Theatre of the Oppressed in Theory and Practice

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**What is Theatre of the Oppressed?**

*“The Theatre of the Oppressed is a system of Exercises, Games and Techniques to help men and women to develop what they already have inside themselves: theatre.”*

*“The basic aim of the Theatre of the Oppressed is to humanize humanity.”*

*-Declaration of Principles, International Theatre of the Oppressed Organization (ITO)*

Theatre of the Oppressed is a collection of theatrical forms and techniques elaborated by Brazilian visionary Augusto Boal over four decades. Theatre of the Oppressed uses theatre as a means to transform reality, with applications in all fields of social activity. It has been used to strengthen families, bridge the linguistic gap between speakers of different languages, write laws, heal minds, and find homes for the homeless, among countless other applications. While there are extensive theoretical writings about the Theatre of the Oppressed movement (mostly by Boal himself) and accounts of numerous applications of the theory to problems around the world, the strength of the movement is in people practicing the theory right now all over the world, actively helping to bring peace to the world.

**What is this course?**

*“The Theatre of the Oppressed is neither an ideology nor a political party, neither dogmatic nor coercive and is respectful of all cultures. It is a method of analysis and a means to develop happier societies. Because of its humanistic and democratic nature, it is widely used all over the world, in all fields of social activities such as:* ***education, culture, arts, politics, social work, psychotherapy, literacy programs*** *and* ***health****.”*

*-Declaration of Principles, ITO (emphasis added).*

We will become some of those people practicing Theatre of the Oppressed to bring more peace to Bloomington, Indiana and the Indiana University campus. After spending some time reading Boal’s theories and studying how psychologists, educators, politicians, and others have applied his theories, we will spend the greater portion of the semester learning to use our bodies as theatrical tools and practicing the theories we have learned. This process will include the students identifying oppressive situations confronting members of the community, writing and rehearsing scenarios that involve that situation and then facilitating the community in overcoming that oppression. Theatre of the Oppressed offers one of the most interactive forms of activism available and this is a great opportunity for you to participate.

**Attendance Policy**

Attendance is absolutely essential to this course, especially in the second half of the semester. Students are allowed TWO unexcused absences because life happens, but otherwise, people need to be in class, engaged, on time. For every absence after and including the third, your grade will be lowered 20 points.

**Deadlines**

Late work will not be accepted. If you need more time, talk to me before the due date of the assignment in question to see about a possible extension.

**Responsibilities Under the Student Code**

“*The* oppressed *are those individuals or groups who are* ***socially****,* ***culturally****,* ***politically****,* ***economically****,* ***racially****,* ***sexually****, or in any other way deprived of their right to* Dialogue *or in any way impaired to exercise this right.”*

*-Declaration of Principles, ITO (emphasis added).*

Please refer to the Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct at <http://www.iu.edu/~code/code/responsibilities/academic/index.shtml> for your responsibilities in terms of academic honesty and conduct. Cheating, plagiarism, and harassment in any form will not be tolerated in this classroom.

**Definition of Plagiarism**

The Indiana University *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct* (2005) indicates that students may be disciplined for several different kinds of academic misconduct. These include cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, interference, and violation of course rules.

In particular the code states:

3. Plagiarism.

Plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else's work, including the work of other students, as one's own. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged, unless the information is common knowledge. What is considered "common knowledge" may differ from course to course.

a. A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, opinions, theories, formulas, graphics, or pictures of another person without acknowledgment.

b. A student must give credit to the originality of others and acknowledge an indebtedness whenever:

1. Directly quoting another person's actual words, whether oral or written;

2. Using another person's ideas, opinions, or theories;

3. Paraphrasing the words, ideas, opinions, or theories of others, whether oral or written;

4. Borrowing facts, statistics, or illustrative material; or

5. Offering materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or collections without acknowledgment.

**Assignments**

**“*Theatre of the Oppressed*** *is the* Game of Dialogue *we play and learn together. All kinds of Games must have* Discipline *– clear rules that we must follow. At the same time, Games have absolute need of creativity and* Freedom*. Theatre of the Oppressed is the perfect synthesis between the antithetic* Discipline *and* Freedom*.* ***Without Discipline, there is no Social Life; without Freedom, there is no Life.***

*“The* Discipline *of our Game is our belief that we must re-establish the right of everyone to exist in dignity. We believe that all of us are more, and much better, than what we think we are. We believe in solidarity.*

*“Our* Freedom *is to invent ways to help to humanize Humanity, freely invading all fields of human activities: social, pedagogical, political, artistic… Theatre is a Language and so it can be used to speak about all human concerns, not to be limited to theatre itself.*

*“We believe in Peace, not in Passivity!”*

*-Augusto Boal, 2004*

**Reading/Experience Journal*:***

Learning doesn’t do you much good if you don’t remember the experience. You will be expected to write at least one journal page for each week of class. During the first part of the semester, your journal will focus on your response to our readings. In the second part of the semester, your journal will shift to your experience in practicing Theatre of the Oppressed. This journal will provide you with a concise record of what you found most interesting from the class for your future studies and work. DUE: First class period of each week.

**Theoretical Paper:**

After we have studied the theoretical basis, each of you will write a 3-4 page paper on some aspect of Theatre of the Oppressed theory or application that you found interesting. You could write about one of the specific types of Theatre of the Oppressed developed by Boal (Newspaper Theatre, Forum Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, etc.), a specific field that Theatre of the Oppressed has been applied to (politics, psychology, education, etc.), a specific performance or group that uses Theatre of the Oppressed (Cardboard Citizens, Jana Sanskriti, etc.), or pretty much anything else related to our readings and discussion. Paper topics should be discussed with me and finalized by the time we finish the theoretical section of our course and will be due two weeks later. DUE: End of week 8

**Leading Discussion:**

Each of you will be responsible for leading a discussion of one of our readings. On that day, your notes should be more extensive and you should come prepared with at least three questions that could generate conversations about the material. This would be a good assignment to share with me before we get into class, so that we can review and revise your questions. DUE: Weeks 1-6, varies by student.

**Leading Games:**

After we start doing workshops of Theatre of the Oppressed, each of you will also lead us in at least one game from the Theatre of the Oppressed arsenal (found in *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*). This assignment will be discussed at more length at that point in the semester. DUE: Weeks 8-10, varies by student.

**Performance:**

We will prepare our own Theatre of the Oppressed workshops and performances to share with the community at the end of the semester. The community, topic, and location(s) of these performances will be decided jointly by the members of the class. This is your chance to bring your own studies and interest to bear on actively helping others. There will be various roles that need to be filled, including performers, outreach coordinators, and any other roles specific to our preparations. These performances are the end result of everything else we will have done in the semester and vital to your understanding of the effectiveness of the movement. DUE: Weeks 15-16

**Performance Paper:**

You will write a 3-4 page paper about your experience practicing exercises, games, and techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed. What did you learn about yourself from the experience? What did you learn about your classmates? What did you learn about the community you live in? How will you apply what you have learned in your future studies and your career? This is your chance to decide what you will take of value from this course experience and share it with others. DUE: Finals Week

**Point Breakdown**

Reading/Experience Journal 150 pts

Theoretical Paper 200 pts

Leading Discussion 100 pts

Leading Games 100 pts

Performance 250 pts

Performance Paper 200 pts

Total 1000 pts

**Readings**

Required Texts:

*Theatre of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal

*Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal

Selections available on Oncourse:

*Rainbow of Desire* by Augusto Boal

*The Aesthetics of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal

*Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to Make Politics* by Augusto Boal

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire

*Playing Boal: theatre, therapy, activism* by Mady Schutzman, Jan Cohen-Cruz

*Youth and Theatre of the Oppressed* by Peter Duffy and Elinor Vettraino

*Working Without Boal: Digressions and Development in the Theatre of the Oppressed* by

Frances Babbage

*Healing Through Dialogue*: *Theatre of the Oppressed and Beyond* by Jaya Iyer

*“Come Closer”: Critical Perspectives on Theatre of the Oppressed* by Toby Emert and

Ellie Friedland

*Glimpses of Freedom: The Art and Soul of Theatre of the Oppressed in Prison* by Katya

Buchleitner

**Weekly Breakdown**

*“The Theatre of the Oppressed offers everyone the aesthetic means to analyze their past, in the context of their present, and subsequently to invent their future, without waiting for it. The Theatre of the Oppressed helps human beings to recover a language they already possess – we learn how to live in society by playing theatre. We learn how to feel by feeling; how to think by thinking; how to act by acting. Theatre of the Oppressed is* rehearsal for reality.”

*-Declaration of Principles, ITO*

During weeks 1-6, we will read theoretical and practical works and watch media resources to gain an understanding of the Theatre of the Oppressed movement.

Week 1 – Introduction and Background

*We will start by learning about the background and formation of Theatre of the Oppressed movement.*

* By what process did Augusto Boal develop his theories?
* What is the movement’s strongest connection to education?
* Why is such a movement necessary?
* What does it mean to be oppressed?

Readings

* *Theatre of the Oppressed*
* *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Week 2 – Basics Forms in Theatre of the Oppressed Movement

*Theatre of the Oppressed has taken on many forms over the decades since its conception. This week we will gain a basic understanding of the various forms and ideas of their applications.*

* What is Newspaper Theatre?
* What is Simultaneous Dramaturgy?
* What is Image Theatre?
* What is Forum Theatre?
* What is Rainbow of Desire?
* What is Legislative Theatre?

Readings

* *Theatre of the Oppressed*
* *Rainbow of Desire*

Week 3 – Theatre of the Oppressed and Politics, Conflict Management, and Education

*Politics is a vibrant field for Theatre of the Oppressed which has been used to create laws and invigorate the political landscape in cities around the world. And even when not creating laws, it does other things “pertaining to citizens” and citizenship by helping educate and resolve conflicts between the peoples of the world.*

* How has Legislative Theatre created binding laws?
* What are some outlets within the field of education for Theatre of the Oppressed?
* How is Theatre of the Oppressed used to encourage dialogue?

Readings

* *Legislative Theatre*
* *“Come Closer”*
* *Healing Through Dialogue*

Week 4 – Theatre of the Oppressed and Therapy

*Theatre of the Oppressed’s uses in a form of psychodrama and other forms of therapy provide insight in to how we approach people who are oppressed by their own bodies and minds.*

* What is psychodrama?
* How can “rehearsing revolution” help people to change themselves and their situation?
* What precautions must be taken to safely use these techniques?

Readings

* *Playing Boal*
* *Theatre of the Oppressed*
* *Youth and Theatre of the Oppressed*
* *Working Without Boal*

Week 5 – Theatre of the Oppressed and Activism

*Here we will see various forms of activism that have adopted Theatre of the Oppressed as one of their primary tools for disseminating change.*

* What is Theatre for Social Change?
* What changes do you want to see in the world?
* How can you use Theatre of the Oppressed to further those goals?

Readings

* *Playing Boal*
* *Glimpses of Freedom*

Week 6 – The Present and Future of Theatre of the Oppressed

*With oppression still rampant in the world, there are countless arenas where techniques from Theatre of the Oppressed can relieve oppressive circumstances.*

* What other areas (from your own lives, future careers, or experience) could benefit from the techniques we have discussed?
* What projects are companies around the world currently working on?

Readings

* *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*

For Weeks 7-16, we will continue to refer to *Theatre of the Oppressed* and *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Readings will be interspersed throughout as needed by the class.

Week 7 – Researching a Need

*During this week, we will, as a class, choose a target community and go out and talk to people in that community. Rather than deciding for ourselves what problems that community has that need addressing, we will find out from them their needs.*

Week 8-10 – Using Our Bodies as a Tool

*For these weeks, we will go through a workshop process playing the games of the Theatre of the Oppressed arsenal in order to learn ways we can use our bodies to form images, sounds, and words for communication to open dialogue with those around us.*

Week 11-14 – Preparing for Forum Theatre

*We will spend four weeks applying the lessons we learned during our workshop period to create scenes based around the need (or needs) we decided on with the community in Week 7. We will write scripts of different scenarios and work through a process to decide which scenarios will best address the needs of the community and allow them to work through their oppression.*

Week 15-16 – Forum Theatre Performances

*We will go out in to the community and present our Forum Theatre scenarios. We will provide resources to the community for “rehearsing their own revolution” and open that Dialogue that is necessary for humanity to be human. Lofty goals, I know, but that is why we are doing this.*