



Master of Fine Arts: Theater and Contemporary Performance  
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## Introduction

Progressive artists, activists and social movements of the 21st century have sought to recognize, stimulate and activate national consciousness with whole bodies of efforts by the very people in the sphere of thought of the fluctuating movements. These coalitions strive for progress that stimulates spontaneity, creative activity, and emotional expressions to break the cultures of silence and promote freedoms in a broad sense.

Socially recognized coalitions seek powerful alternates to reconsidering and reconceptualizing what it means to be fully human in the world. The notion personhood, defined by Webster Dictionary as the “quality or condition of being a person” in today’s climate, is negotiated and influenced in cultural and social domains, emerging to determine behavior and seek out creative control to foster engagement with the world. This version of personhood stands in direct response over individual self-concept defined by people's moral psychologies, motivations, beliefs about the world, and their sense of right and wrong, shaped significantly by keeping some information in and letting other information out.

Powerful alternatives activate freedoms of liberation: movements, motivations, and actions that move away from individual liberties that deem others socially defenseless to focus on collective freedom to further the consciousness and coordinated effort of the collective. "Freedom is more than emancipation, but rather a yearning to enjoy the economic, political, social, educational, psychological, and cultural conditions, that would assume a maximum realization of human potential and finding an equivalence to political personhood,” sociologist Gustavo Gutierrez

says, and further "the gradual conquest of true freedom leads to create, to construct, to wonder and venture." <sup>1</sup>

At the very heart for freedom, new kinds of cruelty always coming into existence, pushing our sights to sharpen, and circles of compassion to enlarge. This awareness Gutierrez refers to is "recognized personhood, centrally located in our social and political theories. We need to acknowledge the political economy of personhood and its deprivation of the majority of the humanity of its status as "cultures of silence," the powerlessness to speak up for ourselves and others, and that liberation grows out of the unbearable consequences of social and economic predicaments." <sup>1</sup>

According to 20th-century social psychologist and philosopher Erich Fromm, "most people who adapt well to capitalistic society, have lost essential aspects of their genuine individuality and spontaneity." Freedom, on the other hand, "can relate to a world of love and work, in the genuine expression of emotional, sensual and intellectual capacities, without giving up individual self." <sup>2</sup> Liberation must include a re-appropriation of spontaneity and emotion that does not repress essential parts of oneself. Transformation of the social conditions that causes distress in the first place has to do with the unraveling through active involvement and demonstrations in the social world.

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<sup>1</sup> Van, Erven E. *The Playful Revolution: Theatre and Liberation in Asia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Rutherford, Jonathan. "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha," in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, 207-221.

An emerging philosophy, the Third Space, activates the continuing inquiry we pursue in the world, with the world and with each other through active invention and reinvention. Social philosopher Homi Bhabha sees the Third Space “as a space in which otherwise static cultural identities can negotiate within a compelling inner space, and re/negotiated here and now in outer exchange points. "People always exist in multiple forms of identification, waiting to be created and constructed." <sup>2</sup>

Social progress itself is dynamic and requires the exploration to be equally potent. What forums and spaces identify, engage, and reflect the Third Space? What are the motivations? Can a metaphysical approach ground in localized specifics?

### **The Third Space and The Theatrical Journey**

The theater is a place, medium, and meeting for individuals with different cultural identities and perceptions to attempt to understand each other. The uniqueness of theatrical space and what theater offers moves through the characters with the unique power to occupy the same space as the audience. According to Brazilian theater practitioner Augusto Boal, "theater is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society." <sup>3</sup> Social transformation involves reflecting and engaging with the other's perspective but also with one's complex struggle.

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<sup>3</sup> Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.

Playwright and politician Vaclav Havel believed that "theater is an instrument of human liberation, a sensitive seismograph of an era, a sponge that quickly soaks up important ingredients in the atmosphere." <sup>4</sup> What then can we learn about the Third Space through the use of theater, and what can we learn about theater by working in the Third Space? I place a contemporary comment, mapping the utilization of the Third Space in philosophy and approach, hypothesizing that theater influenced by and working in the Third Space moves society closer toward self-liberation and social transformation.

## II. Philosophies (Recognizing and Stimulating)

Augusto Boal was a progressive artist, theater practitioner, drama theorist, and activist in 1970s Brazil during a time of tumultuous upheaval. The dismantling of power and its effects on social classes inspired Augusto Boal to introduce *Theatre of the Oppressed*, theatrical forms based on the idea of dialogue and interaction between audience and performer. Boal's *Forum Theatre* refers to the dual role of those involved in the process as both spectator and actor, who observe and create dramatic meaning and action in any performance. Equally, the term "spect-actor" involves participants in invisible theatre (who are unaware that they are part of a theatrical production but contribute to the discussion) and image theatre (who, upon viewing the image created, may alter it to reflect their ideas).

Boal disrupted the traditional audience and spectator approach by turning characters into social causality rather than individual psychology. He portrayed characters as objects of external socio-

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<sup>4</sup> Havel, Vaclav, and Karel Hvizdala. *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvizd'ala*. New York: Knopf, 1990. Print

economic forces, individuals with the totality of possibilities for action in particular social positions. To Boal, characters could be broken up into parts and reassembled. He emphasized the critical need to prevent isolation for the audience. For Boal, “the term spectator” brands the need to restore the observers’ capacity for action in all its fullness. They must also be a subject, an actor on an equal plane with those accepted as actors, who in turn must also be spectators. This way, the spectators no longer delegate power to the characters to think or act in their place. “They free themselves; they think and act for themselves.”<sup>3</sup> Boal supports the idea that theater is not revolutionary in itself but is a rehearsal of revolution. “The proletariat and the oppressed classes do not know yet what their world will be like; consequently, their theater will be the rehearsal, not the finished spectacle. This is quite true, though it is equally true that the theater can present images of transition. All possible paths in theater may be examined, not necessarily to show the correct path.”<sup>3</sup>

Transforming the spectator into an actor follows a general outline of four stages. Boal saw the first word of his theatrical vocabulary as the human body, the primary source of sound and movement-activated by a series of exercises to get to know one's body, its limitations, and possibilities, its social distortions, and possibilities of rehabilitation. The activities of the first stage are designed to undo the muscular structure of participants, not intending to weaken or destroy the structure but to raise to an uninhibited level of consciousness.

The second stage intends to develop the expressive ability of the body. Boal felt there to be a big gap between how a culture expresses everything in words, leaving the enormous capacity of the

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<sup>3</sup> Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.

body in an undeveloped state. Boal developed a series of games to help participants use their bodies for self-expression inviting opportunities to play characters, not just interpret them. Boal concluded that “play” would lead to better interpretation because one would feel more inclined to abandon common, habitual forms of expression.

In the third stage, the theater divides into three parts, each one representing a different degree of direct participation of the spectator into the language. In this stage, the spectator is encouraged to intervene in the action taking place on stage. Where the previous two stages are preparatory, centering around the work of the participants of their own body, here the language is living and present, on a theme discussed. Discussions on stage don't merely take the form of words, but instead, use all the elements of theatrical expression.

The fourth stage is about discourse. To Boal narratives indict rather than justify the existing society, presenting a world that is capable of being transformed. What matters in dramatic performance is what the emotion signifies. People transmit meanings unconsciously, on what Boal calls the "undercurrent." He wanted to deconstruct theatrical conventions to open space where purposes and circumstances change.

Boal rejected the view that popular art should be emotive or circus-like. Instead, he emphasizes that it should be clear and not mystified. However, he was not opposed to emotion in theater as such. The problem, according to Boal, was “with most popular art is not emotional stimulation in itself. It is a lack of reflexivity and reversibility. The audience can be sad at a tragic moment in a

play. But they should be bitter and angry at oppressive situations, not worried at an unstoppable fate.”<sup>3</sup>

His take expresses a particular social dynamic. He argues that the essence of theater is a conflict of wills. This conflict happens both internally – between the will and counter-will of a character – and externally, between characters. Incidents chosen for theatrical treatment should usually obey the three unities of time, action, and place. Narratives should be broken down into moments or incidents. The implication here is that life is a series of distinct molecular components, rather than a continuous, novelistic progression. Author, Michael Taussig suggests that “Boal's approaches are modernist or postmodernist because they break up and play with narratives.”<sup>5</sup> But Boal also sought to eliminate distractions that undermine aesthetic space, aiming for a stage distinct and porous.

Charged with a revolutionary impetus, Boal sought an approach that would stimulate the spectator to transform society and engage in action. Boal's methods inspired another philosophy started a few years later by Mary Overlie, the founder of Viewpoints.

## **IIb. Post-Modern Philosophies: Viewpoints, Devising Theater**

Mary Overlie is an American choreographer, dancer, theater artist, professor, author, and the originator of the Six Viewpoints technique for theater and dance. The Six [Viewpoints](#) technique

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<sup>3</sup> Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> Robinson, Andrew. “Augusto Boal: Brecht and Beyond – The Boal Method.” *Ceasefire Magazine*, 13 Oct. 2016, <https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/augusto-boal-brecht-boal-method/>



is both a philosophical articulation of postmodern performance and a teaching system addressing directing, choreographing, dancing, acting, improvisation, and performance analysis.

At the time (in the late 1970s), when Mary Overlie was developing a Viewpoints framework, contemplative, accidental, and incidental approaches became primary sources of artistic practice. The repositioning of the origin of art from imagination and visions to observation and interaction de-prioritized hierarchical ownership of art. It resulted in a massive shift away from the artist defined solely as a creator. Artists developed an entirely different set of skills, which focused on their ability to read spaces with their bodies, dissect time from various perspectives, and listen and see without prejudice.

The seed of the entire work of The Six Viewpoints starts with the simple act of standing in space. “From this perspective, the artist is invited to read the unfiltered invitation of daily experience. The information of space, the experience of time, the familiarity of shapes, the qualities and rules of kinetics in movement, the ways of logic, that stories form, and the states of being and emotional exchanges that constitute the process of communication between living creatures.”<sup>6</sup> These are the six materials named in The Six Viewpoints that represent deconstructed theater. Working directly with these materials, the artist begins to learn of performance through the essential languages as an independent intelligence.

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<sup>6</sup> Overlie, Mary (1999) *Six Viewpoints: a deconstructive approach to theater*, <http://www.sixviewpoints.com>

Viewpoints seek fluid dialogue with possibilities and interaction. The act of seeing and witnessing generates its structures. The redefinition of the role of the artist creates an environment of heightened equality and extreme democracy. Viewpoints is the isolation of the practical material of theater, their languages, conceptual frames, and established physical and mental practices.

The Six Viewpoints in a horizontal (how decision making is distributed: essentially giving each Viewpoints language equal weight and relevance) refers to a Matrix constructed of a subtle intersection of the six languages. The artist enters it by being flexible on speaking mid-action or from moment to moment. Artists come to understand that space has its own emotion, can be caused by shape, that design can communicate as powerfully as words, and that logic is a delicate and highly flexible tool of communication between audience and performer.<sup>7</sup>

Viewpoints place performers in the theater with the deconstructed languages that surround her to allow the materials to speak directly to the audience. Experimentation can translate through the nature of narrative logic, actor-driven theater, language as sound, scripts as pictures, and timing as a score for action.

Viewpoints, as a method, support imaginative and collective ways of creating. Attention to finer grains of theatrical elements aligns with the potential and possibility of active invention, of lived experience to provide the ground for collective action.

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<sup>7</sup> Overlie, Mary (2006) The Six Viewpoints in Arthur Bartow (ed.) *Training of the American Actor*, New York: Theatre Communications Group, pp 187-221.

### III. Application of the Third Space (Activation)

#### The Third Space, The Journeys and Those Who Opened the Gate

According to Janinka Greewood, “cross-cultural space is a terrain in the Third Space.”<sup>8</sup> Working in theater cross-culturally, we engage in a complex exploration, a field with cultural meanings and differences, where new understandings and a new awareness of identity and belonging can grow.

Re-examining *Te Mauri Pakeaka* is the first of the journeys that Greewood made into the Third Space. *Pakeaka* was an education project that took place in New Zealand from 1976 to 1988.

The project involved schools, tribal elders, and artists coming together to work in the arts. The artworks themselves were catalysts for other explorations to take place: into cultural beliefs and understandings, into the cross-cultural roles that participants could take in the real world, and into the nature of learning and teaching in a society that would regard Maori as well as Western values.

Several schools came together for a week in the community center in Whangarei city, the hub of the North. With them came their tribal elders and many other artists, Maori and Pakeha, who would support them in their work. To make the play, the students and their teachers spoke to elders to find the narrative and deep meanings of the story. They also worked with the artists to find performative styles to tell their stories. “And they needed to play with the various options and test them against the resonances of the story they wanted to convey, and the layers of

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meaning each option already carried.”<sup>8</sup>

Throughout their work, they faced choices. There was no single right way to tell the story. One of the goals of the workshop was to allow the participants to become aware of the possibilities they could work with and explore the connections each of those possibilities had with people, history, and previously developed signs and discourses. All of that happened experientially. Another goal was to permit the participants to find ways into spaces where Maori and Pakeha cultures became part of the cultural interactions, rather than outside observers.

Greewood worked with the continuum of theater processes that ranged from process drama to playmaking to theatrical script. Her quest was in how she explored the landscape in the Third Space: the hyphen between Maori understanding and Pakeha understanding. What are the rhythms, the colloquialisms, the attitudes that suggest particular Maori and Pakeha characters? Within the Third Space, Greenwood sought to bring to life perspectives and values intrinsic to culture and to normalize the inscription of culture as a normal rather than exotic.

“To use theatre cross-culturally, in educational policy and practice in drama, we need to understand new aesthetic and semiotic frameworks. We need to read performative codes from other cultures not as exotica but as signs that carry significant and complex meanings. We need to find ways of appreciating theatrical work from within the value systems and the meanings that

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<sup>8</sup> Greenwood, Janinka (2010) *Journeying into the Third Space: A Study of How Theatre Can Be Used to Interpret the Emergent Space Between Cultures*: Taylor and Francis  
Online <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08929092.2005.10012573>

come with those performative codes.”<sup>8</sup>

“A relationship emerged between working in the body, working in a group, and the sense of realness. In the beginning the realness came because the participants were shaping stories that dealt with issues that were immediate in their own lives. Later the participants talked about the reality coming from the degree of honesty they brought to their explorations of history, legend and politics. The drama allowed participants to test ideas and attitudes in action, to put the images of those ideas into their body, modify them, try them out, show them to other people, and discuss them.

They were acquiring power as well as knowledge; they were placing themselves at the center of knowledge gathering rather than in the outer margins where they had seen themselves previously. They looked at history not only through Maori cultural lens, but also through the lens of their own experience as learners, family members and future teachers in their community.”<sup>8</sup>

The discoveries Greenwood made were just as much about cultural interaction as they were about theater. Theater highlighted aspects of communication, as much as the characteristics of the space that emerged through interactions highlighted particular qualities of theater. In New Zealand, Maori and Pakeha spaces met. The opportunities unfolded when Maori and Pakeha talked, learned from, and celebrated one another. In that space, new relationships,

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understandings, artworks, and political systems could grow. The attitudes, colloquialisms, and rhythms inherently sensed and acted in the Third Space was the connecting thread between both cultures.

In many ways, this activates Boal and Overlie's pursuits for liberty, freedom, and action. We play roles in real life and have the ability to script new ones. Theatre approaches/processes that Greenwood used allows us to experiment with roles that we would like to take in the real-world cross-cultural dialogue.

Isn't theater played out in the public arena as well as on stage? Perhaps we might not see so many of our cross-cultural conflicts as inevitable if we were to bring strategies, we have learned through theater processes in our lived world.

**Conclusion:**

We shuttle between the center and margins to help forge meanings, fracturing ideas that have been socially sanctioned and allow for new agreements to affirm identities, personhood, and relationships. Striving for freedom in the broadest sense, American labor organizer, Lucy Parsons said, "the reinvention of daily life means marching off the edge of our maps."

Theater gives us a pathway to interpret society and also be a change agent. We explore the Third Space through theater, and theater through the spaces in between, by narrating a displacement from existing ways of seeing, and then of shaping and inscribing new understandings.

The perspectives offered in this paper offer approaches from creative, purposeful, and transformative people who worked in the Third Space. Other views may confirm, extend, or challenge these mappings of the space that is still in the process of being both discovered, made, and celebrated.

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