

Spaces of Courage

Diary of the training course



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**IT TAKES COURAGE TO SPEAK OUT
ABOUT INJUSTICE IN THE SPOTLIGHT.
IT TAKES COURAGE TO PRESENT
OUR STORIES ON STAGE.
IT TAKES COURAGE TO OCCUPY PUBLIC
SPACES WITH OUR STORIES.
IT TAKES COURAGE TO STOP VIOLENCE.
IT TAKES COURAGE TO STOP EXPLOITATION.
IT TAKES COURAGE TO STOP INEQUALITY.
SOLIDARITY TAKES COURAGE!
CONNECTING TAKES COURAGE.
PEOPLE NEED COURAGE.
CULTURE NEEDS COURAGE.
PEOPLE AND CULTURE NEED
SPACES OF COURAGE.**

**PLUCK UP YOUR COURAGE!
GIVE IT SPACE!**

Introduction

About the project Spaces of Courage

Written by KUD Transformator

Based on the experience of the partners included in the project and the experiences of the coordinator of the project, who has been working actively in youth work and Theatre of the Oppressed for the last 10 years in Slovenia and abroad, it is clear that Theatre of the Oppressed methodology, even if very efficient for handling diverse social problems, is not known enough and sufficiently applied as a method of youth work across Europe. Thus the aim of the Spaces of Courage project was also to contribute to a wider recognisability and widening of the network of practitioners of the Forum Theatre method, beyond those who are already familiar with it.

The main objective of the project Spaces of Courage was to strengthen the competencies of youth workers, working with the Theatre of the Oppressed methods (especially Forum theatre), through the exchange of knowledge, experiences and skills between partner organisations. The method of Forum theatre, which was the focus of the training, is a widely recognized method of socially engaged theatre, created in the 70s by the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal. Its main aim is to democratise theatre practice, create tools for channelling the political voice of marginalised social groups and contribute to a wider discussion and awareness about different social problems.

This means that on the one hand, the project's objective was focused on improving the skills regarding the method itself and widening the political and social awareness of the youth workers through horizontal learning processes. On the other hand, it also had a deeper aim to encourage social awareness, empowerment and inclusion of young (marginalised) people into social and political processes through the work of youth workers beyond this project.

Partners in the project: KUD Transformator, Theater der Unterdrückten – Wien, Tartaruga Falante – Associação, CENTAR ZA KAZALIŠTE POTLAČENIH-POKAZ, DIALOGOS e.V.), Les Polymorphistes, ASSOCIAZIONE MOE'

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How to read this diary?

Written by Kristina Debenjak for the editorial team

The pages in front of you are a description of what took place and what was shared in the project Spaces of Courage that took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia from the 15th to the 21st of August 2023.

During this time, there were forum theatre plays from different Theatre of the Oppressed groups presented. Each forum theatre play was followed by a Forum Lab session the next day. In the Forum Lab, we analysed the forum performance we saw the day before and put into practice the possibilities of reflecting on and further developing this performance, trying out proposals and exchanging experience, knowledge and approaches between participants. In the process of exploring the forum performance, we exchanged different approaches to working on everything from the aesthetics of Theatre of the Oppressed, dramaturgy, jokering, audience participation, diverse approaches to democracy and non-hierarchical organisation, community development, etc.

In the following chapters, we collected the descriptions of the three most representative forum theatre plays to gain knowledge of the diversity of groups, topics, contexts and approaches to this method. Each forum play is followed by a diary of the forum play that was performed and the Forum Lab analysing and reflecting on it.

1

ABOUT THE FORUM PLAY: Through The Roof!

By Laboratório de Teatro & Política, Porto, Portugal

Maria shares a flat in Porto with two friends. They are waiting for the stability of at least one proper rental contract. The landlord's proposal arrives on Maria's 36th birthday, with an additional 300 euros added to the agreed rent. Maria and her friends cannot afford this. Viable options are scarce. Maria attempts to rally the neighbours. What can one do when caught between the threat of eviction and the prospect of homelessness? Where does solidarity find a home?

The creation of the forum play started in 2022, at the epicentre of the housing crisis in Portugal. The fundamental right to housing, enshrined in the 1976 Constitution, has been ignored over the last few decades. Low wages do not allow people to cope with the rents imposed by real estate speculation. In the last 10 years, [the average price per square metre increased by 124%](#). We are witnessing a strong gentrification movement, motivated by the increase in tourism - which has caused the number of Airbnb and short-term rentals to soar - and by the lack of control over rents.

In a country where the minimum wage is 760 euros, [56% of the workers \(in 2022\) monthly received less than 1000 euros](#) - a percentage that rises to 65% with young people - it is located in the [European capital where incomes registered the biggest increase in the first half of 2023](#). Portugal is the 17th country in the European Union regarding low wages. In Lisbon, you have to spend 82% of your income to rent a house and 74% in Porto.



Photo: Urša Rahne

This generates a spiral of inequality regarding the distribution of wealth, which is transferred to the younger generations. In “Through the Roof!”, we see a dialogue between two young women, one of whom owns the flat, because she inherited it, while the other one is a tenant, who does not have access to the main support system in a capitalist system: property. Adding to the circumstances, the other woman is an immigrant coming from Brazil, a country that was colonised by Portugal. Thus, the confrontation between their experiences of the world and their speeches are symptoms of a structural abyss, which the circumstances expose, update and reinforce. This is visible in their choreography, in what moves them, in how they move, as well as in the plasticity of time. Almost half of the Generation Z (people born between 1995 and 2004) and 31% of millennials (people born between 1982 and 1994) [have to hold two jobs](#). However, this fragmentation does not allow them to make long-term financial commitments, such as buying a house or starting a family, for example. Inequality in access to housing in urban centres, which pushes people to the outskirts, translates into unequal access to goods and services

Although the dialogue on housing has existed since the genesis of the LTP (Theatre and Politics Laboratory), it was in September 2022, with the beginning of the school year, that the group began the process of creating this play. With the skyrocketing prices for student rentals converging with the lack of public housing responses, many students face severe difficulties. The average price for a student room rose 10.5% in the last year. [Renting a room in Porto costs, on average, 425 euros per month and 450 euros in Lisbon. Public university residences guarantee beds for only 14% of the students.](#) This scenario has led many young people to abandon their academic careers. The house houses the future.

In this context, LTP carried out the “[Open House](#)” performance - where several “real estate agents” invited passers-by to visit a camping tent, presenting the advantages of renting it and the required conditions. This action was carried out in front of the main building of the University of Porto, due to its centrality. At the same time, anyone crossing the square was invited to write a postcard to Porto’s City Council.



Photo: Urša Rahne

Following this action, the group continued its discussion on housing, using tools such as Photovoice, gathering journalist articles and image theatre. Stories were collected from the various members of the group and the construction of a forum theatre piece began.

During this process, LTP organised a [crowdfunding campaign](#) to bring to the city of Porto the “[Kantata do Tecto Incerto](#)” - a polyphonic piece about housing, “a spoken and sung chorus that raises voices against the unbridled attack on the right to housing”. “Kantata” was [presented](#) in Porto on November 27, 2022.

The construction of the piece Through the Roof was completed in mid-March 2023, at the time of the biggest demonstration about housing that Portugal has seen to date. The demonstration was organised at the national level by the movement “Casa para Viver”, in collaboration with the collective “Chão das Lutas”. In Porto, the demonstration was organised by the association “Habitação Hoje”, which invited LTP to present the play during an event for the demonstration preparation.

What happened? Reflection on the forum

Written by Daphné Vannatenhoven-Mortier

Introduction

We started outside and we played a warm-up game called “house/resident/tempest”, then we went inside so that the play could start. The joker explained that they change the distribution of the roles all the time.

Scenes

In the first scene, we see a woman performing her daily and repetitive activities; her life, hopes and goals are explained by a narrator. There is some music. The energy and the speed of the protagonist go up and up. In the audience, we understand some themes of the play: how it is to live in Porto (public transport, precarious housing, job flexibility).

In the second scene, the protagonist meets with her landlord’s daughter. We understand that she (and her roommates) have been living in the flat without a contract. The daughter seems to be better off, since she just came back from a holiday in India. She announces that they will sign a contract now. She speaks about yoga, seems nice, compliments the protagonist and also tells her that the rent is going to increase by 300 euros because of taxes; she needs an answer quickly. At first happy, the protagonist tries to negotiate, but the yoga lady has an answer for everything (Airbnb, etc.).

The third scene depicts the protagonist’s birthday. We understand that it is cold and the flatmates are trying to save on energy. They are talking about the rent increase and some



Photo: Urša Rahne

solutions are examined: one flatmate could go and live in her granny's house, but it is rather far, another one suggests to find one more flatmate, but there is not enough space. A character from a different apartment arrives and proposes that they should all just squat the building, but this does not seem to be a good idea for all. Finally, they get the idea to organise a petition.

The fourth scene takes place still in the building, we see the protagonist speaking to a neighbour. He is not implicated in their struggling, he says that he has people at home, and does not want to get in any trouble.

The final scene is a building meeting, but only two people are present. What to do now? Who is going to do anything?

Forum

Joker's Interlude

Another actor (José) replaces the first joker who introduced us to the play (Amarilis); he asks what we saw and if we detected any problems there. The word "gentrification" pops up quickly. He asks if this kind of situation also happens in our home cities. Someone points out that self-organisation is hard.

Then, we talk more about the situation and the personality of the owner's daughter. Afterwards, we discuss the man who does not want to be involved. Finally, we conclude that there are some global difficulties for people to be involved in the conflict and fight.



Photo: Urša Rahne

Interventions

The first intervention is about replacing the protagonist at the party. She tries to convince the others not to pay their rent any more. She claims that the owner will not go to the police, since she is not renting them the place legally. But all the bills are in her name. They are afraid to be left without energy. Maybe they could act on the fact that the owner has not been paying taxes for years, but they do not have any proof of that.

In the audience, someone says that this is a blackmail.

The second intervention is made by two persons. They want to reach out to an expert. They play out the dialogue between this expert and the protagonist, they are talking about organising a collective lawsuit.

With the audience, we talk about how we could go further (campaign, media, how to communicate with people from other apartments?)

The third intervention is about finding allies to go to a housing protest, but “the protest won’t give me a house”. People from the building conclude that the protagonist should talk to the owner’s daughter.

When she does so, she connects with her, using the same language as she does. In the end, we do not know what is going to be the final decision, even when the daughter shows empathy. In the audience, we talk about the root of the problem, capitalism, private property, and the laws in Porto. What should we do from that perspective?

The audience has many ideas, such as joining a political party, or housing cooperatives,... and the joker concludes by saying that to do a forum play is also a way to talk about a problem!

Conclusion and transversal comments

The joker was leading a lot of the play, asking a lot of questions: because of the goal of the play, he wanted to avoid non-systemic solutions (for example: going to grandma’s).

It was interesting that he always asked the audience about how it was in their countries, especially in front of an international audience. On the other hand, maybe we were missing some clarifications about the laws in Portugal.

Globally, it was an inspiring example (in my opinion) of a forum play: the rhythm, the care, the aesthetics, and the work of the actors/actresses, ... Maybe some of the interventions should have been given more time to get into more concrete action.

FORUM LAB TOPIC: Aesthetics of the Oppressed - LAYERS OF CONVEYING A STORY

Written by Metka Bahlen Okoli

The aesthetics of Theatre of the Oppressed weaves together a captivating fabric of artistic elements, crafting a distinctive and potent medium that drives social change. Various elements intertwine to create a multi-dimensional experience that encourages critical thinking, empathy, and transformative action. Rejecting conventional notions of polished performances, this form of theatre embraces authenticity and spontaneity, culminating in unscripted interactions that mirror the rawness of real life. Within the context of forum theatre, these aesthetics serve a specific purpose: to cultivate an immersive experience that resonates profoundly with both participants and observers.

When a Theatre of the Oppressed performance is created, we tell the story in many ways. One of the layers is narrative, the performance has a 'script', it takes place in a sequence of events with or without dialogues, through which it is possible to understand what is happening. The second layer is intonation. This one gives us impressions, emotional basis, analogies... The third one is visual. Through scenography and costume design, we communicate the images of the story as experienced by the group (Fritz, 2021).

At the heart of these aesthetics lies the concept of "rehearsal for reality". Rather than striving for flawless presentation, the seldomly deliberate choice to remain unrefined allows the scenes and characters to mirror the complexities of daily existence. Through this departure from traditional theatrical perfection, participants can become engaged at a personal level, finding their own narratives reflected on the stage. The aesthetics of Theatre of the Oppressed encourage a sense of identification and empathy by erasing the boundaries between fiction and reality.

Central to the aesthetics is the notion of interaction. Spectators cease to be passive onlookers and instead transform into "spect-actors" – active participants who can interrupt the performance, step into the narrative, and propose alternative resolutions to the conflicts presented. This interactive dimension converts the theatre space into a dynamic laboratory, where new concepts are explored, oppressed individuals can challenge their oppressors, and collective brainstorming becomes a conduit for transformation. The aesthetics of interaction dissolve the conventional barriers separating stage and audience, fostering a communal sense of responsibility and empowerment.

Equally pivotal is the use of symbolism and metaphor. Through symbolic gestures, movement, and visual imagery, intricate concepts and systemic dilemmas can be distilled into tangible, relatable forms. This aesthetic approach enables intricate ideas to be communicated with simplicity, enabling performances to be inclusive to diverse audiences while retaining layers of profundity for deeper introspection.

»The creation of one's own aesthetics has a unique role in creating a community of the oppressed, which is often an expression of resistance to aesthetics as dictated by elites. It's about fighting for a world without ruling and creating a community of feelings that opposes the dead mechanism of the state to the living force, a community fueled by the sensual embodiment of its idea« (Rancière, 2012, p. 66).

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Report on Aesthetics of the Oppressed Lab

The laboratory workshop on the Aesthetics of the Oppressed within Theatre of the Oppressed provided a participatory experience that aligned with the aesthetics of this transformative theatrical approach. It emphasised the power of movement, sound and visual symbolism as vehicles for storytelling and social commentary.

It was a focused exploration of the movement, sound and visual elements, key assets of the aesthetics that play a big role in Theatre of the Oppressed. The workshop was designed to immerse participants in the expressive power of movement and visual symbolism, aligning with the philosophy of Theatre of the Oppressed that transcends conventional storytelling and engages participants on multiple sensory levels.

The workshop started with exercises aimed at unlocking the expressive potential of movement. Using the Ghanaian song “Che Che Kule” as a catalyst, participants embarked on a journey through various emotional states. This exercise not only emphasised the role of movement in conveying emotions but also showcased the universality of nonverbal communication. It underscored how the body becomes a canvas for storytelling, a vital element within the aesthetics of Theatre of the Oppressed.



Photo: Urša Rahne

Another aspect of the workshop involved the use of props from the performance and other relevant objects to explore power relations. By placing these objects within the workshop space, participants reflected the dynamics of oppression and resistance. This exercise emphasised the significance of visual symbolism and physical interactions as means of conveying complex social issues. It also highlighted how simple objects could be transformed into metaphors.

The laboratory culminated in smaller group activities where participants were proposing solutions to improve specific scenes from the forum performance. This phase of the workshop encouraged collaborative brainstorming and experimentation, aligning with the interactive dimension of Theatre of the Oppressed's aesthetics. Participants engaged in dynamic discussions, exploring how movement and visual elements could be involved to convey the desired messages and emotions within the performance.

The focus on movement and visual elements reinforced the understanding that these aesthetics are not mere decorations but integral tools for communicating narratives and fostering engagement. By immersing participants in the physical and visual dimensions of storytelling, the workshop demonstrated how Theatre of the Oppressed transcends traditional forms of communication, encouraging a holistic understanding of the issues at hand.

2

ABOUT THE FORUM PLAY **Captive Chains: Unravelling State Violence**

By Resilient Revolt Vienna - TdU Wien, Austria

Short video: <https://fb.watch/mD6lY9xvCl/>

The performance “Captive Chains: Unravelling State Violence” is the outcome of a long internal process within Resilient Revolt Vienna, which is a collective that is part of TdU Wien. Since the regular rehearsal group was created a year and a half ago, our main goal has been to establish a stable and long-lasting group where we can rehearse, organise workshops, and perform on the subject of climate justice.

Through a process of collective vision at the beginning of the year 2023, our group has established its goals and areas of focus for the forthcoming year. They featured topics like safe mobility, freedom of movement, housing as a public good, feminist utopias, or state brutality and the necessity to deal with its roots. Following this, we had rehearsals where we explored our personal experiences regarding some of the subjects we were interested in working on. Questions like, “When was the last time you faced/witnessed injustice?” were used as cues to create brief forum scenes of no more than 2-3 minutes in duration in small groups. With these rehearsals, we established a repertory of short forum situations that we wanted to focus on in more depth in our next meetings. Due to a dynamic group with new members coming



Photo: Urša Rahne

every week, our group faced troubles exploring the situations that had been developed during previous rehearsals in deeper detail. Nonetheless, we continued to meet once a week on Thursdays at the same time to work on and elaborate on the forum scenes we had, attempting to develop the characters and dramaturgy of each scene.

At the beginning of June, we got together to discuss the rehearsals from the previous months once more and work on drawing a red line between the many forum scenes we had developed. We decided to continue working on three of these forum scenes, which included a scene of a Ukrainian doctor who has just arrived to Vienna, Austria, and is being discriminated against by a staff member at the job centre (Arbeitsmarktservice - AMS) who refuses to speak English. A second scene features two police officers racially profiling a person of colour on a train and requesting their identification. A white bystander watches the scene, unsure of how to react. The final scene depicts a court trial for a climate justice activist accused of resisting arrest and violent conduct toward a police officer at a protest that took place in Vienna in defence of the Lobau natural reserve in February 2022.

It appears to us that the violence of state institutions, in all of its varied manifestations, whether it be through bureaucracy, police, or judiciary apparatus, was a common factor in all of these instances. The challenges also lay in identifying the oppressor or the roots of these oppressions, which are related to the power of the State. The forum theatre thus sought to bring to the public the tough work of questioning where there is a potential for intervention and how we could act and combat the maintenance of State oppression in its various manifestations.

Meanwhile, some questions arose over this performance. First, we faced uncertainty about how to present our performance, make connections across the many forum scenes, and tie them to one another. Developing filler scenes between each of the forum plays helped us make transitions between them.

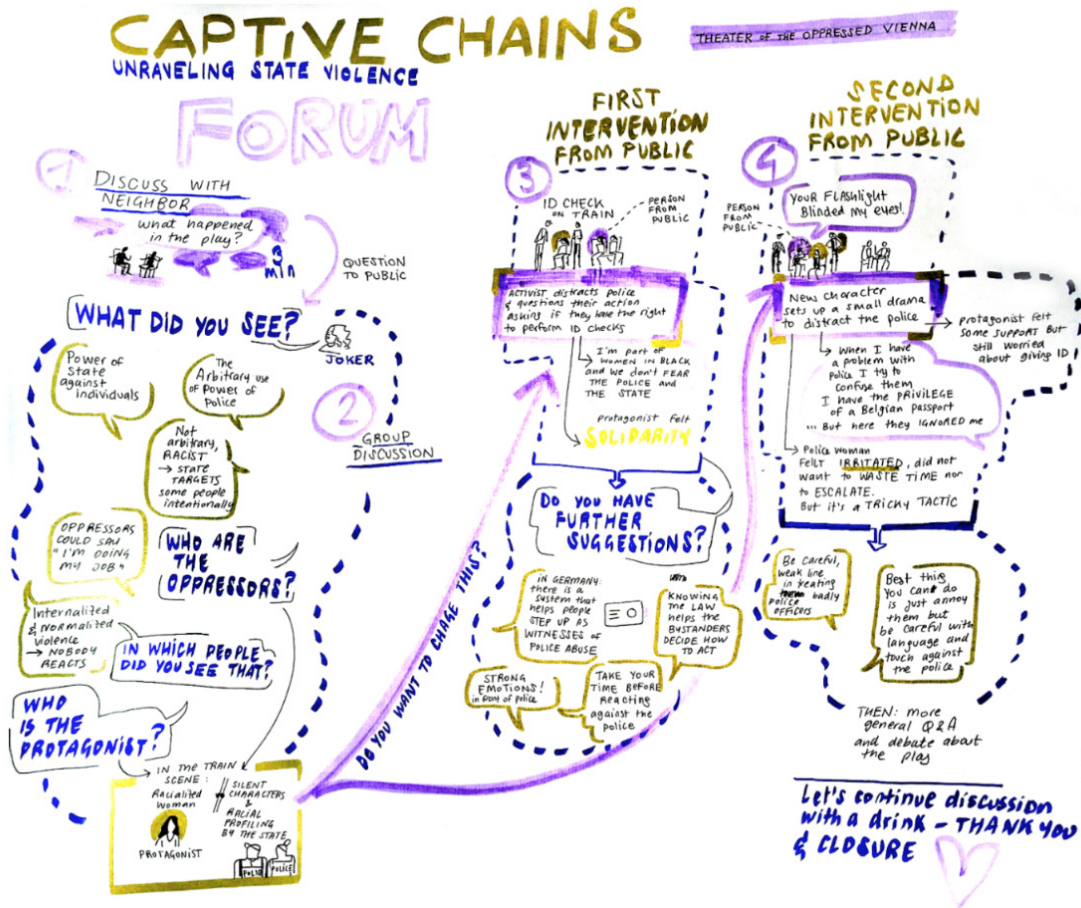


Photo: Urša Rahne

The second forum scene with the racial profiling aboard the train was the one we were most uncertain about. This scene came about as a result of the experience of a white bystander who was confronted by and witnessed racial profiling on a train without knowing how to react or express support for BIPOC people. White people were therefore the target audience for the forum scene, which asked how to react and stand in solidarity with BIPOC people under such circumstances. There were several discussions over whether we should keep working on this scene. Since our group is entirely white, we are aware that we are not being singled out for racial profiling and are not consequently experiencing this from the standpoint of the oppressed. After many talks, we decided to keep the scene and to document our forum scene and include the documentary theatre technique to provide the perspective of BIPOC persons in the play. Looking back on the festival and the inputs of the forum labs, we realised that there are many other ways in which we could have presented this topic without playing the role of a BIPOC person.

What happened? Reflection on the forum

Written and designed by Norma Nardi



FORUM

// Joker asks the audience to discuss with their neighbour what they've just seen in the play.

JOKER addresses the plenary:

What did you see?

AUDIENCE reacts in pop-corn style:

- > The power of the state against individuals.
- > The arbitrary use of power by the police.
- > Not arbitrary, but rather racist. The state targets some people intentionally.
- > The oppressors can always say that they were just doing their job.
- > Internalised and normalised violence: Nobody reacts.

JOKER:

In which characters did you see normalised violence?

JOKER:

Who is the protagonist?

AUDIENCE:

> In the train scene, the protagonist is the woman who gets her ID checked. Antagonists are the silent bystanders, and the Police represent the racial profiling of the state.

// Clarification: The actor is white, but the character in the story is racialized.

JOKER:

Do you want to change what happens in the train scene?

FIRST INTERVENTION

// One person from the audience takes on the role of a bystander in the scene (another train passenger). This character is now an activist who distracts the police by questioning their actions and asking whether they have the right to perform ID checks.

ACTOR FROM THE AUDIENCE:

I am part of the movement Women in Black and we don't fear the police or the state

PROTAGONIST ACTOR:

Through this intervention, I felt solidarity

JOKER:

Do you have any further suggestions?

AUDIENCE reacts in pop-corn style:

- > Knowing the law helps the bystanders decide how to act
- > In Germany, there is a system that supports people in stepping up when they witness police abuse. You can get a cheatsheet of what to do printed in credit-card size, so you have it on you when needed
- > Strong emotions can rise in these situations!
- > Take your time before reacting to the police

SECOND INTERVENTION

// One person from the audience becomes a new bystander in the scene (a train passenger sitting next to the main character). The new character distracts the police by complaining that their flashlights have blinded him.

ACTOR FROM THE AUDIENCE:

When I have a problem with the police, I try to confuse them because I have the privilege of having a Belgian passport. But in this situation, they ended up ignoring me.

PROTAGONIST ACTOR:

I felt supported, but still worried about having to hand out my ID eventually.

POLICEWOMAN ACTOR:

I felt irritated, I did not want to keep wasting my time, and at the same time I did not want the situation to escalate.

...but this is a tricky tactic.

AUDIENCE reacts in pop-corn style:

> Be careful: treating police officers with contempt can end up being a weak tactic.

> In some situations, the best you can do is to just annoy them. But be careful with language and with any kind of physical contact.

// Audience and actors get into a general Q&A and debate about the play.

JOKER:

Let's close the forum and continue the conversation over a drink.

FORUM LAB TOPIC: Dramaturgy

Written by José Soeiro and Josipa Lulić

In the simplest dramaturgical scheme of a forum theatre play, it is common to present the play divided into three moments. The counter-preparation, in which the characters and the relationships between them are presented, and in which it is important to make it clear what the protagonist wants. The Chinese crisis, in which the play's central conflict takes place and is often represented through a one-to-one scene confronting the oppressed character/protagonist with the oppressor, in which the oppressed character fights for what they desire through an action in which they confront the oppressor/agent of oppression. And finally, the closure, in which the protagonist is defeated in his attempt to overcome the situation of oppression presented by the play. This is followed by the forum itself.

This scheme, which is a simplified dramaturgical proposal to help popular and non-professional theatre groups construct their scenes, nevertheless raises a few questions. Firstly, it tends to represent oppression as if it were reduced to an interpersonal relationship expressed at the level of interaction between an oppressed person and an oppressor, making the structural dimensions of the problem less visible. Secondly, it tends to eclipse the multiple social and institutional spaces in which oppression is produced and reproduced. Thirdly, when the scheme is realised in its simplest form, it tends to produce forums that are not particularly interesting.

This dramaturgical scheme produces forums that are not very interesting because they mostly stimulate just four types of interventions by spect-actors that should be the object of critical questioning and whose responsibility lies precisely, to a large extent, in the dramaturgy of the problem presented. These interventions can be classified into four categories.

The first one is audience interventions based on **individual heroism**: as the scene presents the oppressed confronting their oppressor alone, the audience is invited to perform interventions in which, through mere individual behaviour, they heroically confront the oppressor in order to defeat them, thus overshadowing interventions of a more collective nature concentrated on small operations of persuasion and the forming of alliances.

The second category comprises interventions that attempt to convert the oppressor through **empathy**: instead of unbalancing the power relationship in favour of the oppressed, or questioning the imbalance that the structures of oppression produce in terms of social roles and forms of domination, the protagonist tries to convince the oppressor through empathy to stop exercising their power, which generally results in some kind of a magical solution.

The third category is interventions marked by **abstract symbolism**: since the structures of oppression are not represented through multiple concrete mediations, the spect-actor enters the scene and verbally or through images decrees certain processes, which are represented

declaratively or symbolically, and not constructed in the minutiae of their operations. For example, spect-actors announce that they are going to strike, decree that they are going to occupy, or represent, through metaphorical interventions, a movement to oust the oppressor; the solutions are declared or performed only abstractly, but we do not know anything about how they can actually be produced.

The fourth category is the strategy of **individual escape from the situation**: instead of fighting the power relations that engender oppression, the spect-actor takes the place of the protagonist who confronts the oppressor in order to try to escape oppression, to evade it, while keeping the oppressive power relations unchanged.

To find alternatives to these problems, Julian Boal (Boal, 2023) has proposed dramaturgical models that are based on two major changes. The first is to avoid scenes that represent oppression through individual one-to-one conflicts between the oppressed and the oppressor. On the contrary, he proposes to represent the Chinese crisis through scenes whose spaces are the **upstream pillars that produce the situations of oppression**, rather than the clashing events between the oppressed and the oppressor. The second is to make the scenes that are subject to the forum essentially those that pit the protagonist against possible allies, who can either be the agents of reproduction of the oppressive situation through their passivity or their reproduction of the values and structures of oppression, or who hesitate due to fear or disbelief or concrete material constraints, to show solidarity with the actions of struggle and confrontation that the protagonist proposes and for which he tries to mobilise them.

In the feminist theatre of the oppressed (more information can be found on <https://teatrodelasoprimidas.org> as well as in the book by Bárbara Santos - *Teatro das oprimidas*), several elements are crucial to the proposals for a new dramaturgy. The protagonist: feminist theatre of the oppressed is investigating the possibility of creating a collective protagonist in order to emphasise the structural dimension of the issue, as well as to create the ground for collective interventions in the forum part. The stress on the collective is not only coming from the abstract feminist perspective. A structure that allows the intervention of a single person who is able to come in as a superman/woman and resolve the issue, not only supports the patriarchal worldview but is in the end impotent. Society can only change, as it was mentioned before in J. Boal's analysis, through collective political organising. Another dimension of feminist dramaturgy is the emphasis put on the presentation of the structural context in which the scene is taking place. In order to discuss that structural context and take it into account, the story that shows the central question of the play is to be nested in the deep (and often aesthetic) analysis of the wider structural/political/systemic context.

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Report on Dramaturgy Lab

Written by Amarilis Felizes

GAMES

We started with a simple walking exercise, trying to find a dynamic balance, filling up the space in the room, while at the same time constantly moving. We added instructions (stop! go!), and we also played with the instructions (go means stop, stop means go - in order to also wake up our attention). The next step was to take away the instruction from the outside, so that the group had to make a collective decision on when to stop and when to move, without speaking.

DISCUSSION ON THE FORUM THEATRE PLAY

What do you believe was the central question of yesterday's play?

"How to fight against the power of the state?", "How to fight against police violence?"

It is important for a forum theatre play to have a clear, strong, evident, well-defined question.

Exercise

1 - If the main theme of the play was the power of the state, take turns to create a movement and sound that characterises or symbolises it.

(One person performs a movement/sound, and everyone else repeats until there are four of them)

2 - Everyone walks around the space and performs the movements/sounds as indicated by their respective numbers (1, 2, 3, 4).

3 - Number sequences can be indicated (1,1,2,3, ..., 3,3,4,1, ..., etc).

4 - In groups, within five minutes, create scenes or stories using only these four movements/sounds.

Discussion on these scenes (What did you see? Who would be the protagonist? Who are the other characters?).

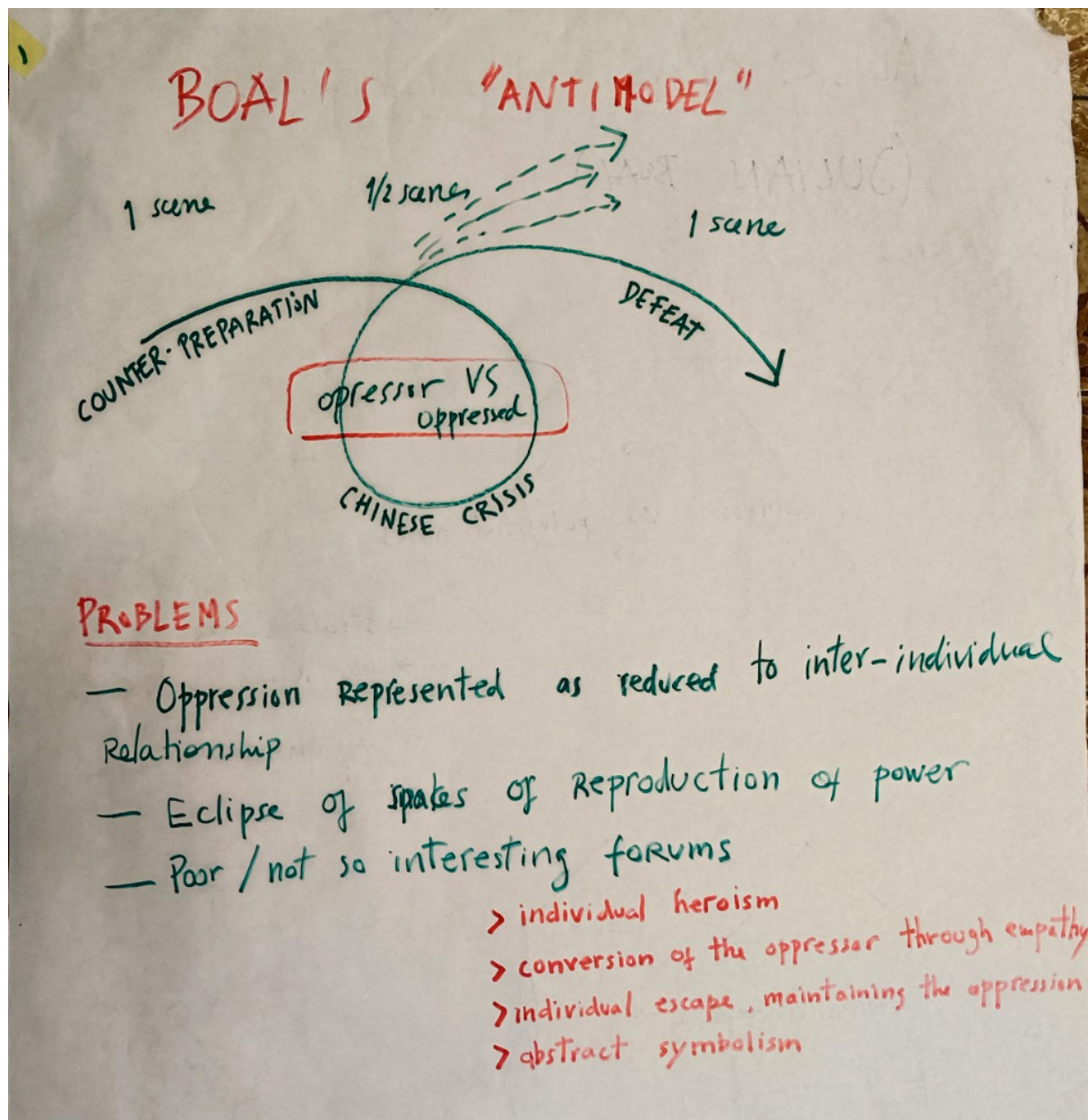
The protagonists/oppressed are the characters that resist, the others are the ones who prohibit or decide; public officials or public institutions, border guards, police, etc. Those "who sometimes resist, other times are also agents of repression."

DRAMATURGY OF A FORUM THEATRE PLAY

Brainstorming about what we need in a forum theatre play:

Actors, audience (spect-actors), a social problem, oppression, need for change, desire for change, attempts/actions to make a change, a question, ...

Presentation of Augusto Boal's dramaturgical model for a forum theatre play:



1 - The counter-preparation

Presentation of the characters and the relationships between them, the problem and the will of the protagonist.

2 - Chinese crisis

The central conflict between the oppressed character/protagonist and the oppressor/agent of oppression, which is often presented through a one-to-one scene.

3 - Closure

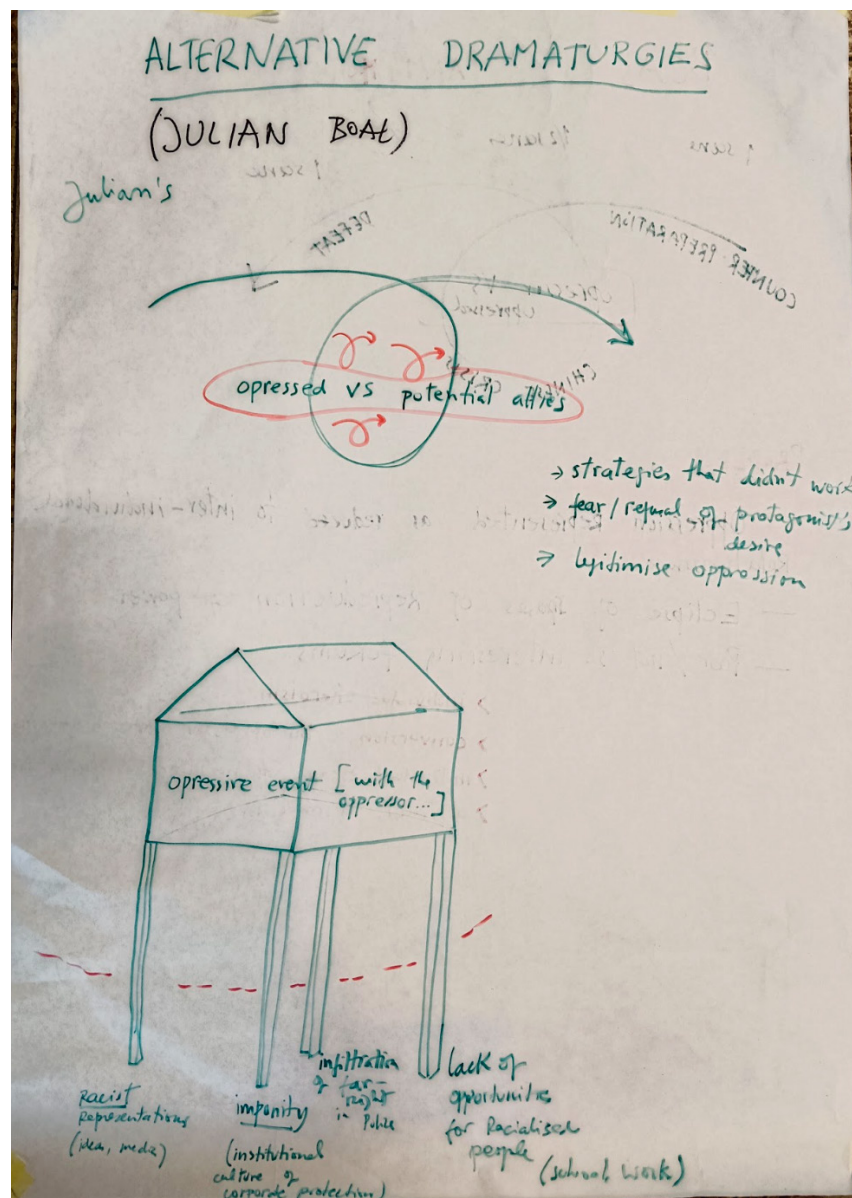
The protagonist is defeated in their attempt to overcome the situation of oppression presented in the play.

Discussion – Possible problems and challenges

- It individualises the problem.
- It puts too much emphasis on the actions of the protagonist.
- It tends to represent oppression as an interpersonal relationship.
- It doesn't show the structural dimensions of the problem, like the multiple social and institutional spaces in which oppression is produced and reproduced.
- It tends to produce forum interventions less useful for dealing with the problem (see J. Soeiro categories of interventions).

Disclaimer: This model was devised because it was important for Boal to have a simple and quickly reproducible model for people to represent their experiences with. It's also important to note that the heroic individualist action and the exemplary action were models valued by the struggling left movements during the 1970s.

An alternative dramaturgical proposal:



- Avoid centring the play solely on the conflict between the oppressed and the oppressor. This might not be the moment when things can change.
- Create scenes between the protagonist and their potential allies (characters who share the same needs but not necessarily the same desires or that have material objections preventing them from taking certain actions or who are the agents of oppression but are in solidarity with the problem, etc.).

The goal is to create scenes where the distribution of power is somewhat more balanced, where there is a genuine possibility for new proposals and actions. Another goal is also to communalize the problem and its potential solutions.

EXERCISE: WORKING ON THE FORUM THEATRE PLAY SCENES

In groups create or recreate a scene from the forum theatre play in a way that highlights the structures that sustain the oppression.

Examples of the recreation or transformation of two scenes:

Scene 1

Reenactment of a dinner with the family of the person who has helped the Ukrainian girl at the job centre.

Discussion: The new scene brings contradictions (the father complains about immigrants but celebrates the hiring of a new foreign player for his football club), and it is good to introduce additional characters to interact with.

Scene 2

Reenactment of a children's game, a bit violent.

Discussion: The scene reveals the roots of toxic masculinity, exclusion, and violence, illustrating how we are taught to be strong and aggressive.

3

ABOUT THE FORUM PLAY: *I'm Not Racist But*

by the Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed (POKAZ), Zagreb, Croatia

The forum theatre play *I'm Not Racist But* was devised under the umbrella of POKAZ's Kazališni jezik/Language of Theatre (KJ, LT) initiative. LT began as a project aiming to support and facilitate the acquisition of Croatian as a foreign language through the techniques and methods of TO; it was intended for foreign nationals in the country, but also aimed to widen its scope to native populations with poor access to Croatian language education, such as the Roma community in Međimurje. Both the need and demand for such a project proved to be high, and LT soon grew into an entire section within POKAZ, offering basic courses of Croatian language and speaking practice, along with the TO practice.

I'm Not Racist But consists of true stories that reflect the lived experiences of the LT courses and lab participants. These stories illustrate instances of racism, xenophobia and discrimination that foreigners, especially those perceived as non-White, encounter in everyday life in Croatia. The question of language is particularly prominent not only because the play originated in a language-teaching environment, but also because it is a hard pressing issue for most of the people concerned. While Croatian is needed to navigate through the country's exceptionally complex bureaucracy, there are no consistent publicly-funded courses available - a fact which employers often take advantage of.



Photo: Urša Rahne

The scenes and vignettes that we devised based on these stories are intertwined by aesthetic practices such as singing, dancing and rhythmic movement. This aesthetic layer is not intended solely as a connective tissue, or as a shortcut for incorporating documentary material into the theatrical form: we have attempted to make it into an indispensable part of the examination and questioning of oppression onstage, in no way inferior to the verbal layer.

Although thus far we have performed the play with six performers, the total number of people that participated in the making of the scene is closer to twenty. Unfortunately, most of them were unable to attend the training, for reasons tied precisely to their legal status: travel restrictions, work obligations, visa specifications, etc. However, we still considered it important to show the play.

What happened? Reflection on the forum

Written by Leonel Silva

Warm-up

The warm-up happened inside the building. First, the spectators were given paper so that anyone who wished it could write solutions or comments that came to their minds during the play and later, during the forum.

The play

The play was divided into smaller scenes in which the audience was confronted with different kinds of racist actions that happened in Croatia to the people who are part of the Theatre of the Oppressed group. And there was a very nationalist feeling accompanying the oppressors. It started with a children's game with chairs in which people were being thrown out of the game, and their chairs were removed so there was no more place for them.

In another scene, we saw racism at a supermarket, where a shop owner had higher prices for immigrants.

Afterwards, there was racism in housing, where the owner of an apartment did not want to rent it when they knew the name of the interested man because he was not Croatian.

In another scene, we saw the boss of an enterprise telling the migrant worker to sign a working contract, but as it was written in Croatian only, the worker was not able to read it... It turned out that it was a document to fire him!



Photo: Urša Rahne

Another scene was some kind of manifestation where we could see police authority and violence against migrants.

...

The play was like an ongoing process which was not finished and where each of the small pieces could be further developed to make an individual forum theatre play.

The Forum

The joker explained that the stories came from people who were part of the theatre group but due to Croatian laws, because they were immigrants, they were not authorised to go to Slovenia to participate.

The audience was once again divided into small groups; each group was invited to choose one of the scenes and think about potential solutions and how to do the scene differently later onstage.

Some groups went onstage and presented what they discussed in the small groups.



Created by Norma Nardi

FORUM LAB TOPIC: Building characters

Written by José Soeiro

Character construction is essential if a theatre-forum play is to present a problem in a way that is complex and capable of provoking an interesting forum. One of the biggest problems with poorly constructed characters is the tendency to present them as one-dimensional, flat and without inner contradictions. What makes the difference in a forum is precisely the ability to present and provoke a real dialectical game.

To do this, it is important to work on the characters in three dimensions

Firstly, the action that the protagonist takes to combat the oppression that he or she is experiencing must be clear: without this, we are dealing with a character who will tend to be a passive victim of his or her circumstances and therefore lack the preconditions necessary for the forum to be useful and interesting. Also, the protagonist has to have a principal desire that is expressed through action but he or she also needs to have counter-wills, contradictory desires and a complex network of material constraints that condition his or her ability to act.



Photo: Urša Rahne

Secondly, in order not to represent oppression as an individual issue in terms of interaction with the single oppressor, it is important to work on the characters of potential allies, in the multiplicity of their desires, hesitations and material constraints. These are characters who may or may not ally themselves with the oppressed, but who must be worked through multiple images capable of representing their variations: they want to join the oppressed, but they do not do it; they want to,

but there are reasons why they cannot; they could, but they are not convinced that this is the fairest or most effective strategy; they could, but they would have to overcome a set of barriers that their material conditions of existence also put in their way.

Finally, there is no worse character for an oppressor or agent of oppression than one who is represented in a flat, one-sided way and without any contradictions. The antagonists always have reasons for wanting to maintain situations of oppression, be these material reasons, which result from the benefit they derive from that situation of oppression, or ideological reasons, which also have to do with their beliefs, values, representations, etc. When preparing the play, we have to investigate and understand in depth the material and ideological reasons of the antagonists - and put all these reasons on stage.

A play with flat characters, in which only a conflict of wills is represented or in which the relationship between the oppressed and the agents of oppression is represented as if they were only in the realm of morality - the characters who maintain oppression do so because they are evil, morally deformed or prejudiced - is a necessarily uninteresting forum, which will not work as a dialectical game of improvisation between actors and protagonist and will not help us to find more tools for transforming the world, as it does not allow us to deepen our understanding of the reasons and social relations that sustain oppression, but only confirms our good morals that oppose the lack of will, intelligence or goodness of the oppressors, which is a totally distorted representation of the social world and an obstacle to intervening in the concrete roots of its functioning.

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Report Lab: Building the characters

Written by Claudia Signoretti

Games

Game 1

Everybody is given a secret number from 1 to 20 (i.e. the total number of participants) on a small piece of paper.

The facilitator calls out two of the numbers (for example, numbers 2 and 18). The two persons having the called numbers try to hug each other, while the rest of the group has to prevent that from happening. No words are allowed, only body movements.

Game 2

The group randomly walks through the space and, without any indication from the facilitator, when someone stops, all the group stops, when someone walks, everybody walks.

Game 3

The group randomly walks through the space. When the facilitator says “Stop”, the whole group stops and follows their instructions:

Touch the shoulder of the person next to you with one of your hands.

Touch the foot of the person farthest away from you with your foot.

With your other hand, touch a third person.

In the second and third rounds of the game, participants can propose other body parts. For example:



Photo: Urša Rahne

Round 2:

Touch another person's ear with your elbow.

Touch another person's hand with your hand.

Touch another person's back with your finger.

Round 3:

Touch another person's hip with your foot.

Touch another person's ear with your hand.

Working on forum theatre scenes**Exercise 1**

Walk and think about a scene from the performance, think about a character: how does that character walk?

Make a movement that identifies this character. When the facilitator says "stop", you freeze and make a statue depicting the character. When the facilitator touches your shoulder, you make a movement and sound typical of this character.

Exercise 2

The group is divided into two sub-groups: on the one side, there is the group made up of those who embody the oppressors, and on the other side the group embodying the oppressed.

Firstly, one group acts and the other one observes.

Everybody finds a spot in the room and starts acting out what the facilitator asks: "In your character role, act out what your character does during the day, 24h, relive the whole day. What does your character do at 5:00-6:00-7:00...?"

After having seen the 24 hours, the facilitator asked the observers:

"What did you think of these characters?"

"How are they?"

"What feelings did you see? "

"Are they in a relationship with some other people?"

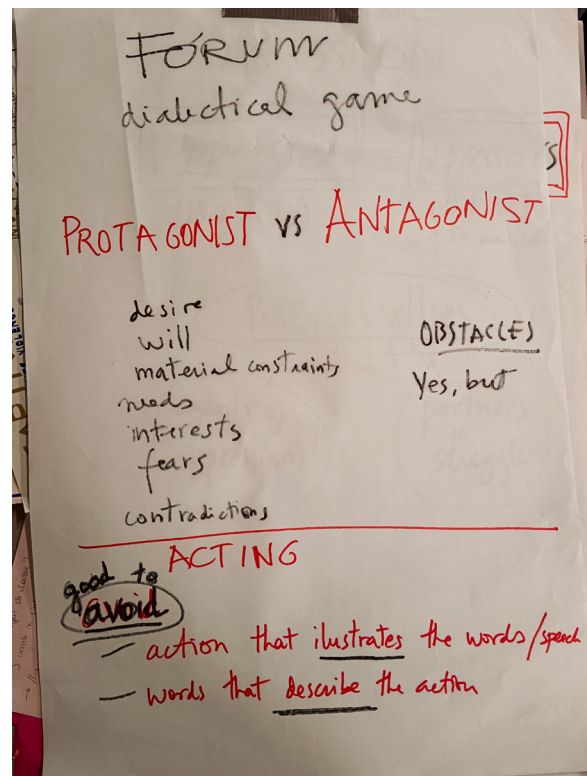
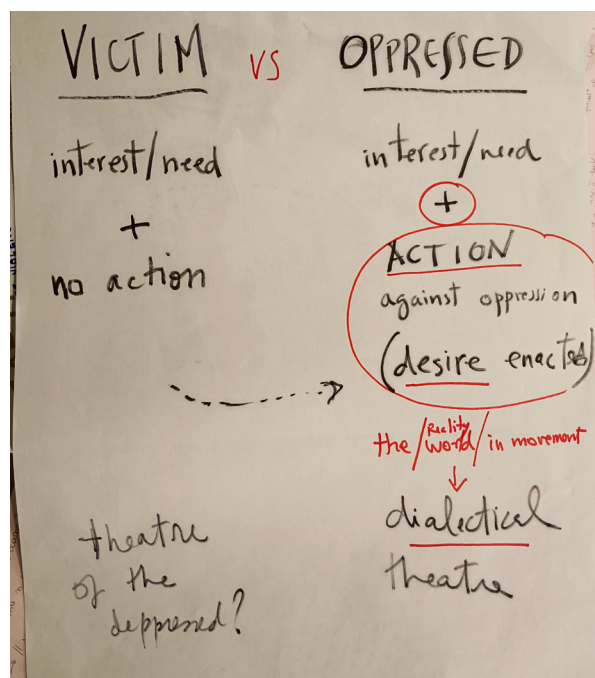
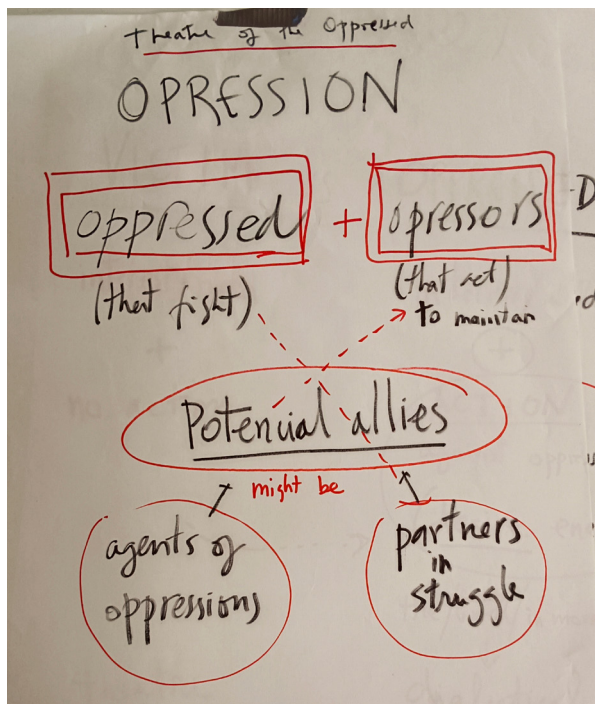
"Are they related to a community?"

After some comments, the two groups switched their roles and those who acted first became observers.

Main comments

About the oppressed: they are being hassled, they sleep badly, have many problems to manage, have no relations with other people, are resigned, mechanised, automatized, loneliness and individualization is noticed.

About the oppressors: there were three kinds of oppressors: 1) the ones struggling a lot with the problems; 2) the careless ones, enjoying themselves without any concerns; 3) those whose life is a flow for them. Generally, they are male, confident, and take up a lot of space. Some are very happy, having the luxury of having/enjoying free time. Some are stressed and never stop working, with a lot of technology.



In a forum theatre (FT) play, there are many kinds of characters.

The Oppressed:

How do we define the oppressed? A victim is someone who has a need and an interest that a situation would change but takes no action to achieve that. The oppressed is someone who has the same interest and need but also takes action to achieve the change. The oppressed are not dominated and passive. They fight, their desire is enacted, and their world is in motion. However, the oppressed do not reach their goal, they are defeated.

If the play just shows the power structure, there are only depressed people and not oppressed. Instead, in forum theatre the power structure is there, but it is challenged by the actions of the oppressed.

The victim is a potential ally of the oppressed because they share the same circumstances and interests.

In forum theatre there is a dialectics, a conflict between the oppressed and the people who act to maintain this oppression.

The potential allies:

The potential allies should not be taken for granted; they are allies. They do not take action but they contribute to the reproduction of oppression. They are agents of oppression but not the oppressors themselves as they are not taking advantage of the oppression. That is why they can break their pattern, while the oppressors cannot because they benefit from the system of oppression.

The oppressor:

The oppressor is the person benefiting from that oppression. He/she/they will never change the situation willingly because they gain from it.

A forum theatre play is a dialectical game between the protagonist and the antagonist, or between the oppressed and the oppressor and/or their potential allies (i.e. all the people interacting with the oppressed).

A forum theatre play is not interesting if the action illustrates what has been said. It is more interesting if it shows the contradiction between words and actions.

How to work on contradictions?

Exercise 1 - the "stop and think" technique

Example of the workplace scene: Signing the Contract.

Play the scene with the "stop and think" technique, to explore the internal monologue of the characters.

Statue of the employer and the employee.

"Stop and think."

"Just sign it!"

"It is in Croatian. I cannot understand anything."

"Stop and think."

"Just sign and go!"

The employee signs.

"Stop and think."

"Perfect! You are fired! You don't work here anymore!"

Exercise 2 - statue, sounds, words

Make two groups, one for the oppressor character and one for the oppressed. In each group, everyone makes an image of what their character is feeling and doing. Make the statue, then add the sound, then the words.

What did you see in these statues?

The oppressed: having bad surprises, panic, shock, hopelessness.

The oppressor: curt, strict, xenophobic.

It is not interesting to have a unidimensional character but one showing all the nuances. For example, for the oppressed showing different emotions means feeling moment by moment. For the oppressor, it means showing a certain action while having another emotion (e.g. the employer is the nicest and kindest person while firing the employee).

When there is no contradiction, the social function is mistaken for the personality. When social function and personality are different (the difference can be either small or big), the oppressor is still oppressing but in a very nice way. In this way, power is not related to the individual personality, because the problem is the power itself, nor if it is exercised in a nice or cruel manner. You can be nice and oppressive at the same time. We have to discuss the social structures of power.

What are the desired actions? How to make it more clear and explicit that a person is not a victim but an oppressed?

Exercise 3 - statues

Make an image of the desired action of the oppressed (before signing the contract). Make a statue of their strategy. Then, make a statue exaggerating this strategy. Then, place these statues in the stage space, close or far from the oppressed according to the extent that they are realistic and desired.

You can incorporate different statues of a character in building the roles of both the protagonist and the antagonist and how they can react in the forum part. The statues show their internal variations of feelings and strategies, will and counter-will, reactions, and emotions, and they can also suggest other possibilities, scenes, and allies. From the statues, additional scenes can be added to provide more information on the context, to understand better the background, and to avoid too abstract scenes.

The oppressors have different reasons to maintain this relationship with the oppressed. The reasons can be material or ideological. We need to understand these reasons. Why does the oppressor refuse to rent the house to the immigrants? The reasons can be shown in other scenes.

Exercise - develop the characters

Take one of the scenes and develop its characters. You can create a new scene or integrate the previous one to:

- 1.) show the variety of desires of the oppressed
- or
- 2.) better understand the reasons of the oppressors.

Newly created scenes:

House rent: a “progressive” couple discussing why they refused to rent the house to Mohamed. Several statues appear one by one to show their reasons.

House rent: The house owner sitting in front of Mohamed. Several statues suggest different behaviours with Mohamed, while the owner embodies these suggestions.

Where do these thoughts come from? It is interesting to show where these ideas are reproduced (the church, the TV, the bar...), to understand how and where we can challenge them, and where we can intervene.

Workplace: several statues behind the employer expressing the feelings, emotions, and thoughts of the oppressor.

It is interesting for the statues to show the contradictions (one standing and another one lying on the ground): she knows she is doing something wrong but she has to do it, she is not benefiting from that, she is an agent of the oppressor.

Bottle: while the shopkeeper is selling the bottle, the statues appear behind them to explain their internal thoughts. These statues express both information and sensations. We can understand the antagonist's sense of being overwhelmed.

Where are the social spaces where these thoughts can come out? We can create more scenes where these thoughts come out so that we can confront them.

Reflections on the process

I had enough, but not too much, very deep reflections in small groups or with individuals about the theatre of the oppressed and politically engaged theatre.

It was really wonderful that we gave our feedback and approached the forum in a creative and cooperative way.

I find the idea of labs or critical generosity is more helpful for me than methodology labs rather than just training on tools.

I have this need that we would have more opportunities like this to share creative ideas on our forum performances.

I leave inspired and encouraged and it's more than just in the sense of theatre. I'm very grateful.

I appreciated very much the possibility of having a look at topics like racism, sexism and social injustice from the perspectives of different Europeans and having an exchange with colleagues from the theatre sector.

I would like to highlight the suggestions of working more in public spaces, of turning more random spaces into performing spaces, into spaces of courage.

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