

Theatre of the Oppressed Study Guide

Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal

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Plot Summary

In "Theater of the Oppressed", Augusto Boal argues that theater is inherently political and that traditional, Aristotelian theater is inherently oppressive. He reviews the history of theater, from Aristotle through Machiavelli, Hegel, and Brecht, and proposes a new idea of theater that breaks the bounds between audience and performers, and between chorus and protagonist.

In the first chapter, Boal presents Aristotle's philosophy and defines Aristotelian tragedy as a coercive system to enforce lawful behavior in the viewer, suppressing any desire for rebellion. According to Boal, Aristotle's tragic hero has one flaw, a characteristic that is antisocial or rebellious. The audience empathizes with this trait, and the virtuous character. When the flaw leads the character to tragedy, the audience pities the character and fears for themselves, who share this trait. Through the character's downfall, the trait is suppressed in the audience.

In the second chapter, Boal reviews the change in theater during the transition from the medieval, feudal period and the renaissance, with the rise of a bourgeois middle class. Boal states that the bourgeois rose up due to their individual prowess and practicality, leading to the rise of the exceptional individual protagonist in theater. Machiavelli's plays propound the value of intellect separated from morality, through which characters can achieve their aims.

In the third chapter, Boal compares Hegel and Brecht. Hegel creates an idealistic theater, where moral characters act according to their individual, free wills. The character is like the subject of a sentence, the acting force that creates action. In Brecht's Marxist theater, the social roles of characters are emphasized. Characters are acted on by society, which forces them into certain actions and behaviors. In Brecht's theater, the audience is called to action through an appeal to reason.

In the fourth chapter, Boal reviews his work in Peru with a literacy program. He outlines ways in which the people can become participants in the theater, instead of inactive spectators. People in the program use theater exercises as a means to discuss their lives and issues that they confront. The audience determines the outcome of the action, instead of the play being a static event that the audience merely watches and absorbs. Boal reviews different types of theater that can involve the audience actively in the ideas of the theater.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, Boal reviews his work in Brazil's Arena Theater and outlines his Joker system of theater. In the Joker system, a Joker character, who exists in the time and place of the audience, represents the author's point of view and presents the argument of the drama. The Joker leads the audience in an educational analysis of what is happening and calls the audience to action at the end of the play.



Chapter 1, Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy, Introduction through Major Arts and Minor Arts

Chapter 1, Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy, Introduction through Major Arts and Minor Arts Summary and Analysis

In "Theater of the Oppressed", Augusto Boal argues that theater is inherently political and that traditional, Aristotelian theater is inherently oppressive. He reviews the history of theater, from Aristotle through Machiavelli, Hegel, and Brecht, and proposes a new idea of theater that breaks the bounds between audience and performers, and between chorus and protagonist.

In the "Introduction", Boal introduces his main proposition, that theater is inherently political. He presents conflicting classical ideas of whether the theater is merely entertainment or is fundamentally political. Aristotle argued that theater and poetry are independent of politics, and Boal seeks to show that Aristotelian theater is a political tool that represses the masses.

In "Art Imitates Nature", Boal states that Aristotle's term "mimeses," applied to art, means re-creating principles of creation, not imitating nature. He presents a history of beliefs prior to Aristotle. In the Greek city of Miletus, Thales believed that the fundamental core of all things was water, which formed a soul that caused transformation. Anaximander modified this belief, replacing water with "apeiron," a divine substance, while Anaximenes believed was air. Heraclitus believed that all things are constantly changing, a transformation caused by inner conflict. Parmenides believed that there was only a single, eternal, infinite, unchanging being, and motion was an illusion. Zeno, Parmenides' student, created arguments to reveal that motion is an illusion, such as the story of Achilles and the turtle, where Achilles can never surpass the turtle because however fast Achilles catches up to the turtle, during that time the turtle will have moved ahead, however short a distance. Finally, Socrates' concept of logos postulates a perfect, unchanging form of an ideal or value, existing in the realm of ideas.

In "What is the Meaning of 'Imitation'?", Boal returns to Aristotle, who rejects the ideal forms of Plato (a student of Socrates). However, he uses the Platonic ideas of things' substance being matter that has a form. Ideas are the form that is applied to matter. All things tend to be similar to a perfect form, and for Aristotle, art must imitate this perfect form that all things, society, and men naturally strive toward.



In "What, then, is the Purpose of Art and Science?", Boal states that Aristotle's conception of the purpose of art and science is to correct the shortcomings of nature in striving to the ideal. In "Major Arts and Minor Arts", Boal presents a hierarchy of all arts and sciences, occupations of man. Minor arts are grouped together to form major arts, which group together into larger major arts. For example, making paintbrushes is a minor art, a part of the major art of painting, which is part of a larger art of visual arts. Boal presents Politics as the overarching group of all arts and sciences combined, because it encompasses all the relations of men.



Chapter 1, Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy, What does Tragedy Imitate? through What is Justice?

Chapter 1, Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy, What does Tragedy Imitate? through What is Justice? Summary and Analysis

In "What does Tragedy Imitate?", Boal presents Aristotle's division of man into an irrational and a rational soul. The rational soul can perform actions, such as eating, that require little thought, while the rational soul is divided into: faculties, all things a man is capable of doing; passions, which are things a man has done; and habits, which are patterns of behavior and being. Aristotle also proposes that man's purpose is concrete good and the ultimate good is happiness. Tragedy imitates man's rational activities directed toward happiness.

In "What is Happiness?", Boal presents Aristotle's three types of happiness: happiness from material pleasure, glory, and virtue. The pursuit of virtue is the subject of tragedy. In "And What is Virtue?", Boal presents Aristotelian virtue as moderation: neither starving nor overeating, neither being selfish nor completely consumed by others. Virtue is learned, and mankind must strive to create habits toward virtue, beginning in childhood.

In "Necessary Characteristics of Virtue", Boal expounds on the four qualities that allow an action to be either a virtue or vice, in Aristotle's philosophy. Willfulness means an act is purposeful, not accidental. However, a person may be responsible for unintended consequences of a purposeful act. Freedom means an act is done without being forced by pressure. However, one's feelings are a part of one's self, not an external force that takes away freedom. Knowledge means an understanding of your choices of how to act. Constancy means that a way of being is a habit, a continuing state instead of a brief passion.

In "The Degrees of Virtue", Boal discusses that each art has its virtue. The virtue of a playwright is to write good plays. Politics, since it encompasses all other arts, has the highest virtue, making politics and justice, the highest good, the realm of tragedy. In "What is Justice?", Boal presents Aristotle's idea that justice is an equal division among equal parties. The difficulty Boal sees is in deciding who is equal and unequal. Aristotle argues for beginning with concrete reality to judge equality, leading to the idea that slaves are lesser than masters, that women are lesser than men, and that other existing inequalities are just. In Aristotle's view, the existing political system defines the status of people and defines justice. The ultimate expression of justice is the Constitution of the

government. Boal takes issue with Aristotle's conception, arguing that what seems like justice to the upper classes who make the laws will seem unjust to the disenfranchised.



Chapter 1, Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy, In What Sense can Theater Function as an Instrument for Purification and Intimidation? through A Short Glossary of Simple Words

Chapter 1, Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy, In What Sense can Theater Function as an Instrument for Purification and Intimidation? through A Short Glossary of Simple Words Summary and Analysis

The section "In What Sense can Theater Function as an Instrument for Purification and Intimidation?" picks up the idea of inequality. Boal identifies repression as the force that keeps the oppressed from uprising, and tragedy is one part of this repression. Boal acknowledges other values of art, but says that the fundamentally repressive nature of theater must be addressed.

In "The Ultimate Aim of Tragedy", Boal denies that a work can be classified as Aristotelian based on only structural elements and says that the main ideas of Aristotelian theater are often missed, and many people put too much importance on structural ideas, primarily because of the fragmentary nature of Poetics, which must be filled in by reference to Aristotle's other works. The aim of Aristotelian tragedy is catharsis, a correction of man's actions.

Boal presents several thinkers' interpretations of catharsis. Racine sees tragedy as instructive in avoiding vice, but Boal points out that Aristotle's tragic heroes are virtuous, but have a flaw or weakness. They do not have vices and are not held up to be abhorred. Jacob Bernays proposes that catharsis is like medicine for the soul. Seeing one's own inner feelings portrayed on the stage purges them and creates a state of calm.

Boal points out that the primary emotions mentioned by Aristotle are pity and fear, emotions that the audience feels toward the characters, not emotions within the tragic heroes. The audience pities the good characters in tragedies and fears that the same bad things may happen to them. Milton proposes that fear and pity eliminate something analogous to them. In Aristotle's Politics, he uses the term catharsis to mean the elimination of wild behavior through stimulating wild behavior. In S.H. Butcher's reading of Aristotle, he finds that the negative element associated with fear and pity is eliminated through stimulating fear and pity in the audience, through drama. However, Boal points



out that pity and fear are not vices, and that what theater seeks to eliminate must be a vice opposed to the highest virtue, justice.

"A Short Glossary of Simple Words" defines tragic hero as a character that appears when the State begins to use the theater to oppress the people, a representative of the aristocracy. Ethos is a character's action, while dianoia is the reasoning behind the action. Ethos can also be defined as the character's faculties, passions, and habits. All faculties, passions, and habits of a tragic character must be good, and according to the law, except one, hamartia, or the tragic flaw, the one wrong aspect of the tragic hero that must be destroyed. Empathy is the link between spectator and main character, who is perceived as like the spectator. The spectator allows the protagonist to act for him or her, and the spectator lives through the protagonist.



Chapter 1, Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy, How Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy Functions through General Notes

Chapter 1, Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy, How Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy Functions through General Notes Summary and Analysis

In "How Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy Functions", Boal dissects an Aristotelian tragedy. A hero has a tragic flaw, which has so far led to happiness. The audience empathizes, and the same characteristic in the audience is stimulated. The hero falls, the peripeteia, and the audience fears that tragedy may befall them, too. The high status of the hero raises the stakes. The hero recognizes the flaw in himself, the anagnorisis, and the terrible end of the character, the catastrophe, reinforces in the audience the consequences of this flaw. The audience's fear and pity purges them of the flaw in themselves. Theater, Boal concludes, is a political coercive tool.

In "Different Types of Conflict: Hamartia and Social Ethos", Boal examines variations of Greek tragedy. "Hamartia Versus the Perfect Social Ethos" puts the hero's tragic flaw in conflict with society's ethos, as Oedipus is in conflict with the society. "Hamartia Versus Hamartia Versus the Perfect Social Ethos" puts two tragic heroes in conflict, and they destroy each other. The audience empathizes with both. In "Negative Hamartia Versus the Perfect Social Ethos", a character has vices, not virtues, and has one virtue instead of one flaw. The character is saved through his or her virtue. Aristotle objects to models like this one, which was often used in the Middle Ages. "Condemned for Faithlessness" by Tirso de Molina tells the story of an evil man saved by one virtue, believing God would condemn him, while a pure man is condemned by one flaw, doubting God will reward him.

In "Negative Hamartia Versus Negative Social Ethos", a corrupt person lives in a corrupt society. The one virtue in the protagonist causes him or her to be condemned by the society of vices. The spectator rejects the vices of the society, instead of the virtue of the hero. The final type is "Anachronistic Individual Ethos Versus Contemporary Social Ethos." A character such as Don Quixote is synchronized with a past ethos, not the present society's. In another variation, the society claims to value virtues but in reality does not, while a tragic character tries to live by these values.

In the Conclusion, Boal states that Aristotelian tragedy is still in use, in varying forms, to repress antisocial behavior, but cannot be used by revolutionary groups during the revolution, when the ethos is undefined. The society must have clear values that are



relatable in drama. Boal defines westerns as tragedies, from the "bad guy" point of view, where the villain is the tragic hero felled by a hero who represents social ethos. In any case Aristotelian poetics is a formula for upholding society and repressing change.

In General Notes, Boal notes that a wholly good character who comes to a good end creates no drama. A wholly bad character who comes to a bad end creates no empathy. A wholly good character who comes to a bad end creates a sense of injustice, and a wholly bad character who comes to a bad end encourages vice. Next, he notes that Plato opposed artists, who made a poor copy of a poor version of the ideal. Third, anagnorisis is essential to make sure the audience recognizes the characteristic portrayed as a flaw. Fourth, he notes Aristotle's focus on becoming, not being. Finally, he notes that happiness, for Aristotle, was found in virtue, assuming basic needs were met.



Chapter 2, Machiavelli and the Poetic of Virtù, The Feudal Abstraction and The Bourgeois Concretion

Chapter 2, Machiavelli and the Poetic of Virtù, The Feudal Abstraction and The Bourgeois Concretion Summary and Analysis

In "The Feudal Abstraction", Boal states that Aristotle, Marx, and Hegel all agree that art transmits knowledge. Marx further postulates that the artist's societal perspective determines that knowledge, and particularly that mainstream art transmits messages of the class in power in order to maintain that power, though other classes may have their own art.

Boal believes this particularly applies to theater and finds examples in Shakespeare, Sheridan, Greek theater, and particularly the Middle Ages, where feudal society created art that lacked individuals and promoted stasis and religion. Noble characters were equated with saints, and the last judgment was often a subject, both intimidating the masses and reminding them of the reward for servitude. Medieval theater, whose characters were often ideas like Lust, Virtue, or Sin, had similar elements to other arts, and Boal argues it was Aristotelian in its coercive, repressive character. Medieval theater had plays of virtue, such as Abraham being rewarded for being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac to God, and plays of sin, such as Everyman, confessing his sins on his deathbed and being forgiven. Boal states that the most coercive theater appears as the current societal regime is weakening, both in the middle ages and the time of his writing.

In "The Bourgeois Concretion", Boal describes the changes at the beginning of the Renaissance, with movement toward cities and development of commerce. New values of the emerging middle class rose: thrift, efficiency, science, and the individual. God's focus shifted to weighing good deeds against evil ones, and religion valued the ability to gain wealth. The advantage the feudal lords had over the rising bourgeois was a claim to power giving them by God. The bourgeois had only virtù, their innate abilities and qualities, and praxis, the test of the effectiveness of an idea in practice.

Machiavelli criticized the bourgeois for valuing tradition and romanticizing nobility. The new society required a new art, focusing on the individual and the power of intellect and cunning. A prime example is Shakespeare and his highly individualized characters, though his characters themselves are mainly not bourgeois. His heroes are a few select elite who possessed virtù, hailing the exceptional individual (the bourgeois) among the masses.



Chapter 2, Machiavelli and the Poetic of Virtù, Machiavelli and Mandragola and Modern Reductions of Virtù

Chapter 2, Machiavelli and the Poetic of Virtù, Machiavelli and Mandragola and Modern Reductions of Virtù Summary and Analysis

In "Machiavelli and Mandragola", Boal discusses Machiavelli's play Mandragola, a transitional play between feudal and bourgeois theater. The characters are in part, individuals, and in part, abstractions. Machiavelli believes that reason, separated from morality, is the key to gaining power or conquering a woman, as in the play. The "virtuous" characters believe in this idea, such as Ligurio, the practical central character who approaches all problems through his own intellect, without thought to morality.

Ligurio alters his attitude and behavior to make the most of any situation, and he goes about, calculatingly, with the help of like-minded amoral and grasping Friar Timoteo, finding a way to seduce honorable Madonna Lucrezia. Timoteo's God is earthly and in his worldview, financing the Church is the highest goal. Another "virtuous" character is Sosrata, Lucrezia's mother, a former brothel owner. Nicia, Lucrezia's husband, desperately wants an heir and is manipulated into allowing his wife to sleep with another. Lucrezia represents a traditional pure woman, but transitions to an earthly woman using her values at her own discretion to get what she desires.

In "Modern Reductions of Virtù", Boal discusses Hegel, the leader in the movement of the bourgeois to take away the moral freedom imbued in characters by Machiavelli and Shakespeare. Hegel proposed characters to be bound by moral values, which are in turn embodied by the characters. The characters conflict with characters embodying opposing values, and the conflict resolves in balance. In Romanticism, Boal sees a resurfacing of the Last Judgment theme of medieval art. Spiritual perfection, accessible by all men and composed of unchanging values, is the theme. In realism, man is the result of environment, but realism can only go so far, since theater cannot fully recreate reality.

Subjective styles like impressionism, expressionism, and surrealism portray abstract emotions, while realism often makes a formula of psychology, where a certain environment leads to specific problems. Playwrights like O'Neill deal with relations between man and God, while the bourgeois utilize popular cinema to reinforce capitalist values. Machiavellian ideas resurface in modern works, with a comic bent. Ionesco reduces mankind to a complete lack of communication, where every expression equates to "chat." Boal sees all major modern theater as reducing multidimensional man to something lesser, and the last expression of multidimensionalism in

Shakespeare. He sees theater as showing signs of the end of the bourgeois and believes a new theater must arise.



Chapter 3, Hegel and Brecht: The Character as Subject or the Character as Object?, The

Chapter 3, Hegel and Brecht: The Character as Subject or the Character as Object?, The Summary and Analysis

In "The 'Epic' Concept", Boal states that the use of old words in new ways creates misunderstanding about Marxist changes in the theater. Bertolt Brecht used the term epic theater, while Aristotle spoke of epic poetry, which recalls the past in a long form and specific form of verse. Erwin Piscator defined epic as a theater that incorporated multimedia elements to create a sense of the work's reality. Boal says that the term epic is now only applied to films taking place in the open air, with many characters and much combat. Brecht's use of the term is in reaction and opposition to Hegel.

In "Types of Poetry in Hegel", Boal discusses Hegel's concept of epic poetry, in which the spiritual actions of man or god encounter difficulties. The objective events, instigated by the spiritual, are the focus, not the poet, while in lyric poetry, the poet expresses his emotions and soul. In Hegel's dramatic poetry, the objective and subjective are combined by making the action immediate, being relived in the present.

In "Characteristics of Dramatic Poetry, Still According to Hegel", Boal explains Hegel's view of drama as the struggle and conflict between living characters. The origin of drama is character and personal desire, and the character is free to pursue his actions according to inner drive (making the character the subject, or acting force).

In "Freedom of the Character-Subject", Boal discusses Hegel's concept of the free character-subject. Animals, and man-as-animal, are not free, bound by basic material needs. Men who are least dependent, such as princes, are most free and therefore make the best characters. Similarly, a civilized society restricts freedom through social pressures, so one above the law is the best character. Physical confinements like Prometheus's chains do not impede freedom, which is the will and ability to act. Hegel gives another example of a painting of a child who continues to eat a banana, despite his mother spanking him. Hegel's dramatic poetry deals with significant themes and with concrete individuals as representatives of universal truths who act out of moral values. In true tragedy, the characters must not be able to reconcile their purposes.

In "A Word Poorly Chosen", Boal explains that Brecht's Marxist drama denies the character as a subject who acts but casts the character as an object acted on by economic and social forces, to which the character reacts. The character is not free. In Hegel's view, of epic poetry, lyric poetry, and drama, the real moving force is the spirit

within the character. For Brecht, social relations, not personal will, create action. Boal considers the word "epic" poorly chosen to describe Brecht, since Brecht is completely in opposition to Hegel, for whom "epic" was merely one genre. Boal proposes the term "Marxist poetics." Boal presents an outline of differences between dramatic and epic poetry, according to Brecht, comparing the character-subject with character-object.



Chapter 3, Hegel and Brecht: The Character as Subject or the Character as Object?, Does Thought Determine Being (or Vice Versa)? through Empathy or What? Emotion or Reason?

Chapter 3, Hegel and Brecht: The Character as Subject or the Character as Object?, Does Thought Determine Being (or Vice Versa)? through Empathy or What? Emotion or Reason? Summary and Analysis

In "Does Thought Determine Being (or Vice Versa)?", Boal presents the idea that Hegel, Aristotle, and others present characters as determined by inherent qualities, while Brecht's characters are in process and created by society. The Pope's actions are dictated by his position. Boal also uses the example of the four American presidents in power over the course of the Vietnam War, all forced by position to act not as humans but as the president. Ruling classes act as part of their class, using reform only as a temporary state in crisis to placate the people and avoid revolution.

In "Can Man be Changed?", Boal retells the story of Brecht's "A Man is a Man", in which Galy Gay, a man on his way to buy a fish, is transformed by circumstance into a thief and then a war hero named Jeriah Jip. Boal retells another story by Sartre where a character is transformed into an anti-Semite. In both, characters are defined and redefined by societal forces, but Brecht's play is a formalist exercise in taking apart and putting back together a character.

In "Conflict of Wills or Contradiction of Needs?", Boal states that the individual personality of an American president (as referenced previously) makes no difference, and in the position of president, all men will act the same. He categorizes the conflict in Hegel as a moral necessity, arising from the nature of the character, while conflict in Brecht is a social or economic necessity. The characters are driven by their social positions. Boal says that Brecht does not deny that individual will can affect the world, but that the driving forces in drama are social and economic. Boal cites a scene where the widow of a murdered man follows his casket arm and arm with his murderer, since the two are partners in business.

In "Empathy or What? Emotion or Reason?", Boal recalls the empathy of Aristotle's drama. Empathy can instill pity and fear, and other emotions, but it always makes the audience passive. Brecht's idea of drama seeks to change the world, and deemphasizes emotion, focusing on understanding, the element Aristotle called *dianoia*.



Brecht does not deny emotion, but is opposed to emotional manipulation of the audience and emotion related to ignorance instead of knowledge. The cause of tragedy is identified in Brecht: the commerce of war taking away Mother Courage's sons or Franco's fascist soldiers shooting fishermen. Spectators are not simply upset by fate, but taught to direct anger towards the right quarters.



Chapter 3, Hegel and Brecht: The Character as Subject or the Character as Object?, Catharsis and Repose, or Knowledge and Action? through Empathy or Osmosis

Chapter 3, Hegel and Brecht: The Character as Subject or the Character as Object?, Catharsis and Repose, or Knowledge and Action? through Empathy or Osmosis Summary and Analysis

In "Catharsis and Repose, or Knowledge and Action?", Boal contrasts Hegel and Aristotle's idea that the clash of emotions in drama leads to catharsis, purging antiestablishment ideas, and ends in a calm repose for the audience with Brecht's Marxist idea that the audience gains knowledge through the drama, which stirs the audience to action, to transform the world. Brecht said that theater must be performed for the workers, the victims of social inequity who will change society. Boal says the supposedly Aristotelian play "Señora Carrar's Rifles" is actually not, since the main character is spurred to action against the unjust society instead of purged of a characteristic in opposition to the social law.

In "How to Interpret the New Works?", Boal presents a portion of Brecht's poem "On the Everyday Theatre," which gives a detailed description of a man retelling about an accident, a dramatic performance that is honest without pretence, and contrasts it with the pretense of the theater. The poem concludes that all men are artists, which Boal reiterates, adding that art is not a commodity to be bought and sold.

In "The Rest Does not Count: They are Minor Formal Differences Between the Three Genres", Boal states that other distinctions Brecht makes between his "epic" or Marxist theater and "dramatic" or idealist theater are unimportant, formal differences. This includes objective focus on events versus subjective focus on experience and emotion, condensing action to one time and place, and the existence of suspense. Boal draws the distinction that Marxist works must show, not necessarily true incidents, but the true nature of the world, and how it changes, as revealed to the working class.

In "Empathy or Osmosis", Boal describes empathy as a "terrible weapon" which causes a viewer to give himself up to the ideal, unreal character. The real viewer makes choices and forms views based on the unreal, fictional world. Boal calls the absorption of false ideas from fiction "esthetic osmosis." Boal gives examples of Donald Duck's Uncle Scrooge imbuing the spectator with the desire for money, and Mexicans empathizing

with the western hero-invaders conquering Mexican land. Boal is especially critical of non-political films like love stories that create a fantasy world the audience subscribes to without realizing it, calling them dangerous. He also criticizes Sesame Street for indoctrinating children into a capitalist world of banks and money.



Chapter 4, Poetics of the Oppressed, Poetics of the Oppressed and Experiments with People's Theater in Peru, pages 121-130

Chapter 4, Poetics of the Oppressed, Poetics of the Oppressed and Experiments with People's Theater in Peru, pages 121-130 Summary and Analysis

In "Poetics of the Oppressed", Boal paints a picture of the history of theater beginning with cooperative, communal celebration, which is usurped by ruling classes, which divide the theater into audience and players, and the players into protagonists and the masses. He states that these walls must be torn down in the "Joker" System of theater.

In People's Theater in Peru, Boal tells of a literacy campaign in Peru called Operación Alfabetización Integral, or ALFIN, begun in 1973 by the revolutionary government to eliminate illiteracy within four years. The problem was made more difficult by the existence of at least 45 languages and many dialects, and the program strove to teach literacy in both Spanish and the native language, as well as teach other literacies such as theater, film, and journalism. Educators were recruited locally and trained specifically depending on their area: barrios, rural areas, mining areas, and areas where Spanish was not the primary language.

Boal implemented a "theater of the oppressed" in the program, to transform the audience into participants and protagonists. Boal uses the example of Estela Linares's photography program in the same literacy program, where participants not only discussed photographs but took them, answering educators' questions in photography, through their pictures. The question, "Where do you live?" was answered by different students with a photo of an interior of a shack, a dangerous river bank, a river that attracted pelicans captured for food, a main street in a neighborhood, and a picture of a child's face, injured by rats due to an epidemic of mange killing his protecting dog. In the latter example the man said he lived in a place where things like the tragedy of the child happened. Boal is enraged that the photo was taken on Kodak film "Made in the U.S.A."

Boal says photography of the masses may reveal the symbols important to the people. Participants asked to photograph exploitation responded with photos of the grocer, the landlord, or the government. A young boy photographed a nail, such as boys must rent to hold their shoeshine equipment, used to eke out a living. The theater uses the body instead of the camera, and Boal describes the change of spectator to participant in stages.

The first stage is knowing the body, which makes the participants aware of their bodies and of the way their work deforms their bodies, using certain muscles and allowing others to sit idle, marking people's physical forms with their societal role. Boal seeks to dissect and examine the body through races with paired participants joined in different ways, movement exercises where one participant must maintain a specific distance from a moving person, boxing matches without touching, and other improvised, silent scenes.



Chapter 4, Poetics of the Oppressed, Experiments with People's Theater in Peru, pages 130-142

Chapter 4, Poetics of the Oppressed, Experiments with People's Theater in Peru, pages 130-142 Summary and Analysis

The second stage is making the body expressive. Participants use their bodies to communicate, imitating animals, people, or other things. One student portrayed a hummingbird and was convinced that the student portraying a bull was his mate, the other hummingbird. Boal notes that students should be encouraged to create their own games.

The third stage is the theater as language. The first degree, or level, is simultaneous dramaturgy, where actors perform a short scene conceived by a local resident. At the climax, actors ask the participants for solutions and improvise the ideas. One woman offered her situation, having discovered that her husband took advantage of her illiteracy by putting her in charge of keeping love letters from his mistress. In the scene where the discovered husband comes home, the audience suggested several solutions for the actress: cry to make the husband feel guilt, leave the husband, lock the husband out, and beat the husband, the solution finally chosen by the audience. The audience begins to participate and determine the theater, instead of having it determined for them.

The second degree is image theater, where participants shape others into a picture of a situation, and then transform the image into how they would create change, with some minor variations. One woman recreated the castration of a rebel from her village. Participants changed the image to create a peaceful, happy village. Some women would not change the praying, kneeling woman, while others started with her. The soldiers were shifted from attacking the rebel to attacking his captors. Some participants changed the consciousness of the attackers. One had bound captives free themselves; another was unable to fit the bound captives into her conception.

The third degree is forum theater. A sketch of a political or social problem and solution is rehearsed and performed. In a second performance, disagreeing participants jump into the performance, replacing an actor and changing the course of the scene. One man, forced to work twelve-hour shifts in a fish meal factory, proposed the solution of working fast to break the machine, and resting while the machine is fixed. The scene was enacted and discussed. On the second run-through, a spectator jumped in and proposed to bomb the factory. The workers argued that it would destroy their source of income. The participant wanted to throw the bomb himself but did not know how to

make or throw one. Another participant jumped in and formed a strike, only to have the boss replace all the workers. The participants finally decided on forming a union; the solution always comes from the participants and is not imposed on them. Boal calls forum theater a rehearsal for revolution, which spurs participants to action.



Chapter 4, Poetics of the Oppressed, Experiments with People's Theater in Peru, pages 142-156

Chapter 4, Poetics of the Oppressed, Experiments with People's Theater in Peru, pages 142-156 Summary and Analysis

The fourth stage involves more finished theater. Newspaper theater, developed by the Nucleus Group of Sao Paulo, Brazil's Arena Theater, transforms news into drama. A news story may be read outside the context of the newspaper, or two may be read together, each giving meaning to the other. Information, historical parallels, ironic context, musical accompaniment, or rhythms may be added to a reading. Actors may mime context, or the news may be improvised. Graphic events may be enacted and made concrete.

Invisible theater is enacted in a public place. In one example, actors sat at tables in a hotel restaurant. An actor complained about the food and ordered the better, more expensive, barbeque a la pauper. After, he admitted being broke but offered payment in unskilled labor. As a garbage man, it would take 10 hours of work to pay for the barbeque. As a gardener, it would take 7 hours. The actors and restaurant-goers all discussed the disparity between expensive meals and low wages. The performance ended with a collection to pay for the food, among dissent, and stirred discussion. Invisible theater removes the distinction between actor and audience. In another example, two invisible actors discussing getting literacy training were interrupted by an old woman saying one is never too old for learning or making love, a comment that broke up the performance.

In photo-romance, participants act out a scenario, and then are asked to compare it to the source, a popular, empty, capitalist pictorial romance. The reading becomes comparative and critical instead of passive. This can be done with comics, television or other genres. In breaking of repression, a participant reenacts a moment of being repressed. In a second reenactment, the protagonist resists the oppression. The specific instance is put in the context of the whole social/political picture. In myth theater, local myths are analyzed to find political meanings. One example is a landowner who supposedly gained the only local water source by trading away his oldest daughter, a capitalist transaction that gave the landowner something rightly belonging to all, water.

In analytic theater, a story is told and improvised. The characters' social roles are defined and symbolized. A policeman is a worker, represented by overalls; a bourgeois, represented by a tie; an oppressor, represented by a gun. Symbols are chosen by the

participants. After, the story is reenacted, with roles altered or symbols added literally. Rituals and masks reveals rituals of human interaction. The same scene, for example a Catholic confession, is enacted several times, with the actors portraying different classes each time. Boal concludes that the theater should have no spectator, only participants spurred to action.



Chapter 5, Development of the Arena Theater of São Paulo, First Stage and Need for the Joker

Chapter 5, Development of the Arena Theater of São Paulo, First Stage and Need for the Joker Summary and Analysis

In "First Stage", Boal contrasts the Arena Theater to Brazil's European-style, upper-class TBC theater and follows its stages of development. The Arena Theater sought to find Brazilian works, but Brazil's authors were working in foreign style, so the theater settled on realism as a first stage. The new Actor's Laboratory studied Stanislavski's method acting style, with Brazilian actors. They performed works by Steinbeck and Brecht, among others, using the intimate circular style of theater. The art direction evolved from conventional structures of doors and windows, to a bare stage of few elements, to finally appropriate design for circular staging.

"The Seminar of Dramaturgy" was developed to create Brazilian plays, a second stage. In 1958, the first Brazilian plays were performed, and all non-Brazilian works were rejected. The style was almost photographic, reflecting exactly Brazilian life. Acting focused on the flow and interaction of emotion. A third stage involved adapting classic works, such as Machiavelli's "Mandragola", to Brazil, in a current social context. These adaptations included significant revisions to some texts and none to others. Instead of copying original styles, the theater created new ones. Actors used social interrelationships to interpret characters. The fourth stage is musicals. Boal and G. Guarnieri wrote "Arena tells about Zumbí", with music by Edu Lobo. The play destroyed conventions and empathy.

In Need for the "Joker," Boal says that conventions and structures are not good or bad, but that one cannot show transition with finished, unchanging styles. In "Zumbí", actor was separated from character. The characters took on masks of behavior, specific habits of speech, movement, and expression, regardless of the actor in the role. Actors and scenes remained in different times and places. Each actor interpreted the whole play, not just a character, making the performance communal. The performance used many different theatrical styles, mixing melodrama and vaudeville; realism and surrealism, and of course used music. The goal was chaos and stimulation.

Boal again traces the theater's development, from realism (a mere imitation), to more complex interpretive works, to the contrasts of classic works interpreted to modern Brazil, and finally to "Zumbí", where one episode from Brazil's history was expanded by adding context and related materials in many styles. The aim was to unite the singular

event with universal context. Boal proposes "Joker" as the new form of theater hinted at in "Zumbí."



Chapter 5, Development of the Arena Theater of São Paulo, Goals of the Joker and Structures of the Joker

Chapter 5, Development of the Arena Theater of São Paulo, Goals of the Joker and Structures of the Joker Summary and Analysis

In Goals of the "Joker," Boal notes that the characteristics of theater arise from the conditions of the place and time in which it is created. Shakespeare's violent opening scenes were meant to capture the attention of rowdy audiences. Characteristics of the people determine the theater, but underdeveloped countries choose the theater of the mainstream, divorcing the theater from the people and culture. The "Joker" system is tied to the Brazil of the time, and presents both play and analysis together. Narrators sometimes fill this function throughout theater, giving commentary on the meaning of the play. "The Joker" is a narrator who is closer to the audience, not part of the fiction. He is almost a lecturer.

In the Joker system, all theatrical styles and genre are used, and each scene is conceived differently, according to its needs. The Joker's explanations tie these together, like a prosecutor presenting different styles of evidence or testimony. Boal seeks to take advantage of all the styles and innovations that have come before, and not discard them in the name of originality. The Joker system also addresses the character-object versus the character-subject, giving the character freedom to act, but within the context of social analysis. The system also allows plays to be performed with limited actors, on a limited budget.

In "Structures of the 'Joker,'" Boal notes that in Zumbí, the goal was never to give the same actor the same role in two scenes. In performing Tiradentes in the Joker system, the actors perform functions. One is the protagonist function, which unites an actor and character in a style of realism. The empathy between audience and character is restored, but balanced by explanation from the Joker. The Joker function is the opposite of the protagonist one, creating and commenting on reality. He is omniscient, beyond the context of the play, taking on the viewpoint of the author or adaptor.

Other actors are divided into a deuteragonist chorus, supporting the protagonist, and an antagonist chorus, averse to the protagonist. Costumes relate to actors' functions and their social roles. Except in love scenes, any actor can play roles of either gender. There is also a choral orchestra, which plays and sings. The system can be modified to fit different plays.



The structure of a Joker performance begins with a dedication to a person or event. An explanation follows, a lecture by the Joker character presenting cast, author, adaptor, techniques, and purposes. The play is divided into episodes, composed of small, complete scenes that can be dialogue, song, or any other form. The first group of episodes will have one more than the second. Rhymed comments by a chorus connect the scenes. Intermittently, the Joker stops the action to interview a character, revealing interior thoughts. Spectators ask questions. In the end, the Joker's exhortation, a speech or song, calls the audience to action. In concluding, Boal argues against the elimination of the hero, noting that every time, culture, and class will have heroes unique to itself.



Characters

Augusto Boal

Augusto Boal is one of the active forces behind the Arena Theater in Brazil, and he is the creator of the Joker system, as well as one of the writers of "Arena tells about Zumbí", an early example of the Joker system at the Arena Theater. Boal analyzes theater from a Marxist perspective and believes that the function of theater should be to educate the masses in preparation for a revolution. Theater of the oppressed is theater opposed to oppression, Boal's counter to oppressive Aristotelian theater, which he believes encompasses all mainstream media.

Like the Marxist Brecht, Boal sees the need to remove hidden strings from theater, which use emotions to manipulate the audience. He believes that the audience should not be an idle spectator, who is dehumanized by giving up his own ability to think and act through empathy with the characters. For Boal, spectators are passive viewers who are robbed of humanity and manipulated by an elite. Boal wants to eliminate the passiveness of the audience by making theater into an interactive experience, where the viewers think, discuss, and even intervene.

Boal's Joker system is post-modern. It uses many different styles and modes of theater from the past, treating each scene in a unique way, chosen as best for that particular scene. The style is unified by the use of the Joker, a character who is outside the time and place of the play, and instead is more like the performance's audience. The Joker is a spokesman for the author or adapter of the performance, and provides analysis for the audience.

Aristotle

Aristotle is a Greek philosopher who wrote an analysis of theater called Poetics. Boal recounts elements of Aristotle and interprets his Poetics as describing a theater of coercion, meant to prevent rebellion and promote the status quo. Aristotle's worldview finds virtue in temperance, so that extremes are vices. He also considers justice to be the highest virtue, and the template of justice is the existing pattern of society. In this way, Aristotle values the status quo.

Aristotle's focus in his Poetics is tragedy, and in an Aristotelian tragedy, the hero is a high-ranking, virtuous man, who has a single flaw. In Boal's reading, the virtues of the man are the qualities desired by the existing oppressive society, while the flaw is a rebellious quality that exists in all people to some extent. Through empathy, the audience relates to the hero, giving over their free will to the character.

Aristotle's tragic hero falls from his high position due to his flaw. This fall is known as peripeteia. According to Boal, the fall inspires both pity for the character and fear for themselves, who share the characteristic, in the audience. The hero recognizes the



flaw, and this recognition is called the anagnorisis. The recognition of the flaw causes the audience to recognize the trait as a flaw and suppress it in themselves. The tragic hero comes to a terrible end, called the catastrophe, which according to Boal reinforces in the audience the horrifying consequences of the flaw, suppressing the rebellious quality still further.

Niccolo Machiavelli

Machiavelli lived during the transition from the medieval period to the Renaissance. Machiavelli emphasized the value of intelligence and reason to tackle any problem, separated completely from morality or values. Machiavelli wrote a play called "Mandragola", in which a character uses his wits to seduce a woman.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Hegel was a philosopher of the theater, who proposed an idealist theater. Hegel believed that the characters in the theater must be free, and that their spirit, or personal will, was the prime mover. Hegel's characters are bound by moral value.

Bertolt Brecht

Brecht was a Marxist playwright who proposed a new theater in opposition to Hegel that would drive the audience to action and educate the masses. Characters in Brecht are determined by their social roles and are made the object of society. In Brecht's work, the character is a character-object, acted on by society instead of a character-subject, a free agent acting on the world according to individual will.

Thales of Miletus

Thales was an ancient Greek who believed that the fundamental core of all things was water, the stuff of the soul. The soul was the source of movement and transformation.

Anaximander

Anaximander was an ancient Greek who believed that the fundamental core of all things was an unknown substance called apeiron, the stuff of the soul. The soul was the source of movement and transformation.



Parmenides

Parmenides was an ancient Greek who believed that all change and motion was an illusion, and that all things were in fact aspects of a single, eternal, infinite, unchanging being.

Zeno

Zeno, an ancient Greek and student of Parmenides, proposed paradoxes created to prove that motion was an illusion, including the story of Achilles and the turtle. In the story, Achilles can never catch a turtle in a race, since however long it takes Achilles to get to the turtle, the turtle has had time to move forward while Achilles has been moving toward the turtle's position.

Socrates

Socrates was an ancient Greek philosopher who postulated a logos, a perfect, unchanging form of an ideal or value existing in the realm of ideas.

Erwin Piscator

Piscator defined epic as a theater that incorporated multimedia elements to create a sense of the work's reality.

Estela Linares

Estela Linares was an educator implementing a photographic literacy program in Peru.



Objects/Places

Operación Alfabetización Integral (ALFIN)

ALFIN was a literacy program in Peru begun in 1973, which sought to develop literacy in Spanish, in native languages, and in various arts.

Arena Theater

Arena Theater was a theater company in Brazil that rose up in contrast to the mainstream Brazilian theater that imitated European theater.

São Paulo, Brazil

São Paulo, Brazil was where the Arena Theater was located and where Boal participated in it.

Peru

Peru is a South American country with a revolutionary government, where the populace speaks many different languages, and where the government started a program for literacy that taught Spanish, native languages, and also literacy in photography, theater, and other arts.

The United States of America

Boal views the United States as an imperialist force that produces coercive theater, movies, and television designed to oppress the masses and maintain the inequitable status quo. He portrays the United States as constantly oppressing and exploiting other countries.

The Photo of the Child's Face

In a photographic literacy program, one participant takes a photo of a child's face to answer the question where he lived. He explains that the child, whose dog used to protect him from rats, was attacked by the vermin after the dog died in a mange epidemic. The man says that he lives in a place where tragedies like this happen.



The Fish Meal Factory

In a theater exercise, a man examines the problem of the fish meal factory where he is forced to work twelve-hour days. The man's original solution to the problem is to break the machine, but the theater group ultimately determines that their solution would be to start a union.

Barbeque a la Pauper

Barbeque a la Pauper is a fictional barbeque dish ordered by an actor performing invisible theater, theater that appears to the viewers to be reality, in a hotel restaurant. He offers to pay for the expensive dish, which is much better than the normal food, through his undervalued labor, causing a discussion of value and labor.

Photo-romance

A photo romance is a pictorial popular fiction, which Boal is highly critical of. These stories are often empty and melodramatic, and one form of theater Boal recommends involves comparing these unrealistic romances to reality.

Teatro Brasileiro de Comedia (TBC)

The TBC was an elite, mainstream theater company in Brazil which imitated European theater.

The Joker

The Joker is a construct used as a type of narrator in plays, delivering analysis and commentary on the action of the theater so that the audience can understand and analyze the presenter's purpose instead of becoming a tool of the emotional coercion of the play.

Themes

Oppression and Coercion

One of the primary themes that Boal deals with is oppression and coercion. In Boal's worldview, people are greatly defined by their roles in the society. As members of a specific class, individuals begin acting according to the rules of their class instead of according to their personal wills. The members of the upper class become oppressors, and the workers become the oppressed. The oppressed workers are kept in ignorance, prevented from improving their situations, and are manipulated and pacified to prevent them from revolting. Since theater is part of culture, and culture is primarily influenced by the mainstream of society, Boal necessarily sees culture as part of the force that manipulates, coerces, and oppresses the masses. Boal's analysis of Aristotelian theater reads theater in this way, identifying it as a mechanism that works on human emotions to manipulate and repress.

In Boal's worldview, empathy is a tool to make the masses passive and to take away their humanity. Empathy in the theater causes the individual to turn over his or her human identity to the character, who thinks and acts for the individual and teaches an untrue picture of reality. Oppression, which is present in every part of life, and is concretely real in every individual's life, is also present in the theater. The solution to oppression is education. The masses need to be brought to action to counter their passivity. They need to be educated about how they are coerced and manipulated. They need to be trained to take an active role in the revolution, to lift themselves out of oppression. Boal's experiments in theater are designed to create an educated, analytical, active informed public.

Theater as Political

Boal describes Aristotle's categorization of arts and sciences into major and minor arts and sciences. Minor arts might be making a brick or a paintbrush. These, in turn, are part of a larger art, such as architecture or painting. These in turn are part of even more major arts, such as town planning or visual arts. Boal represents politics as the highest art, encompassing all interaction between humans. Therefore, politics are comprised of all the lesser activities of man. Within the scope of this definition, which Boal seems to subscribe to, as well as ascribing it to Aristotle, everything is political, including (and especially in the context of the book) theater.

The perspective of politics as all-encompassing fits into Boal's Marxist worldview, where human behavior is dictated by class relationships and where culture is designed to reinforce the existing system of exploitation. The theater, in this context, becomes a political tool, used by the upper classes for exploitative purposes. However, the theater and its elements are neutral tools to Boal. They can be used for different means. Boal rejects the mainstream theater of the bourgeois as the political tool of the oppressive



upper classes. Theater defines the "truth" of the world by representing the world, but the "truth" that theater defines is whatever the writer, actors, and producers of the theater see as the truth. Therefore, the theater is always biased, reinforcing one worldview or another and imposing it on the spectator. It presents truth, but also defines it. Boal does not reject the theater. Instead, he repurposes the theater as a tool for the education of the oppressed. This is Boal's reason for his title, *Theater of the Oppressed*. His theater is a political tool, not of the oppressor, but of the oppressed.

Spectator versus Actor

In Boal's view, the difference between the spectator and the actor is artificial. Every person has the capacity for art, as a human being, and by taking the active role away from the spectator, the theater is dehumanizing and oppressing the spectator. The spectator's identity, thoughts, and feelings are co-opted by the theater. The spectator-actor relationship is a dichotomy. They are opposites, and in traditional theater, they are forces that are actively antagonistic. The actor usurps the spectator's identity and humanity.

Boal seeks to destroy the antagonistic, manipulative, dysfunctional relationship between the actor and the spectator. In order to destroy this relationship, he proposes to unify the roles of the spectator and the actor. The spectator must be activated and become an actor, a mover, a force that acts on the world. The actor must relinquish some of his control over the performance, instead unifying with the spectator in a cooperative effort. The antagonists, spectator and actor, need to become equals, working together in a Marxist way for the greater good of the whole.

Boal proposes different ways to make the passive spectator into an actor, and these involve giving the spectator a role that is interpretive and analytical, and often a role that can change and mold the theatrical work itself. The spectator sometimes creates content and jumps into the performance, sometimes interrogates and questions the characters, and sometimes decides on resolutions for problems. Whatever method is used, the spectator is not passive, and the theater does not impose ideas and thoughts on the spectator. Instead, the goal is to spur the spectator to action.

Style

Perspective

Boal's perspective is Marxist, and he writes from the perspective of South America, specifically Brazil and Peru. His experiments in theater are directly tied to a time and place, and that time and place is 1970s Brazil and Peru. He sees great suffering and oppression among people who live in extreme poverty, in a society of inequality. He believes that a revolution is inevitable and that the bourgeois are on their way out, living a dying way of life. He also sees theater as a tool to hasten that transition through the education of the masses, who will rise up when they realize that their circumstances are the result of the oppression of the upper classes.

Boal believes that traditional Aristotelian theater is oppressive, designed to instigate and reinforce the society's traditional values, and that this reinforcement of values suppresses revolutionary thought and feeling. He also believes that theater should not reject heroes and emotions, or any kind of past theatrical style and method. He sees existing styles, and even Aristotelian methods like empathy, not as wrong in themselves but as neutral tools that can be used for right or wrong objectives.

Boal's goal in theater is education, and so he frowns on theater that does not make clear its point, resorting to manipulating emotions. His proposed Joker theater uses the Joker as a teacher, who leads the audience through the message of the performance. The Joker is necessary to add the element of education to the performance and to make the audience active, while maintaining elements of traditional theater in individual scenes.

Tone

Boal's work is not an objective study, though its tone often seems outwardly objective. Instead, the book is a view of theater through the lens of Marxism, and particularly Boal's own brand of Marxism. Boal's presentation is colored by a perspective of the world that is defined by social classes warring with each other and the need to educate the people to prepare for a Marxist revolution. He is openly critical of the United States and of the bourgeois, which he classes as oppressors due to their social role, despite any individual propensities. Where he agrees or disagrees, he inserts his opinion, writing primarily a work of personal opinion and argumentation. He is presenting evidence for his arguments, not presenting mere historical fact.

Boal's tone is often analytic and academic, approaching his analysis of theater from a historical perspective and utilizing terms in an academic matter, where he carefully and cautiously defines words. He reads Brecht and Aristotle's works carefully, looking to interpret them in as accurate a manner as possible, often disregarding common presumptions about Brecht or Aristotle's philosophies of theater. However, Boal's point



of view is clear in every analysis, affecting his ideas about both Brecht and Aristotle. He assigns political value to Aristotle's poetics and, counter to general opinion, casts Brecht as agreeing with him about not eliminating heroes from theater. Though these both may be valid conclusions, Boal comes to them in part because they echo his own beliefs. The tone of the work is altered by Boal's perspective, which formulates his historical analysis into an argument for a specific kind of theater.

Structure

Boal's book is actually a collection of articles, each forming a chapter. Each chapter examines a different aspect of theater, but together they form a cohesive argument. The first three chapters chronologically present a history of theater. First, Boal analyzes Aristotle, the representative of the theater that represents the status quo and oppression of the masses. Aristotle is the foundation of all the aspects of theater that Boal objects to.

Moving forward through time, Boal presents the changes in the world and the theater that came from the transition between the medieval period and the Renaissance. This represents for Boal a crucial moment, the emergence of the bourgeois, which will become the oppressive capitalist class. In Machiavelli, Boal sees the application of bourgeois values to Aristotelian theater. Finally, Boal discusses Hegel and Brecht, two opposing forces of theater. Hegel represents oppression and a passive audience that is manipulated and oppressed. Brecht represents the rise of Marxist theater, which changes the theater into a force to educate the masses and call them to revolutionary action.

The final two chapters represent the future of theater. They discuss Boal's experimental theater, which tries to break the Aristotelian rules of theater, destroy the passive and manipulated spectator, and involve the audience in a fluid, transformational theater. Boal presents educational, interactive theater exercises used in a program in Peru, and finally his idea of a Joker system of theater, which combines elements of traditional theater with a Joker-narrator who leads the audience in an analysis of the performance and a call to action. This is a problem-and-solution structure, where Boal presents the problem of theater in the first three chapters and his proposed solution in the last two.



Quotes

"But bear in mind what we already know: that for Aristotle tragedy imitates the actions of man's rational soul (habitual passions) as he searches for happiness, which consists in virtuous behavior." —Chapter 1, Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy, And What is Virtue?, p. 16.

"We conclude, therefore, that pity and fear are the minimal specific form linking the spectator and the character. But these emotions are in no way the object of purification (purgation)." —Chapter 1, Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy, The Ultimate Aim of Tragedy, p. 30.

"Aristotle formulated a very powerful purgative system, the objective of which is to eliminate all that is not commonly accepted, including the revolution, before it takes place." —Chapter 1, Aristotle's Coercive System of Tragedy, Conclusion, p. 47.

"The entire body of Shakespeare's dramatic work serves as documentary evidence of the coming of the individualized man in the theater." —Chapter 2, Machiavelli and the Poetics of Virtù, The Bourgeois Concretion, p. 63.

"The main realist limitation in the theater consists in its presenting a reality which is supposedly already known." —Chapter 2, Machiavelli and the Poetics of Virtù, Modern Reductions of Virtù, p. 76.

"As we have already seen, regardless of who the President of the United States of America may be, he will always have to defend the most reactionary imperialist interests. His individual will determines nothing." —Chapter 3, Hegel and Brecht: The Character as Subject or the Character as Object?, Conflict of Wills or Contradiction of Needs?, p. 100.

"Art is immanent to all men, and not only to a select few; art is not to be sold, no more than are breathing, thinking, loving. Art is not merchandise. But for the bourgeoisie everything is a commodity: man is a commodity." —Chapter 3, Hegel and Brecht: The Character as Subject or the Character as Object?, How to Interpret the New Works?, p. 109.

"Now the oppressed people are liberated themselves and, once more, are making the theater their own. The walls must be torn down." —Chapter 4, Poetics of the Oppressed, Poetics of the Oppressed, p. 119.

"In the forum theater no idea is imposed: the audience, the people, have the opportunity to try out all their ideas, to rehearse all the possibilities, and to verify them in practice, that is, in theatrical practice." —Chapter 4, Poetics of the Oppressed, Experiments with the People's Theater in Peru, p. 141.



"The poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place." — Chapter 4, Poetics of the Oppressed, Experiments with the People's Theater in Peru, p. 155.

"And empathy must be reconquered—but within a new system that will incorporate it and make it perform a compatible function." —Chapter 5, Development of the Arena Theater of São Paulo, First Stage, p. 166.

"We propose a 'Joker' who is a contemporary and neighbor of the spectator." —Chapter 5, Development of the Arena Theater of São Paulo, Need for the "Joker," p. 175.



Topics for Discussion

What criteria does Boal use to assign value to different types of theater?

How does Boal's definition of Aristotelian theater differ from more traditional definitions? Why does Boal define Aristotelian theater this way?

What is Boal's definition and opinion of spectators? Why does Boal want to eliminate spectators from theater?

What is Boal's opinion of Brecht's Marxist theater?

Evaluate Boal's definition of theater and how it encompasses new, experimental forms of theater. How does it differ from a traditional definition of theater?

How are theater and education related for Boal?

Evaluate the concept of the "Joker." Why and how does Boal use this concept? How does it change theater?