rehearsal for a revolution" (Boal, 1985 [1974], p. 141) against a repressive regime, but subsequently, when he worked in Europe, he found that the European context demanded something different. What was needed here was rehearsals for healing, so TO became more of a therapeutic tool to help people overcome internal oppressions such as loneliness, alienation, suicidal tendencies, moral dictates by the media, peers, etc.

Boal devised a series of TO exercises that are aimed at overcoming internalized oppressions and in themselves are therapeutic techniques. Boal refers to these exercises as the Cop-in-the-Head which deal with fears that persist even after bad experiences are over and the “oppressors” no longer hold any power over us. An important objective for TO is, in fact, to disarm the “cops in our head.” In *Rainbow of desire*, Boal emphasizes that the goal for TO is

to dynamise. This dynamisation, with the action, which results from it (set off by one *spect-actor* in the name of all), destroys all the blocks which prohibited the realisation of actions such as this. That is, it purifies the *spect-actors*, it produces a catharsis. The catharsis of detrimental blocks! (Boal, 1995, p. 72)

This *spect-actor*-actor collaboration can help determine alternative solutions or achieve a good debate. Newspaper theatre and forum theatre can both be effective tools in the process to promote peace. The point is to promote internal peace through catharsis on an individual level as well as to promote people’s peaceful coexistence on a collective level. Czechoslovakian playwright, dissident and president, Václav Havel’s thinking about this resonates with Boal’s:

Without free, self-respecting, and autonomous citizens there can be no free and independent nations. Without internal peace, that is, peace among citizens and between the citizens and the state, there can be no guarantee of external peace. (Havel, 1986, pt. 1, sct. 9)

Milani, Freire, and Boal’s work is still valid today. All three worked with a community using radical pedagogical processes to empower participants. Theirs was a process that connected individuals in a community by engaging each individual in thought, dialogue, individual and collective reflection and action. Such processes have the potential of raising awareness and impacting not only the individual learners but also their communities because they are about active community and political participation with an aim to changing the culture of violence and injustices and consequently promoting peace.

Notes

¹ *catharsis*—literally, ‘purging’; a term Aristotle borrowed from medicine to refer to the arousal and release of emotion through dramatic narrative.

² *dianoia*—a thinking through, or over, a meditation, **reflecting**.

³ Praxis—theoretically reflective action.

⁴ *spect-actor*—Augusto Boal’s coined this term to mean fusion of spectator and actor, a spectator who reflects and also takes action.

⁵ *conscientização*—Freire’s Portuguese term for conscientization.

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