



# **IronHawk on Death Row**

**A Handbook**

**18<sup>th</sup> Annual Pedagogy & Theater of the  
Oppressed Conference**

**Berkeley, California  
2012**

**“IronHawk on Death Row”** is part of a larger project, *ACTING FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ RIGHTS*, which strengthens the human rights of Indigenous Peoples worldwide and promotes cooperation among indigenous and non-indigenous peoples towards the implementation of the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP A/RES/61/295). In conjunction with training and outreach activities, the project uses Theater of the Oppressed to create information and popular education materials designed to raise awareness of the UNDRIP. Materials include a manual, and theater and web-based multimedia services aimed at train-the-trainer (TOT) workshops and advocacy tools.

*ACTING FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ RIGHTS* is book number seven of the Human Rights Education Series of the University of Minnesota Human Rights Center. The center assists human rights advocates, students, educators, and volunteers access effective tools, practices, and networks to promote a culture of human rights and responsibilities in local, national, and international communities. For more information, see <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/>.

Project partners:

- Kristi Rudelius-Palmer, M.A. Project Leader. Co-Director, University of Minnesota Human Rights Center (UMN-HRC).
- Mariana Leal Ferreira, Ph.D., Project Author. Associate Professor & Co-Director, Global Peace, Human Rights & Justice Studies Program, San Francisco State University.
- Nancy Flowers, M.A. Project Coordinator. Human Rights consultant and writer; Editor, Human Rights Education Series for the UMN-HRC.
- Tom Goldtooth, Executive Director, Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), Bemidji, Minnesota.
- Alberto Saldamando, J.D., General Counsel, International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), San Francisco, CA.
- Melissa Nelson, Ph.D., Executive Director, The Cultural Conservancy (TCC). Associate Professor, American Indian Studies, San Francisco State University.
- Jiwon Chung, Theater Director and President, Pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed Organization (PTO).

This brochure was supported by award number P20MD000544 from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities or the National Institutes of Health.

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# ***IRONHAWK ON DEATH ROW*** **A Theater of the Oppressed Handbook**

**Mariana Leal Ferreira, editor**  
**San Francisco State University**

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Gladiator mosaic in Rome, 2000 years ago, when animal fights were followed by the execution of criminals thrown *ad bestias*. The Archaeological Museum of Tripoli, Libya. Not much different from death row in the U.S. today.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Acting Human Rights & Theater of the Oppressed**

When theater insinuates itself into the classroom or out onto the street, human rights education becomes an inspiring and powerful experience. Acting out skits or exploring different characters within a human rights framework, alternative scenarios and endings turn out to be real possibilities. Drama promotes critical thinking, so that students can reflect upon and formulate their own ideas of the world they'd like to help create. This handbook is designed to make the teaching of human rights exhilarating for actors and non-actors alike. Whether you have experience or not using theater as a pedagogical tool, the stories, plays, and detailed learning activities presented here will guide you through the principles and practice of Augusto Boal's revolutionary **Theater of the Oppressed** (TO) methodology. The goal is to show how theater can be used to create a world where human rights are appreciated and protected.



*The legendary Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal (1931-2009) founded the "Theater of the Oppressed" movement. He was deeply influenced by Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," using the stage as a platform for social dialogue and to ultimately change society. In this handbook we use Boal's methods of **Image Theater** and **Forum Theater** to encourage the participation of audience members as "spect-actors," as he liked to call them, rather than mere spectators. Like Boal, our goal is to engage you in a theatrical rehearsal for real life human rights issues.*

In my own work Paulo Freire's emphasis on dialogue, on people working with each other to transform the world materialized into short stories, memoirs, drawings, photographs, and maps published collectively in numerous newsletters, first-readers, atlases, and history books in the Xingu Indigenous Park and other reservations or territories where I worked. Through dialogues and debate students were challenged to adopt more critical positions about the country and their lives. Like Freire, many educators viewed education as an effort to liberate people and not as yet another instrument to dominate them. In this respect, the narratives in this manual offer a portrait of what Indigenous community members were, and to a large extent still are, thinking, saying, and doing

to make for justice and human flourishing. Freire's insistence on situating educational activity in the lived experience of participants has opened up a series of possibilities for the way education has been put into practice in Brazilian schools, including Indigenous ones. Boal's Theater of the Oppressed is one such methodology, which closely mirrors the dialogical and transformational aspects of Freire's critical pedagogy.



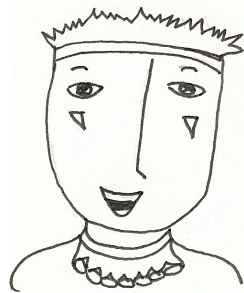
*Did you know that Paulo Freire (1921 - 1997), created his philosophy of popular education working with the illiterate poor of the Brazilian Northeast? Starting in the late 1940s, his innovative approach to literacy emphasized peasants' ability to generate knowledge collectively, using "generative terms" - such as land, water, food, transportation - that conveyed their life conditions and worldviews. Freire's*

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed enabled people to see themselves as historical actors, capable of organizing on their own and creating social change.*

Theatre of the Oppressed, or TO for short, is a set of collective and creative techniques, games, and practices invented by Augusto Boal to promote social and political change. In this handbook TO gives educators and students, individuals and communities the tools to analyze and transform their actions within contemporary situations of indigenous peoples' lives. Forum Theater and Image Theater are the main TO techniques used here to explore, rehearse, and enact community-oriented and community-building solutions to problems of oppression, conflict, inequality, and injustice. Forum Theatre begins with the enactment of a scene -- such as Antonio's insistence on giving his twin sisters a piece of bread in *Madness of Hunger* -- in which the protagonist tries unsuccessfully to overcome oppression. The joker then invites the spect-actors to replace the protagonist at any point in the scene and offer an alternative action that could lead to a different ending or solution. The result is a rehearsal for real situations, based on the enacted dialogues stemming from the suggested alternatives. Image Theatre, in turn, is a series of silent exercises in which participants create embodiments of their feelings and experiences. Beginning with a selected situation, such as unemployment, participants form images with their own bodies, and sculpt images onto others' bodies. These frozen images can then be dynamized or brought to life, through a sequence of movement-based and interactive exercises explained ahead in detail.

The narratives in this handbook point to the importance of understanding the breadth of human rights instruments of protection, most notably the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Theater of the Oppressed emerges as an extraordinary methodology to explore different possibilities to create and re-create worlds anew, as it relies on individuals' and communities' perceptions of how to overcome oppression and achieve liberation. You may, of course, apply the games and exercises proposed here to better understand and suggest new possibilities for the liberation of Indigenous Peoples in your community or anywhere else in the world. But keep in mind that you may also follow our suggested learning activities to address oppressive situations closer to you and your communities and the different venues for liberation that are locally situated and contextualized. Ultimately, by using this handbook you will learn how to apply TO to strengthen your work and contribute to the enjoyment of human rights everywhere and for all peoples.

Madness of Hunger is one of the 10 plays portrayed in the forthcoming handbook *Acting for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (Book number 7 of the Human Rights Education Series, University of Minnesota Human Rights Center). The book, in turn, is part of a larger project that uses Theater of the Oppressed to commemorate the adoption by the United Nations of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September 2007.



*After more than thirty years of negotiation between nation-states and Indigenous Peoples worldwide the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** was finally adopted by the UN National Assembly on September 13, 2007. An overwhelming majority of 143 voted in favor, with only four negative votes (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United States), and eleven abstentions. Human Rights Declarations become universally applicable upon their adoption by the UN regardless of how individual states vote.*

Acting for Indigenous Peoples' Rights celebrates the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (2006-2015). We hope you enjoy this handbook and put into practice some of our suggested thoughts and activities using Theater of the Oppressed, and write your own play!

Mariana Leal Ferreira. Berkeley 6/1/2012

# IronHawk on Death Row

*By Mariana Leal Ferreira*

Sharp metallic noises, like a knife striking the floor, still make me jump. They take me back five or six years, awake or in my sleep, to the cold steel walls of a maximum security prison in Nashville, where I visited American Indians on death row during my tenure as an anthropology professor at the University of Tennessee. As I passed through the multiple checkpoints into the visitation room, nerve-wrecking sounds of steel gates and electronic locks felt like torture. It's true what prisoners say: the haunting clatter is yet another form of cruel and unusual punishment, added on to their death sentences. The noisy penalty co-exists side-by-side with ring-worm and other preventable skin diseases, outside cagings in inclement weather, solitary confinement, and gladiator fights staged by prison guards and the warden for their sheer enjoyment.

I taught long-distance courses to the inmates, taking advantage of the prison law library to better understand United Nations treaties, such as the Geneva Conventions, the Genocide Convention, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. After a couple of years, private prison administrators, who contract with the state of Tennessee to *profit from forced confinement* -- the classic definition of slavery, cracked down on our attempt to educate all prisoners on international human rights law. My visitation rights were abruptly revoked. Although I've created dramatic settings for these conversations, every scene in this play is based on true facts. The text is also culled from a wide array of archival materials, such as press reports, court transcripts, personal correspondence and regular phone calls I received from the prisoners. I wrote *IronHawk* in 2007 with the conviction that the death penalty is not justice. In this play, you clearly see the institutional racism upon which the existing capital justice system resides.<sup>1</sup>

Human rights issues conveyed in the play include: the death penalty, religious freedom, and racial discrimination.

## **Synopsis of IronHawk:**

IronHawk, an Apache warrior now on death row for 33 years, embarks on a spiritual journey at the moment of his botched execution at a maximum security prison in Tennessee, in the Summer of 2010. The play examines the continuing Genocide of American Indians on death row in the U.S, highlighting the Geneva Convention's ban on the

execution of Prisoners of War or P.O.Ws.

**Cast of Characters:**

**IronHawk**, Apache death row inmate, 52. Spiritualist, educated and smart.

**Hutch**, death row inmate, 48. Pragmatist, uneducated, smart.

**Ms. Manslaughter**, prison warden, 45. Sadist, pig-headed.

**Executioner**, 45.

**Time and Place:**

Contemporary Maximum Security Institution in Tennessee. Scenario: Inside IronHawk's cell, in an outdoor exercise iron cage, and in an execution chamber.

**Dedication:** We dedicate *IronHawk* to Leonard Peltier, a citizen of the Anishinabe and Dakota/Lakota Nations, unjustly imprisoned since 1976. Dedicate your own theater activities to a person or event as a form of ideological warm up, "a song sung by all, a scene, or simply a recited text," as Boal likes to say.<sup>ii</sup>

## IronHawk

### SCENE ONE

(IronHawk and Hutch are playing poker in a steel "cage" in the prison yard of a maximum security facility. IronHawk's left eye is covered by a black patch because of injuries sustained in a gladiator fight staged by prison guards and the warden.)

IRONHAWK

Your turn.

HUTCH

Fuck, I'm out of luck. Sucker, you took all my money!

IRONHAWK

I'm going blind and you curse the Devil? You gotta watch yourself here in Unit Six. Bros don't play cards with sissies like you. Straight Flush, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

HUTCH

Lucky mother fucker! You cheatin' me, Chief, some ol'Injun trick? I hear you're full of magic – hypnotize guards, disappear from your cell – how



come your magic ain't got you off death row? Always wanted to transfer here to watch you fight. Folks say you take three at a time, bare-handed. Pretty good for slashin' a white man's throat with a huntin' knife!



*The United Nations opposes the Death Penalty. The US is in violation of UN regulations by having the death penalty.*

IRONHAWK

I'm no Chief. I'm an Apache warrior -- IronHawk is my name, and I am innocent. I'm a political prisoner of the United States government, a P.O.W.



*The four UN Geneva Conventions are meant to protect the wounded, the sick, the shipwrecked at sea, prisoners of war and civilians in time of armed conflict. The Third Geneva Convention, adopted in 1949 after the horrors of WWII, discusses in detail the rights of prisoners of war or P.O.Ws.*

HUTCH

P.O. what?

IRONHAWK

P.O.W. means Prisoner of War.

HUTCH

You gotta be kiddin'. The war in Iraq?

IRONHAWK

Indian wars, colonial wars. They've been waging war against my people for hundreds of years. Never heard of Wounded Knee?

HUTCH

Yeah, I seen cowboy movies on TV, like Dance with Wolves. But that was way back then. Chief, we're in the 21<sup>st</sup> century!

IRONHAWK:

Geronimo, Crazy Horse... My heroes all killed cowboys. Did you ever wonder why?

HUTCH

'Cause you're savages!

IRONHAWK

Genocide!



*The 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide defines genocide as any act committed with the idea of destroying in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.*

HUTCH

Genocide? Fuck. Too much readin' those damn books. Think the law gives a fuck about us? Now, gladiator fights are cool, man, you ain't givin' up on those, are you. What fun is there for an inmate like me if there ain't no fightin'? Listen up, Chief. You plannin' some big escape? 'Cause books ain't gonna get you out of this hole. And magic ain't neither.

IRONHAWK

You know nothing about your rights on death row. More than 100 inmates were released on DNA.

HUTCH

Rights for poor folks like us? Who gives a fuck? DNA is for O.J. Simpson dudes.

IRONHAWK

Indian people care. The Geneva Convention says you can't kill prisoners of war.



*Article 13 of the Third Geneva Convention says that "prisoners of war must at all times be humanely treated." In addition, "prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or*

*intimidation and against insults and public curiosity.”*

HUTCH

Geneva what?

IRONHAWK

I can show you law books in my cell. International laws protect victims of Genocide and prisoners of war.

HUTCH

Your lawyer teach ya this shit?

IRONHAWK

I got no counsel, I represent myself. Got all the paperwork ready for my last appeal in the Federal Supreme Court.

HUTCH

You takin' the needle or the chair?



*Think about this: the approximate number of Death Row inmates in the U.S. in 2009 was 3,230. States with the most DR inmates are: California (655), Texas (390) and Florida (375). (Source: Bureau of Justice.)*

IRONHAWK

My body is sacred. I'm an Apache warrior and I fight with my own weapons.

HUTCH

A weapon?

IRONHAWK

A peace pipe.

HUTCH

To crack someone's head?

IRONHAWK

I pray for peace in the world.

HUTCH

Pray as much as you want, Chief. But this pow-wow stuff is bull shit to me. Here come the guards. Behave or they'll stick them Taser gun in your balls again.

## SCENE TWO

(Ms. Manslaughter is talking to Hutch in his cell.)

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Speak up, what did you find out? Is Chief playing another Indian trick anytime soon?

HUTCH

Ma'am, the Injun's got some smarts. I saw books in his cell, lots of'em. That's what the ol'Injun does, study them law books.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

How can an ignorant Indian learn from a book? I'll kill him one way or another, it's my revenge. The last fight is mine. Can't wait to see him drooling, his braids going up in smoke, his eye balls popping. I should even get a promotion out of this!

HUTCH:

He's not taking the chair, Ma'am, not the needle, neither. Guess what, he calls himself a P.O.W. A prisoner of war. I seen it in the books, too, some Geneva thing that protects him. The Injun's smart, Ma'am, he really is. Something to do with Genocide.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Bull shit, there's never been no Genocide in this country.



*Let's not forget that mass killings of Indigenous Peoples occurred in the United States. By conservative estimates, the U.S. population prior to European contact was greater than 12 million. Four centuries later, the count was reduced by 95% to 237 thousand.*

HUTCH

It's true, Ma'am, I saw it in the books. Here it is, he wrote it down for me. (pause) It's called Geneva Convention. That ol'Injun knows his stuff. He's read every fucking book in the library.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

What else?

HUTCH

He's got a weapon in his cell, some kind of pipe.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

The peace pipe? I've made sure he won't burn sage in that thing ever again.

HUTCH

He says the pipe's sacred, some peace mission he's onto. Still calls it a weapon, he does. Ma'am, I think the pipe gives him special powers.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

The pipe's his weak spot. If he doesn't take our deal we'll confiscate it right away. I'm saving that for last.

HUTCH

Ma'am, if he finds out I'm a snitch he'll kill me!

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

You go back to Unit Two as soon as we're done. Good work, Hutch. Now, find out exactly when he's filing the federal appeal cause that's when he'll get the letter.

### **SCENE THREE**

(Manslaughter approaches Ironhawk's cell.)

Chief! Get your ass up here! I have a letter for you.

IRONHAWK

A letter?

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Sign here, on the X .

IRONHAWK

Tennessee Department of Corrections? I'm waiting for the Supreme Court!

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

We got a great deal for you, lucky son-of-a-bitch! Free commissaries, intimate visits, and you get to keep the pipe. Give up your appeals and

take the chair, easy!

IRONHAWK

My pipe is not a privilege. It's my right, my religion.



*Article 12 of the UNDRIP says that "Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains."*

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Religion here only Jewish, Christian or Muslim.

IRONHAWK

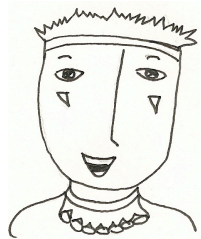
You want me to ... blow my head up in smoke? I'm a POW, you guys can't kill me!

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

In California, they'll gas you. In Washington, you'll hang. Here in Indian country, if you take the needle like a dog, *I'll make sure you're awake every step of the way.*

IRONHAWK

I'm protected by the Geneva Convention! I am an Apache Warrior! Article 130 says you can't kill me, the Genocide of American Indians isn't over, yet!



*The Third Geneva, Article 30, considers it a "grave breach" to kill, torture or treat inhumanely Prisoners of War.*

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

The Convention means shit in Guantanamo or Iraq. You're gonna die anyway, so take the deal and keep the pipe.

IRONHAWK

You can't take my pipe, I've had it for 30 years. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Geneva Convention says: articles having a personal or sentimental value may not be taken from POWs. Take the letter, I'm not signing.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Think you know international law? Next thing, you're innocent. Murderer! You're giving up tons of pleasure *and* your pipe. So you'd rather go back to the hole and straight to the chair?

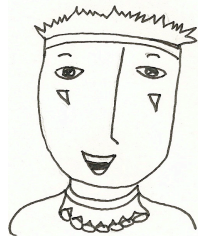
IRONHAWK

You can't kill a P.O.W. I've got my rights.

(IronHawk takes a piece of paper from his pocket and reads aloud.)

IRONHAWK

(facing audience) "Prisoners of war must at all times be humanely treated. The willful killing of protected persons—including sick and wounded, and captured or surrendering soldiers—is a grave breach of the Third Geneva Convention."



*"Prisoners of war must at all times be humanely treated. Any unlawful act or omission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody is prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present Convention. In particular, no prisoner of war may be subjected to physical mutilation or to medical or scientific experiments of any kind which are not justified by the medical, dental or hospital treatment of the prisoner concerned and carried out in his interest. Likewise, prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity. Measures of reprisal against prisoners of war are prohibited." (Third Geneva Convention, Article 13)*

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Sign the letter, bastard!

IRONHAWK

I've got nothing for you, Manslaughter. Just a prayer to make you see the light.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

You got 24 hours. We'll even getcha spare ribs and some Scotch! I'm tired of you, Chief. You're disgusting and fat. If you don't give up your

appeals and take the chair, I'll make sure you're in terrible pain till your heart finally stops. I control the injection chamber. This last gladiator fight is mine. I wanna watch you die.

#### SCENE FOUR

(The Death Chamber. The Executioner ties down IronHawk's arms and legs to the gurney and shaves his right calf. He hooks up IronHawk's arms to an IV. The curtains between the execution room and the witness stand are closed. Manslaughter comes out of the adjoining cocktail room.)

IRONHAWK

Grandfather! I'll light a fire to your spirit.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

(speaking to IronHawk) Just too bad you didn't take the deal. Apache magic isn't that powerful, is it Chief. Your pipe's gone. Now it's my turn, you can't escape *my* magic. Got a good potion brewing, you'll die like an animal!



*The methods of execution used worldwide are: lethal injection, beheading, firing squad, hanging, stoning, and the electric chair.*

IRONHAWK

Hear My Voice, Grandfather! I prepare a feast for you!

EXECUTIONER

His veins are good for nothin'. I'll try the calf.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Poke harder. Aren't you the best jabber?

IRONHAWK

Grandfather! I shall walk the beautiful trail.

EXECUTIONER

Found a trickle of blood. (pause) Ma'am, is the cocktail ready?



MS. MANSLAUGHTER

All three drugs ready to flow into ... your sacred ... temple, Chief? We'll see how sacred you are today.

IRONHAWK

My father, Sun. My mother, Dawn. I send forth my prayers.

(It's 11:55 pm. IronHawk is now flat on his back. Manslaughter opens the curtains.)

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

(facing audience) The governor...and the mayor! You folks don't ever miss an execution. Five more minutes... Goodbye, Chief. Say 'hi' to your grandpa. I'll take good care of your pipe.

IRONHAWK

(facing audience) You can't take away my dignity.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Dignity? You'll be at the Body Farm tomorrow. We donated your body to science.



*The Third Geneva Convention states that "Deceased prisoners of war shall be buried in individual graves unless unavoidable circumstances require the use of collective graves. Bodies may be cremated only for imperative reasons of hygiene, on account of the religion of the deceased or in accordance with his express wish to this effect. In case of cremation, the fact shall be stated and the reasons given in the death certificate of the deceased. (Article 120)*

(Manslaughter steps into the witness room and takes a front seat.)

IRONHAWK

(to the Executioner) Make sure my braids don't touch the floor.

EXECUTIONER

Anything else?

IRONHAWK

I am innocent!

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Let the execution begin!

(At midnight, a green light indicates the initial flow of shot number one. Sodium Pentothal, a sedative drug, shall induce a coma in 2 to 3 minutes. IronHawk is praying.)

IRONHAWK

I've made a footprint. I call for the abolition of the death penalty worldwide.



*International death penalty trends are unmistakably towards abolition. Use of the death penalty worldwide has continued to shrink, and use of the death penalty has also been increasingly curtailed in international law. Since 1990, an average of three countries each year have abolished the death penalty, and today over two-thirds of the world's nations have ended capital punishment in law or practice. For more info, see*

*<http://www.amnestyusa.org/death-penalty>*

(The Executioner checks the IV.)

EXECUTIONER

(facing audience) Ma'am, we missed the vein. It's goin' straight in the flesh. His arms are swellin' and he's still awake.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Shot number two will knock him out.

(A yellow light starts flashing. Tubocurarine, known as curare, shall freeze the muscles and paralyze everything but the heart. IronHawk is still praying.)

IRONHAWK

I've made a footprint. My death is a violation of the right to life.

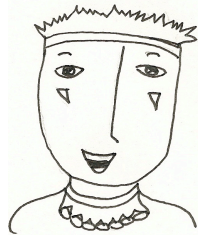
At 12:20 the Executioner checks the IV again. IronHawk's feet and hands are still twitching. He opens his eyes.)

IRONHAWK

What's going on?

EXECUTIONER

Dead man talkin'!



*There are many reasons why we should oppose the death penalty. The innocent may be wrongly executed. Since the DP was reinstated in 1976, more than 80 inmates have been freed from Death Row. That's 1 Death Row inmate found to be wrongfully convicted for every 7 executed.*

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Give him a double shot.

(The Executioner presses the yellow switch twice. A double dose of curare is sent flowing into IronHawk's arms. It is 12:25.)

EXECUTIONER

Ma'am, his lips are movin'.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

Go ahead with number 3.

EXECUTIONER

He's awake, tryin' to breathe!

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

(facing audience) Still trying to be tough! Won't take much longer...enjoy!

(It's half past midnight. A red light indicates Potassium Chloride is the lethal drop that will stop IronHawk's heart.)

IRONHAWK

The preying bird of death is calling. (gasping) Creator, bless the fallen warriors!

(IronHawk's mouth is foaming. His head falls to the side. The Executioner picks up the braids, placing them across the Indian's chest.)

EXECUTIONER

God bless ya, Chief.

MS. MANSLAUGHTER

(facing audience). The inmate is finally dead at 12:45 am. *You are cordially invited to Willie Softskin's electrocution on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, in this same room. May God be with you, Amen.*

**The End**

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

By Nancy Flowers



*You'll enjoy the TO learning activities selected from Boal's Games for Actors and Non-Actors and adapted for IronHawk. Read the play before you begin to practice, as most games and exercises use scenes from the story. We begin with emotional and ideological warm-up exercises, move on to games of mask and ritual, then finally suggest Forum Theater workshops to give everyone the opportunity to rehearse new outcomes for liberation.*

### **Activity 1. THE POWER OF EMOTIONS**

**Overview:** Participants practice a range of positive and negative emotions

without any specific reason for feeling this way.

**Time:** 15-20 minutes

**Materials:** None

1. **Getting Started:** Explain that during the entire activity they cannot use words, only numbers (e.g., 65, 130, 2) and that at no time may they touch anyone.
2. **Shifting Emotions:**
  - Ask participants to circulate expressing positive emotions toward each other.
  - As they continue to interact, ask them to begin to shift the quality and quantity of this positive emotion to less positive.
  - At intervals cue participants to continue this negative emotional shift until they are expressing hatred or despair and threatening violence. Clarify that they must never touch anyone. Urge them to focus on expressing the emotion at this point, not on self-protection.
  - Then gradually ask participants gradually to shift back to positive emotions, as if they were rediscovering the good qualities of others until they return to the original state of harmony.
3. **Debriefing the Activity:** Discuss the experience and relate it to attitudes that people hold about social issues like the death penalty using questions like these:
  - How did you feel during this activity?

- Did you try to imagine some motivation for the positive or negative emotions you were expressing?
- Do you sometimes experience strong emotions like these without knowing what has caused you to feel this way?
- Are there some situations or subjects that cause some people to have such strong emotions?
- How do these emotional responses on such topics affect social change?

Adapted from *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal 1992, pp. 222-223).

<b>Activity 2. NOTHING HUMAN IS ALIEN TO ME</b>
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**Overview:** Participants re-enact the Execution scene, taking a different role each time.

**Time:** 60 to 90 minutes

**Materials:** Copies of *Ironhawk* for each participant.

**1. Getting Started:**

- Frame the topic: Explain that about 64% of the population in this country are in favor of executing convicted murderers, while only 30% are opposed to it (Gallup 2008). For the most part, people who support capital punishment do so quietly, unwilling or unable to justify why they would kill to stop others from killing.
- Explain the goal of the exercise: to explore our ability to feel, think and be in this world in ways infinitely more various than we are aware of.
- Ask participants to form groups of four and explain that each person in the group will play each of the four roles in the Execution scene in *Ironhawk*. Explain that at some point you may call a halt to the action..

To the Facilitator: If one group does not have four participants, add these “extras” to another group, which will then have a silent observer in each shift of roles.

**2. Exploring the Roles:**

- Ask each group to find a space and begin acting out the scene.
- After enough time has elapsed for the actors to begin to develop the character, call a halt to the action and instruct

each actor to pass his or her script to the actor on the right, who will then take over that role.

To the Facilitator: Depending on the time available, you may want to re-enact the whole scene four times or call a halt four times in a single reading.

### 3. Debriefing the Activity:

- When all groups have completed their scene, discuss the experience asking questions like these:
  - *What was it like for you to shift roles like this?*
  - *How did each actor feel in each of the different roles?*
  - *Were there some roles that you enjoyed playing? Even “negative” ones?*
  - *Why were certain actors’ performances more convincing?*
  - *What emotions did the actors draw on or feel emerge in themselves during the performances?*
- Observe that actors are given the opportunity to explore *how they would feel* about supporting the death penalty, because everyone is capable of wrongdoing. Virtuous behavior is the result of free and conscious choice and not the fruit of an incapacity for wrongdoing. This exercise consists of stimulating those latent parts of each of us, to best understand everything that is inherent in human beings. The actor is not asked to alter her personality, only to sound out her possibilities, and by the same token, those of the characters she is going to play.

Adapted from *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal 1992, pp. 224-225).

<b>Activity 3. SPEAKING THE INNER VOICE</b>
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**Overview:** Participants stop in mid-scene and speak their character’s thoughts aloud.

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:** Scripts of *IronHawk*

1. **Getting started:** Explain that participants will take parts and act out a scene from *Ironhawk*. At some points the Joker will shout, “Stop! Think!” and all the actors will begin speaking aloud what is in their character’s mind at that moment in the action. They will continue

speaking at the same time until the Joker shouts, "Go on!" at which point the actors will pick up the scene just where they left off.

To the Facilitator: This exercise allows actors to reveal their thoughts, which may be quite contrary to the arguments made in the play, or else be alienated from the storyline altogether. To do so, participants need to be already familiar with the play. Actors communicate on the conscious level by their words and movements, but also at the "undercurrent" level, by means of the thoughts they "emit." When an actor's thoughts clash with his or her actions, the audience receives "static," two contradictory messages that are impossible to reconcile.

2. **Acting a scene:** Assign a scene or scenes from *Ironhawk* to be acted out. Have the Joker stop the action at least once in the scene. You might have more than one set of actors repeat the same scene.

To the Facilitator: Some suggested passages:

- Scene One: When IronHawk says he is a Prisoner of War and Hutch questions whether Genocide has ever occurred in the United States and has never heard of "Indian Wars."
  - Scene Two: When IronHawk and Ms. Manslaughter talk about American Indian religion and the peace pipe, citing the Geneva Convention.
  - Scene Three: The anti-death penalty argument.
3. **Debriefing the Activity:** When all scenes are completed, discuss the experience asking questions like these:
    - What was it like to hear both the scripted voice and the inner voice of the characters?
    - Did you hear a clash between the scripted voice and the inner voice? If so, what was the effect of this conflict?
    - Did hearing the inner voice help you to understand the character? To act the role better?
    - If a scene was acted more than once, what significant differences did you hear in the inner voices?
    - Are there situations in real life when hearing the inner voice would be helpful? Unhelpful?

Adapted from *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal 1992, p. 227).

<b>Activity 4. STYLE OR SUBSTANCE?</b>
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**Overview:** Participants act out a scene from *IronHawk* in a different genre

or style

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:** Scripts of *IronHawk*

1. **Getting started:** Ask participants to brainstorm other dramatic genres that can be used to tell any story (e.g., circus, melodrama, farce, opera, sitcom). Divide them into several small groups and ask each group to choose a scene from *IronHawk* to present in a different genre.

To the Facilitator: For example, IronHawk's botched execution could take on the characteristics of a circus. As a farce *IronHawk* would require broad satire and improbable situations (e.g., What if Ms. Manslaughter fell in love with IronHawk?) In a melodrama IronHawk's actions would be more salient than his characterization as a spiritual Apache. A situation comedy focusing on the humorous side of real-life situations and is usually character-driven.

2. **Shifting genres:** Ask each group to perform its version of any scene from the play. After each presentation, ask the audience for any further ideas about transforming the play into this genre.
3. **Debriefing the Activity:** After all the presentations, discuss the experience asking questions like these:
  - What was it like to see a scene in different genre? Was anything gained? Lost?
  - Which alternative genre seemed most successful? Least? Why
  - Did shifting genres provide any insights into the play?
  - Why do you think the author chose to use the original genre?

To the Facilitator: This exercise is likely to generate new material or other possibilities for action against the death penalty.

Adapted from *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal 1992, p. 229).

## FORUM THEATRE ACTIVITIES

### Activity 5. What's on Your Mind?

**Overview:** Actors stop a scene and express what their characters are thinking at a specific moment.

**Time:** At least 45 minutes

**Materials:** Copies of *IronHawk*

1. **Getting Started:** Explain that when the Facilitator/Joker interrupts the action saying, "Stop! Think!" then speaking in an undertone, all



the actors will begin to express what is on their character's mind at that moment. When the Facilitator/Joker shouts "Continue!" the scene starts up again.

- Assign specific scenes and ask for different volunteers to play the parts
- Recommended scenes:
  - When IronHawk says he is a P.O.W. and Hutch questions whether genocide has ever occurred in the United States.
  - Scene Two when IronHawk and Ms Manslaughter discuss Native American religion and the peace pipe.
  - The death penalty argument

**2. Thinking Aloud:** Have the actors start their scene. Interrupt it several times at key moments.

- After each scene ask the participants for comments and observations.

**3. Debriefing:** Discuss the activity asking questions like these –

- What was it like to have to imagine and express your character's thoughts?
- What clashes did you observe between a character's thought, words, and actions?
- How do actors communicate their feelings?
- What happens when an actor's thoughts are not in accord with his or her actions?
- What happens in real life when a person's real thoughts clash with his or her words and actions?
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Adapted from *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal 1992, p. 227).

### Activity 6. Mixed Emotions

**Overview:** Characters' mixed emotions are acted separately and then consolidated.

**Time:** At least 60 minutes

**Materials:** Copies of *IronHawk*

1. **Getting Started:** Explain that this activity explores the complexity of many emotions, rehearsing separately the elements of a character's motivation and finally consolidating them into a single expression that combines all elements.

- Ask for volunteer actors, three to play IronHawk and four to play Ms Manslaughter.

- Ask the remaining participants to serve as “coaches” for the actors, suggesting how they might express these complex and conflicting emotions.

Alternative: For simplicity and brevity, use only two actors who act all the different emotions.

2. **Analyzing and Rehearsing Mixed Emotions:** Explain the roles to each group of “coaches” who will direct the actors. Clarify that actors do not have to stick to the script but can add any words or actions that convey the different emotions.
  - For IronHawk show these elements:
    - His will to live
    - His counter will to die
    - Both motivations in his dominant will to live, i.e., he wants to live but also sees his death as liberation.
  - For Ms Manslaughter show these elements:
    - Her strong urge to kill, especially as expressed in Scene Two (i.e., the “bye-bye” song, her proposal to exchange the pipe for the electric chair, her control of the execution chamber
    - Her counter will to appear as a good prison warden who treats all inmates fairly despite their race or religion
    - Some doubts in the face of IronHawk’s citing the Geneva Convention
    - Her dominant will to kill (the Execution Scene)
3. **Conveying Mixed Emotions:** After rehearsing, ask the actors to present their roles to the rest of the group.
4. **Debriefing:** Discuss the activity asking questions like these –
  - What did you learn from this activity?
  - Was it difficult to separate the conflicting emotions? To consolidate them?
  - What does this activity suggest about prejudice? About the complexity of conflict? About social justice?

Adapted from *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal 1992, pp. 228-229).

<b>ACTIVITY 7. METAMORPHOSES</b>
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**Metamorphosis 1: Swapping Masks**

**Overview:** Characters and their “followers” gradually exchange roles  
**Time:** At least 15 minutes  
**Materials:** Copies of *IronHawk*

1. **Getting Started:** Explain that this exercise explores the dynamics of transformation.
  - Ask for two volunteers to act the roles of IronHawk and Ms Manslaughter. They will start by reading from a specific passage of the play but then can begin to improvise from that situation.
  - Divide the rest of the participants into two groups and assign each group to be the “followers” of one of the characters. Explain that without using words they must imitate or reflect the emotions and mannerisms of their respective character.
  - Explain that at a signal from the Facilitator/Joker, the two characters will begin to exchange roles so that gradually IronHawk becomes Ms Manslaughter and vice versa.
2. **Metamorphosing:** When the characters and their “followers” have developed their initial roles, signal that they must now gradually exchange roles. Bring the action to a close when the characters have fully exchanged roles.
3. **Debriefing:** Ask the participants to discuss the experience of changing from one character to another asking questions like these:
  - What was this experience like for you? Was it difficult to change roles?
  - Did you learn anything by playing the role of both characters?

Adapted from Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, p. 149.

<b>Metamorphosis 2: Shifting Masks</b>
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**Overview:** Actors follow a changing leader and shifting emotions  
**Time:** At least 30 minutes  
**Materials:** Copies of *IronHawk*

1. **Getting Started:** Explain that this activity also explores transformation of emotions through following the lead of a key actor.
  - Ask one participant to play the role of IronHawk and 4 or 5 others to play the role of “followers.” Explain that the “followers” will try

to match IronHawk's words and emotions so that the group is more or less speaking in unison.

- Explain that the Facilitator/Joker may interrupt the action several times and designate someone else the group to become IronHawk. The new leader must express an emotional state as opposite to the original as possible. The rest must now follow this new leader.
- Assign a scene where IronHawk speaks alone (e.g., his status as Prisoner of War, his prayers for peace in the world). Explain that the actor playing IronHawk may begin with the text of the play but can also use his own words to convey his feelings.

Alternative: To involve more participants the Facilitator/Joker may remove, add, or substitute another participant for one of the followers.

2. **Passing the Lead:** Allow enough time for the role of IronHawk and his emotions to change several times.

Alternative: Have two or more groups of leader and followers acting at the same time.

3. **Debriefing:** Discuss the activity using question like these –
  - What was it like to shift leaders? To shift emotions?
  - What was it like to observe others making these shifts?
  - Did the activity give you new insights into the character of IronHawk? Into acting skills?

Adapted from Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, p. 150-151.

### Metamorphosis 3: Adding Masks

**Overview:** Participants suggest additional characteristics to the role of the

Executioner

**Time:** At least 20 minutes

**Materials:** Copies of *IronHawk*

1. **Getting Started:** Explain that in this activity new qualities are added to the role of a character, in this case the Executioner.
  - Ask for a volunteer to play the Executioner.
  - Discuss with the group what would happen if, without losing any of his characteristics, other qualities were added to his mask. For example, how would the Executioner act if, on top of everything

he already is, he possessed the sadistic and violent personality of Ms. Manslaughter or IronHawk's spirituality and peacefulness? The possibilities are infinite.

- Explain that once the Executioner begins to play his assigned role, any participant may suggest an additional quality.

2. **Adding Roles:** Ask the Executioner to start acting an assigned scene from *IronHawk*. He may start with the written script and add his own words. Once he has begun, invite participants to suggest an additional quality to his role and let the actor respond. Do this several times.

Alternative: Repeat this action several times with different participants playing the Executioner.

3. **Debriefing:** Discuss the activity using question like these –
  - If you were the Executioner, how was it to add new qualities to your role?
  - What additional qualities seemed to “fit” the Executioner? Which did not?
  - Is the character easier to understand with these additional qualities?
  - Does we understand a character or situation better when new qualities are added?

Adapted from *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal 1992, p. 150).



# Give wings to your imagination! & Devise Your Own Play

By Jiwon Chung

Have you ever envisioned writing theater plays, and eventually directing and performing them yourself in community or other public settings? Have you ever experienced the pleasure of fully expressing in prose or in dramatic action your life experiences and ideas for a better world for yourself and those around you? Have you even considered the fact that we are all innate actors, the main protagonists of our own lives, who fashion the world we live in and help create day by day in everything we say, feel, think, and do?

Well, here's a few hints on how to get started writing your own plays, following Augusto Boal's ideas about theater of the oppressed, and his original and exciting games for actors and non-actors alike.<sup>1</sup> Just like Boal, we believe everyone's life is a play in itself -- and in this respect you're the main character of your own trajectory and life experience. Your motivation to make this a more just and peaceful world for all provides the basic inspiration for your creativity on how to end oppression today and achieve liberation. So let your imagination fly high!

*Madness of Hunger*, and each one of the plays in *Acting for Indigenous Peoples' Rights*, highlights a very specific *conflict* that requires a resolution; and here's a very important point to keep in mind when you write your own play: *an issue only becomes an issue if there is conflict involved*. The protagonist wants something very badly—to get out of prison, to regain control of her health, to get a job, to save his children from starvation—but something and someone keep it from happening.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Boal, Augusto 1992 *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> See Chung, Jiwon 2011 "Theater of the Oppressed as a martial art." In T. Emert and E. Friedman (eds.). *Come Closer: Critical Conversations about Theater of the Oppressed and Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

## Devising a play

We want you to think about creating your own play.

It's easy. A play is, "a passion and a platform." Simply put, we all know how to tell stories. Devising a play is just telling a story with the characters brought to life, speaking, moving and acting. The essence is take an idea that involves an encounter and a conflict of wills, and create an engaging story from this encounter. This story is told through a sequence of physical actions that results in the transformation of one, or several characters in the story.

If you are feeling enterprising, you can also do a forum play as we do in Theater of the Oppressed. This is the same process, except you write this story in a way such that it invites people to intervene and take action to change the outcome of the play. The story itself is usually one of oppression, limitation or injustice. This type of play does not simply describe a situation, but asks a question, poses a problem, and invites the audience to look for ways to solve or change the situation. While you can write a play by yourself, we recommend that you get together with a group of people, and create a play together, as the results are usually richer and more interesting. It is also easier to perform a play if everyone has had a hand in creating it.

- First, **decide the theme**, topic, issue you would like to create a play about.
- Second, **discover the world** of the story. We suggest that you do this by improvising, using your body (creating still images with your bodies) to discover this.
- Third, once you have the world in which the story takes place, **find the story** or narrative line and flesh out the characters and relationships.
- Fourth, using body sculptures, improvisation, rehearsal techniques, explore the characters, their relationships, the place (the environment), the time (and weather), and the desires of the characters. (This is called **exposition** or platform in dramaturgy). Make sure to build in opposing desires/conflict, and find a way to *make us care* about what the characters care about. You may want to break the story down into episodes or acts.
- Fifth, **find the crisis** or conflict of the story (and flesh it out). Show us clearly what is at stake, and show us how things are transformed through this conflict. Make sure is everything is

justified (has a reason for being in the story). If you are creating a forum play, where you invite the audience to intervene, structure the story so that there are places and opportunities for intervention.

- Six. **Perform** the play! Take a bow!

The following are some principles you can follow in creating a play together.

- Feel free to use your personal experiences or stories as a source of creative inspiration.
- Build on other's suggestions, be positive, curious, say "yes, and".
- Rather than discuss and argue over a point, bring an idea to life by experimenting on your feet, using your bodies to explore the viability of an idea or a interaction. Improvise and explore the relationships.
- Alternate action & experimentation/improvisation with discussion, but keep the bulk of discussion for later: you will work much faster, and the creative energy will be higher if you move, act, improvise together.
- Allow yourself to be creative, take risks, share your experiences, your feelings, your ideas, impulses and insights.
- Be playful *and* respectful.
- Don't insist on your ideas. Working together, you may find that you can create a richer, more exciting story if you tap into everyone's experience and wisdom. Even if an idea is not explicitly written into a story, a character can still incorporate a strong idea or image as an unspoken thought or background for a character (subtext or back story). Remember, many voices (polyphonic composition) are always richer than one!

The following is a more **detailed description** of how you might follow the process above.

1. First, **chose a theme** to create story about. For example you might decide you want to make a play about family, or racism, sexual harassment, growing up, or love.
2. **Discover the world** in which this story happens. A good way to start this process is to make a still image (or series of still



images) using your bodies. Imagine you are creating a photograph, or a sculpture, with your bodies, about this theme. If you were to do a love story, then create an image of love. Have all the participants share comments about this image: what they see, what they think is happening, what they think the relationships are. Allow this to inspire some ideas about what the story is.

(Alternatively, ask “if I were to create a movie poster about this story, what would be on the movie poster?” Make an image of this movie poster with your bodies).

3. Now **dynamize/animate** this still image (bring it to life) with sound, words, movement and action/interaction.  
You can use some of the following prompts or suggestions to help you animate the image:
  - a) What does your character want, desire? (Speak a line from the character’s thoughts/wishes) What is your character afraid of? How does your character feel? (Make a sound that expresses your character’s feelings).
  - b) Make a movement that shows what the character would do next. Try moving one by one, and everyone together (preferably in slow motion). What happens? What (if any) are your obstacles? What’s at stake, at risk if you don’t succeed? How will you get what you want?
  - c) What is your relationship to the other characters in this world? Who is your ally? Who is your antagonist/enemy/opponent/oppressor? Who is an obstacle? Who has power over you? Who do you have power over? Put your hand on the shoulder of these respective characters.
  - d) Where does this all take place? What is in the space? (If the elements in the environment had a voice, what would they say?)
  - e) What time does this take place? What is the time of day? What is the temperature, the weather?
4. Collect all the ideas from above, and then **improvise** (bring this scene to life), with action and dialogue for a few minutes. (If you have made a movie poster, think of improvising a short trailer for the movie).

5. Gather comments from the group on what they felt and saw as actors and as audience, what they see in the story. From this discussion, **develop the story**.
6. If necessary, **find the crisis point** of the story, and make a still image of the crisis point. If you had chosen to do a story on love, you may find the crisis point is a loss, a separation, a betrayal, a realization, or an encounter. You may repeat the prompts in 3) to develop and animate this moment. From this point, you can do several things.
  - A) Walk the story backwards in time, until the history leading up to that point becomes clear and coherent with the rest of the ideas and characters you have developed for the story. You may discover that some elements need changing.
  - B) Create several core images (4 or 5) that reflect key moments or points in your story. (If you can think of a 4 panel cartoon, you have the right idea). Explore each scene and develop the connections and transitions between them, as well as the characters within them. You can also ask (a) narrator(s) to improvise a story as they see it (play the images and ask the narrator to improvise a narration about the sequence of images).
  - C) Improvise the scene (or scenes) between the individual characters, each character exploring their objectives, and trying to overcome obstacles and resistance. See where each character and relationship leads the story. Make us care about what happens!
7. **Write the entire play** together, finding elements that cohere and hold the story together. Pay attention to dialogue, action, staging and pacing. If you are building a forum play, make sure to construct a play that shows the main character (protagonist) oppressed, but not depressed or destroyed. Write the scene in a way that engages the audience while showing some room for possibilities of transformation (without being artificial).
8. **Enact the play** for your group. You can invite viewers to give you feedback about the story. Have them ask questions of the character. Flesh out details of character, relationship, motivation, environment, story, conflict, Remove or cut out

unnecessary elements, simplifying the relationship and story to the key essential dramatic elements.

9. **Rehearse** the play. (See rehearsal techniques below).
10. (Optional) Jazz it up! If you feel like it, feel free to add music, sound effects, narration, soliloquy, song, dance, poetry. A love story may work well with a musical confession, or an operatic love song. If you have the resources, you may want to add costume, props, scenery, or even lighting. But keep it simple. If you have a good story, you have a good play.
11. **Perform** the play!
12. If you have created a forum play, where the audience can intervene to change the outcome, first play the story once, and then tell the audience you will enact it again. During this second enactment, tell the audience that anyone can intervene in the story, by shouting “stop”, replacing the protagonist (the main character), and trying out something different. The actors should continue to try to achieve their original goal, while being flexible to the new actions taken by the intervening “spect-actor”. Think of this process as a laboratory where different possibilities are explored. After each intervention, acknowledge the “spect-actor”, and have a brief dialogue on what worked, or didn’t, and why. Repeat this process, and wrap up the event with a large group discussion. Congratulations!

**Rehearsal Techniques:** These are some techniques used in theater of the oppressed to clarify, sharpen, the story and the acting while working as a group. You do not need a director for this. You can try some or all of these techniques during the rehearsal and development stage.

1. Do the scene/play silently, without making a single sound or speaking a single word.
2. Do the scene, stop it, and ask the actor to speak the inner thoughts (monologue) of the character.
3. Interrogation/Hot seating: have audience members stop the scene at any given moment and ask questions of the character. Continue the scene and repeat this process.
4. Play the scene with different emotions, focusing on one emotional color at a time.
5. Play the scene in different styles/genres.

6. Do the scene with the actors acting in very close proximity, and very distant from each other.
7. Do the scene exaggerating all movements, emotions, conflicts, etc.
8. Play the scene with the actors swapping characters.
9. Play the scene with characters speaking only one word for each phrase of the dialogue
10. Designate an animal for each character, and play the scene with each character playing the scene with the energy and characteristics of the animal.
11. Have the actors create a physical action with each line or phrase of dialogue.
12. Play the entire play from each different actor's perspective; exaggerating or changing the dialogue to show the subjective world of each character.

**Example:**

Let's imagine that unemployment is an issue in your community. You could get together with some friends, and create an image or several images of the issue of unemployment. You may create images of people looking for work, of people suffering the consequences of unemployment, or you may even create an abstract or metaphorical image, perhaps someone hanging off a ledge or wandering through a desert. What is important is that you build the images with care and detail, and use them as a jumping off point to generate ideas, images, thoughts and feelings. Explore where the story takes place, the world in which this is happening, and what is happening. Now bring the image to life, noting the character, the environment, their relationships, and their motivations. Ask the characters what they want, desire, what they are doing, what their next logical step is, what their relationships are, etc. Improvise this scene for a few minutes in front of the group and see what happens. See if any ideas for a story arise for the group at this point. If they do, great, devise the story together.

If a story does not seem clear, then find a crisis point that might arise in a story that involves unemployment. For example, someone may be forced to do something injurious to her or himself, or to another to get by because of unemployment. Build an image of this moment, and explore this situation. What is the person doing? Why are they doing this? How did they get to this point? At this point you can do several things: make a series of panels that show this sequence, like a cartoon. For example,

the first image might be someone working. The second might be this person losing their work. The third might be a scene of an eviction notice, or their last employment check. The fourth might be an unethical proposition. The fifth?

Alternatively, you can start from the point of the crisis, and keep walking the story backwards towards the beginning of the story. Or you can define the characters, and improvise these scenes and the relationships within it.

At this point, you should have something you can explore. Play the scene using the outline of the story, and improvising the rest. Decide and fix certain elements that are important in the story, that you might consider the weight bearing pillars or pivotal points in the story. As you improvise, notice what works and doesn't and keep the things that do. Be very fluid about this. If you feel you are ready, show the draft play to your group and get more feedback. Play close attention to whether the audience feels that the character is engaging—that they care what happens to him or her—and whether they feel the choices made seem credible and justifiable. Note also, whether the audience feels that you did the issue justice, whether it is a real and honest engagement with the issue itself. Also, ask, if appropriate, if you have addressed the larger social structures and institutions involved, and if not, what it would take to bring that into the picture.

If the response overall is positive, and the structure of the play feels solid, then start to rehearse it. This is essentially the work of a director, but it is possible to do this democratically as a group, and the play and your ensemble work will be stronger for it. You can use some or all of the rehearsal techniques outlined above, as well as any other ideas that you may have as a group. Last, but not least, take time to make something aesthetically pleasing—explore all creative possibilities and options—and feel free to incorporate music, sound effects, dance or any other aesthetic or artistic element to get your message across.

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**Jiwon Chung** is founding director of Kairos Theater Ensemble and adjunct professor at Starr King School, Graduate Theological Union. His approach to anti-oppression work is informed by his experiences as a veteran and 3 decades of vipassana meditation. He sees the stage as a sacred space where individuals can truly encounter each other, and through this charged encounter, “bend the arc of history towards justice.” **Please send any comments, questions or feedback regarding this process to: [jiwonchung@sksm.edu](mailto:jiwonchung@sksm.edu). “I’d love to hear from you.”**

# **The Theater of the Oppressed as a Rhizome. Acting for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Today<sup>3</sup>**

**By Mariana Leal Ferreira and Dominique Devine**

The spread of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed across the Americas and the rest of the world can be understood in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome, whose nomadic habit of growth and propagation mirrors the power of the Theater of the Oppressed to reproduce itself in more than 70 countries worldwide. The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome is now deeply rooted in academia and has sprouted in classrooms and in the streets, bringing together students, scholars, administrators, policy makers, and community activists in the pursuit of social justice and human rights. An examination of its use as a pedagogical tool calls attention to its potential for creating a world in which human rights are appreciated and protected. Its use is particularly timely today given the worldwide attention to the rights of the indigenous peoples represented by the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.

**Keywords:** Theater of the Oppressed, Indigenous peoples, Augusto Boal, Popular education, Human rights

*Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even non-sign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple... It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows.*

—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

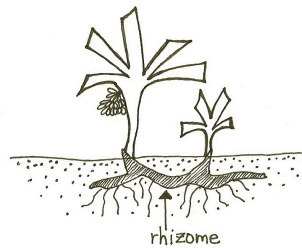
A series of plays in the tradition of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed on indigenous peoples' rights in contemporary North and South America—their histories of genocide, capital punishment and incarceration, disease and starvation, and the struggle to repatriate their

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<sup>3</sup> In: *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 183, Vol. 39 No. 2, March 2012 11-26

ancestors' remains—calls attention to what indigenous peoples are doing today to fight for justice and self-determination. We suggest here that arts-based performances encourage decolonizing points of view. The power of the Theater of the Oppressed lies in its ability to reach out to broad audiences that rarely have access to human rights education. Our argument is that, spreading like a rhizome, the Theater of the Oppressed can produce viable pollen and hybridize with other forms of community and academic knowledge to facilitate public discussion of the protection of indigenous peoples' rights. The topic is especially timely given the recent adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirms the minimum human rights standards necessary for the “survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world,” among them self-determination, protection from discrimination and genocide, and the right to the land and resources that are essential to their identity, health, and livelihood.

**Figure 1: The rhizome banana plant**



The new millennium has seen growing interest in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of the rhizome in popular education (Douglas-Jones and Sariola, 2009; Gough, 2006). The metaphor of the rhizome involves a decentered, nonhierarchical system that favors a nomadic system of growth and propagation. Theater of the Oppressed workshops and laboratories are dispersed by natural and man-made causes alike. The countries of exile of Augusto Boal, Paulo Freire, and other popular educators during the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–1985), including Argentina, Chile, France, Portugal, and several African countries, do not follow the linear trajectory of academic knowledge, nor do the more recent popular offshoots of the revolutionary theater movement follow a predictable plot. The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome has “multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 21). We seek to engender a cartography of Theater of the Oppressed multiplicities connected to other dramatic

possibilities, focusing on the North and South American plateaus. Brazil is the mother-plateau as the site of the first tuber, Boal's Center for the Theater of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro, whose rhizomatic qualities enabled this revolutionary theater movement to spread first underground and then into the street.

The literature on the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the propagation and growth of the Theater of the Oppressed is scant. Rather than a linear historical trajectory, we want to map an assemblage of distant, radiant tuber-points that "establishes connections between certain multiplicities" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 23). The potential of the Theater of the Oppressed has been seen as a "rehearsal of revolution" (Boal, 1993 [1975]: 141). Here our goal is to map spurts of writing, directing, and performing in academia and, in particular, at San Francisco State University (SFSU), where we work. We have found inspiration in traces of the Theater of the Oppressed in social networks such as Facebook, as well as in more traditional national and international symposia and conferences. It is always "in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*." While the tree "imposes the verb 'to be', the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction 'and . . . and . . . and . . .'" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 25).

The protagonists of our plays—Wanderley Guarani, an Amazonian prophet and warrior who liberated his people from military dictatorship (in *Firewater*); Antonio da Silva, a seven-year-old *nordestino* who offered himself as a sacrifice to save his sisters (in *The Madness of Hunger*); IronHawk, an Apache warrior (in *IronHawk on Death Row*); Mollie Ruud, a Yurok woman who devoted her life to defending the fishing rights of her people (in *Diabetes Jackpot*); and Pecwan Sky Girl, a medicine woman who fought for the repatriation of ancestral human remains (in *May Your Body Lay Naked on Mother Earth*)—have set the stage for ever-expanding Theater of the Oppressed experiences at SFSU in the past decade. They have helped us weave deeper connections between the life experiences of faculty, staff, and students and the university's core values of equity and social justice. The five plays, all based on historical facts, were written by Mariana Ferreira to raise awareness about the rights of indigenous peoples in the Americas, and all five have been stage-read and/or performed in public places by Dominique Devine and students and colleagues at SFSU and at the University of California, Berkeley.

When the Theater of the Oppressed insinuates itself into the classroom or out into the streets, human rights education becomes an



inspiring and powerful experience. Inviting students and community members to perform our plays on indigenous peoples' rights or to write and perform their own allows for alternative scenarios and the real possibility of peaceful endings. Drama promotes critical thinking. The discussion and dissemination of these plays enables students and others to reflect upon and formulate their own ideas of a just world. The Theater of the Oppressed has the power to spark strong student activism and promote social change in provocative ways (Albarello, 2007; Chung, 2011; Von der Horn-Gibson and Marin, 2008; Johnson, 2005; McLennan and Smith, 2007; Solorzano, 1989; Thompson, 1997). Playwriting and acting enhance the imagination, triggering feelings that might otherwise remain dormant in academic or public settings.

Throughout the centuries, theater has shown its power to change public and community perception of social problems (Bartlett, 2005; Bradley, 2006; Brecht, 1964 [1930]; 1977; Kuhn, Brecht, and Giles, 2003; Styan, 1981) However, as Boal (1993 [1975]: 142) explains, "we are used to plays in which the characters make the revolution on stage and the spectators in their seats feel themselves to be triumphant revolutionaries." Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 5) would agree: insofar as theater assumes the form of a root-tree, "to which our modernity pays willing allegiance," there is no possibility for dialogue. "It is not a method for the people" (8). What is theater without discussion? While Boal himself did not expect theater itself to be revolutionary, he said that the Theater of the Oppressed presented a radical opportunity for social change. It was certainly a "*rehearsal of revolution*" (1993 [1975]: 141, italics in the original) because it invited the audience to participate on stage in the theatrical action, to intervene and propose alternative solutions to oppression that could change the history of their lives. In this respect, the audience—transformed into "spect-actors" rather than mere spectators (Boal, 1993 [1975])—experienced the "connection and heterogeneity" of the rhizome by taking part in the play as actors. Here we are far from the elitist, bourgeois form of theater that Brecht (1964 [1930]; 1977) also condemned.

## THE THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED IN LATIN AMERICA AND WORLDWIDE

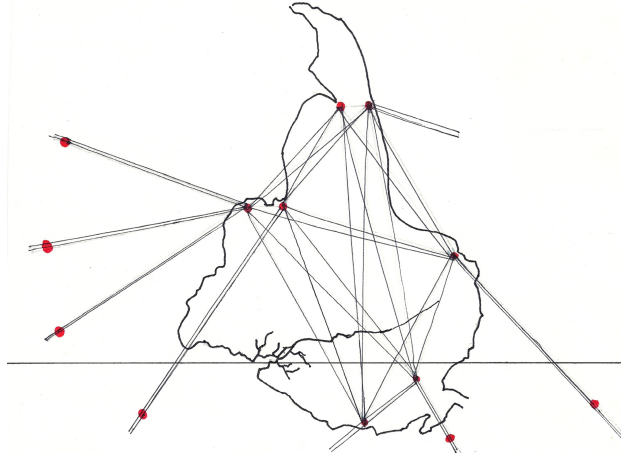
Given the rapid multiplication of workshops dedicated to popular education in schools, prisons, and community centers, as well as its subterranean, revolutionary independent growth, the Theater of the

Oppressed rhizome obviously does not depend on the government or corporate-sanctioned initiatives that practitioners call “superficial tracing.” What we want to do here is produce a map, which differs from the tracing in that “it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12).

The Theater of the Oppressed emerged in Brazil in the early 1970s and first extended its multiple entryways throughout Brazil and then to Africa, with laboratories sprouting in Mozambique, the Ivory Coast, and Angola, whose governments at the time were less repressive to revolutionary movements and the creative arts than Brazil’s military junta. Most of these organizations focused both on the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 2006 [1970]) and on the Theater of the Oppressed (Boal 1993 [1975]), instruments for critical-historical reflection, social interaction, and pedagogical practice.

The fall of the Brazilian military dictatorship in 1985 and open democratic elections that same year sparked an explosion of uncensored Theater of the Oppressed initiatives in Brazil and elsewhere in South America. As rhizome buds often do, the Theater of the Oppressed emerged from the relative darkness of its exclusive subterranean subsistence into the limelight and the essence of its novel, open democratic character. The Centro de Teatro do Oprimido (Theater of the Oppressed Center), founded in 1986 in Rio de Janeiro, soon became a well-known research center for the development of its methods and teachings. The center’s initial goal was to revise, experiment with, analyze, and systematize the exercises, games, and techniques of Boal’s methodology. To this day, Theater of the Oppressed labs and seminars are producing theatrical spectacles and artistic projects based on the aesthetics of the oppressed (Boal, 2006 [1975]). Most of these projects relate to education, mental health, the prison system, and the civil rights and human rights movements, aiming at social change via community dialogue and aesthetic, artistic pathways. The center’s mission is to strengthen citizenship and social justice as a democratic way of transforming society. Its mission statement incites to social action directed at the affirmation and protection of oppressed peoples as protagonists of their own lives. Its values are spelled out very clearly: Life + Ethics + Solidarity + Aesthetics + Dialogue (Centro de Teatro do Oprimido, 2011).

**Figure 2: The South American plateau and the TO Rhizome**



Starting in the late 1980s, the Brazilian government, through its Ministry of Education and Culture, lifted the military censorship on the Theater of the Oppressed by lending support to community-based performing arts. “Fábricas de teatro popular” (popular theater factories) dedicated to social transformation mushroomed across the country, in classrooms and in the streets, as the fruiting bodies of the Theater of the Oppressed’s rhizomatic growth. According to the *Fábrica de Teatro Popular–Nordeste* (2011), the strategy has always been to “create networks of multipliers and popular groups that will use Theater of the Oppressed methodology” with the goal of “diffusing and proliferating popular theater across the country.” Theater of the Oppressed factories or workshops in Brazil “develop their activities in communities and universities, in the countryside and in the city. They also encompass activities for persons with disabilities, and thus broaden the possibilities of expression for diverse social groups, helping to find alternative solutions to everyday problems.” Today there are dozens of Master’s theses and doctoral dissertations in Brazil on Theater of the Oppressed workshops and the use of theater as a pedagogical tool.

Mapping the growth of popular theater outside of Brazil is no easy task. In South America, countries that underwent military dictatorships like Brazil’s, including Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay, seem to have developed Theater of the Oppressed activity earlier and more intensely. Boal, who was arrested and tortured by the military in Brazil in 1971 because of his revolutionary theater movement, spent the first five years of his exile in Argentina. Popular community theater

sprang up all over Argentina with the end of military rule in 1983 (Borba, 2007). Decades later, in January 2010, Argentina organized the First Latin American Theater of the Oppressed Conference, which included dozens of local, national, and international Theater of the Oppressed workshops. The event was sponsored by the Red Latinoamericana de Teatro del Oprimido Sur, a popular network whose goal is to bring forum theater and other Theater of the Oppressed techniques to marginalized communities and educational centers in the Province of Jujuy, Argentina, and beyond.

Amantes del Teatro del Oprimido Chile (Lovers of Theater of the Oppressed Chile) has a Facebook page visited by hundreds of Latin American supporters. As a fast-growing rhizome, the Theater of the Oppressed Facebook page links interested people around the world. From this site we learn, for instance, that in November 2010 the Theater of the Oppressed flourished in Bañado Sur, Paraguay, among members of the youth organization 1811, whose goal was to use the Theater of the Oppressed to “infiltrate into the local community to find tangible alternatives to demonstrate and denounce the local reality” (Ecos del Paraguay, 2010). And in Peru the blog Foro-Red Paulo Freire—Peru chimes in with discussion of liberating education in Peru, Latin America, and the world. These are but a handful of Theater of the Oppressed buds sprouting along what is now a worldwide rhizomatic network of participatory education via popular theater.

Boal’s eight-year exile in France in the 1980s, after his forced stays in Argentina and Portugal, produced a number of Theater of the Oppressed laboratories in Europe. In Berlin the NGO Sabisa employs creative media and the performing arts in projects for social transformation and community cultural development. Sabisa partners around the globe use the Theater of the Oppressed in its various modalities (forum theater, image theater, invisible theater, legislative theater) as a pedagogical tool to inspire social change.<sup>2</sup>

## THE THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN BRAZIL

Our focus here on the human rights aspect of the Theater of the Oppressed stems primarily from Mariana Ferreira’s experience as a schoolteacher and a practical nurse in indigenous areas of Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s and as a medical anthropologist and human rights educator in the Americas (Ferreira and Lang, 2006). In the Americas,

more than 90 percent of the original population—at least 20 million people—were summarily exterminated after the European invasion in the late 1400s. It is not difficult to imagine how different the fate of these communities would have been had their basic human rights been respected from the start (Ferreira, 2004; 2002a; Ferreira and Suhrbier, 2002; Nelson, 2008).

From the beginning, Ferreira's work in both health and education was oriented by the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006 [1970]) provided substantial insights for young revolutionary educators developing a system of popular education in Brazilian indigenous schools during the military dictatorship. The networking of the Theater of the Oppressed, considered subversive by the government, proved invaluable to her practice.

Freire's work, helping people see themselves as historical actors capable of organizing on their own and creating social change, had inspired Augusto Boal to invent the Theater of the Oppressed in the late 1960s. Freire developed his philosophy of popular education among the illiterate poor of the Brazilian Northeast. Starting in the late 1940s, he emphasized peasants' ability to generate knowledge collectively, using "generative words" such as "land," "water," and "food" that broadly conveyed their life conditions and worldviews. Military dictators strongly opposed this system of popular education, and both Freire and Boal were forced into exile. Popular educators connected with nongovernmental and indigenous organizations and academic institutions such as the Comissão Pró-Índio de São Paulo (Pro-Indian Commission of São Paulo) and the University of São Paulo defied the military ban on Freire's and Boal's ideas and carried out revolutionary educational programs in spite of strong retaliation. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was still only in draft form, and rights-based meetings were either banned or heavily censored by the military.

Following Freire's critical pedagogy, Ferreira and her indigenous students in central Brazil posited that learning was an act of culture and freedom through *conscientização*. Freire (2007 [1973]) defined critical consciousness as the ability to perceive social, political, and economic oppression and take collective action against it. The activities and publications produced by Xavante, Kayabi, Suyá, and Juruna students in the Xingu Indigenous Park reflected this consciousness, which was understood to have the power to transform reality (see, e.g., Ferreira, 1992; 1994; 1997). In order to evade repression by the military, the students sometimes wrote and performed plays and wrote short stories

using pseudonyms. The 1988 Constitution helped empower the organized indigenous movement in the country, reflecting a worldwide trend. In the original draft of the UN Declaration, which had been put together in 1985 by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (the world's largest human rights forum), the right to cultural diversity, to quality education and health care, and to occupation of ancestral territories were major themes, but the concrete implementation of such rights was far from the reality. Indigenous peoples around the world still experience poverty, ill health, and racial discrimination. They are united in their suffering, but they are also united in working toward having their rights respected. The UN Declaration reflects more than 30 years of hard work on the part of the peoples themselves to develop this important international instrument of human rights protection:

In the Xingu Indigenous Park, Freire's emphasis on dialogue and on working together to transform the world materialized in plays, short stories, memoirs, drawings, photographs, and maps published collectively in numerous newsletters, first-readers, atlases, and history books used in indigenous schools where Ferreira lived and worked in the 1980s. Most young teachers and nurses working on indigenous reservations throughout Brazil viewed education as an effort to liberate people rather than as yet another instrument for dominating them. Freire's insistence on situating educational activity in the lived experience of the community had opened up a series of possibilities for the way education was conducted in Brazilian schools, including indigenous ones. Thus the Theater of the Oppressed closely mirrored the dialogical aspects of Freire's critical pedagogies of hope (2006 [1992]), the heart (2000 [1997]), and freedom (1998 [1984]).

Students from 17 distinct indigenous nations, speaking 17 different languages, attended the Diauarum School in the Xingu Park, where Ferreira taught mathematics and Portuguese in the 1980s. In 1981 she and her students put together several original plays at the school. *Fishing on the Xingu River* conveyed the daily practices of local communities that relied heavily on fishing for survival. The idea was for communities to share techniques for catching a variety of freshwater fish in the Amazon basin. To this end, games were quickly developed to introduce these practices to immigrant villagers such as the Panará, relocated from far away by the military. Similar activities were developed for hunting techniques for large animals such as the tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*), which were published widely in Portuguese and indigenous languages.

At the Diauarum School, in the true spirit of mostly Freire's and Boal's pedagogy of liberation, Ferreira was experimenting with new forms of popular education and interactive theater. The oppression was the forced dislocation of indigenous peoples from their original lands, rich in timber and gold, and their confinement in poverty on diminutive reservations. The pedagogical aim was to provide students with the resources (literacy, mathematics, history, and map-making skills) that would foster their autonomous growth and decision-making power. UN documents showed that, along with Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, Brazil followed the policies developed by the United States in the 1800s to deal with "native populations": encapsulation on reservations, confinement in boarding schools, and no attention to economic development. The comparison was fruitful especially because it offered the students, many of whom were community leaders, the opportunity to recognize that similar types of oppression led to comparable outcomes: indigenous peoples worldwide face high rates of degenerative diseases, including cancer and diabetes, as well as a number of social ailments, such as depression and drug addiction (Ferreira and Lang, 2006). The practice of forum theater allowed students from different ethnic groups to offer alternative solutions to urgent problems.

As Boal predicted, the Theater of the Oppressed helped reveal the more subtle forms of oppression, such as the military's perverse system of privilege and compensation. *Fishing on the Xingu River* helped reveal problems such as the water pollution caused by cattle raising, mining, and logging. The school's many publications, including the newsletter *Memórias do Xingu* (Xingu Memories), were initially printed on an alcohol-run mimeograph and featured student essays on land, sustainable farming, and intertribal gatherings. It is apparent now that the Freirian-Boalian Theater of the Oppressed rhizome helped connect communities that had not initially found common ground in their oppression. It showed them that they had antagonists in common, and thus they became protagonists in the same rehearsal for revolution—liberation from military rule.

The students practiced all possible forms of interaction, looking for subterranean nomadic intertribal connections where there seemed to be none, impersonating their common antagonists—loggers, gold miners, the military, and government officials. While the Gê-speaking Kayapó and Suyá peoples usually proposed more aggressive strategies to deal with rights violations, Theater of the Oppressed games revealed that the Tupi-speaking Kayabi and Juruna peoples had developed peaceful tactics

that were often very effective. Whereas the Theater of the Oppressed was the medium, what was the message? Here again, conscientização insinuated itself into community-oriented activities, enabling local indigenous peoples to exercise their constitutional and human-rights-based sovereign powers.

#### BOAL'S LEGACY: THEATER AND SOCIAL ACTION IN THE CLASSROOM

Ferreira has used the Theater of the Oppressed in more than 30 years of community-based participatory work with indigenous peoples in Brazil and in the United States and also in the classroom, in cultural centers, and in the streets to raise awareness about human rights and engage communities in social action (see, e.g., Ferreira 1982; 1983; 1994; 1999; 2001; 2002; 2004; n.d.; Ferreira and Prandini, 2011; Ferreira and Suhrbier, 2002; Scheper-Hughes and Ferreira, 2003). Devine has practiced the Theater of the Oppressed in her course work at SFSU and taken the movement into the streets of San Francisco. Following Boal, our goal is to engage others in a theatrical rehearsal of real-life human rights issues using the Theater of the Oppressed rhizome to relate directly to indigenous peoples in the Americas today.

We draw on multiple fragments of indigenous narratives in South and North America whose radicle (embryonic root) assembles a line of flight from traditional historical narratives that identify an illusionary “we” from individual recollections of an “I” (Ferreira, 1998). The plays we have presented facilitate the dissemination of the UN Declaration throughout the world, following the principles spelled out by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 7–12). We posit that bringing theater and critical thinking into the research and advocacy mix has the power to generate new attitudes and respect for others and protect the human rights of indigenous peoples worldwide.

In the past two decades, the intersection between the Theater of the Oppressed and the social sciences and humanities has been bolstered by studies showing how theatrical productions in the classroom with high levels of audience participation have brought about social and political change (Albarello, 2007; Downey, 2005; Johnson, 2005; McLennan and Smith, 2007; Thompson, 1997). With a few notable exceptions, anthropology has been slow to document and publish Theater of the Oppressed experiences in the classroom and in the public arena aimed at promoting an understanding of and tolerance for social and cultural



diversity (Ferreira 2004; 2002; Prandini and Ferreira, 2011).<sup>3</sup>

The Theater of the Oppressed has become an effective tool for teaching critical thinking, social change, and human rights in classrooms and clinical settings across the globe. Most recently, it has been used across disciplines including political science, sociology, education, and psychiatry to deal with a wide array of revolutionary issues: promoting sexual and reproductive rights (Thompson, 1997), protecting youth at risk (McLennan and Smith, 2007), deconstructing race and racism (Von der Horn-Gibson and Marín, 2008), and treating psychiatric disabilities (Faigin and Stein 2010). The movement is growing steadily: liberatory educators, activists, artists, and community organizers from all over the world have come together since 1995 for the annual International Pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed Conference, whose main goal is to challenge oppressive systems by promoting critical thinking and social justice. The conference is based on the ideologies and works of Freire and Boal, who used pedagogy and theater to overcome social systems of oppression.

Today there are dozens of organizations sprouting in the United States, according to the radicle principles of the rhizome, that are encouraging theater for social justice and human rights in the classroom and in public arenas. The goal in most cases is to raise awareness about civil and human rights and engage communities in revolutionary action. The Brecht Forum's New York Marxist School, founded in 1975, has used Boal's Theater of the Oppressed to create social change. For the Theater of the Oppressed Laboratory in New York, the new goal of popular education is to create mechanisms of collective power over the structures of society. In Seattle, Washington, the Duwamish tribe has developed an innovative dinner-theater project to raise public consciousness of its history and current-day struggles and to promote the cultural, social, political, and economic survival of Seattle's First People. In Woodburn, Oregon, Voz Hispana Causa Chavista is working to build political power in the local Latino community through leadership development and new-voter organizing. Nearby, in Portland, the Partnership for Safety and Justice (formerly the Western Prison Project) is using theater to address issues of violence and racism. The Forum Theater Project for Violence Intervention has gone directly into communities affected by violence and by racism in the criminal justice system and worked with them to develop a script based on the life experiences of individuals and families. The project has partnered with Act for Action—Theater for All, an organization devoted to the use of

theater for education and social justice (Harris, 2006). Broadly speaking, all of these initiatives draw upon Boal's (1993 [1985]) views on tragedy, justice, and equality.

#### THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY CLASSROOM

In anthropology courses at SFSU, the area of educational research can be understood as a rhizome space when Theater of the Oppressed is used as a pedagogical tool. Imagining knowledge production as a rhizome plateau of sorts is particularly generative in postcolonial educational inquiry (Gough, 2006) because it allows for critical connections to be made and novel "networks of analogies" to be formed (Foucault, 2001 [1966]). We are joined in our efforts by other social scientists and educators who have recently used the Theater of the Oppressed as a pedagogical tool (Albarello, 2007; Bartlett, 2005; Johnson, 2005). In particular, we are interested in encouraging students and instructors to include the critical language of social justice and equity in the humanities and the social and biological sciences and take action toward the protection of human rights of all peoples. In this respect, Theater of the Oppressed "rhizomes affirm what is excluded from western thought and reintroduce reality as dynamic, heterogeneous, and nondichotomous; they implicate rather than replicate; they propagate, displace, join, circle back, fold" (O'Riley, 2003: 23). It is this propagation of a critical discourse that we are most concerned with, one capable of reinventing and transforming reality.

Since 2007, under the direction of Theater of the Oppressed practitioner Jiwon Chung, we have employed Boal's methodology in graduate and undergraduate courses in anthropological theory and human rights. We have examined social issues such as health care, unemployment, homelessness, war, violence, and poverty from students' firsthand experiences through skits, games, and exercises based on Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1998 [1992]). The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome presents itself as an effective poststructuralist interpretive metaphor because of its chaotically complex network of fragments or stems interconnecting the life trajectories of the minority, underserved, working-class students at SFSU. In addition, we have used a number of Ferreira's plays about indigenous peoples' rights to discuss the UN Declaration and other critical

instruments of human rights protection.

In several of our courses, including “Foundations of Anthropological History,” “Anthropology and Human Rights,” and “Endangered Cultures,” we formed interactive “play groups” that functioned throughout the school year as nodal networks, inviting students to take a stance and engage in action against oppression that directly affected them and those around them. In the process, all students wrote and performed their own plays and instantly became “spect-actors” rather than mere spectators of one another’s actions. As a result, their life trajectories became intimately associated; “the rhizome is so constructed that every path can be connected with every other one. It has no center, no periphery, no exit, because it is potentially infinite. The space of conjecture is a rhizome space” (Eco, 1984: 164).

Since the summer of 2007, hundreds of SFSU students working under the guidance of Ferreira and Theater of the Oppressed practitioners Jiwon Chung, Dominique Devine, Eva Langman, and Nathan Embretson have helped unleash the power of Deleuze and Guattari’s all-inclusive “and . . . and . . . and . . . .” We have written, directed, and performed numerous Theater of the Oppressed plays on campus, in the streets of the broader San Francisco Bay area, and at national conferences in the United States and abroad. Devine’s play *Realizing the Dream* explained the demise of the Neanderthals from the historical viewpoint of the anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942). The daughter of a Vietnam War veteran, she has used the Theater of the Oppressed to reflect on her father’s and her own traumatic memories of violence in times of war and peace.

Several SFSU students have commented on their experiences in using the Theater of the Oppressed in the classroom to address human rights. Krystale Triggs, an anthropology major and human rights advocate, said, “Personally, the Theater of the Oppressed makes me realize where I stand in an established system of power. In understanding my place, I can further challenge myself and stand on higher grounds, empowering others.” Margaret Decuir concurred:

Theater of the Oppressed really helped me learn about human rights violations by fleshing them out and making them real. Performing and observing real people enacting something as serious as homelessness, veteran's mental health or any other topic really helped me grasp the concept and feel more strongly

about taking a stand against oppression and violence. Theater of the Oppressed is wonderful and should be used in all schools across the world.

Nicole Marchand, who took “Anthropology and Human Rights” (a class that organizes the annual SFSU Human Rights Summit) in spring 2008, said, “Theater of the Oppressed in the classroom creates solidarity, makes class more intimate and connected, and makes us think on the spot about critical human rights issues. You have to be sensitive to all sides in a Theater of the Oppressed game and must think through all solutions thoroughly, whether you agree with them or not.” Roshan Pourabdollah, a graduate student in human rights education at the University of San Francisco, agreed:

As a student and educator, I’m truly thankful for my exposure to the Theater of the Oppressed during my time at SFSU. I’ve been able to take the pedagogical tools learned in “Anthropology and Human Rights” and transfer them to the classroom and community at large. The experience of being a “spect-actor” exposed me to new ways of deconstructing complex issues and imagining positive solutions. Theater of the Oppressed is fun, uncomfortable, exciting, and mind-blowing all at once, and a tool I know I’ll use in many years to come.

Nathan Embretson, a video maker and an SFSU graduate, became a Theater of the Oppressed advocate after his experience using theater in the anthropology classroom to raise awareness about the rights of indigenous peoples:

Coming from a privileged background, I never had to think deeply about these issues. Using Theater of the Oppressed techniques such as opposite thought and forum theater allowed me to tap that human experience and see the issue in a more holistic way. This is the power that Theater of the Oppressed brings to the classroom experience. It allows access to realities that we don’t confront in daily life, and provides a platform to discover tools to fight against injustice.

Using Theater of the Oppressed in the classroom has opened up multiple opportunities for students and faculty to understand the rights of

indigenous peoples and to expand their human rights and social justice work. At the 15th annual International Theater of the Oppressed Conference in Minneapolis in May 2009, Nathan Embretson and Mariana Ferreira presented the workshop “The Color Red: Fighting with Flowers and Fruits in Xavante Territory, Central Brazil” (Ferreira, 2004). Using forum theater, the Joker (played by Embretson) briefly outlined the dramatic conditions of life faced by indigenous peoples in central Brazil today. Participants then rehearsed several possible solutions to the conflict between the Xavante people and large landowners in the state of Mato Grosso. “Living sculptures” brought alive the perceptions of “spect-actors” about the Xavante’s theory of environmental justice, based on an economy of gift exchange and the circulation of wealth for all people (Mauss, 1990 [1950]).

The characters in the plays we have used in the classroom suffer a wide array of human rights abuses and take concrete action to defend their entitlement to ancestral lands, food, water, and cultural diversity in order to create a better world for themselves and their communities. Our goal in presenting these plays has been to prepare practitioners to take action according to the principles of the UN Declaration. The plays have offered “spect-actors” a way to see the world as it is, while the Declaration points to an ideal world in which human rights are respected. The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome has bridged the gap between present and future by challenging practitioners to rehearse for revolution, posing critical questions: What might be some of the different possible outcomes if the Declaration became a legally binding document, a convention? What were its strengths and weaknesses? How applicable was it to the particular cases of human rights abuses presented in the plays? The objective has been to address these questions.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ THEATER TODAY

The games and techniques we have employed in the classroom are part of what Boal (1993 [1975]: 142) calls “rehearsal” or “people’s theater” rather than spectacle or bourgeois theater:

The rehearsal stimulates the practice of the act in reality. Forum theater, as well as these other forms of a people’s theater, instead of taking something away from the spectator, evoke in him a desire to practice in reality the act he has rehearsed in the theater. The practice of these theatrical forms creates a sort of uneasy

sense of incompleteness that seeks fulfillment through real action.

The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome does just that: through its multiple entryways, multiplicities, and fertile networking system, it evokes in its practitioners the desire to engage in real human rights action to dismantle oppression.

Now that the UN Declaration has been adopted, the challenge is to get it implemented by states, UN bodies, and societies, and then work towards a Convention. The Theater of the Oppressed rhizome is a very powerful movement for raising awareness of the Declaration because it helps people understand the document in detail and in practice, relying on embodied skills, other ways of knowing, and multiple forms of social interaction. Because the Theater of the Oppressed rhizome insists on insinuating itself even into places where it is not invited, it surprises us with its generous array of games and exercises that empower individuals and communities to recognize that what they think, say, feel, and do really matters. Its ability to propagate and grow gives it the opportunity to be very productive, leaving in its budding track a range of materials for popular education such as the plays and theories mentioned here. It encourages “spect-actors” to stand up, engage in action, and discuss ways to protect the human rights of indigenous peoples to equality and nondiscrimination, respecting the specificities of each community.

#### NOTES

1. The texts are available at <http://humanrights.sfsu.edu/Theater.html>. *IronHawk* was stage read in 2007 at the 106<sup>th</sup> AAA Annual meeting – Difference, (in)equality & Justice, at the session “Anthropologists in the Global Arena: Dialogues for Change, and at the 5<sup>th</sup> SFSU Annual Human Rights Summit: Privileged Destruction. Examining Environmental Justice in San Francisco, CA, in 2008. Finally, *Firewater* was stage-read at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual SFSU Human Rights Summit in San Francisco, CA, in 2006.

2. <http://www.sabisa.de/sabisa>. Sabisa partners include the Aarohan Theater in Kathmandu, Nepal; the Amani Peoples’ Theater in Nairobi, Kenya; the Community Arts Project and the Mother Tongue Project in Cape Town, South Africa; DOMINO—Citizen Involvement in the Limelight in Halle/Merseburg, Germany; Ellis and Bheki in Durban, South Africa; the GRIPS Theater, the Regional Association for Play and Theater, the Forumtheater Rabenschwarz, World Community Services/Weltfriedensdienst, and Hier geblieben! in Berlin, Germany;

InterACT in Graz, Austria; Kamoto Community Arts in Lusaka, Zambia; Forumtheater Inszene in Cologne, Germany; the Themba HIV/AIDS Project in Johannesburg, South Africa; the University of Malawi Department of Fine and Performing Arts in Zomba, Malawi; and Young People for Change in Durban, South Africa.

3. It is encouraging that at least one anthropology textbook, *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective*, includes a passing reference to Boal in its chapter on “Art” (Ferraro, 2007: 374). Ferraro’s limited view of “liberation theater,” however, refers superficially to Boal’s forum theater technique without naming or explaining this important piece of the Theater of the Oppressed repertory and without contextualizing the emergence of Theater of the Oppressed in its Brazilian sociopolitical context.

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