

Foreword

No-one working in the fields of theatre and politics, applied theatre, theatre history, theatre and performance theory, and transdisciplinary enquiry across the borders of theatre, society, ›development‹, sociology and social practice from the late twentieth century on can avoid the centrality of Augusto Boal's theatre practice and methodology, its application and implications. This book recognises these dimensions, which have been the subject of a wide range of critical work and the inspiration for extensive and diverse theatre practice across the world. It also seeks to outline a number of framing contexts which have shaped this work and to draw from them conclusions about its relevance beyond its original context. It brings together a range of historical, political and aesthetic perspectives which make clear where Boal comes from and why he drew on his lived experience to construct an embodied strategy which transcends its origins to resonate with the business of claiming the fullness of what it may mean to be fully human in human society.

The book seeks particularly to open up questions about Boal's work in the following areas:

- Social and political: how do Boal's practice and premises inflect how we might or should conceptualise and structure society, individuals, power relations, economies?
- Critical pedagogies: how does Boal's work and its relational nexus, including for example Freire and Fals Borda, demonstrate and/or develop the understanding and application of practices of learning, understanding, growing and collaborating?
- The body: in which dimensions does Boal's practice illuminate and open up somatic practices and aesthetic sensibilities which are crucial to social, political and environmental relationship for the twenty-first century?

There are three strands to the argument. The first part of the book consists of an analysis of Freirean roots and sources in the Theatre of the Oppressed, as well as the context of revolutionary discourse and Boal's experiences in Latin America: the Freirean people's cultural centres

in Brazil, the period of the Arena Theatre and Boal's participation in the Peruvian ALFIN alphabetisation project. At its heart is a Freirean interpretation of the Declaration of Principles of TO (Theatre of the Oppressed), published in 2003. Whereas the revolutionary Latin American theatre movements, under the influence of Paulo Freire, aimed to mobilise the masses towards democratisation, the Theatre of the Oppressed's declared goal has been the *humanisation of mankind*, as set out in the Declaration of Principles.

The second part attempts a kind of geomorphological comparison and reconstruction of TO by analysing the Participatory Action Research (PAR) of Orlando Fals Borda and the process of Collective Creation based on the work of Enrique Buenventura. By means of this analysis the practice of TO is linked to *emancipatory art and sciences* in Colombia. The underlying goal of this comparison is to reintegrate essential context-based characteristics of TO that might have been neglected or lost during its transfer into the European context, in order to create an extended range of potential connections to challenges of the twenty-first century.

The third part of the book contextualises the theatre of Augusto Boal in terms of an *aesthetics of perception* and an orientation towards *peace*. On the physical, somatic level, it draws on the methodology of Moshé Feldenkrais's school of perception, which was also referred to and used by Augusto Boal. It also makes links with work on the biology and neurology of self-determination and on the aesthetics of awareness (Maturana, Varela and Welsch), in particular the latter's observation that aesthetic thinking gives rise to exceptional ›reality competence‹. This chimes with Boal's last work, *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, referenced here on the basis of the 2009 Portuguese text, which differs considerably from the English version of 2006.

If the dominant economic and political mindset in much of the world exemplifies an ethos of production and consumption, and an assumption of ›ownership‹ rights applied to ›property‹ – including the ›environment‹ – an enormous shift of the imagination is required to reposition the relationships and practices which have built upon that perspective. And imagination, to transform into any kind of political action, needs to be rooted in somatic, aesthetic processes. This book shows clearly, via accounts of the political and theatrical situation in Latin America in the 1960s and 70s, the description of Boal's Peruvian

ALFIN work, a Freirian analysis of the relationship between pedagogic practice and the principles of Theatre of the Oppressed, an examination of the ethics and praxis of Participatory Action Research (PAR), and finally an analysis of the somatic, aesthetic and corporeal dimensions of Boal's work in the light of recent transdisciplinary approaches, that successive forms of such a reimagining can be identified across the development and deployment of Boalian practice. As a necessary part of this, relationships between human beings, between ›self‹ and ›other‹, between the ›human‹ and the ›natural‹ can be repositioned, re-experienced and revalidated.

The book concludes that the main endeavour of emancipatory research, sciences and arts lies in the attempt to reconstruct and to repossess history on a personal, biography-based level as well as on a political, community-based level. It thus traces the sources of the Theatre of the Oppressed in the 1960/70s‹ politics both of Latin America and of Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and goes on to situate it as a form of embodied learning: as a process of developing critical awareness of and activating the mechanisms, which Boal and Freire perceive as fundamental to social change and the challenging of dominant frameworks of thought and behaviour. It both situates Boal and Freire historically and politically within the times and spaces of their initial work and shows how their thinking and practice draws on this moment of ›wound‹ under oppressive regimes to evolve an active humanism and a model of development which is rooted in individual bodies and the world they inhabit; and signals that the implications extend well beyond Latin America in the 1960s.

In this vision therefore, ›politics‹ may be understood as a variety of social and pragmatic positions and practices, whose focus might be: i) applied theatre practice; ii) Theatre of the Oppressed and other Boalian work; iii) development theory and practice; iv) somatic and psychodramatic process; v) educational theory and methodology; vi) politics and history, particularly theatre history, of Latin America in the latter half of the 20th century; vii) sociology and participatory methodologies.

In the Foreword to the German edition of this book (2013), Harald Hahn writes: ›(the book) shows that, even after the death of Augusto Boal (1931–2009), Theatre of the Oppressed has the means to engage boldly and successfully with the concrete practical demands of the 21st century‹, in large part because ›TO is positioned as a theatre of Human

Rights, though not as one-dimensional theatre for the purpose of *education about* human rights, but rather a theatre of active work for peace, which aims to produce a form of healing.

The book however also locates the origins of Boal's work in a context in which both peace and human rights were in short supply; and documents and analyses the contexts of that reality and Boal's place in it alongside Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the liberatory theatre activity of the 1970s in Latin America (including Enrique Buenaventura's *Creación Colectiva*) and the radical refocusing of research orientations which underpins Orlando Fals Borda's development of Participatory Action Research.

In bending together origins, contexts and methodologies, its vision is characterised by the author's understanding of TO as autopoietic theatre work, a form of practice whose particular contribution is to enable both communities and individuals, in terms of their communal identity and their personal history, to recreate themselves continuously from their own resources and transform themselves by an aesthetic of awareness, in fulfilment of Boal's final writing.

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