Augusto Boal's FORUM THEATRE for teachers
(notes from a workshop at Athens Conference 2000)

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PART 1

A. Notes about Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre.(*)

THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED
Augusto Boal is the Brazilian dramatist who, during over forty years of work in different parts of the world, has developed the techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed.

Boal begins with the principle that theatre, like language, can be appropriate to anybody so long as the methods are passed on to them. It is this teaching role that Theatre of the Oppressed sets out to achieve. Through series of exercises, games, techniques and drama forms (of which Forum Theatre is the most commonly used), the aim is to understand social reality, to then be able to change it. As in the Education of the Oppressed of Paulo Freire, in Theatre of the Oppressed there is no room for the passive spectator. There is a time to observe and another to act.

In 1971, for political reasons, Boal was forced to leave Brazil and went to live in other countries in Latin America, from which he was also exiled due to the political regimes of these countries. He then went to Portugal and later France, where he lived for more than ten years and established the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed in Paris. At the beginning of the eighties, the political situation became more liberal and Boal returned several times, until he finally decided to settle back in his homeland. He worked on different projects until he established the Centre of Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro, with five other people. At the beginning of the nineties, Boal realised it was necessary to progress his work, to create new forms of expression of Theatre of the Oppressed and to guarantee its existence in Brazil. And so, he began to develop the Legislative Theatre project, a drama form which would go beyond rehearsing the future, and which could be used as a basis for altering social reality.

In 1992, Boal decided to stand as parliamentary candidate for the municipal government of Rio, with the proposal of democratising politics through theatre, in other words, to carry out Legislative Theatre. During the electoral campaign, Boal demonstrated his ideas through various pieces of Forum Theatre, performed by different groups and presented in different parts of the city. Many people voted for Boal's project and he became a senator of the city of Rio de Janeiro. He was then able to invite a group of assistants to work with him, to carry out the political project for which he had been elected. Today, Boal works with a group of fifteen people, some of whom are legislative advisers and cultural

development workers. Legislative theatre involves teaching the drama techniques to community groups, trade unions and others associations. The groups then put together model plays about the different problems or issues, and through analysing different interventions to the play, plan concrete action, which can bring about real change regarding that particular issue. Initially contact with different organisations is made through the Jokers, who look for new contacts and respond to requests. Their initial work is to go to the interested group and begin theatre workshops. The people interested decide what they want to communicate to other people, and what issue they want to dramatise. And so they put together a Forum Theatre piece about the issue. Then the groups present their show in different places – public squares, parks, political demonstrations, trade union meetings, etc, and in Community Festivals which are organised by Boal's team, so that the groups can communicate with people through theatre and entertainment.

Each time the group puts on the show, reports are made about the different interventions from spect-actors that have taken place. Usually the reports are analysed by the groups and by Boal's legislative advisors, to work through the suggestions which came from the different forums, and to see which may be viable, and can be acted upon to become reality. The suggestions made can mean different action: the preparation of a new law; change to an existing law; the need to carry out research into the laws on a particular issue, so that those interested become more informed; the organisation of legal action; or the planning of concrete political action.

FORUM THEATRE
Forum theatre was developed in Latin America as a means of working popularly in theatre to tackle the overriding problems of the lives of ordinary people. Working with groups of workers and peasants in literacy campaigns initially, and then more widely, Boal applied the theories of Paolo Freire to create a form in which 'the oppressed becomes the artists'.

A typical sessions begins with exercises and games aimed at activating and connecting the five senses and engendering an atmosphere of fun and creativity. The objective of the session is to evolve a piece, or several pieces of theatre derived from the experiences of the participants of which an oppression or a problem is the focus. The structure of the piece must involve a Protagonists – the oppressed person who is defeated or frustrated by the Antagonist or oppressor, who, unlike the Protagonist, may be a multiple entity. The session is conducted by a facilitator who becomes the 'Joker' for the Forum, the enabler or mediator for the group.

A Forum performance involves the replacement of the Protagonist by those watching, who are not spectators, but SPECT-ACTORS, in common with the performers of the piece. The piece, which can be of any length, is played once through and then repeated from the beginning. SPECT-ACTORS who believe

that they can offer alternatives to the actions of the Protagonist are encouraged to shout "Stop", halt the action, and take over the role and try out another solution. Anyone who wants to can have a go. The protagonist is usually the only role replaced, but there are a few rules governing whether and when other characters can be substituted. Together, they 'rehearse change'.

The nature of society is reflected in its smallest cells. The great themes are inscribed in the smallest personal themes. Theatre of the Oppressed is the theatre of the first person plural. It absolutely must begin with the individual story, but Boal says, if it does not pluralize itself, it is not fulfilling its purpose. In a group of spect-actors, each individual is encouraged to see the commonality of what is taking place and to act on behalf of the others as well as herself.

* The above Notes are from TIPP (Theatre in Prison and Probation Centre) at Manchester University 1995

B. The rules of the game for an audience

Forum Theatre is like a game, and, as with any game there are rules, which must be addressed for the game to be successful.

1. First, you will watch a performance, which shows a problem/ issue/ situation of oppression.

2. At the end of the performance, you are invited to applaud the efforts of the actors and then some time discussing amongst yourselves the situation and some possible solutions for changing the series of events.

3. The performance will then be repeated. At any time, any audience member can call out freeze, come up on stage and take the place of the central character (protagonist), in order to try to change the series of events. (In this way, the spectator becomes the 'spect-actor'). You need never have experienced drama in your life to take part in this - what you need are ideas of how to change the events to effectively resolve the problem/oppression.

4. In terms of the rules of the game, you may only swap places with the characters that want to change the circumstances presented. Alternatively, you may introduce characters that may be able to support other characters that wish to change.

5. You may feel nervous about standing up in front of everyone - this is only natural. However, if no one gets up, the performance will continue as it did the first time and therefore the series of events will go unchanged.

6. The Joker is at hand at all times to guide and support anyone who is slightly nervous. If you have an idea for change but do not want to come up on stage,

you may still call out freeze and offer your suggestion to the group of actors who will then perform this suggestion.

7. One final thing to say is that no one may offer violence as a suggestion for change. Forum Theatre does not accept this as a method of change.

C. Rules for the Joker

1. Jokers must avoid all actions, which could manipulate or influence the audience. The audience should never be confronted with the joker's own personal interpretation of events.

2. Jokers must personally decide nothing. They must keep relaying doubts back to the audience i.e. does this solution work or not? Is this right or wrong?

3. Watch out for 'magic' solutions. The joker may interrupt the spect-actor's action if they consider an action to be magic. They must not make that decision but must ask the audience if they believe it to be.

4. The joker is the 'midwife', assisting in the birth of all ideas, of all actions!

5. It is more important to achieve a good debate than a good solution

6. The joker should not mingle with the audience or the actors but remain separate from them - physically alert and dynamic at all times. If the joker is tired or confused, she will transmit a tired and disorientated image to the audience.

7. Be flexible according to your audience e.g. An audience of Year 8 girls may have an agenda of simply wanting to get on stage with their friends, rather than progressing the action so you can afford to be strict with them

8. Decide with the performers during the rehearsal process whether there are to be 'missing characters' i.e. characters who do not appear in the performance but can be introduced during the forum. For example if the protagonist is living with his father, where is mum? Can she be brought into the action or is she too far away or even dead? The devising process can create an elaborate character network or simply be left for the spectators to create during the forum. This can however, sometimes lead to 'magic' solutions whereby wonderful grandparents appear to save the day!

D. Augusto Boal's Arsenal of Games & Exercises
(During the workshop, we were able to run through a number of the games and exercises listed below)

Name & Gesture
The group stand in a circle. The leader begins by introducing herself by her first name accompanied by a physical gesture. The whole group repeat the name and gesture. This process works around the group until everyone has said their name and performed a gesture. This process is then repeated but without the name this time. Then anyone who wishes takes a step forward and the rest of the group must say his or her name and perform that person's gesture.

Bombs & Shields
Group spread out around the room. Each person chooses one other person without making their choice known; that person is their Bomb. Then choose another person – that one is their shield. The aim of the game is to keep your shield between yourself and your bomb.
There will be a lot of frantic movement to begin with and the facilitator can count down from 10 – 1 as the bomb is about to explode. On the command freeze, the facilitator goes around the group asking if people managed to keep their shield between themselves and their bomb.

Tangles & Knots
The group stand in a circle. Each person must remember who is standing on his left and his right. The leader then asks the group to spread out around the room and begin to walk freely about. The leader will then call out instructions – walk with those with the same coloured hair as you – walk with those with the same coloured shoes, or the same coloured eyes. Then the leader will give more instructions – create 3 circles, or 4 squares or 2 triangles or one star and individuals must form themselves into groups to make this happen. The leader will then ask everyone to freeze where they are stood; to locate the person who originally stood to their right, and to their left and then point at them both, without moving. Very slowly, people will then begin to stretch and then move towards their two neighbours until the entire group are holding hands. This will be a tangle. The group must then try to untangle themselves, without letting go of their neighbours' hands. 9/10 times it does work!

Columbian Hypnosis
Group divide into pairs – choosing A & B. A will 'hypnotise' B with her hand – B must keep her face just a few inches from A's hand at all times – always an equal distance. A should try to manipulate B into all sorts of positions, using forgotten muscles, in order to use her body in a different way. A & B swap around
Variation: Group divides into 3's. A hypnotises B & C using two hands which may do entirely different movements at any time.
Variation: One person (A) stands in the centre of the rest of the group who stand in a circle. Each person silently chooses a part A to be hypnotised by. 'A' then begins to move about very slowly and the whole circle must follow their chosen part.

Rhythm with chairs

5 actors have a chair and each create a frozen image using the chair. The facilitator numbers each image 1 – 5. The rest of the group then moves around the space and at any time the facilitator will call out one of those numbers, which the group must then replicate.
Variation: the facilitator calls out more than one number at a time

Cat & Mouse

Divide into pairs, linking arms and standing side by side. Pairs spread out around space. One pair is nominated Cat & Mouse. The cat chases the mouse around the room; if he catches her, they swap roles. The mouse has an alternative to being caught – if she links arms with any pair (thus becoming a trio) the partner furthest from her becomes the mouse and must run away from the cat.
Variation: when the mouse joins a pair, the partner becomes dog who proceeds to chase the cat etc.

Two By Three By Bradford

In pairs begin counting: 1,2,3 – each partner saying one number at a time.
Once this has been mastered, replace the count number 1 with a sound.
Then replace count number 2 with a physical action
Then replace count number 3 with a sound and a physical action.
Variation: Run the exercise with the whole group standing in a circle.

Carnival at Rio

The group stand in a circle. One person begins by creating a rhythmic sound and movement; they can move inside the circle for a while until they are clear on it. They then move over to face the person to their left, with whom they share their sound and movement. Once that person has mastered it, the original person moves on to the next person in the circle and so on until they have worked their way around the whole circle and are back at their starting point. Once the second person has mastered the original sound and movement, they then create their own and begin to journey it around the group. Etc. There will be a huge noise of sounds and rhythms once this is under way!

Push Not To Win

This exercise is the perfect example of training for Forum Theatre! It is about using all one's strength and still not winning. During a Forum session, an actor must neither give way to the intervening spect-actor, not overwhelm him, but help him apply his strength.
Divide into pairs. Imagine a line is drawn between each pair. Pairs put their hands against one another's shoulders and begin to push. To push your opponent and cross over the line into their territory would be to win the game – in this game, you do not want to win. Give in to your partner's strength; support one another's weight, sometimes pushing harder, sometimes allowing your

partner to push you harder.
Variation: Back to back (from sitting to standing)
Variation: Shoulder to shoulder
Variation: Seesaw

Boal's Ball
Choose a ball; play with it making sure your entire body is involved.
Create a regular, repetitive, rhythmic action and sound to accompany your ball
Practise is while walking around the room
Find a partner, continue playing but observe every detail of your partner's movements and sound
"Exchange Balls" – adopt that person's movement and sound exactly
Find another partner – repeat exchange
Find another partner – repeat exchange
Now get your original ball back…………………..

Blind Cars
Divide into pairs. One person stands in front of the other and closes his eyes – he is the blind car. The person behind is the driver who gives directions by touching the 'car's' back with his hand;
Touch left shoulder = turn left; touch right shoulder = turn right; press centre of back = move forward (pressure denotes speed); no touch = stop.

The Soldiers and the Skipper
Four volunteers are asked to march in line from one side of the room to the other. Their objective is to keep marching at all costs. A fifth person, the skipper, begins to skip and dance around the marchers after they have been marching for a couple of minutes. As the skipper gets in their way, the marchers beat her onto the ground, and, leaving her for dead, continue their marching.
The marchers represent the oppressors and the skipper, the protagonist. Having watched this model once (or twice for clarification), the audience are invited to take the place of the protagonist to try to prevent the oppression from being repeated.

E. IMAGE THEATRE

Complete the Image
Two people shake hands and freeze. The leader asks the spectators what story they see.
One person then comes out of that frozen picture, leaving an incomplete image.
A volunteer then comes in and completes the image to make a different story.
Variation: Work in pairs
Variation: Work in three's

Remember the Image
One volunteer stands in front of the rest of the group. The group is asked to close their eyes by the leader. The volunteer then moulds herself into a frozen image. The leader tells the group to open their eyes for a couple of seconds, take in the image they see, then close their eyes and recreate that image themselves.
Variation: 2 volunteers create images; 3 volunteers create images, making it more difficult for the group to remember all of the images.
Variation: the group divide into two lines, facing each other. One line close their eyes while the other line sculpts itself into an image – then repeat as above

French Telephone (Do Nothing)
Group stands in a circle. Each person is instructed to look at the person 4 along from him to his left (if the group is an uneven number). The group is instructed to "Do Nothing". However, if the person he is watching makes any movement, he should copy that movement precisely. The leader can then instruct the group to copy any movements that are made and to make them more grotesque, much larger or more emotional (with more happiness, sadness etc.)

Individual Images
Group stand in a circle facing out. Leader says a word or a theme and counts down from 3 – 1 at which time the participants turn and face into the circle presenting a frozen image of that word.

e.g. The Family
1. An individual creates an image of a family. This can be modified by the audience to create an agreed-upon image.
2. Characters are asked to start a rhythmic movement to accompany the image
3. Each character then adds a phrase or word that relates to the character's situation and personality
4. The joker then asks each character to show the movement that would follow the original image

Two Models
First Model
1. An issue/subject is agreed upon by the group.
2. 5 individuals are asked to come up on stage, one at a time, to present their idea of that issue. They do not see anyone else's representation
3. All 5 present their images on stage together. Audience members may wish to come and add further ideas.
4. The spect-actors/images are asked to begin to interrelate with one another to give a broader perspective of a society view of the issue.
5. If spect-actors are presenting images of being oppressed they are then asked by the joker to change their image to present the oppressor, and vice versa.

Second Model

1. An oppression is agreed upon by the group.
2. An individual creates an image of the oppression, sculpting spect-actors into a group image. This may then be discussed with the audience to agree upon the "Real Image" of this oppression.
3. The joker then asks the spect-actors within the image to change in order to represent an "Ideal Image" whereby the oppression is no longer there (try not to be too magic in this presentation)
4. Re-showing the original "Real Image" the Joker then asks the spect-actors to move in slow motion from the "Real Image" to the "Ideal Image" – this is the "Image of Possible Transition". This may be modified throughout by audience members to make the transition as realistic as possible.

THE FORUM THEATRE SESSION IN ATHENS

A. Session Plan
11.0 *Introduction* – who we are (SHOUT! theatre company), what we've done
Who are you, why have you come here?
11.10 Warm up Games
Name & Gesture (10)
Tangles & Knots (15)
Rhythm with Chairs (10)
French Telephone (5)
Complete the image (15)
12.05 *Soldiers and the Skipper (6 soldiers)*
12.45 *Devising & Rehearsal*:
- Introduce basics of forum theatre performance (5)
- Group share and brainstorm ideas of their own oppressive experiences (15)
- Group vote on one of those ideas
- Person comes onto stage and with Joker create: (10)
- IMAGE OF ALL CHARACTERS; Physical distance, posture, emotional distance
- Create image of each scene – audience input and become characters (20)
- Run whole story as series of images
- Develop and improvise each scene (20)
2.0 LUNCH
4.0 *First Forum*
4.40 *Second Forum*
5.30 *Evaluation*
6.00 *End*

B. The workshops
- *General introduction*
- *Warm up games from Boal's Arsenal of games for actors and non actors*
- *Forum theatre exercise – a practical introduction to how Forum Theatre works – "The Soldier and the Skippers"*
- *Devising and rehearsing two pieces of Forum Theatre*
- *The Forum begins………(2 models)……*

Model One
(Susie's group)
A daughter and her family

After a brainstorm of ideas, it was agreed by the group that one woman's story was of particular interest to forum. When growing up, this woman had felt oppressed by her family; her father ignored her interest in theatre and desire to

achieve a career in this area, her mother was more interested in her own son and his well being, and her brother mocked and bullied her. She eventually felt unable to stay in the family and left, unnoticed by any of her family members.

Once the story had been established, 5 images were created to represent the narrative structure. The protagonist held a paper mask throughout the images to represent her love of theatre and desire to succeed professionally. One image showed the brother throwing the mask to the floor with a mocking gesture. Following the creation of these images the group rehearsed the scenes through improvisation.

On showing the model to the audience, one woman immediately said that there was nothing to forum, as, at the end the protagonist leaving was a positive result and something to be applauded not thought of as oppression. Others disagreed with this although it was a very valid comment to make. Other strategies were to talk to the father on his own, at a quiet time when he could be made to listen to the protagonist's wishes. This met with some success. One spect-actor tried bringing the mother and father together to talk to them, which was less successful.

Model Two
(Daniel's group)
Sexual harassment in the workplace

A woman is sexually harassed by a colleague at work, in a school. He undermines her professionalism, saying she must be putting off pupils from learning by how she looks and what she wears. A group of female students come to her to say that this teacher has been making suggestive comments to them but that they don't want her to tell the head teacher about this. However, she does go to the head teacher to complain about her male colleague's behaviour. The head teacher refuses to listen to her, saying that the male teacher is well respected and valued and has a long career in the school.

The woman is left not knowing what to do for the best.

A number of strategies were tried out during the forum; spect-actors tried confronting the male teacher, usually with little effect as he appeared to be set in his ways. Others tried being more assertive with the head teacher, to try to make him understand the seriousness of the problem.

C. Review of the Forum Theatre performances

Time was always an issue throughout the day and so the rehearsal period was much shorter than it should realistically have been for these performances.

However, both groups created very solid, focused plays, which held the essence of forum theatre i.e. the protagonist has an unresolved problem. The time to forum both performances, too, was far too short to come to any kind of conclusion about the issues raised, but was an opportunity (which we had set out originally to achieve) for teachers to see how a piece of forum theatre is put together and how the forum process works.

Daniel and Susie believe, also, that a forum theatre workshop is not necessarily about resolving/solving a problem presented to an audience, but is an opportunity for them to try out lots of strategies to see which one works best for them. It is a time to raise a debate around an issue so that individuals become aware of the different elements of the issue and go away still thinking about it, rather than having a cathartic theatrical experience, which they walk away from and forget about in five minutes.