

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

This is a conflation of two books, *Stop! C'est magique* (Paris: Hachette, 1980) and *Jeux pour acteurs et non-acteurs* (Paris: La Découverte, 1989), with liberal additions and alterations as Boal has added examples of his latest ever-developing practice. As the title suggests, the exercises and games detailed are mostly suitable both for trained and untrained performers – it is fundamental to Boal's work that anyone can act and that theatrical performance should not be solely the province of professionals. The dual meaning of the word 'act', to perform and to take action, is also at the heart of the work.

Three main categories of the Theatre of the Oppressed are discussed in this book – Image Theatre, Invisible Theatre and Forum Theatre. However, there is a continuous overlap and interplay between all these forms, and the choice of the particular form simply depends on the situation in which the work is being made and the goal of the theatrical event.

Image Theatre is a series of exercises and games designed to uncover essential truths about societies and cultures without resort, in the first instance, to spoken language – though this may be added in the various 'dynamisations' of the images. The participants in Image Theatre make still images of their lives, feelings, experiences, oppressions; groups suggest titles or themes, and then individuals 'sculpt' three-dimensional images under these titles, using their own and others' bodies as the 'clay'. However, the image work never remains static – as with all of the Theatre of the Oppressed, the frozen image is simply the starting point for or prelude to the action, which is revealed in the dynamisation process, the bringing to life of the images and the discovery of whatever direction or intention is imate in them.

At its simplest, the idea underlying this is that 'a picture paints a thousand words'; that our over-reliance on words can confuse or obfuscate central issues, rather than clarifying them; that images can be closer to our true feelings, even our subconscious feelings, than words, since the process of 'thinking with our hands' can short-circuit the censorship of the brain, the 'cops in the head' placed there by society or personal experience. The polysemy of images is a vital factor in this work; a group of individuals will perceive a whole range of different, but often intriguingly related, meanings within a single image, often seeing things which the sculptors had no idea were there. Images work across language and culture barriers and, as Boal shows, frequently reveal unexpected universalities. Also, working with images, sculpting rather than talking, can be more democratic, as it does not privilege more verbally articulate people. Image Theatre can be used in the preparation of Invisible Theatre or Forum Theatre, and is central to the more recent therapeutic work, the subject of Boal's next book, *Méthode Boal de théâtre et de thérapie – l'arc-en-ciel du désir* (see p. 191).

Invisible Theatre is public theatre which involves the public as participants in the action without their knowing it. They are the 'spect-actors', the active spectators, of a piece of theatre, but while it is happening, and usually even after the event, they do not know that this is theatre rather than 'real life'; of course it is also 'real life', because it is actually happening, the people are real, the incidents are real, the reactions are real. This is theatre which does not take place in a theatre building or other obvious theatrical context, with an audience which does not know it is an audience. Several actors rehearse a scene which they then play in an appropriate public space; the scene usually involves an unexpected subversion of 'normal' behaviour within that particular society. In reaction to the incidents in the scene, the public becomes involved in an argument, usually aided by a couple of *agent provocateur* actors mingling with the public and expressing extreme and opposite reactions to the events of the scene.

For example, in Brazil, a man in Boal's group went to a shop with street frontage, with a woman friend, and started trying on women's dresses; another actor, as part of the gathering crowd, expressed loud indignation at this 'perversion', while a third actor took the cross-dresser's part – why shouldn't he wear women's clothes if he wants to ... in no time at all a crowd is involved in heated discussion. Invisible Theatre is a way of using theatre to stimulate debate, getting

people to question issues in a public forum. It might be compared to 'agit-prop' street theatre, with the essential difference that the audience is free to take up any position it wants, and has no feeling of being preached at. It asks questions without dictating the answers. * This again is fundamental to the Theatre of the Oppressed – it is never didactic to its audience, it involves a process of learning //*** together rather than one-way teaching; it assumes that there is as much likelihood of the audience knowing the answers as the performers.

Forum Theatre is a theatrical game in which a problem is shown in an unsolved form, to which the audience, again spect-actors, is invited to suggest and enact solutions. The problem is always the symptom of an oppression, and generally involves visible oppressors and a protagonist who is oppressed. In its purest form, both actors and spect-actors will be people who are victims of the oppression under consideration; that is why they are able to offer alternative solutions, because they themselves are personally acquainted with the oppression. After one showing of the scene, which is known as 'the model' (it can be a full-length play), it is shown again slightly speeded up, and follows exactly the same course until a member of the audience shouts 'Stop!', takes the place of the protagonist and tries to defeat the oppressors. Forum Theatre

The game is a form of contest between spect-actors trying to bring the play to a different end (in which the cycle of oppression is broken) and actors ostensibly making every possible effort to bring it to its original end (in which the oppressed is beaten and the oppressors are triumphant). The proceedings are presided over by a figure called the 'joker' (see pp. xxiv and 232), whose function is to ensure the smooth running of the game and teach the audience the rules; however, like all the participants in Forum Theatre, the joker can be replaced if the spect-actors do not think he or she is doing a fair job, and virtually any of the 'rules' of the game can be changed if the audience wants. Many different solutions are enacted in the course of a single forum – the result is a pooling of knowledge, tactics and experience, and at the same time what Boal calls a 'rehearsal for reality'.

This is a very simplified description of Forum Theatre – and, as befits a form of theatre which is now over twenty years old, there are many different manifestations of it in operation all over the world. It is used in schools, factories, day centres, community centres, with tenants' groups, homeless people, disabled people, people in ethnic

minorities, etc. – anywhere where there is a community which shares an oppression. Its aim again is to stimulate debate (in the form of action, not just words), to show alternatives, to enable people 'to become the protagonists of their own lives'.

Having used Forum Theatre myself with a variety of different communities in Britain, I can testify to its efficacy, both as a way of using theatre to make sense of life and as a means of giving people the strength and confidence to overcome their oppressions. It is also great fun, giving rise to many different kinds of hilarity – laughter of recognition at the tricks of the oppressors, laughter at the ingenuity of spect-actors' ruses, triumphant laughter at the defeat of oppression. Initially one might have thought that the traditionally 'reserved' British might be the last people to get up on a stage and intervene in a theatrical action; however, if the model is right, if it is true to life, and is sufficiently effective at making the audience angry about the treatment of the protagonist, then up on stage they will come, especially when a first brave spect-actor has broken the ice. The phrase 'true to life' should not, however, be taken as an indication that Boal favours realism as a style for Forum Theatre; as detailed in the following pages, he sees truth as being utterly distinct from realism – theatrical truth, as shown in Theatre of the Oppressed work, need bear no relation to literal realism; if the oppressed see their oppressors as monsters, then it is monsters that we should show, even if this means developing a visual style more akin to expressionism than realism.

Boal's work pursues a dogged course with endless energy and relentless optimism. He himself zooms around the world, from Africa to Canada to Europe to Rio, teaching his methods and techniques and, to all appearances, seeming on every occasion to take as much joy in seeing a group work for the first time with an exercise he must have done some thousands of times before. (One of the problems of translating the book has been actually discovering where Boal is in the world at any particular time, coupled with the vagaries of the international postal system.) When you take in this frenetic globe-trotting, you start to understand that his ambitions for the Theatre of the Oppressed as a world-changing practice are no mere quixotism.

This is not to suggest any stasis in Boal's practice – while remaining true to the fundamental principles of the Theatre of the Oppressed, first set down some twenty years ago, Boal continues to invent new exercises and adapt old ones with the vigour of a 20-year-old; magpie-

like, he raids traditional games in whatever country he finds them, changes them if necessary to suit his particular goals, and then brings them back to his Paris and Rio centres like a hunter bringing back trophies. It is this element of joy and enthusiasm, coupled with an immense and warm humanity, which I fear no translation could entirely convey.

When watching him work, one is struck by his constant awareness and analysis of everything that is going on in the room. Impatience is rare, and emerges only when it is clear that the questioner has not listened to the answer or is not prepared to apply his or her own intellect to the work, or is looking for something more akin to paternal acceptance than knowledge of theatre and how it can help us understand and challenge the world we live in.

In his working practice as a teacher of the Theatre of the Oppressed, he eschews labels, carefully dodging questions which might pin down his current ideology or pigeon-hole it in a category of, say, 'Marxist', or 'Brechtian', or whatever; such limiting categorisations are inimical to the whole spirit of the Theatre of the Oppressed, involving as they do the mechanisation of actions and reactions, and eliminating the possibility of change or individuality – in almost every case, the Theatre of the Oppressed moves from the individual to the general, rather than vice versa. Whatever Boal's current political views, they never infringe on this work, beyond the basic philosophy of being in sympathy with the oppressed in any situation and the belief in humanity's ability to change. This does not mean that Boal does not involve himself in direct political action, sometimes using theatre – in the recent Brazilian elections he campaigned actively for Lula, the candidate of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (the Workers' Party), who came very close to winning. Boal also directs 'straight' plays in 'straight' theatres, and sees Theatre of the Oppressed as just one of the many forms of theatre, not the only one, but one which can live happily alongside the others. But the Theatre of the Oppressed is the Theatre of the Oppressed, its own animal, nothing else.

Certain points of translation may need highlighting. First of all, gender – with so many thousands of references to people, whose gender is irrelevant to the context, the constant use of 'he or she' (or the other way round) would simply have taken up space and interrupted the flow. 'S/he' was an option, but it is unsayable and there is no equivalent for the possessive pronoun; where possible I have pluralised, but in many instances this would have made things diffi-

THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED IN EUROPE

INTRODUCTION

In the pages which follow, I am going to give a brief account of some experiments carried out recently in a number of European countries. All these experiments were done in precarious conditions, with little time; two weeks in Portugal, a week in Paris, two in Stockholm, and five days in Godrano, a small Sicilian village near Palermo.

In all of these places I was able only to explain the mechanics of the different techniques, without ever being in a position to carry out an in-depth analysis. Everywhere I tried to follow the same basic scheme.

First came two days' work integrating the group, with exercises and games, and discussions on the political and economic situation in Latin America, and on the nature of the popular theatre which exists in some of our countries. These two preliminary days were necessary because the groups with which I was working were heterogeneous; in Paris, the actors came from several troupes (Aquarium, La Grande Cuillère, Carmagnole, La Tempête); in Stockholm, they were actors and spectators at the Scandinavian Skeppsholm Festival (Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, immigrants); in Portugal, people from all backgrounds; and only in Godrano actors who were all from the same group, i.e. the inhabitants of the village. †

Even if they had all been homogenous groups, I believe that this introduction would still have been necessary; actors must always work on their bodies to get to know them better and to make them more expressive. The first two days' exercises are those I describe in the second section of this book. When, afterwards, we worked with the public, we would begin by asking them to do the same //

exercises, in order not only to warm them up and help them shed their inhibitions, but also to establish a form of theatrical communion with them.

During the following two days, exercises and games would be linked together and we would prepare Invisible and Forum Theatre scenes.

On the fifth day came the showing of the Invisible Theatre scenes and on the sixth day the Forum Theatre presentation.

Contact with the audience in the Forum Theatre sessions was always established following the same format: physical warm-up and disinhibition of the spect-actors by means of games and exercises, then Image Theatre work, and finally the Forum Theatre piece itself. The themes to be treated were always suggested by the group or by the spect-actors; I myself never imposed, or even proposed, anything by way of subject-matter – if the intention is to create a theatre which liberates, then it is vital to let those concerned put forward their own themes. And, as the preparation time was short, we never managed to write whole plays, just short scenarios.

IMAGES OF TRANSITION – THE BEGINNINGS OF IMAGE THEATRE

The technique is very simple.

First the spect-actors are asked to make a group of statues, i.e. one image, which shows in a visual form a collective perspective on a given theme. For example, in France the subject was unemployment; in Portugal, the family; in Sweden, male/female sexual oppression. One after another, the spect-actors show their images. A first group statue sculpted by a spect-actor is exhibited; if the watching group, collectively or as individuals, does not agree with the image presented a second spect-actor remakes it, differently; if the audience still only partially agrees with it, other spect-actors can modify the original statue, or complete it, or build another, completely different statue. The goal is to arrive at an image which represents a consensus among the participants. When, finally, everyone is in agreement, we will have arrived at the *Real Image* (that is, the image of reality, the world as it is), which is always the representation of an oppression.

The spect-actors are then asked to construct the *Ideal Image* (the image of ideality, the world as it could be), in which the oppression will have disappeared – the representation of the desired society, in which existing problems will have been overcome.

We return then to the *Real Image* and the debate begins. Each spect-actor, one by one, has the right to modify the Real Image, in order to show in a visual form how it may be possible to move away from our actual reality and create the reality we desire; they must show the *Image of the Possible Transition*.

The spect-actors must express themselves rapidly (so that they don't think with words and then try to translate their words into concrete representations); the aim is for the spect-actors to think with their own images, to speak with their hands, like sculptors. Then the 'statues' themselves are asked to change the oppressive reality, in slow motion or in a series of freeze-frames. Each 'statue' (actor) must act like a character in role, and not display his or her own personal character traits.

Examples of Image Theatre

1 Love-making

In Sweden, a young girl of 18 showed as a representation of oppression a woman lying on her back, legs apart, with a man on top of her, in the most conventional love-making position. I asked the spect-actors to make the *Ideal Image*. A man approached and reversed the positions: the woman on top, the man underneath. But the young woman protested and made her own image: man and woman sitting facing each other, their legs intertwined; this was her representation of two human beings, of two 'subjects', two free people, making love.

2 The family

In Portugal, someone depicted a family in an inland province: a man sitting at the end of a table, a woman standing next to him, serving him a plate of food, and several people sitting round the table. A young man from Lisbon made almost the same image again, except that now all those who were seated sat on one side of the table, the left-hand side, leaving the right-hand side empty, and everyone – apart from the head of the family – was gazing at a fixed point: the television. The same theme in the United States had been shown in the following way: a central character seated in an armchair, the other characters sitting on an arm of the chair, or on the floor, or lying flat on their stomachs, all with plate in hand, all watching the television,

the table banished to a corner of the room, serving only as a place to dump the food. In France, a similar picture had been created, with the difference that the characters were not together, but each in their own space; one stretched out on the ground, almost asleep, watching the television, another leaning against the door craning his neck to see better, etc. The whole gamut of representations corresponded to the whole gamut of 'families'; the father as boss, the television as centre, the other members of the family integrated or not, etc. After the presentation of such images, we always ask the audience to build the *Ideal Image*.

3 Immigrants

In Sweden, an immigrant suggested a representation of immigrants. The different expressions of this theme were: a man with outstretched arms asking for help, another man working like a dog, a young black woman lying on the ground, wretched – expressions of despair. I then asked seven Swedes to show with their bodies how they saw themselves in relation to the immigrants. The seven struck attitudes of solidarity: arms open, embraces, a hand stretched out to signify the offer of help. I immediately asked the immigrants to come back and asked both parties to try to incorporate one another into their images, first as immobile statues, then in slow-motion sequences. It was extraordinary how, in spite of their enormous and clearly visible efforts, none of them made physical contact with each other – the requests for help and the offers of help did not connect, they remained apart. I let the exercise go on, and the audience saw clearly that the proffered help was pure fiction. This became even more evident when I insisted on prolonging the exercise even further; then the amazed audience was able to register the fact that not one outstretched arm came near the young black woman on the floor who was asking for help.

Thus, we were able to see the *desire* to help, and not the *act*.

Later, one of the Swedish participants declared that he had felt willing to help and that he had demonstrated this by his stance. He had not, however, shown the desire to reach out his hand to the young black girl. He explained later that only at the end had he understood that if his willingness was real, then the young woman was also real – at least within the authenticity, within the reality of the exercise – because the exercise was true, was real, and within this reality he had done nothing. In other words he realised that if his desire had

been real, he would really have helped the young black woman, who was really there.

4 Old age

In Sweden again, someone proposed that we treat the subject of old age; the young people then depicted unproductive, contemplative old people, awaiting death, soliciting help to cross the road, holding up the traffic, etc. Afterwards, when I asked these same young people to enter into contact with the old people they had presented, and show the *Ideal Image*, all of them, at first, showed themselves feeding an old person, or helping one cross the road, or bathing one, etc. Scenes in which all, to a greater or lesser extent, acted as nurses; scenes in which the old people were always just as unproductive and useless as before. I asked them to try to take up the original *Real Image* again, and, in slow motion, show an *Image of the Possible Transition*. Slowly, very slowly in fact, this attitude changed: one person, then another, and finally all the young people, started to show old people engaged in activities which were productive or creative, or at least not merely contemplative; for example, looking after children, reading a book, painting a picture, teaching, etc.

5 Unemployment

In France, unemployment was the topic proposed. Generally speaking, all the scenes were very similar: a never-ending queue leading up to a young woman typing. Near her, other people working. All the people in the queue had long faces. In Denmark, I saw the same theme illustrated in almost the same way, except that the people queuing were smiling and distributing political pamphlets; it seems that in Denmark the Social Security system is more generous and the unemployed can get up to 90 per cent of their salary – they take advantage of this to engage in a variety of activities, including politics. In Portugal, the same theme had been more comprehensively dealt with: the same queue, the same young woman, but in addition, by her side, a figure composed of three men holding up three women in a sort of pyramid, crowned with arms holding a loaf of bread. In the activated version of this image, the loaf of bread was given to a policeman, who in turn gave it to a man reclining some distance away from the bread production process, lying on his back, eating; this man gave the policeman some crumbs from the loaf he had

received, the policeman kept half of these for himself, and gave the other half to the human pyramid which had produced it. Opposite, in the line, men and women awaited their turn to join the pyramid, to start working, to get half the crumbs of the loaf. (For more examples of Image Theatre, see pp. 164–201.)

FIRST EXPERIENCES WITH INVISIBLE THEATRE

One point must be clearly understood: Invisible Theatre is theatre; it must have a text with a scripted core, which will inevitably be modified, according to the circumstances, to suit the interventions of the spect-actors.

The chosen subject must be an issue of burning importance, something known to be a matter of profound and genuine concern for the future spect-actors. From that starting point, a small play is constructed. The actors must play their parts as if they were playing in a traditional theatre, for a traditional audience. However, when the play is ready, it will be performed in a place which is not a theatre and for an audience which is not an audience. In the course of our European experiences, we did shows in the Paris Métro, in ferry-boats, in the restaurants and streets of Stockholm, and even on a stage, in a theatre where a conference was taking place.

I repeat again: in the Invisible Theatre, the actors must perform just like real actors; that is, they must live.

Examples of Invisible Theatre

1 *Sexual harassment*

This invisible play was performed three times in the Métro in Paris, on the Vincennes–Neuilly line. Our chosen theatre was always the last carriage before the first-class section, in the middle of the train.

1st action

The group (apart from two actors) got on at the first stop; the scene-setting took place at the second. Two female actors remained standing near the central doors; one actor, the Female Victim, sat down, with the Tunisian on the next-door seat, the Mother and Son a little further away, and the other actors scattered around the carriage. Through two stations, nothing abnormal took place; they all read the papers or engaged in minimal conversation with the other passengers, etc.

2nd action

At the third station, another actor, the Male Aggressor, got on board. He sat down opposite the Female Victim, or, if the seat was taken, stood beside her. After a little while, he started nudging his leg against the young woman's, and she immediately began to protest. The Aggressor said he hadn't done anything, it was an accident. On no occasion did a single passenger ever defend the young woman. After a short interval, the Aggressor returned to his task, and this time didn't stop at leaning his leg against the young woman's, but openly placed his hand on her thigh. The latter became indignant, but no one backed her up. She got up and crossed to the other side of the compartment, where she remained standing. The Tunisian grasped the opportunity to stick up for ... the Aggressor. That concluded the second action.

3rd action

At the fifth station, the Male Victim got on, a very handsome young actor, the best-looking man in our group (– we were no James Deans!). He had barely entered before the two women by the doors, the Feminist and her Female Friend, started airing various opinions on this young man's good looks. After a bit, the Feminist addressed the Male Victim, asking him the time. He answered. She asked him which station he was getting off at. He objected:

Look, what's with the questions? Have I asked you anything, have I asked you what station you are getting off at?

If you had asked me, I would have told you: I'm getting off at République, and if you'd like to get off at the same place, we could 'get off' together.

As she spoke she caressed him, under the outraged stares of the passengers (who must have had some difficulty believing this unusual scene). The young man tried to escape her clutches, but she hung on to him:

Are you aware that you're a very handsome man? Do you know, I have this terrible urge to kiss you ...

The young man tried to flee, but he was hemmed in between the Feminist and her Friend, who were loudly asserting their right to kiss