



“Desmatamento,” by Brazilian folk artist José Antonio da Silva, 1983.

# Madness of Hunger

A Theater of the Oppressed  
Handbook

Berkeley, California  
2011

**“Madness of Hunger”** 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/>.

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***MADNESS OF HUNGER***  
***A Theater of the Oppressed Handbook***

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***Table of Contents***

**Introduction: Acting Human Rights and Theater of the Oppressed..... 4**

**Madness of Hunger: A One-Act play (Mariana Ferreira)..... 7**

**Theater Of the Oppressed Learning Activities (Nancy Flowers)..... 20**

**Devise Your Own Play! (Jiwon Chung) ..... 31**

**Theater of the Oppressed as a Rhizome (Mariana Ferreira & Dominique Devine) ..... 39**

**Theater of the Oppressed Glossary..... 62**



## 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.



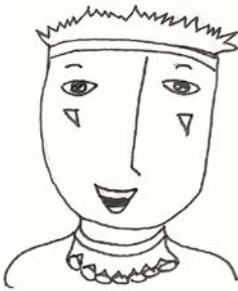
*Did you know that Paulo Freire (1921 - 1997), created his philosophy of popular education working with the illiterate poor of the Brazilian Northeast? Starting in the late 1940s, his innovative approach to literacy emphasized peasants' ability to generate knowledge collectively, using "generative terms" - 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 ....., 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 9/15/2011

# *Madness of Hunger*

## A One-Act Play

By Mariana Leal Ferreira <sup>1</sup>

As soon as I walked into the “Anthropology of the Body” class at UC Berkeley in the Fall of 1992, as a doctoral student in medical anthropology, many of my colleagues wanted to find out more about the “madness of hunger,” which our Professor Nancy Scheper-Hughes wrote about in *Death Without Weeping. Everyday Violence in Brazil* (UC Press 1992) – one of the assigned books for the course. My classmates wanted to know, being a native Brazilian myself, if I had ever witnessed or heard about what the madness of hunger can do to poor women and their families elsewhere in Brazil, other than the impoverished northeast Scheper-Hughes talks about. Yes, I had indeed heard similar stories from my children’s nanny, Josefina, who grew up in the state of Minas Gerais, Central Brazil, when she pointed out how lucky she was to be alive since she had been saved by her mother (*salva pela mãe*), unlike some of her siblings, because they had simply loved each other (*se amado*). Josefina and I, however, never got into the grueling details of what being spared meant in her experience, mostly because she avoided the topic. The love and affection she demonstrated towards my own children, Mairum, Djuni, Pedro, and Amanda, only reinforced the theory, advanced by Scheper-Hughes in *Death Without Weeping*, that mothers in Brazil bond with infants when the women know the children have a chance of surviving the harsh life of the impoverished Northeast, the *sertão nordestino*.

Right then, the play “Madness of Hunger,” was born in my mind, dedicated to Edilson, the seven-year old Antonio in the play, whose photo in the book and caption: “Shh, Mãe, I’m ready to go there,” starkly

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted with permission from *Death Without Weeping. Everyday Violence in Brazil*. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, University of California Press, 1992. Stage-read at 1) the 105<sup>th</sup> AAA Annual Meeting in San Jose, CA, in Nov. 2006, on the panel “On the Margins of the Everyday. Papers in Honor of Nancy Scheper-Hughes,” by SFSU students, and directed by Debby Kajiyama; and 2) the Los Rios Anthropology Expo at the Consumnes River College in Sacramento, CA, in Oct. 2011, by Kairos Theater Ensemble, under the direction of Jiwon Chung.

reveal how poor nordestinos made sense, in their own terms, of the political-economic problems the country endured during the military “economic miracle” (1965-1975) and its aftermath. In North America, it seems difficult to understand the lack of “innate” Mother Love, which we always take for granted. Antonio and his family can be considered today as part of the “emergent indigenous peoples” or “new ethnicities” in Brazil, who apparently lack a traditional land-base, culture, and language, but who nonetheless have tried to live their lives with dignity for centuries, fighting daily for their most basic human rights.

## **Madness of Hunger, The Play**

### Main characters:

Antonio da Silva, 7

Madalena, Mother

Maria, Aunt

Bullet: Antonio da Silva, seven years old, offers his body in sacrifice to relieve his mother from the madness of hunger in Northeastern Brazil.

### Synopsis:

Antonio da Silva, a seven-year-old smart little *nordestino*, offers his body in sacrifice to forestall once and for all the madness of hunger in Alto do Cruzeiro, northeastern Brazil. Antonio considers himself “a lucky boy” and says he is “glad to be alive,” despite his bare-bone and ill health. He fears, however, for the fate of his younger twin sisters, on the brink of starvation, and for the sanity of mother Madalena, who suffers from chronic *nervos*. There is never enough food in the house for the children, who are constantly crying, driving Madalena crazy. One day Maria shares her last two Valium pills with her sister Madalena so that the woman can make the decision no mother can dream of: Which one of her three kids should she let go of this time? Should it be Maria Antonia or cross-eyed Carolina? Antonio, she ponders, is already too old to be an angel. When Antonio overhears the conversation between his mother and aunt Maria, the boy decides to carry out his plan: to offer his own body, like Jesus did, to end the sacrifice of others. What ensues is a battle between life and death, between love and desire, and between justice and fate.

## **ACT ONE**

*Inside a small thatched-roof mud hut in Alto do Cruzeiro, Northeastern Brazil. In one corner, a plaid hammock is slung across wooden beams; in the other, a few pieces of clothing*

*hang from a stretch of barbed-wire. A blackened aluminum pan sits right in the middle of the dirt floor, next to some burnt sticks and cracked coco nut shells. Antonio is swaying the hammock where his two twin sisters (who can't be seen) lay, crying.*

Antonio (scratching his head full of lice)

Hush, hush, Mama will soon be back with some milk. Hush, hush, stop crying and go to sleep!

*Maria walks in carrying a bucket full of water on her head.*

Maria

Madalena! Madalena!

Antonio (scratching his head)

Mama went to the drugstore to get some medicine for her nerves.

There's nothing to eat ... (to the girls) Sshhhhhhhhhh... close your eyes and go to sleep!

*The boy turns back towards Maria, reaches into his pocket and hands her some folded bills. Maria lowers the bucket onto the ground.*

Antonio

This is the money we collected to send your daughter to São Paulo.

Maria (counting)

...3,4,5,6,7! Oh my beloved Jesus, bless the people of the Alto for their generosity! Once Fatima starts as a nanny, we'll all do better around here. Her first paycheck, we're going to have a feast, a real barbecue! (retrieving a small package from her bra) Here, take this for your sisters, and have some yourself. You're just a bag of bones! You need to be strong to help your mama split firewood. Now, what's that thing on your neck?

Antonio (touching the side of his neck)

I don't know.

Maria (examining the lump)

Does it hurt?

Antonio (scratching his head)

Only when I swallow.

Maria

You're skinnier and skinnier because you don't like food! Next time you won't fool us, pretending you're dead. You'll go straight to the cemetery in a cardboard coffin all right!

*Madalena walks in the door, looking pretty dismayed. Antonio hands her the small brown package and takes off running.*

Madalena (opening the bundle)

What is this, *comadre*?

Maria

A piece of bread for the girls....Shhhh, they're asleep. Did you get the medicine?

Madalena (taking a bite)

Huum, I am starving...Seu Tito gave me a pill for 50 cents... nothing left over for the milk, what to do? But then, coming up the hill I heard Nailza screaming. I looked in the window and saw her shaking all over, losing her head! She was ready to hit her boy with this huge log! She's worse off than us here; her little angel left last month and now the boy refuses to eat. She says he's already hallucinating, getting ready to go! Poor woman, so I gave her the Valium.

Maria

Now what have you got? No medicine, no food! Finish up that bread, *comadre*, before the girls wake up, otherwise it's *you* going mad again! Here, take some of this money and buy yourself some meat. Fatima will have to wait another month.

Madalena

No! She's our only hope!

Maria

Let's go down to Seu Tito again and ask for more medicine.

Madalena

And pay him how?

Maria

I have my way with him.

Madalena

You mean...

Maria

Listen, Madalena, like you, I am hungry, too. Almost everyday my house is without food. My compensation is screwing. Do I take pleasure in it? Of course I do. How else am I going to know I'm alive if I don't screw?

Madalena

I may be a *pobre* and hungry but I do have my pride.

Maria

Pride? You're wasting away, giving up sex. Sex is your right, and it's free! I may be a bag of bones, but I'm still crazy about screwing.

Madalena

No wonder you're always pregnant.

Maria

I get up at four in the morning, I hardly sleep at all. There is no time to take care of myself. I carry water on my head, I prepare the meals, I feed the kids, but I always find time for sex. I'm all bones, all right, but I still know how to screw real good.

Madalena

It was sex that first brought trouble into your life. So many mouths to feed!

Maria

Yeah, but it is sex that now brings medicine and food to my family. What other solution is there for a poor black like me?

Madalena

Long ago I had my fill. Now I am completely nauseated by screwing. I'd only do it to save Antonio's life, only for my sweet little boy! See, I'm rotting with this terrible disease, God is angry at me. It's punishment for my life as a street woman. What a game without any fun!

*Antonio enters abruptly, screaming.*

Antonio

Mãe! Mãe! They're taking Nailza to jail!

Madalena

What? Nailza?

Antonio

She killed her children, Mãe, João and Antonio are dead! It's true, I saw blood all over them!

Madalena

Oh my God, what are you saying? That can't be, I just gave her some Valium!

Maria

Sometimes one pill just won't do. Takes me at least two to settle down...Nailza looks pretty hardy.

Madalena

The poor woman is going to rot in jail. The sheriff just doesn't understand *nervos*. The man's rich, doesn't even have to eat! Antonio, go find Manoel and tell him to go straight to the jailhouse to see what's going on.

## **ACT TWO**

*Antonio walks into the hut with a bundle of firewood on his shoulder.*

Antonio

Mãe, you abuse me!

Madalena

It's only because you annoy me so much!

Antonio

But Mãe, I'm so hungry!

Madalena

There is nothing, nothing left to eat.

Antonio

I want milk.

Madalena

Can't help you kill your hunger, my son. (mixing a spoonful of sugar in a glass of water) Here, take some sugar water and go to sleep.

Antonio

(drinking) Ah, my stomach feels so dry! I had a dream I was eating a steak.

Madalena

Go to sleep, just go to sleep! We'll have a party soon, beans, cornmeal, and some pop. (Antonio exits)

Maria (entering)

*Comadre*, bad news: I got only 50 cents begging at the market... Here are some black beans for the kids.

Madalena

What are we going to do? We can't be like this forever. The kids want more than just beans, they want milk and meat. Here's the real struggle.

*Children crying in the background. Madalena covers her ears with her hands.*

Madalena

Who can stand by and listen to a child crying that its stomach is aching from hunger? I am going crazy!

Maria

Come on, *comadre*, these little critters don't suffer!

Madalena

Antonio is so sickly, always hungry.

Maria

He doesn't even pay attention to food! And now that lump won't even let him swallow, do what?

Madalena

He just told me he's hungry, dreaming of a steak.

Maria

Must be the worms, I've got lots myself -- tum tum tum, they drum inside my body. *That* can make you crazy, too.

Madalena

(covering her face, shaking her head) No, no, it's not worms, I don't think... He doesn't have the strength from meat. He'd whine and cry for whole milk when he was littler, always rejected papa d'água.

Maria

Papa d'água? Babies fed on water soon have blood that turns to water.

It's a miracle he's still alive. But weren't all of your kids fed on papa d'água.

Madalena

All seven raised on that, now there are only three left.

Maria

You've let four go, and Antonio's managed to escape you. Wasn't he meant to be an angel?

Madalena

They all loved papa d'água, except Antonio. That's why we got so close.

Maria

Whatever you fed him, you should have never picked him up, carried him around, kissed. Never! Getting attached from the start... Now you're in trouble!

Madalena

Not Antonio, Não! He never had any desire to eat and I felt pity for him. Poor critter! So we cuddled. I tried and tried to feed him *polenta* but he just wouldn't eat.

Maria

Shame on you, now look where you're at: in love with the boy. I don't think there's any hope, he's so sickly! Let him go!

Madalena

Stop it, I'll pick one of the girls. Your small children are all long gone, what do you know?

Maria

They're all good angels, God bless, left this world without suffering. I was smarter than you: never picked them up, never cuddled, no *carinho*, but you!

Madalena

*Só Deus sabe!* [Only God knows!] I gave him sugar water every night to go to sleep without crying, the little angel! (hands in prayer) Please God, don't take Antonio, he's just learned the alphabet. I'll send you one of the girls!

Maria

Maria Antonia? Carolina? You gotta decide fast. Next thing you know

you're getting attached to them, too. It'll never get better.

Madalena

Antonio is my arms and legs, but there's just not enough food! (crying) I can't go on like this!

*Sound of babies crying gets louder and louder*

Maria

I'll get up real early tomorrow morning, light a candle to the Sacred Heart, and pray we get some meat at the *Matadouro*.

Madalena

(screaming) I can't stand this! I can't stand this!

*Maria takes a small paper package from inside her bra, unfolds it and hands Madalena two small pills.*

Maria

Here, take'em for your nerves, it's your turn.

Madalena

Valium? Where did you get it.

Maria

Seu Tito gave me a couple on Christmas. We should use them now. It'll make the decision easier.

Madalena

*Obrigada*, this stuff makes me feel so strong!

Maria

Now you go lay down, pray to God you get some sense in your head, and decide by early morning who's gonna leave this world next. (Maria exits)

### **ACT THREE**

*Madalena is stirring some sugar into a glass of water. She looks up at the sound of her girls crying, places her hand over her ears, and calls out the window:*

Madalena

Maria! Maria! Come up here fast! Mariaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

Maria (entering in haste)

*Comadre!*

Madalena

I've made my decision. I'm gonna let *both* the girls go. They'll be happy together in heaven, the little baby angels.

Maria

Both the girls? You can't give up the girls, they're your future!

Madalena

Better the girls should go than Antonio or me.

Maria

What are you saying? The girls don't want to die, Antonio does. Why fight...

Madalena

I fought for him to stay alive and he *is* alive! Now I'm not giving him up, forget it.

Maria

Your two beautiful girls...

Madalena

They'll be much better off in heaven, the two of them together. I can't split the two apart. They were born together and now they'll leave this world together...

Maria (in anger)

Is this what the medicine did for you? Listen, it is very wrong to fight with death. Antonio is doomed, when a child wants to die it will. You let the girls go, you'll be alone! God wants Antonio, not the girls!

Madalena (closing her eyes)

I can still feel his mouth on my nipples, his little hands in my tangled hair. Now when I look into his eyes I feel for him! I just can't let him go!

Maria

He has no more taste for life, he's always lived in the shadows looking for death. But the girls, they want to live!

Madalena

They will be the prettiest little angels... Oh my Lady of Sorrows...

Comadre, will you help me? *Por favor!*

Maria

It is your choice.

Madalena

They have to die so he can live. I have made the decision.

*The girls start crying. Antonio runs in the door and hands his mother a small package.*

Antonio

Mãe! This bread is for the girls! Dona Maria gave it to me down at the market.

Madalena

Here, I'll take care of it. Have a piece yourself (breaking the bun in half and biting into it)

Antonio (scratching his head)

No, mãe, I'm not hungry.

Madalena

Please eat the bread, you need it. *Por favor!*

Antonio (pushing the bread away)

Mãe, listen, I had a dream!

Madalena

Son, there is *no* meat. None!

Antonio

Mãe! Listen! I was an angel and I was flying for real! Way, way up there, way above the clouds, everything so blue and beautiful. Mãe! It is beautiful up there!

Madalena

Eat the bread, here, and stop the nonsense.

Antonio

Mãe! I saw the gate to heaven, just like you said, gold and bright. And guess what, Papa was there, waiting for me with José, Marcelo, Eliza, and Paulinho!

*The girls are crying louder and louder. Antonio moves toward them with the bread in hands.*

Madalena

Get away from them! Here, if you don't want the bread, give it to me.  
(grabbing the bread from him and biting into it)

Antonio

Mãe! I wanna go there, please!

Madalena

In your dreams!

Antonio

Mãe! I am ready to go there.

Madalena

Now you shut up and go fetch some water. You were never supposed to be an angel, and now you're too old to turn into one. You're staying here with Mama and we're going to have a good life together, just the two of us.

*Madalena grabs Antonio and hugs him. The boy tries to free himself from the mother's arms, at no avail.*

Antonio

Let me go!

Madalena (releasing the boy)

Listen, Maria gave me some money and we'll go buy a steak right now. I'll cook it just for you!

Antonio

I don't want a steak, it hurts too much to swallow. I want to go to Papa! It's so beautiful up there! I saw hotdogs, candy, ice cream...

Madalena (softly)

Listen my son, I can't let you go. You're my arms and legs ... and ...you're my ... heart, too! Since you were little...

Antonio

There will be more food for Carolina and Maria Antonia. Please, mãe, let me go!

*Madalena starts to shake uncontrollably. She tries to grab Antonio again, who moves away from her.*

Madalena

Come here, my beloved son!

Antonio

Hush, mãe, hush, I'm ready to go there.

Madalena

You are *not* going there, there is no such thing as heaven! Come to me!

*The two embrace. Madalena is still shaking uncontrollably. Antonio tries to calm her down. The girls crying in the background gets louder and louder. Madalena places her hands over her ears and starts walking around, but her legs start failing her.*

Antonio

Mãe! Mãe!

Madalena (kneeling down, hands to the sky)

*Meu Senhor Jesus Cristo, help me! Spare Antonio, take the girls instead, the little angels! You are a hungry God! I've given you four little angels already and now you want my beloved Antonio, too! You can't take him, you just cannot. (shouting) Leave him alone! I give you two little angels instead, Maria Antonia and Carolina, two beautiful babies. That ought to appease your hunger. Let Antonio live!*

*Madalena falls to the ground, unconscious. Antonio kneels down beside her and starts his own prayer.*

Antonio

*Querido Jesus, please help me! I want to be an angel, I really do! I really am ready to go there and I promise you, I'll be good, very good! Querido Jesus, I am sorry I've been so bad, fighting against death, but I couldn't leave Mama alone! Querido Jesus, please, please make Mama understand that I can be a good angel, that I can take up wings and fly! Please, I beg you, let Mama have the girls, they are so pretty! She will forget me, I am good for nothing no more! I can't chop wood very well and to carry water I need to ask for help! What good am I down here, good for nothing! Querido Jesus, please take me with you. Take me with you and I will not disappoint you ever, ever again. Amen.*

**Curtains.**

# *Madness of Hunger* **Learning Activities**

By Nancy Flowers

Here are some games and exercises adapted from Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Routledge 2002), to be used in connection with *Madness of Hunger*, or else adapted to your own play of choice.<sup>2</sup>

## **WARM UP ACTIVITIES**

### ***FOLLOWING THE MASTER: HUNGER***

**Overview:** Following a leader, participants express the emotions of hunger  
**Time:** 30 minutes  
**Materials:** None

1. **Getting started:** Have two small groups of uneven numbers (3 or 5 participants) face each other. Explain that the two in the middle facing each other are the "masters" of the others in their line. Ask them to start a communication between the two lines expressing the emotional experience of hunger using words, sounds, gestures, movements and facial expressions. The words do not need to make "sense." Everyone in the line repeats the actions and sounds of their master. Explain that when an extreme state is reached, the master instantly returns to calm and clarity.
2. **Expressing hunger:** Ask the participant to start the action. Let them process through at least two peaks of emotion before calling stop.

To the facilitator: You might change master halfway through the activity. If there are enough participants and time, ask another group to perform as well.

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<sup>2</sup> We'd love your feedback on how well the suggested activities worked in your community. Please send comments to [marianaf@sfsu.edu](mailto:marianaf@sfsu.edu). This will help us refine the games and exercises for other chapters of *Acting for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

3. **Debriefing the experience of acting:** Ask the actors to respond to questions like these:
  - What was it like to try to express hunger?
  - Was it easy to follow a master in this expression? To be a master?
  - Did you learn anything from trying to express hunger?
4. **Debriefing the experience of acting:** Ask the actors to respond to questions like these:
  - What was it like to observe the actors? What did you feel as you watched?
  - Did you learn anything from their efforts to express hunger?

To the facilitator: After participants have experienced the play “The Madness of Hunger,” remind them of this activity and ask whether it helped them to better understand the feelings of the characters.

Adapted from Boal *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 223.

### ***BELOW THE POVERTY LINE***

**Overview:** “Families” adapt to worsening economic conditions  
**Time:** 30 minutes  
**Materials:** Chart showing costs of necessities

To the facilitator: Using an imaginary currency, list prices for necessities such as rent, utilities, bus fare, shoes and other items of clothing, milk, bread, and other food staples.

1. **Getting started:** Divide participants into “families” of different sizes, ranging from a single couple to families with many children. Ask each family to decide who are the children and their ages and who are the parent or parents.

Post the chart of economic statistics and ask participants to sit in a semi-circle so all can see. Explain that each family and 100 units of currency each month, which is enough to meet basic necessities of life. However, they must make a decision about how to manage their income in changing economic situations

2. **Falling below the line:** Ask each family to decide how they will respond to increasingly difficult circumstances such as these below,

asking “What will you cut from your budget now?” Some possible economic crises:

- There’s a devaluation, and your money loses 30% of its value.
- The landlord raises the rent 10 units a month.
- The local government doubles the cost of bus fare.
- The cost of food rises 10% (i.e., costs 10 units more each month)
- The breadwinner loses his/her job and the family loses two month’s income until a new one is found.
- Someone in the family is sick requiring medical fees of 25 units per month
- There’s a depression, one parent is out of work, and your monthly income drops to 50% (if there are two parents). If there is only one parent, you have no income.

After each change, ask each family what they will do to cope. Soon families will have to begin eating less and doing without necessities.

To the facilitator: Give the families only a minute to make their decisions, simulating the pressure of sudden economic shifts.

**3. Debriefing the activity:** Ask questions like these about the process of impoverishment:

- Which economic changes had the greatest impact on your family?
- How did your family make decisions? Was it a good method?
- What were the hardest decisions to make?
- Which families felt the greatest impact? Which members of the family?
- What does this exercise tell you about the experience of falling below the poverty line?
- What does “poverty line” mean? How is the definition of “poverty “ determined?

## **BECOMING ANGELS**

**Overview:** While participants enact a familiar ritual, members of the group become “angels”

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:** None

1. **Getting started:** Divide participants into two groups. Explain that the group will silently enact a familiar ritual (e.g., wedding, birthday or anniversary party, graduation). However, while they are acting out this dumb show, the Joker will touch one person after another and they will become an “angel,” i.e., an invisible spiritual presence. Everyone will continue carrying out the ritual in the same manner.
2. **Becoming angels:** Ask each group to perform their ritual in silence. Create several “angels” in each ritual.

To the facilitator: Ideally the main figures in the ritual (e.g., bride, celebrant, presider) do not become angels.

3. **Debriefing the activity:** Ask questions like these:
  - What was it like to have participants in the ritual change into angels? How did this change affect the ritual?
  - In what ways do we experience the presence of “angels” or absent persons in the rituals of our lives?

Adapted from Boal *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 224.

## **WARM UP ACTIVITIES**

### **WHEN I GROW UP**

**Overview:** Participants act out their childhood heroes or mythical figures they dreamed of becoming.

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:** Slips of paper and pens or pencils

1. **Getting started:** Divide the group in half. One group will be the first audience. Give the other half slips of paper and ask them to write their name and the name of the hero or mythical figure they dreamed of becoming when they were children. Explain that they will move around the room demonstrating in gesture, facial expression, movement and body language what fascinated them about this character.
2. **Acting out the childhood hero:** Ask the actors to begin acting while the other half watches. After a few minutes tell the actors to find a partner and begin a dialogue that is appropriate to their character but does not reveal the identity.

After another few minutes, ask everyone to sit down. Read the name of each participant in turn and ask the audience to describe the characteristics they saw in that person's character. They should not try to guess the identity of the hero but how the person behaved as this will reveal what qualities or capacities the actor really wanted to develop, using the qualities of someone real or fantastic as the embodiment of that aspiration. After the first half has been discussed, the second group does the same.

3. **Debriefing the activity:** Observe that this activity reveals the characteristics and aspirations that participants still cherish. Comment that participants may reveal their heroes only if they wish. Ask questions like these:
- What was it like to pretend to be your childhood idol?
  - Were you surprised what characteristics the audience saw in your performance?
  - To what extent do you still idolize this character? Why or why not?
  - What does our interpretation of a character affect how others see him or her?
  - What can we learn from this activity about the importance of an actor's understanding of himself or herself?
  - How can you apply these insights about idealized figures to the characters in *The Madness of Hunger*? Which characters seem to have heroes or idols?

Adapted from Boal *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 166.

### THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

**Overview:** Participants act out their childhood fear.

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:** Slips of paper and pens or pencils

To the facilitator: This activity is structured like "When I Grow Up," substituting childhood fears for childhood dream.

1. **Getting started:** Divide the group in half. One group will be the first audience. Give the other half slips of paper and ask them to write down their name and the character or thing that frightened them as a child. Explain that they will move around the room demonstrating in gesture, facial expression, movement and body language how they felt in a state of fear of these characters.

To the facilitator: The fearful character needs to be concrete (i.e., a person, an animal, a “tangible” ghost) rather than an abstraction like “fear of water” or “fear of the dark.”

2. **Acting out the childhood fear:** Ask the actors to begin acting while the other half watches. After a few minutes tell the actors to find a partner and begin a dialogue in which each tries to frighten the other the way they themselves were frightened.

After another few minutes, ask everyone to sit down. Read the name of each participant in turn and ask the audience to describe the characteristics they saw in that person’s enacted fears. After the first half has been discussed, the second group does the same.

3. **Debriefing the activity:** Observe that this activity may reveal fear that may still live on inside participants. Comment that participants may reveal their fears only if they wish. Ask questions like these:
  - What was it like to pretend to be your childhood fear?
  - Were you surprised what characteristics the audience saw in your performance?
  - To what extent do you retain this fear? Why or why not?
  - What does our interpretation of a character affect how others see him or her?
  - What can we learn from this activity about the importance of an actor’s understanding of himself or herself?
  - How can you apply these insights fears to the characters in *The Madness of Hunger*?

Adapted from Boal *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 167.

## THE MODEL CHILD

- Overview:** Participants act out the kind of child their parents wanted them to be.
- Time:** 30 minutes
- Materials:** Slips of paper and pens or pencils

To the facilitator: This activity is structured like “When I Grow Up” and “Things That Go Bump in the Night,” using parental expectations for the child’s own dreams.

1. **Getting started:** Divide the group in half. One group will be the first audience. Explain that they will move around the room

demonstrating in gesture, facial expression, movement and body language the kind of child their parents wanted them to be.

- 2. Acting out parental expectations:** Ask the actors to begin acting while the other half watches. After a few minutes tell the actors to find a partner and begin a dialogue in which each speaks in the manner their parents would have liked in a child.

After another few minutes, ask everyone to sit down. Name each participant in turn and ask the audience to describe the characteristics they saw as that parent's idealize child. After the first half has been discussed, the second group does the same.

- 3. Debriefing the activity:** Observe that this activity may reveal expectations that still live on inside participants. Ask questions like these:
  - What was it like to pretend to be your parents' ideal child?
  - Were you surprised what characteristics the audience saw in your performance?
  - To what extent to you retain or react to these expectations? Why or why not?
  - What does our interpretation of a character affect how others see him or her?
  - What can we learn from this activity about the importance of an actor's understanding of himself or herself?
  - How can you apply these insights fears to the characters in *The Madness of Hunger*? What is a "model child" in this play?

Adapted from Boal *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 168.

## FORUM THEATER ACTIVITIES

### MY SOMEDAY

**Overview:** One at a time participants act out the future they imagine.

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:** None

- 1. Getting started:** Observe that before we make voluntary changes in our lives, we identify what we are going to do. Explain that in this activity participants who wish will take a turn doing actions and saying lines that express attitudes and ideas they will have in the future: *Someday I will say this and I will do that.*

2. **Imagining the future:** Call for the first volunteer to act. After a few minutes thank the participant and call for another volunteer and continue until most of those who wish to act have had an opportunity.
3. **Debriefing the activity:** Ask questions like these:
  - What was it like to project yourself into the future? Did some of your own projections surprise you?
  - What was it like to observe the projections of others? Did some of these surprise you?
  - Was there a common theme or tone to these performances?
  - Did you find you shared expectations of the future with some of the actors?

Adapted from Boal *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 234.

### THEIR SOMEDAY

**Overview:** Participants act out the imagined future of characters in “The Madness of Hunger”

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:** None

To the facilitator: ideally this activity is preceded by “My Someday.” However, it can stand alone

1. **Getting started:** Ask participants to imagine attitudes and ideas the characters from “The Madness of Hunger” will have in the future (e.g., Antonio, Madalena, Maria, one of the twin girls). Explain that as you name one of the characters, anyone who wishes may step one at a time into the playing space and begin to speak and act as those characters would when speaking about the future: *Someday I will say this and I will do that.*
2. **Imagining the future:** Begin by calling out a character’s name. When one participant has acted this part for a few minutes, tap him or her and call out the character’s name again, permitting someone else to play the role.. After a few turns, call out another name. End with the twins, whose future is already in doubt.
3. **Debriefing the activity:** Ask questions like these:
  - What was it like to imagine the future ideas and attitudes of these characters?
  - Which were the most difficult? Why?

- Were there common features in these character's projection of the future?
- How do you think it affects people not to be able to imagine a future?
- How would such people affect their families? Their community? Their society?

Adapted from Boal *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 234.

## ANOTHER VISION OF THE WORLD

**Overview:** While some participants act out a scene from "The Madness of Hunger," others may intervene to create a different vision of the world and a better outcome.

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:** Copies of "Madness of Hunger"

To the facilitator: This activity presumes that participants have already seen the play performed.

1. **Getting started:** Observe that in real life, it is often necessary to change our vision of the world before we can change the world. Explain that in this activity the actors will repeat an act from "The Madness of Hunger" exactly as written with the particular *vision of the world* presented in the play. However, this time participant as "spect-actors" can intervene, take up a role, and change that vision of the world. Anyone in the audience who sees an opportunity to take the actors place in order to bring about a better solution, should shout, "Stop." The actors will freeze in position while "spect-actor" explains from what point he or she wants the scene to begin again. The "spect-actor" then takes the role of one of the characters and the action begins again.

However, the other actors do not respond to this new solution but maintain their same vision of the world, illustrating how difficult it is to bring about change.

To the facilitator: Make sure everyone understands this rather complicated process. As the Joker, the facilitator will need to keep the process orderly, encourage actors stop playing, and change the scene or rules when appropriate.

2. **Changing the outcome:** Ask the actors to begin the scene. When a "spect-actor" has intervened and met with resistance, ask him to retire and be replaced by the original actor of that part. Let the action continue

until another “spect-actor” intervenes. Alternative: act another scene in the same way.

**Alternative:** Without warning give the “spect-actor” permission to replace any of the resisting actors with others from the audience who can take up the changed worldview.

- 4. Debriefing the activity:** Ask questions like these:
- What was it like to try to change the outcome? To meet resistance? To refuse to change?
  - What does this activity suggest about the difficulties of changing people’s vision of the world? About the dynamics of social change?
  - What strategies does it suggest about creating social change?
  - How can these ideas be directed to creating social change for Indigenous Peoples?

Adapted from Boal *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 243.



**Caatinga\*, the vegetation of the *sertão nordestino***

\*From the Tupi language *caa-tinga* or white forest: A forest composed of stunted trees and thorny bushes, found in areas of small rainfall in Brazil.





# 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>3</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>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Boal, Augusto 1992 *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>4</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 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>5</sup>

By Mariana Leal Ferreira and Dominique Devine<sup>i</sup>

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*

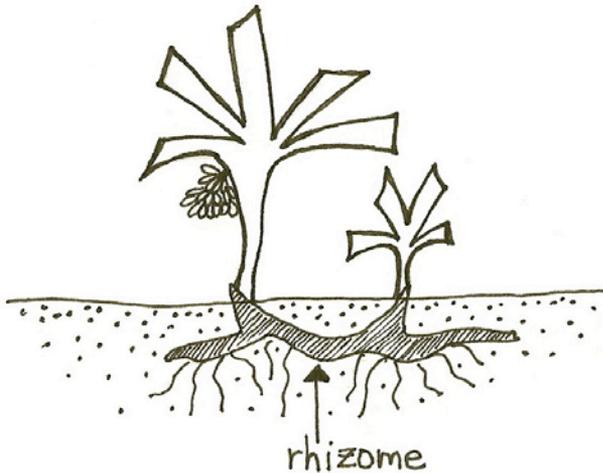
A series of plays in the tradition of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed on indigenous peoples' rights in contemporary North and South America—their histories of genocide, capital punishment and incarceration, disease and starvation, and the struggle to repatriate their

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<sup>5</sup> To appear in *Latin American Perspectives*, March 2012.

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.<sup>1</sup>

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

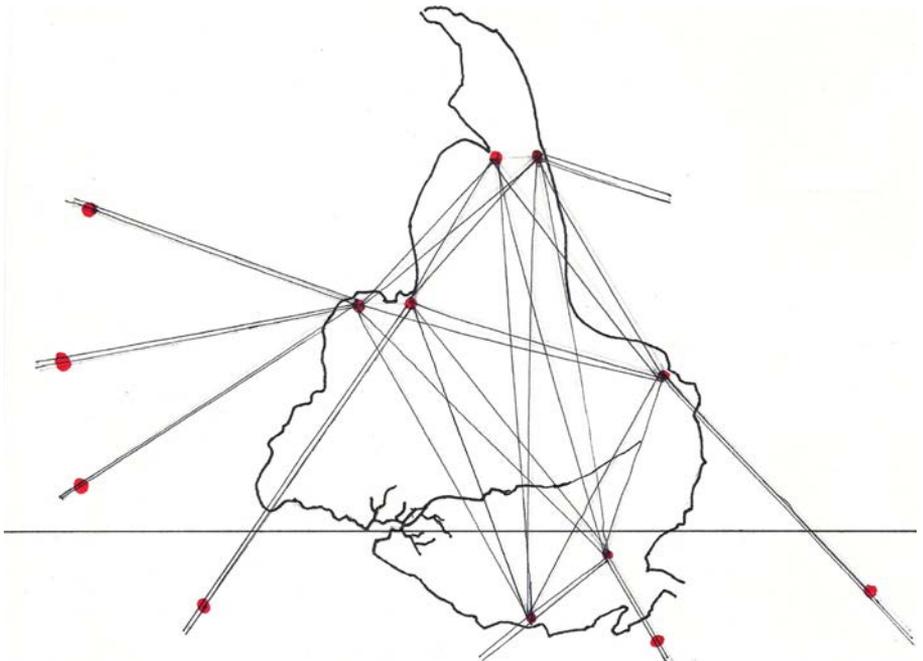
Given the rapid multiplication of workshops dedicated to popular education in schools, prisons, and community centers, as well as its subterranean, revolutionary independent growth, the Theater of the Oppressed rhizome obviously does not depend on the government or corporate-sanctioned initiatives that 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.

Ferreira’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>. One of the plays, *Diabetes Jackpot*, was first performed at the 107th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco in November 2008, and Dominique Devine stage-read it and organized two workshops based on it at the 17th International Creative Drama in Education Congress in Istanbul, Turkey, on September 3, 2010. *The Madness of Hunger*, adapted with permission from Scheper-Hughes (1992), was stage-read by SFSU students directed by Debby Kajiyama at the 105th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Jose, CA, in November 2006. *May Your Body Lay Naked on Mother Earth* (co-authored with Eva Langman), was stage-read in 2008 at the 107th AAA Annual Meeting on the Panel Radical Theater as Cultural Intervention: Exploring Art and Politics in Anthropology). *IronHawk* was stage read in 2007 at the 106th AAA Annual meeting – Difference, (in)equality & Justice, at the session “Anthropologists in the Global Arena: Dialogues for Change, and at the 5th SFSU Annual Human Rights Summit: Privileged Destruction. Examining Environmental Justice in San Francisco, CA, in 2008. Finally, *Firewater* was stage-read at the 3rd 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 geliebt! 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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## Theater of the Oppressed Glossary\*

**Banking System of Education:** Friere’s analogy for the traditional model of education in which the “expert” teacher deposits information into passive students who receive and later return the information in the form of rote responses to tests and questions from the instructor.

**Cop-in-the-Head Exercises:** Boal’s term from his *Rainbow of Desire* techniques for games that address internalized oppressions. Boal suggested that we often stop ourselves from taking action in the face of oppressions because fears and negative messages from others (the “cops” in our heads) have been internalized.

**Conscientização (conscientization):** Freire’s Portuguese term for the development of critical consciousness, which allows us to question our historical and socio-political situation in order to take action toward developing a truly democratic society.

**Demechanization:** Boal’s system of inventive movements and games designed to alleviate our mechanized physical, emotional and mental tendencies, developed through repetition/habituation over time, releasing us to think and act more creatively.

**Dynamization:** Boal’s term for the activation of human images sculpted by spectators by adding sound, movement, and lines of dialogue.

**Image Theatre:** Boal’s series of wordless exercises in which participants use the human body as a tool to represent feelings and ideas, often about a specific concept or theme. Through “sculpting” others or their own bodies, participants develop images of a situation or oppression. The images become the impetus for reflection and dialogue.

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\* In: T. Emert and E. Friedman (eds.) *Come Closer: Critical Conversations about Theater of the Oppressed and Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, p. 188.

**Joker:** Boal’s term for the master of ceremonies for a TO performance. The joker guides the audience through the TO event, assisting, coaxing, questioning, explaining, and exploring. The joker is an adaptable figure, open to the widest possible range of spect-actor interpretations, solutions, and imaginative interventions.

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**Magical Solutions:** Solutions offered by spect-actors that are unrealistic, too ideal, or too facile; they misrepresent the complexities of the oppressive situation depicted in the scene.

**Oppressor/Oppressed:** A reference by both Freire and Boal to the hierarchical social and political systemic structures that affect human interactions. Oppressors are those who hold power over the oppressed, whether they recognize their oppressive power or not. Power is, in fact, maintained, specifically by denying equity to others, thus oppressing them.

**Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed (PTO):** A not-for-profit organization with the following mission: “To challenge oppressive systems by promoting critical thinking and social justice.” PTO organizes an annual conference focused on the work of liberatory educators, activists, artists, and community organizers.

**Praxis:** Freire’s concept of informed action. Freire speaks of praxis as the pairing of critical reflection and intentional action; transformation of oppressive circumstances requires thoughtful analyses of the circumstances coupled with action that responds to the analysis.

**Rainbow of Desire:** Boal’s body of theatrical “psychotherapeutic” exercises that examine individual, internalized oppressions that influence the ways in which we view and interact with each other and the culture at large.

**Simultaneous Dramaturgy:** Boal’s early approach to Forum Theatre in which, during the play, the actors stop the action and ask the audience for suggested solutions to the situation depicted. The audience voices ideas that the actors then play out on stage.

**Spect-actor:** Boal’s term for TO audience members who choose to participate in the action of the Forum scene.