



**GAMES FOR ACTORS
AND NON-ACTORS**

SECOND EDITION

AUGUSTO BOAL

Translated by Adrian Jackson

'compulsory reading' – Plays and Players

'an inspiring and powerful book' – Artscene

'Boal's work deserves and demands emulation' – Theatre Research International

Games for Actors and Non-Actors is the classic and best-selling book by the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal. It sets out the principles and practice of Boal's revolutionary method, showing how theatre can be used to transform and liberate everyone – actors and non-actors alike!

This thoroughly updated and substantially revised edition includes:

- Two new essays by Boal on major recent projects in Brazil
- Boal's description of his work with the Royal Shakespeare Company
- A revised introduction and translator's preface
- A collection of photographs taken during Boal's workshops, commissioned for this edition
- New reflections on Forum Theatre
- A postscript considering the effect of 11 September, 2001.

Augusto Boal is a theatre director, dramatist, theorist, writer and teacher. He was a Member of Parliament for Rio de Janeiro from 1993 to 1996. He is the author of *The Theatre of the Oppressed*, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, *The Rainbow of Desire*, *Legislative Theatre* and *Hamlet and the Baker's Son: my life in theatre and politics*.

Adrian Jackson is Artistic Director of Cardboard Citizens. He has translated four books by Augusto Boal, collaborated with him on a number of occasions and taught Theatre of the Oppressed widely in countries including Namibia, South Africa, Hong Kong, Mauritius and Finland.

Theatre Studies/Politics

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This book is dedicated to

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Helena Reckitt and Talia Rodgers, for their enthusiasm and help;
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Blanca Laksman and Leonardo Thumin, for having invented Cecilia!

Postscript – with pride in our hearts

Since I wrote the above, I have been privileged to witness, at the Memorial of Latin America in São Paulo, a solemn ceremony held to mark the closing of this Staging Human Rights project which had run over the course of a year, in thirty-seven prisons in that state. In recognition of the humanistic character of its subject matter and the excellence of its outcomes – the opening up of dialogue between four thousand prisoners, hundreds of support staff and innumerable neighbouring populations – the project was awarded the *Premio Betinho de Direitos Humanos* (Betinho Prize for Human Rights) for 2001 by the municipality of São Paulo.

In the morning, the prison guards presented their piece, which showed the difficulty of their work in the overcrowded prisons, and the poor remuneration and the ever-present danger which accompanies their calling. As is always the case with our theatrical method, the guards themselves played all the parts – even those of the prisoners, for which they donned the uniforms of the sentenced men, as well as adopting their physical stances – the head lowered, the hand on the shoulder of the man in front.

This was followed in quick succession by the male prisoners' piece, which spoke of their lives. One of them had his ten children in the audience, delighted at their dad's newly revealed artistic abilities: in a particularly moving scene, his seven-year-old daughter went on stage to hug him, forcing him to leave the stage to take the girl back to her seat in the audience, beside her mother, a free citizen.

That evening came the culmination: the women prisoners staged the moment when one of their number, Amanda (there telling her own true story), was separated from her six-month-old baby, a child conceived in prison – a parting which the law ordained.

In Theatre of the Oppressed, reality is shown not only as it is, but also, more importantly, as it could be. Which is what we live for – to become what we have the potential to be. This vital element is entrusted to the creativity of the audience: the spectators come on stage, substituting themselves for the protagonist, and trying to find viable solutions for real problems.

The audience, moved to tears at the sight of the mother kissing her goodbyes to her child, took her place a number of times, suggesting the construction of crèches attached to prisons, run by the prisoners; or daily visits, after school and before bed; or yet other ways of avoiding having to break, too prematurely, the link between the mother and her offspring: the protagonist's condition of woman and mother, everyone thought, should outweigh her condition of prisoner. Though one and the same person, the latter should not have to pay for the sins of the former.

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When the theatrical element of the event was over, the *paulista* authorities, representatives of the three bodies involved, were unanimous in their speeches, proclaiming the necessity of continuing this Theatre of the Oppressed project in the prisons, with the objective of humanising the relations between these two constituencies, compelled by circumstance to a daily coexistence, in spite of their diametrical differences.

Then came the farewells. With tenderness, we embraced these prisoners, male and female, and their guards and support staff – people who had made us laugh and cry, as they performed their stories, their hopes, that day.

The time for goodbyes. In the ample auditorium of the Memorial, seven armed soldiers went on stage, and each prisoner gave his arm to his guard, and they set off for the bus that would take them back to their cells. As they set off, one of the guards still had time to say: 'Do you know something? As far as human rights go, I haven't learnt a thing – I still don't know what they are. But there's one thing I have understood today – that these guys are not our enemies. They are people.' He went off chatting to his prisoner, no longer his enemy – a person now. Off he went, without knowing that actually, that day, he *had* understood, at the most profound level, what is meant by the term 'human rights': respect for one's neighbour. The recognition that *the other* is also a man, a woman, a human being. Like that sad mother whom the law obliged to separate from her little one; like that father, the unsuspected actor, who so moved his little girl.

And now, with pride in our hearts – but not without sadness – on our chests we wear Betinho's medal.

* * *

The third of my experiences is under way at the time of writing, and is spreading and gathering momentum: working with the MST, the best organised social movement in Brazil, a country more than half of whose surface belongs to less than the twentieth of the population. Most of that land was *grilada* ('cricketed'), a sharp practice involving the falsification of documents by placing newly drawn-up papers in a box along with some of those chirruping insects, and locking the box up tight. After a month or two, the papers look like they are very ancient, very legal, notably yellowed documents, above all suspicion.

Millions of peasants have no land to cultivate while millions of acres remain idle and useless, with the owners waiting for the government to build a highway for them, so that prices will soar. The land is kept unproductive and useless, like tons of gold in the vaults of a bank.

The MST, a non-violent organisation, occupies only such deserted properties and it cultivates them. Its members never occupy a productive area; they never invade a living farm. Even so, resistance from the 'legal' landowners is extremely violent and unarmed peasants are constantly killed. Of course they don't rely on Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to save their lives: they organise themselves in all possible ways. One tactic is to try to make the reality of their lives clear to the entire population, to gather sympathy for their cause; the newspapers and the TV stations almost never give space to them.

At the beginning of 2001, they approached us with the following question in mind: how can we use theatre to make our efforts and our needs more widely known? They certainly have problems. The police treat them with inhuman violence; when they are arrested, policemen maltreat their wives and their families; in court, not infrequently, they meet judges who are friends of the landowners but no friends of justice; in the government, they meet slow bureaucrats.

We started off working in the normal way: exercises, games, Image and Forum Theatre. We did plays about confrontation with police forces and with the private armies of the 'cricketers'; plays about their confrontation with people in the cities who do not know what happens in the countryside and believe the media's misinformation; plays about their own internal organisation . . . until we started to approach more domestic issues, like sexism, intolerance of different types of local folk music, or confrontations inside a family after they had been allocated a small patch of land; while the family was still living in bad conditions in huts, moving from place to place, waiting to occupy a piece of land, there was democracy – once inside the new farm, the old structures of the family tend to return, the father being the chief, the mother his lieutenant and the children their employees.

MST is made up of wonderful people, but they are also like us, they have the same qualities and the same inadequacies . . . which is why, after having done many Forum Theatre pieces, they asked us: 'Why can't we do Rainbow of Desire?'

Just like the prisoners, just like the RSC actors, just like everybody.

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Theatre of the Oppressed was created to serve people – rather than people being there to serve Theatre of the Oppressed.⁴ In the beginning, it is true, we had very clear enemies, those whom we could call antagonists, oppressors: we lived in countries suffering under tyrannies. There was no sense in analysing the oppressors to try to find out if they had some decent qualities, if they were good grandfathers to their grandchildren. A dictator is a dictator, even if he says his prayers at night, kneeling on straw. Forum Theatre, at that time, was very simple and clear: an oppressed protagonist, knowing what she or he wanted to do, facing a brutal enemy, an oppressor, who thwarted her/his desires. The Forum was the search for alternatives to try to find concrete solutions because everything else was already understood and accepted as true.

Later, we started to find situations where oppression was not so clear cut, yet both parties claimed to be oppressed: inside a couple, among friends, parents and children, teachers and pupils . . . confrontations that were not purely antagonistic, in the sense that conciliation was possible and desirable. In these particular cases,

A note on creative heresies and unacceptable deviations

After a Forum theatre session in a faraway hamlet in West Bengal, Sanjoy Ganguly remarked to Julián Gal, who was working with him at the time: 'I think your father would not approve of this heresy: today I allowed a real grandfather oppressor to replace the grandfather character in the play and show how he was, contrary to the actor's portrayal of him! Why did I do this? Because, by showing himself as a nice gentle old man in front of the whole village, that man signed a contract with the entire population to be nice and gentle from that moment on!' This I think was a creative heresy – like the rule applied in some African countries that the author of the 'best' intervention receives a crown of flowers.

Mado le Pennec in Brittany has worked with government employees who are supposed to help the people with their problems. That is what they are supposed to do, but, tired of the monotony, most of them mistreat the people when they come to seek help. Mado teaches them the art of being a 'Joker' – someone who does not give 'advice' or 'orders' but sincerely and democratically seeks to learn what needs to be done. In doing Theatre of the Oppressed with the people seeking their help, the social workers abandon their authoritarian posture and assume a more human one. They 'were' oppressors; as Jokers, they become allies. Creative heresy!

There are however some unacceptable deviations – not adaptations of the mechanisms of Theatre of the Oppressed to special conditions and local problems, but total treason to the philosophical basis of this form of theatre, which must be Theatre *about*, to and above all of the Oppressed. I have heard of some groups that use Theatre of the Oppressed in 'business', allegedly to help the workers to do their jobs better and in so doing to be more comfortable . . . and productive – they are usually sponsored by the bosses. This deviation is the same as using the music of Wagner to stimulate workers to build things more quickly, or Debussy to encourage computer software workers to be more meticulous in the handling of the delicate components. Wagner and Debussy are not responsible for that. Neither

A.B.

replacements could be made on both sides, since both sides claimed to be the oppressed party.

Soon we understood that Forum was not enough to deal with those questions because it is in the nature of Forum to work on objective, visible, well-known oppressions – this made us try out other forms of Theatre of the Oppressed, other possible theatrical structures that could help us to understand more complex situations, no longer just those considered well known and obvious to all, as was the case at first with Forum.

So, one by one, the introspective techniques came into being. This book concentrates on the preparation of models to be played in Forum by anyone willing to speak using theatre as a language, and also on the preparation of plays to be played in front of 'normal' audiences, by professional actors. Even so, it contains a few embryos of those more internal techniques.

This book is a practical introduction to all the forms of Theatre of the Oppressed. All these forms are complementary, because human beings are complex and not so easy to understand as we would like them to be. The best way of using them is to use them all.

* * *

I love to dream, even when I know very well that my dream is impossible. Even so, I dream: one day I will direct *Hamlet* with actors from the RSC, prisoners from the prisons of Carandiru, peasants from the MST and workers from the slums of Rio. One day . . .

This will never happen, I know. The role of utopias is not to be reached: it is to stimulate us to try harder and go further. To be able to dream is already a dream come true!

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