trans atlantic cultures
Cultural Histories of the Atlantic World 18th–21st Centuries

ISSN 2739-6614
transatlantic-cultures.org



Theater of the Oppressed: Intercontinental Trajectories

Sophie Coudray

From its 1950s roots in Brazil to its proliferation around the world, the history of Theatre of the Oppressed has been about artistic, political and human exchanges. This article analyzes the movements that fostered the development of a trailblazing theatrical practice in Latin America and Europe that can now be found on every continent.

PUBLISHED	January 3, 2023
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE	French
AVAILABLE IN	English, French
TOPICS	Performing Arts
SPACES AND PLACES	Europe · South America · South Atlantic · Africa · North America
PERIODS	The Atlantic Space Within Globalization
KEYWORDS	theatre of the oppressed, augusto boal, political theatre, exile
PERMANENT LINK	https://transatlantic-cultures.org/en/records/trajectoires-intercontinentales-du-theatre-de-l-opprime/

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Brazilian director Augusto Boal developed and theorized Theatre of the Oppressed so that non-professional actors could use theater as a tool to raise awareness, debate, mobilize and train for collective action. While the birth of the movement coincided with the publication of *Teatro del oprimido y otras poéticas y politicas* in 1974, its poetics grew out of a decades-long journey in several Latin American countries. Boal's exile accelerated its spread to Europe. In the late 1970s, the method became professional and spread to France through workshops and the publication of Boal's books. At the dawn of the 1990s, when Theatre of the Oppressed was already widespread in Europe and the Americas, with centers in Paris, Rio de Janeiro and other cities, it developed in Africa and West Bengal, India, where it reached an unprecedented scale.

The international dimension lies at the heart of the poetics of Theatre of the Oppressed, which has developed at the pace of transnational and intercontinental exchanges in relations of opposition, porosity and adaptation. Without claiming to be exhaustive, this article analyzes the practice's artistic, theoretical and political aspects through the lens of trajectories and exchanges by chronologically following the stages of its development in the Atlantic space as well as its evolution in different areas.

The roots of Theatre of the Oppressed: Augusto Boal and Brazilian people's theater (1956-1971)

Born 1931 in Rio de Janeiro, Augusto Boal fell in love with theater at an early age. His references were mostly European, which can be found in Theater of the Oppressed. Boal earned a degree in chemistry before pursuing his education in that field—and theater—at New York's Columbia University, where he studied under John Gassner and expanded his theatrical horizons while writing and directing plays. Back in Brazil, in 1956 Boal joined Teatro de Arena de São Paulo, a small company whose repertoire and aesthetics he helped to refresh alongside young actors and playwrights from the university theater. All of them were committed to the same progressive, even militant, political goals during the presidency of João Goulart (1961-1964), who enacted sweeping social reforms. Teatro de Arena espoused the idea of popular theater, which in this sense means theater for the *Brazilian people*, the concept of the people having less to do with the nation than with the working classes. [1]

At first, the Teatro de Arena opted for realist aesthetics, Actor's Studio method acting and a primarily European (Mirbeau, Feydeau, Sean O'Casey) and American (Steinbeck) repertoire before stepping away from these models. The first break was an aesthetic one, involving the actors' style and diction. While great institutions such as the Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia traditionally copied European patterns and rhythms of speech, tending towards Portuguese diction, the Teatro de Arena challenged the colonial legacy and its byproduct, "bourgeois" theater. By 1958, the break was complete. Rising political tensions and the radicalization of several of the company's members prompted the Teatro de Arena to completely turn its back on the European and American repertoire, at least for a few years. Brazilian authors now wrote the plays, which focused on the everyday realities of Brazilian life, from football to strikes. Boal created and led a playwriting seminar to nurture a new generation of authors who combined art and politics. The goal was to break free from bourgeois Brazilian theater and the European model from which it borrowed heavily.



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★ Sendo esporte das multidões, coisa quase integrada na nacionalidade brasileira, não poderia o teatro relega-lo, e, arrostando todos os imprevistos cênicos aí está.
★ A peça é burlada na **Escola do Realismo**, portanto, não obedecendo à mesma orientação cênica de "Êles não usam Black-Tie". É o mesmo **naturalismo**, mas, com certo apuro técnico na encenação.
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★ Futebolistas, técnicos, mentores e seus familiares, terão seus dramas pessoais, vividos fora da cancha, levados para um espetáculo teatral.
★ A "gaveta", o suborno, o egoismo individualista, em choque com o senso de equipe que a todos deve presidir.
★ O desajuste dos atletas: daquêle em evidência, com cartaz crescente; daquêle outro, em franco perceptivel declinio.
★ Enfim, é futebol fora do campo: nas concentrações, nos vestiários, nas "secretarias" mudando estas os resultados concretos da cancha.
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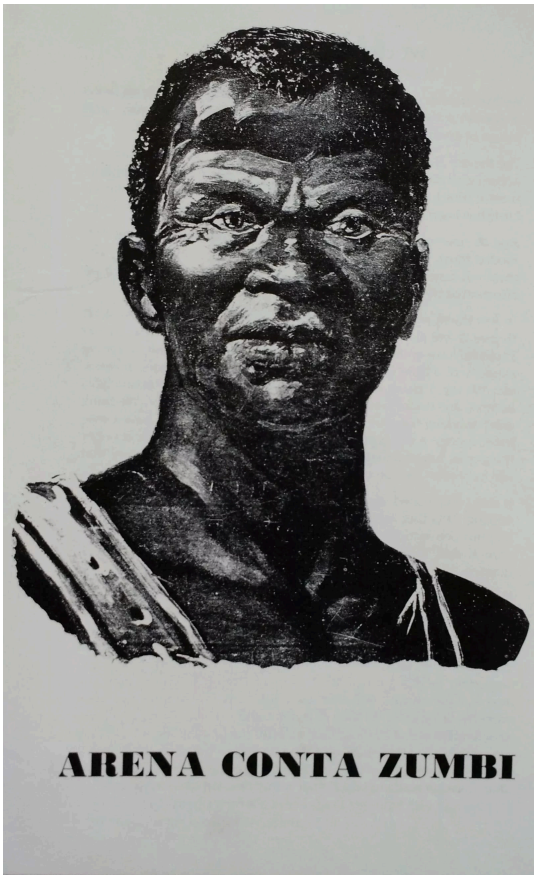
Um Teatro de Cultura e Elevação ! ! !

Teatro de Arena, 1959

Source: Instituto Augusto Boal, AB.ABTt.001

The Teatro de Arena staged plays by Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, Oduvaldo Vianna Filho, Roberto Freire and Boal while keeping its realist aesthetics based on Stanislavski's methods. Here again, the language itself was affected: Brazilian Portuguese and working-class accents could now be heard on stage. Black and mixed-race actors reflected the Brazilian population's ethnic diversity, contesting the social and racial hierarchies inherited from colonization.

After years of rejection, the Teatro de Arena returned to the European classics, but with a Brazilian twist. From 1962, Machiavelli and Lope de Vega were staged and adapted to the national context. Bertolt Brecht's influence grew increasingly important in Boal's work. Then, the 1964 coup and ensuing military dictatorship completely changed how plays were produced and performed—especially by left-leaning companies like the Teatro de Arena. Plays about political events were written, leading to clashes with the police and government censors. The company then began producing musicals. From 1965, several plays paid tribute to Black and revolutionary heroes in the series *Arena conta* ("Arena tells the story of..."): *Arena conta Zumbi*, *Arena conta Bahia*, *Arena conta Tiradentes* and *Arena conta Bolívar*.



Arena vs Zumbi poster

Source: Archives municipales de Nancy, Fonds 1 Z 214

Boal then experimented with group theater and developed what he called the *sistema coringa* (the "joker system"), which later became central to Theater of the Oppressed. The players took turns performing several roles, breaking with identification-based acting. The character's social mask, inspired by the Brechtian social *gestus*, ensured continuity in deliberately fragmented, eclectic collective works mixing different aesthetics. The plays met with great success, making it possible for the Teatro de Arena to tour the United States (New York and Berkeley), Mexico, Venezuela, Peru and Argentina—but they also made the authorities suspicious.



The Joker System (sistema coringa), 1970

Source: Instituto Augusto Boal, AB.ASCf.046

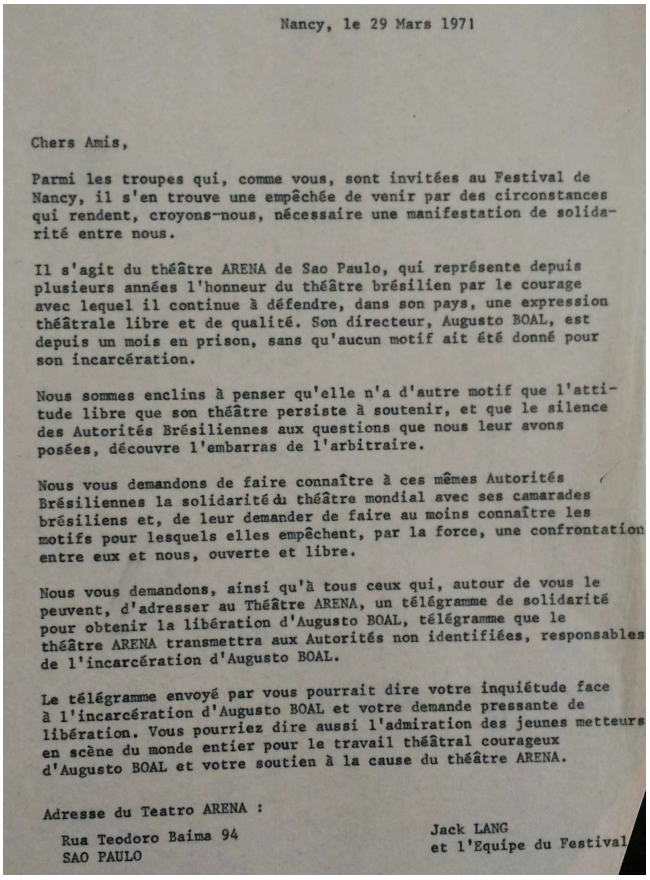
From 1956 to 1964, the Teatro de Arena based its work on the dialectical relationship between the rejection and appropriation of European and North American theatrical forms and artistic models. Under Boal's aegis, the company forged a unique aesthetic and political identity in Brazil's theatrical landscape, relying on aesthetic and theoretical aspects borrowed from European dramaturgy (Brecht, Stanislavski, and several authors) to foster the emergence of a new generation of Brazilian writers, actors and themes. But during the military dictatorship, Boal turned to European authors: he used his 1964 production of Molière's *Tartuffe* to denounce the involvement of the conservative branch of the Brazilian Catholic Church in the coup d'état. In 1970, his last play with the Teatro de Arena was Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*.

In the late 1960s, the Teatro de Arena struck out on a new path: production was handed over from artists to the people. Without breaking with professional theater, alongside the company's creative activity Boal developed workshops with non-professional actors in São Paulo's factories and neighborhoods. In 1970, one of the techniques he used was newspaper theater (*teatro jornal*), which consists of performing new sketches every day based on articles in media outlets controlled and censored by the military government to demystify the news and show what the press does not print. The technique itself was not new—the "living newspaper" was already used for information transmission and education purposes in the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1920—but Boal adapted it to media and theater censorship in Brazil. Years later, the theatrical practice of political intervention using non-professional actors was to become the cornerstone of Theater of the Oppressed.

As the idea of Theater of the Oppressed took shape in Boal's mind—practice came first, theory later—its roots had an intercontinental character. Between 1956, when Boal joined the Teatro de Arena, and 1971, when he went into exile, there was never a clean break with Europe and the United States. Even in the periods when European plays and aesthetics were rejected, ties remained, especially theoretical ones, starting with Stanislavski's continuing influence (since his theatrical training) and Brecht several years later. There were also human connections. From 1968, Boal was in contact with Émile Copfermann, who introduced his thought and methods to France by having some of his articles published in the journal *Travail théâtral*. Lastly, there were artistic links. The Teatro de Arena introduced *Arena conta Zumbi* and newspaper theater at the 1971 World Theatre Festival in Nancy. Boal's reputation preceded his exile. The Teatro de Arena's productions were known throughout the Americas and beyond, setting the stage for a postive reception of Theater of the Oppressed.

From Latin America to Europe: a poetics through the lens of exile (1971-1985)

Boal came under suspicion of engaging in subversive activities, fomenting rebellion and writing anti-government texts disseminated abroad, although he was never charged with any crime. His conspicuously political artistic practice and the relationships he had established abroad led the dictatorial junta's police to abduct him in February 1971. On the basis of false accusations, he was imprisoned and tortured for months at the Department of Political and Social Order. In jail, he wrote his own version of Victor Hugo's *Torquemada* to describe the reality of prison life. Moreover, his incarceration jeopardized the Teatro de Arena's participation in the World Theater Festival in Nancy. Fortunately, Boal already enjoyed a solid reputation and the festival's president, Jack Lang, quickly launched a major international solidarity campaign, gathering signatures from European and American artists and intellectuals, including Richard Schechner, Arthur Miller, Bernard Dort, Jean-Louis Barrault, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ariane Mnouchkine, Antoine Vitez and Peter Brook. The international mobilization undoubtedly contributed to his release: the regime was careful to keep up a tolerant façade for the rest of the world. Boal was freed in the spring but forced to go into exile.



Nancy, le 29 Mars 1971

Chers Amis,

Parmi les troupes qui, comme vous, sont invitées au Festival de Nancy, il s'en trouve une empêchée de venir par des circonstances qui rendent, croyons-nous, nécessaire une manifestation de solidarité entre nous.

Il s'agit du théâtre ARENA de Sao Paulo, qui représente depuis plusieurs années l'honneur du théâtre brésilien par le courage avec lequel il continue à défendre, dans son pays, une expression théâtrale libre et de qualité. Son directeur, Augusto BOAL, est depuis un mois en prison, sans qu'aucun motif ait été donné pour son incarcération.

Nous sommes enclins à penser qu'elle n'a d'autre motif que l'attitude libre que son théâtre persiste à soutenir, et que le silence des Autorités Brésiliennes aux questions que nous leur avons posées, découvre l'embarras de l'arbitraire.

Nous vous demandons de faire connaître à ces mêmes Autorités Brésiliennes la solidarité du théâtre mondial avec ses camarades brésiliens et, de leur demander de faire au moins connaître les motifs pour lesquels elles empêchent, par la force, une confrontation entre eux et nous, ouverte et libre.

Nous vous demandons, ainsi qu'à tous ceux qui, autour de vous le peuvent, d'adresser au Théâtre ARENA, un télégramme de solidarité pour obtenir la libération d'Augusto BOAL, télégramme que le théâtre ARENA transmettra aux Autorités non identifiées, responsables de l'incarcération d'Augusto BOAL.

Le télégramme envoyé par vous pourrait dire votre inquiétude face à l'incarcération d'Augusto BOAL et votre demande pressante de libération. Vous pourriez dire aussi l'admiration des jeunes metteurs en scène du monde entier pour le travail théâtral courageux d'Augusto BOAL et votre soutien à la cause du théâtre ARENA.

Adresse du Teatro ARENA :

Rua Teodoro Baima 94
SAO PAULO

Jack LANG
et l'Equipe du Festival

Jack Lang's letter

Source: Archives municipales de Nancy, 1 Z 214

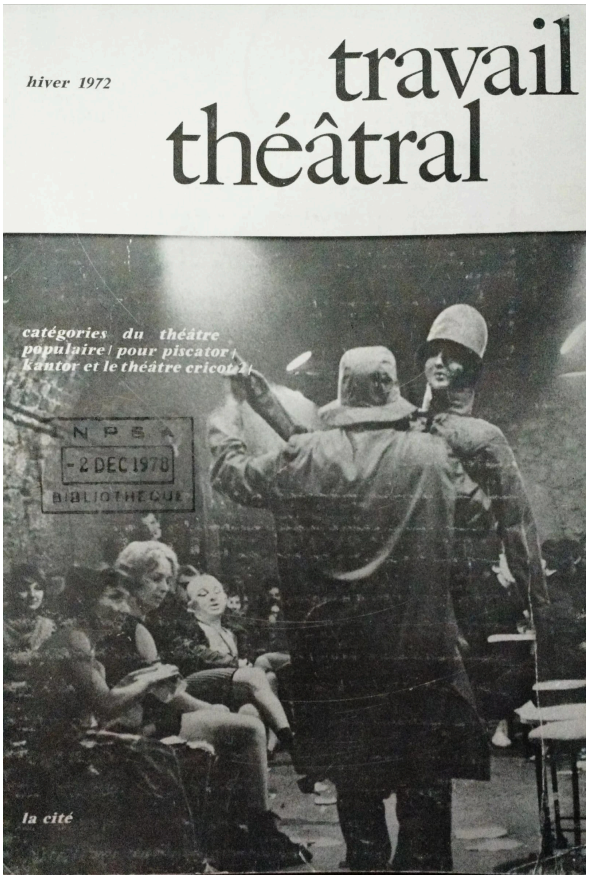
After his release, Boal went to France to rejoin his company and demonstrate the originality of their work in Nancy and Paris. When the Teatro de Arena returned home, it was without Boal: his life was at risk if he went back. He and his wife, actress Cécilia Thumin, moved to Buenos Aires, beginning a decade of life in exile. Boal did not return to Brazil until the 1979 amnesty bill became law.

While living in Argentina, Boal worked in Peru, Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico. Theater of the Oppressed was born during this Latin American exile. With students in Buenos Aires, he worked on "invisible theater", using it to spark public political debates while keeping his identity a secret to ward off any potential threats. The idea of performing theater in the public space without the "spectators" knowing it did not start with Boal, but he put it into a more complete arsenal underpinned by theatrical and political theory, which made it one of the leading Theater of the Oppressed techniques and lastingly associated him with invisible theater.

In 1973, Boal's workshops in Peru as part of the Avarado government's national literacy drive gave the poetics of the oppressed a decisive push. With non-professional actors from underprivileged backgrounds, sometimes not even sharing the same language, he developed many branches comprising Theater of the Oppressed techniques and exercises: image theater and simultaneous dramaturgy, which heralded forum theater. Years of experimenting in Latin America with the idea of a people's theater performed by non-professional actors as a means to raise political awareness or spawn a collective social movement culminated in workshops. The "spect-actor" became the crux of a process in which the oppressed, who until then were merely passive observers of the political system keeping them down, could use theatrical tools to collectively organize, take action, mount the stage of history and overturn the political order. This achievement, or rather this temporary phase in the constant developement of Theatre of the Oppressed ,

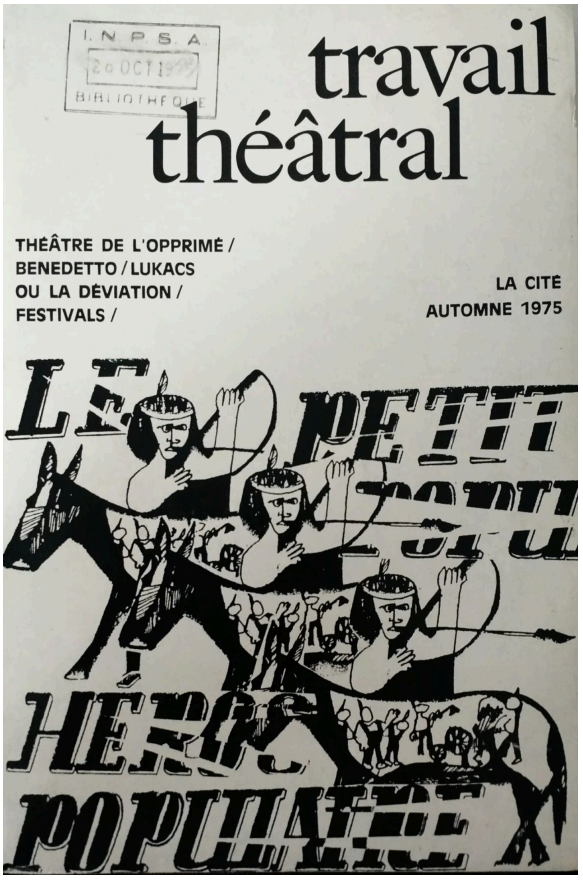
led to the 1974 publication of Boal's summary theoretical work: *Teatro del oprimido y otras poéticas y politicas*, published in English in 1977 as *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London, Routledge). The title is an unambiguous reference to the very popular *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire, who had a clear impact on Boal's method. The book summarizes articles written over a period of many years, drawing a straight line from Boal's work as director at the Teatro de Arena and the workshops in Peru. The following year, he published a second book, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, to dialogue with and supplement the first (London, Routledge). *Theatre of the Oppressed* laid the theoretical groundwork; *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* is a user's manual. Together they sum up Boal's different artistic stages, Stanislavski's influence, his disagreements with Aristotle and Brecht and acting workshops with non-professionals. As the synthesis of a journey that was both artistic and political, *Theatre of the Oppressed* shows the poetics of the oppressed at the confluence of multiple experiences that Boal united under a guiding political principle: making theater work for the oppressed so that it can be used as a tool of struggle, a "rehearsal of the revolution". [2]

In 1977, the Boal family, fleeing the threat of a coup d'état in Argentina, began their European exile. The first stop was Portugal, but that was only a waystation. Friends and intellectuals with whom he had established relationships over the years, especially Bernard Dort, helped him reach his final destination, France. The Teatro de Arena's performances in Nancy (1971), the publication of articles in *Travail théâtral* (1972, 1975, 1977) and the translation of his first two books into French (1977 and 1978) popularized his name and method in France, opened up doors and allowed him to settle in Paris in 1978.



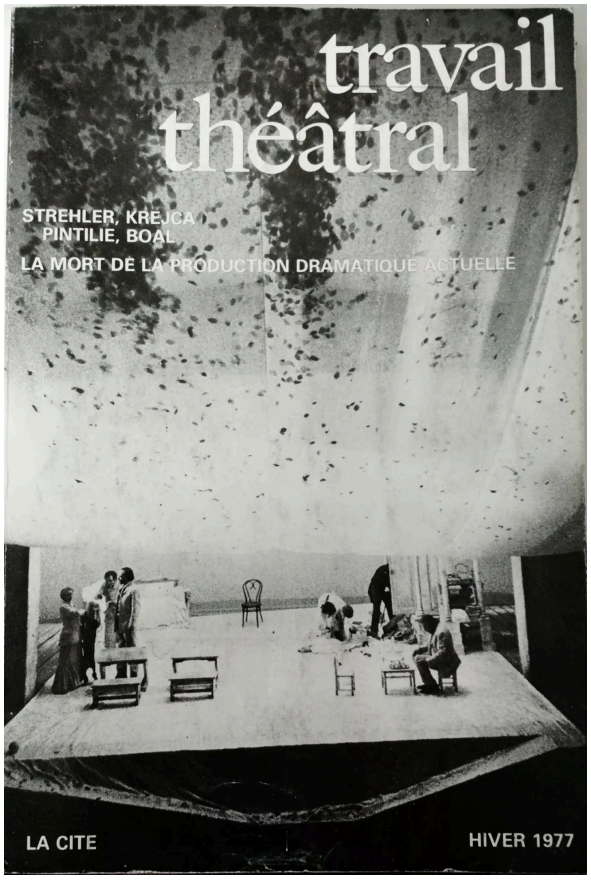
Travail théâtral, 1972

Source: Collection Sophie Coudray



Travail théâtral, 1975

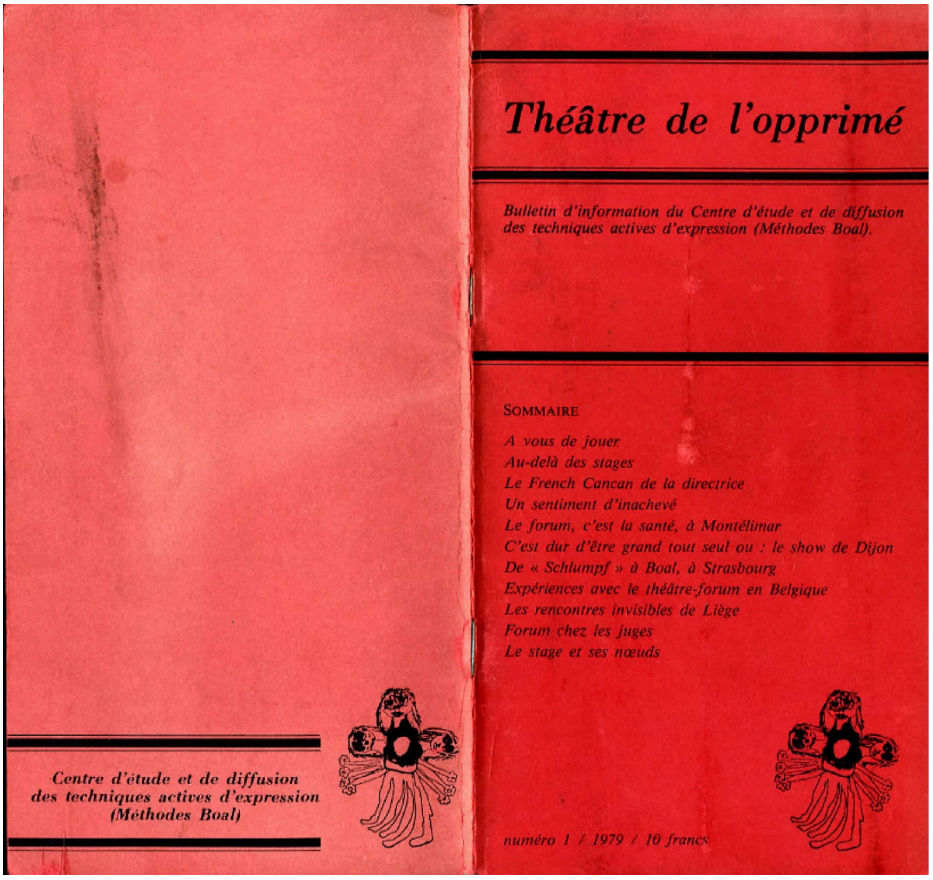
Source: Collection Sophie Coudray



Travail théâtral, 1977

Source: Collection Sophie Coudray

The conditions were ripe for Theatre of the Oppressed to really take off while coming into its own as a professional practice at the intersection of theater, education and political and social commitment. With help from Émile Copfermann, Boal founded the "Boal group", which in 1979 became the Centre d'entraînement et de diffusion des techniques actives d'expression (Center for Training and Dissemination of Active Expression Techniques, or Céditade) that in 1985 became the Centre for Theater of the Oppressed (CTO), entirely devoted to developing, practicing and disseminating Theater of the Oppressed.



Céditade Report, 1979

Source: Collection Sophie Coudray

Hailing from a broad array of socio-professional backgrounds (educators, social workers, artists, students, etc.), the practitioners around Boal learned Theater of the Oppressed techniques, adapted them to the French context and taught the method in workshops. Forum theater quickly became the flagship technique, at the group's initiative or by request from different sectors (professionals, trade unions, community organizers, etc.). Schools were also very interested in the techniques, and Theatre of the Oppressed entered classrooms. The Céditade set up its own forum theaters on various themes, from jobless couples to the sociopolitical issues of motherhood, as well as forum shows that, unlike forum theater, were performed in theaters before diverse audiences. In 1982-1983, the Céditade gave a series of performances at the Théâtre Présent in Paris called *Enjeux la vie*, a group of four plays it created, including an adaptation of a work by Brecht. Meanwhile, Boal continued directing in France and Germany —in collaboration with the Céditade or independently depending on the project—and staging his own work (*Coup de poing sur la pointe du couteau*) as well as plays by Latin American authors such as Júlio Cortázar and Griselda Gambaro. However, once the enthusiasm of artists, students and activists, heightened by Boal's international reputation and political refugee status, had faded, Theater of the Oppressed, like his more traditional productions, began to fall flat. Many, including at the Ministry of Culture, considered it too militant, too unprofessional and too sociocultural. The days of "rehearsing for the revolution" seemed to be over. But Theatre of the Oppressed found a new lease on life as a sociocultural practice by forging close ties to the education, prevention and urban policy sectors.

In Europe, the audience concerned or attracted by the practice and the performances based on the method, originating from work deeply grounded in Latin America's political, social and artistic reality, turned out quite different from what Boal had previously attempted. This led to changes in techniques and

the analytical framework as well as the development of new Theater of the Oppressed branches rooted in the European context, such as, in the mid-1980s, "Rainbow of Desire" a form of theater therapy developed with psychiatrists. At the crossroads of psychotherapy (dialoguing with Jacob Moreno's humanist psychodrama) and activism, Rainbow of Desire techniques aimed to root out the "cops" living in the participants' minds and help them overcome the internal hurdles resulting from the internalized oppression that kept them from engaging in collective struggles.

Theatre of the Oppressed undeniably expanded after a permanent group was founded in Paris. But given his international career, could Boal really be said to have had a "French period", including as a more "traditional" director? France, where Theatre of the Oppressed began its professionalization and institutionalization process, seems only to have been a springboard for the mass dissemination of its techniques.

Back in Brazil (1985-2009)

Theatre of the Oppressed quickly conquered Europe, offering Boal unquestionable fame. Brazil's 1979 amnesty law allowed him to organize a tour with his Parisian group in his native land, where his reputation remained strong, and to showcase the techniques and poetics of Theater of the Oppressed. Boal moved to Rio de Janeiro for good in the mid-1980s, when the political situation allowed him to develop his theater as part of national education policies. His ties with France remained intact. He had a close relationship with the Paris CTO until the mid-1990s and remained its president for several years.

Boal also brought Theatre of the Oppressed into dialogue with institutional politics by putting his practice at the service of the Workers' Party, of which he was a city councilman (*vereador*) in Rio de Janeiro from 1992 to 1996. He used his method to consult with his constituents during forum theater sessions on themes concerning their daily lives (health, education, etc.), taking their proposals to draft bills and pass laws. This branch, called legislative theater, depended on Boal's term (he did not win another one) and was used by other groups in Brazil in the late 1990s. Many experiments based on the method took place in various countries, such as the Netherlands, Canada and the United Kingdom to improve the National Health Service in East Sussex in 1999. More recently, sociologist José Soeiro put legislative theater to work in Portugal, where he was elected to the National Assembly in 2005.

Until his death in 2009, Boal remained an international figure, traveling the world to lecture and lead workshops. His books have been translated into many languages and are still in print. In 1994, he received UNESCO's Picasso Medal for his contribution to the arts and culture.

An international practice

Theatre of the Oppressed is designed as a method to transmit the joker, the central figure in Boal's poetics, to the oppressed, non-actors who become "spect-actors" using its techniques in their liberation struggles. Transmission is at the heart of the project. The first thing Boal did after setting up a permanent group in Paris was train a team of jokers who, in turn, taught the method to others. In the late 1970s, Theatre of the Oppressed developed in different countries (Belgium, Denmark, Quebec, West Germany, Sweden, Mexico, the United States, Tunisia, Brazil and certainly others, although an official count was not kept at the time). Most of the groups remained completely independent from the Paris structure, which played a more

centralizing than directive or supervisory role. At first, the Céditade tried to set up a Theater of the Oppressed network, but quickly abandoned that goal. The Paris CTO nevertheless played a key part in transmitting Boal's method through workshops for a wide range of audiences all over Europe.

Boal introduced Theatre of the Oppressed to the world, including through the translation of his two seminal texts. Boal intended to allow anyone to freely appropriate his method and harness it for movements in a wide range of contexts. In order to facilitate its dissemination and prevent any attempt to commercialize a fundamentally militant method, he always refused to copyright the name "Theater of the Oppressed". The choice is easy to understand in light of his original project of allowing non-actors to use theater for social or political ends without having to be led by professionals who do necessarily understand their struggles or share their interests. But the movement quickly escaped control. Theatre of the Oppressed techniques were used in different contexts and for diverse, if not opposing, ends. Boal later openly criticized uses of forum theater that ran counter to an emancipatory approach.

Theatre of the Oppressed was developed after experiments motivated in large part by a rejection of European and North American models while maintaining ambivalent relationships in a dialectic of distance and reappropriation of this theatrical legacy. Established professionally in Europe by a permanent group seeking recognition from public officials, artists and activists while gradually spreading in many countries, it is an inherently international practice born in exile and rooted in borderless solidarity networks. If an international Theater of the Oppressed movement exists, it is not clearly structured and remains relatively fragmented and heterogeneous. Some figures, such as Julian Boal, Sanjoy Ganguly, Bárbara Santos and José Soeiro, may claim informal authority over the movement, but without overtly exercising leadership on an international scale. While the International Theatre of the Oppressed Organization (ITOO) was founded in 1983, today professional and non-professional national and international groups practice Theater of the Oppressed more on the basis of political and artistic affinity. Meetings and international Theatre of the Oppressed festivals in Latin America, Europe and India seem to be the cornerstone of international dialogue and cooperation. Some things about ITOO remain unclear, notably the number of member countries and the officialization of its existence. Nevertheless, it seems that by 1991, ITOO grouped together 44 companies and about a hundred writers, academics, cultural officials and practitioners from India, Gabon, Brazil, Cuba, Estonia, Israel, Canada, Puerto Rico, Guadeloupe, Singapore, the United States, Sweden, England, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal and France. ITOO develops North-South intercultural Theater of the Oppressed activities while fostering dialogue on theoretical and practical issues between groups from different countries. Today there are Centers for Theater of the Oppressed (CTO) in several cities, from Rio de Janeiro to Kolkata and Omaha.

While Theater of the Oppressed was long associated with Latin America and Europe (primarily France, because Boal was living in Paris), one of the main centers was in West Bengal, India, where Sanjoy Ganguly founded Jana Sanskriti ("People's Culture" in Bengali) in 1985, starting a new chapter in the movement's history. After reading the English translation of *Theater of the Oppressed*, Ganguly reached out to Boal. The special relationship they developed marked a decisive turning point for Jana Sanskriti, [3] which began rethinking its work in light of this method, closely mixed with traditional Indian artistic practices. Strong ties exist between the Indian movement and groups from other countries, especially France. In the early 1990s, Paris CTO members helped train Indian practitioners, who in turn participated in the international Theatre of the Oppressed conference in France in 1991. Discussions about their respective practices and joint training programs have regularly taken place on different continents since the 1990s. Currently, European practitioners are particularly in demand to train their Indian

counterparts. Jana Sanskriti operates as a movement, with permanent actors training non-professional recruits, performing in rural parts of West Bengal, pursuing overtly political goals, working locally with villagers, transforming deeply rooted practices, influencing public policies and building protest movements. Today, Jana Sanskriti often appears as a model for practitioners in other countries because of its structure, its similarity to the original poetics of Theater of the Oppressed and the magnitude of its theatrical campaigns. Theater of the Oppressed is a movement that originated in Latin America, developed professionally in Europe, spread internationally, returned to and took root in Brazil and fully blossomed in India.

Besides India, there is a host of more or less activist amateur and professional troupes in many countries across the continents whose work is based on Boal's method and books. In the United States, professionals often combine Theatre of the Oppressed techniques with others, merging art forms into a vast repertoire of participatory theatrical practices centered on the excluded and the voiceless. There are many Theatre of the Oppressed troupes, or at least troupes for which its techniques are one tool among others in Latin America, where international meetings take place on a regular basis. In Burkina Faso, Prosper Kompaoré founded the Atelier theater burkinabé in 1978 (subsidized by the government and NGOs to mount shows on health, the condition of women, etc.), which fully integrates forms of popular African cultural and artistic expression to promote participatory theater for development. Based on Boal's books, Kompaoré incorporated Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, mainly forum theater, into traditional Kotéba theater. In 1989, Boal participated in the francophone theater festival in Ouagadougou. The techniques were also used in other African countries, such as Ethiopia and Eritrea, although they did not always work there since they were not adapted to the socio-political context and practices specific to the oppressed groups the artists were addressing, thus casting doubt on the method's alleged universality. Several countries have forged partnerships, including an international program directed by Bárbara Santos in Brazil to disseminate Theatre of the Oppressed and train practitioners in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Angola and Senegal (the Kàddu Yarrax Company holds a forum theater festival every year in Dakar).

Thus, even without a global headquarters or a centralizing body, many practitioners regularly collaborate internationally, if not intercontinentally, and create more or less formal networks. Several international festivals took place in the past few decades and in 2009, Rio de Janeiro hosted practitioners from 28 countries for the first Theatre of the Oppressed international conference.

While Theatre of the Oppressed may seem stuck in the bygone era of revolutions and national liberation movements, it has not declined like so many other activist theater troupes. In the 2000s, many new companies founded by practitioners who have not always followed Boal's teachings have picked up the torch and paved the way for a new generation, renewing some of the practice's artistic aspects and applying them to present-day political struggles. The poetics of the oppressed, turned into a method, makes it easy to appropriate, adapt to various contexts and incorporate a diversity of sometimes controversial practices. Above all, it allows them to continuously evolve and survive. This accounts for why Theatre of the Oppressed remains so vibrant more than 40 years after Boal's seminal work was published. If the movement is now found on every continent, that is undoubtedly because it opens up spaces of dialogue from one country to another, can be used to address the specific needs and interests of oppressed groups and was forged in a form of internationalism at a time when the word "oppressed" had a very strong political resonance.

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NOTES

1. Augusto Boal, "Sur le théâtre populaire en Amérique latine," *Périodes*, March 5, 2015
2. Sophie Coudray, "La radicalité politique du Théâtre de l'Opprimé," *Périodes*, April 30, 2018
3. Sanjoy Ganguly, "Repenser l'interaction sur le hors scène. L'expérience du Jana Sanskriti," *Contretemps. Revue de critique communiste*, January 4, 2017